Chapter 1

Overview of a Century

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In This Chapter

▶ Determining where the twentieth century started and ended

▶ Defining the twentieth-century world

▶ Comparing the twentieth century with earlier centuries

▶ Seeing how the world changed in the twentieth century

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*T*he twentieth century saw more change in a shorter time than any other period of human history. By the time the century ended people were flying regularly, sending instant messages by e-mail or text, slipping mobile phones into their pockets, and communicating with any corner of the world in seconds. What was everyday life to millions of people (okay, millions of people in rich countries) was the stuff of dreams at the start of the century. Yet many things seemed hardly to have changed at all: wars still broke out, famine still struck, and the gulf between rich and poor seemed as wide as ever. This chapter introduces you to the twentieth century and looks at some of the themes you can explore in the rest of the book.

When (and How Long?) Was the Twentieth Century?

The twentieth century officially started on 1 January 1901 and carried on until the end of 2000. But centuries aren't just groupings of dates; they're periods that historians reckon had some unique flavour or theme. The nineteenth century had a particular mindset and outlook that was quite different from the way people thought in the eighteenth century and different again from the way people thought in the twentieth. Often these changes in thinking were linked to a big event that forced people to re-examine their ideas.

The end of history is nigh! Or is it?

In 1990, as the communist bloc was crumbling before the eyes of the world, the American historian Francis Fukuyama published an article, later expanded into a book, in which he declared that the world had finally reached the 'End of History'. That's quite a claim and very bad news for those of us who depend on it for a living. But hang on: How can you possibly end history? History goes on whether we like it or not. So what was Fukuyama on about?

Fukuyama had gone back to a nineteenth-century German philosopher, largely forgotten nowadays, called Friedrich Hegel. Hegel taught that human affairs – that is, the events that drive history – operate in much the same way as forces in the natural world: You have one force coming one way challenged by a different force coming the opposite way. They clash, an almighty bang happens, and when the dust has settled a new force emerges, dusts itself down, and sets off in a new direction, until it's met by a different force coming the opposite way – you get the idea. In other words, conflict makes the world go round. This pattern of force and counter-force is called *dialectic* or, specifically, 'Hegelian dialectic' – a useful phrase to use at parties if you want the room to yourself.

Hegel's most famous follower was Karl Marx. Marx worked Hegel's ideas out simply: The first force is the bosses, the force coming the opposite way is the workers, the clash will be the great revolution, and out of that will emerge a new force going in its own direction, which will be a workers' democratic republic. *Class* conflict, said Marx, is what makes the world go round. And for some two hundred years, you could argue, it did. The Cold War, which pitted the communist (that is, Marxist) countries against the capitalist countries, seemed to prove Hegel's (and Marx's) point very well. The only trouble was that when the revolution finally came, it was the *communist* countries, not the capitalist ones, that fell. The people tore down the communist regimes, declared democracy, and immediately started opening links and ties with the West. Not only was the Cold War over, but the West had won. More to the point, there was no one around who could challenge the US and its allies. Or, in Hegelian terms, no counter-force existed: The liberal-democratic West could set off in its new direction in full confidence that it had overcome every enemy it was ever likely to face. Hegelian dialectic had finally run out of counter-forces: History, as Fukuyama put it, was henceforth at an end. His book sold well.

Until 9/11. A new counter-force had arrived on the scene to challenge the might of America: Militant Islam. It's far too soon to say what new direction will emerge from that clash, but it persuaded Professor Fukuyama to revise his opinions. Maybe history isn't over after all: We've got a few more forces and counter-forces to go through yet. That strange sound you can hear in the distance is Friedrich Hegel having the last laugh.

REMEMBER

Centuries aren't determined by years, but by pivotal events. For this reason, they can be 'long' (going beyond the span of a hundred years) or 'short' (starting and finishing inside their chronological span). Consider these examples:

✔ **The seventeenth century:** Historians like to say that the eighteenth century, which 'ends' with the French Revolution in 1789, only really 'began' in 1714 when King Louis XIV of France died. That makes the eighteenth century only seventy five years long!

✔ **The nineteenth century:** Most historians would say that the nineteenth century started with the outbreak of the French Revolution (if you're not sure what *that* was, see *European History For Dummies* (Wiley)). But that started in 1789. And if the nineteenth century *really* began with the French Revolution, when did it end? No great earth-shattering event occurred in 1900 to make people spill their coffee and say, 'Oh well, there goes the century'; but fourteen years later there certainly was, when the First World War broke out. So historians often like to talk of a 'long nineteenth century' from the French Revolution in 1789 to the First World War in 1914 and forget the maths.

So when should we date the twentieth century? Is it a 'long' century or a 'short' one? If we take the First World War as the point when the nineteenth century really ended and the world changed fundamentally, then 1914 becomes our start date, and most historians would go along with that.

Not all historians agree with this beginning date. Some argue that the twentieth century started with the Russian Revolution in October 1917. Others say the century began when Queen Victoria died on 22 November 1901. Others say the century *really* started in 1905 when Einstein published his *General Theory of Relativity*, or in 1918 when Marie Stopes published *Married Love* and made family planning possible, or in 1903 with the Wright Brothers' first powered flight. Or you could just take the mathematical view and say the century began on 1 January 1901!

If saying when the twentieth century began is difficult, just as tricky is saying when it ended. If we leave aside the mathematical date, 31 December 2000, then we have two serious contenders:

✔ **9 November 1989:** The Berlin Wall coming down symbolised the end of the Cold War (though strictly speaking the Cold War had ended the year before). People knew that the world would never be the same again and they were right.

✔ **11 September 2001:** The attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 were so bewildering that they never got a real name: At first people just referred to 'the events of 11 September', as if a minor scuffle had occurred in the street, and then everyone settled on '9/11'. People knew that the world had changed at that pivotal moment, and again, they were right.

Which of these two dates marked the turning point when the twentieth century ended and the twenty-first got going? That will be for historians of the future to judge. In this book, I take the story just into the new century, to the 9/11 attacks on the USA. That's when the 21st century really got going.

Characterising the Twentieth-Century World

At the start of the century the world was essentially divided into two parts: Advanced industrial countries in Europe, North America, and Japan, and vast areas of the globe, including most of Asia and almost the entire continent of Africa, which *belonged* to them as colonies. Some countries came into a third category of independent nations, for example China and the nations of South America, which didn't belong to anyone else, but in fact were so heavily dependent on the industrialised countries that they may just as well have been colonies. So what, exactly, was the twentieth-century world? And to what extent did people of the twentieth century think in terms of a single 'world'?

All together now: A world government (of sorts)

The world seemed to get its act together after the Great War (1914–18). For the first time in history a sort of world government actually existed: The *League of Nations*. The League met in Geneva, with nations from all over the world represented equally, and was supposed to lay down international law and solve disputes between nations by common agreement. The League did achieve some very important breakthroughs, such as banning the use of lead in paint and establishing a proper law of the sea, but its political work proved a flop. Some major nations stayed out of the League, and those that joined took no notice of it when it suited them. Above all, the League didn't represent those parts of the world that were ruled as colonies – most of Africa and Asia, in other words. The League proved totally unable to stop aggressive nations plunging the world into the Second World War. But the *idea* of a world government didn't go away.

After the Second World War the nations of the world had another go at setting up a world government. This time it was called the United Nations and it met in New York. Unfortunately, the UN was immediately paralysed by the Cold War, the name given to the period of icy tension between the capitalist West and the communist world that lasted from the 1940s to the 1980s. The UN has sent armed peacekeeping missions into various world troublespots, but hasn't always been able to prevent wars, massacres, and atrocities.

TECHNICAL STUFF

'First World, Third World' – What happened to the 'Second World'?

'Third World' was never a satisfactory term, not least because people were often unsure what the first two worlds were. Other phrases were tried: First 'Undeveloped World', then, in case that term seemed a bit harsh, 'Under-developed World', and, more encouragingly, 'Developing World'. In the 1980s a special commission on poverty in the 'Third World' headed by the former German Chancellor Willi Brandt recommended referring to the rich countries as 'the North' and the world's poorer countries as 'the South', which made geographical sense up to a point (though it meant wealthy Australia and New Zealand found themselves allocated to the North. Strewth!). But even this terminology has its limits. After the end of the Cold War the world learned that some former communist 'northern' countries like Bulgaria and Romania lived in conditions as bad as some 'southern' or Third World countries. And what about big 'Third World' or 'Southern' countries like India and China, which by the end of the century were well on their way to becoming economic superpowers, yet had problems of poverty every bit as bad as the poorest African countries?

Three worlds in one: First, third, and non-aligned

In 1955, when the Cold War seemed to be heading towards nuclear disaster, the leaders of many of the nations who had recently gained independence from the European colonial powers met at Bandung in Indonesia and declared themselves the 'non-aligned' world – that is, they were not allied to either side in the Cold War. In fact, most of them tended to sympathise with the communist bloc on a my-former-colonial-ruler's-enemy-is-my-friend basis, but the fact remained that the world now seemed to be divided into *three* camps: Capitalist, communist, and non-aligned.

By the 1960s, after most of Africa had gained its independence from the Europeans, one fact began to become crystal clear about this non-aligned world: many of the countries in it were economic disaster areas. Many of these new nations had to borrow huge sums of money to combat famine and disease and they were expected to repay at interest. As a result, this debt-ridden 'third world' became a by-word for poverty, hunger, corruption, and, all too often, dictatorship and war.

Connecting through technology

During the last thirty or so years of the twentieth century, technology brought the world closer. The Internet and the World Wide Web created an international communications system that helped people get in touch with each other and feel part of the same world. You could log onto a gaming site in your front room and find yourself playing against someone from the other side of the world. While sending a letter abroad had once meant buying special lightweight air mail paper and a colourful stamp and feeling rather exotic at the post office, now you could e-mail someone on the other side of the world in the time it took to e-mail your colleague at the next desk.

Save the world!

The issue that did most to give a truly global sense of togetherness wasn't a political ideology but a growing realisation that if we didn't all learn to act together, we were likely to destroy the planet we all live on.

Environmental groups started campaigning in the 1960s and 1970s to save endangered animal species, but by the 1980s they were turning their attention to the appalling damage being created by industrial pollution. Because pollution doesn't respect borders, countries *had* to start thinking and acting together to defend their common global interests.

By the 1990s, environmentalists were raising the alarm about changes to the climate caused by the release of carbon gases into the atmosphere. These gases are emitted from objects common to life in the West, such as refrigerators, cars, and aeroplanes. Making the situation worse was the destruction of vast areas of rainforest – particularly the steady destruction for economic and political reasons of the Amazon rainforest – that would normally absorb these 'greenhouse gases'. It was no good the Brazilian government arguing that what was happening to the Amazon was an internal matter: The destruction had implications for *everyone*.

REMEMBER

Sometimes global problems can seem too big for any of us to do much about, but environmentalists have a good slogan which reminds us that we're all part of one world: *Think globally – Act locally*.

Ch-ch-ch-changes!

A lot changed during the twentieth century, including a few things that people used to think would go on for ever. The poet Thomas Hardy wrote about a man ploughing his fields, following his horse as men had done for centuries and would do for ages to come: He hadn't reckoned on tractors,

though. So many basics of life – farming, childbirth, travelling, sitting at home in the evening – went through such huge changes that it is often hard to believe that the 1900s and the 1990s were less than a hundred years apart.

From monarchs . . .

The twentieth century saw some major changes in leadership. In 1900, most of the world's major states, and quite a few of the smaller ones, were ruled by monarchs. Even states that had got rid of their kings, such as France, the USA, or the states of South America, often treated their presidents as if they were royalty.

However, monarchs didn't enjoy anything like the power and authority their ancestors had possessed. The British monarchs and the German emperors had to work with elected parliaments which laid down strict limits on royal power; the Russian and Chinese emperors and the Turkish sultan all claimed to have total power over their subjects but soon found that in fact they didn't: All of them were forced to grant their people an elected parliament. The appalling destruction of the First World War made many people lose faith in the monarchs who had led them into it. After the war, revolution broke out in many of the countries that had fought in it, and many monarchs had to flee for their lives. But all too often the new democratic politicians proved incapable of dealing with the serious problems the new republics faced. The people didn't necessarily want the old monarchs back, but they did want rulers who could promise to restore order. Cue the dictators.

. . . to dictators

If you've lived all your life in a democratic country, it can be quite a shock to realise how unusual you are. In the second half of the twentieth century dictatorship was the *usual* form of government in most of the world. Most African countries were dictatorships and so were most South American ones. In Chile, the democratically elected government was overthrown by an American-backed coup in 1973 and the Chilean president, Salvador Allende, was murdered. Brutal dictatorships operated at various times in Indonesia, in North Korea (and, you could argue, in South Korea too), in Iraq and Syria, in Iran, in Afghanistan, as well as in the Soviet bloc in eastern and central Europe. Post-war Spain, Portugal, and Greece all went through military rule and had to establish themselves as fully democratic countries before they could even think of applying to join the European Union. The following sections identify some of the century's most influential dictators.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924)

When the Russians overthrew their tsar in February 1917, the new government was supposed to set up a democratically elected parliament, but

instead the Bolsheviks (communists), led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, overthrew the Russian government and took power themselves. Lenin said that democratic elections were just a middle-class ploy to fool people into thinking their opinions mattered; real democracy, he said, lay in setting up the *dictatorship of the proletariat* – that is, all power to the workers. (You can find out more about the Russian Revolution and Lenin in Chapter 4.)

After Lenin died in 1924, he became venerated almost like a saint, which was ironic because he'd abolished religion in Russia. His body was embalmed and put on show in Moscow and his possessions were regarded virtually as holy relics. Russians invoked his name and guidance before doing almost anything, from building a bridge to doing their homework. This phenomenon was known as the *cult of personality*.

Josef Stalin (1879–1953)

As soon as Lenin was dead, the Bolshevik leaders all started plotting against each other. The man who won was Josef Stalin, and he set up a cult of his own personality even bigger than Lenin's. The only free debate allowed in Russia was over who could come up with the best praise for Stalin. What made this situation worse was that while everyone was calling Stalin the father of the country who looked after everyone, the reality was that his secret police were rounding up people in their thousands and sending them to labour camps. See Chapter 4 for more on Stalin.

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945)

Italian dictator Benito Mussolini was the first ruler outside Russia to copy Lenin's style of dictatorship. Mussolini seized power in 1922, saying he would save Italy from anarchy and communism. Instead he took all power into his own hands, had anyone who opposed him killed, and persuaded the Italian people to hail him as their leader, or *il Duce* in Italian.

Mussolini saw himself as a new Caesar who would restore Italy's ancient days of glory. He borrowed many details from the Romans, including the raised arm salute and a desire to conquer the Mediterranean world. For the symbol of his new party, Mussolini borrowed an ancient Roman symbol of a bundle of rods bound together around an axe to symbolise the strength and authority that come from unity. This symbol was called the *fasces*, which is simply the Latin word for 'rods', so Mussolini's regime became known as *fascism*. (To find out more about the Romans , see *The Romans For Dummies* (Wiley)).

Mussolini didn't just seize power in Italy; he established a new type of rule known as *Totalitarianism*. This idea holds that the State is all important and the individual isn't. Everything belongs to the State and should be run by the State and anyone who stands out against this idea is an Enemy of the State and must be crushed. In theory, 'the State' and 'the People' were the same thing; in reality the State meant the government and the people had to do what they were told. The leader or *dictator* (another term the Italians got from the Romans) embodied the State and therefore in theory he embodied

the People. Which was just a neat way of saying that if you opposed the leader you were, by definition, an Enemy of the People and should be destroyed.

At first Mussolini seemed to be so successful that his style of leadership caught on and soon fascist-style leaders popped up all round the world. Fascist-style regimes sprouted in South America, across central and eastern Europe, in China, and in Japan. Mussolini's most fervent admirer, however, was the man who would give dictatorship a permanently bad name, Adolf Hitler. See Chapter 5 for more on Mussolini (and Hitler).

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945)

Hitler showed there wasn't much anyone could teach him about how to run a dictatorship. Not only did he have his opponents murdered, take all of German life under the control of the State, and set up a secret police force to keep everyone under observation, but he so captivated the German people that he turned this most cultured of European nations into a gang of racist thugs. He set up a huge industrial programme dedicated to finding and killing every Jew and gypsy in Germany, and later in the whole of Europe. Germany was a chilling illustration of what a dictator can do if he really sets his mind to it.

Hitler led Germany into the disastrous Second World War, which killed millions around the world and utterly destroyed his beloved country. When the dust had settled, people were determined that never again should power lie in the hands of tyrannical megalomaniacs like Mussolini and Hitler. That was the intention, at any rate, but it didn't quite work out.

Mao Zedong (1893–1976)

Chinese communist leader, Mao Zedong, who seized power in 1949, set up a cult of personality every bit as ruthless and disastrous as anything Mussolini or Stalin had run. Mao even pretended to welcome criticism: 'Let a Thousand Flowers bloom!' he declared in the 1960s, encouraging people to come forward and express their views openly. They did, and he had them arrested. See Chapter 16 for more on Mao.

Pol Pot (1928–98)

One of the most tragic examples of dictatorship occurred in Cambodia. Pol Pot, leader of the communist *Khmer Rouge*, seized control of Cambodia in 1975 and immediately declared it 'Year Zero': Cambodia would start again, from scratch. Pol Pot ordered everyone – *everyone* – out of the cities and into the countryside to till the land alongside the peasants. Doctors, teachers, and anyone with any degree of learning were regarded as an enemy of the people and shot. Pol Pot had whole villages wiped out. Thousands and thousands of Cambodians were shot and their bodies left to rot in what became known as the 'killing fields'. No one knows exactly how many Cambodians were massacred before Pol Pot's murderous regime was finally overthrown in 1979. See Chapter 14 for more on Pol Pot.

Nineteen Eighty-Four

In 1949 the British writer George Orwell produced *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* a chilling vision of an England under the heel of the ruthless dictatorship of 'Big Brother'. It was a bleak world, in which the secret 'Thought Police' prevented people thinking for themselves and telescreens watched what people were doing and saying at home. You could be arrested for 'thoughtcrime' and language was manipulated into something called 'newspeak' so you couldn't even have the words with which to voice dissent. (Originally Orwell wanted to call it *Nineteen Forty-Eight* but his publishers thought that was a shade too pessimistic so he reversed the figures to get *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.)

Of course, when the real 1984 arrived and turned out to be a year much like any other, people decided 'Panic over – George got it wrong'. Even the Soviet Union soon started unravelling. But many aspects of Orwell's vision of the future remain true, even if not quite the way he envisaged: Thanks to microchip technology and genetic records the State *can* keep tabs on every aspect of our lives. So can many multinational corporations. Even Orwell didn't anticipate that.

African dictators

Africa produced a series of grotesque dictators in the last decades of the century, including:

- ✔ **President Mobutu of Zaire**, who seized power in a military coup in 1965 and amassed an enormous fortune for himself while his country grew steadily poorer.

- ✔ **President Idi Amin of Uganda**, who seized power in a military coup in 1971, expelled the country's Asian population, and set about murdering thousands of Ugandans, including many schoolchildren. He was eventually overthrown in 1979.

- ✔ **Emperor Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Empire** (otherwise known as the Central African Republic), who seized power in a military coup (do you see a pattern here?) in 1965 and declared himself President. His regime became steadily more bizarre thanks to his deep Napoleon fixation. In 1977, he declared the country an Empire and staged a massive coronation ceremony based exactly on Napoleon's in 1804. It cost a small fortune while his people were some of the poorest in Africa. When schoolchildren protested against the uniforms he was making them wear (and pay for) he ordered his troops to kill them. He was overthrown in a coup in 1979.

Two cheers for democracy?

Democratic regimes can rarely compete with dictatorships on the glamour front: Democracy tends to run to balding middle-aged men in suits rather than eccentrics in uniform, but its had its fair share of successes. The

Western democracies were on the winning side in the Second World War (though so too was the highly undemocratic Soviet Union, don't forget), and they also saw out and won the Cold War. Perhaps more importantly, democratic ideas have taken hold around the world so that even dictatorships have to *pretend* to be operating democratically. The 1980s saw a series of popular risings for democracy that overturned the dictatorships in Argentina, the Philippines, Haiti, and then across eastern Europe. Even South Africa dismantled its racist apartheid regime and allowed democracy; in 1994 thousands of black South Africans queued for hours to have the chance to cast their vote for the first time in their lives.

Even so, the world was very far from being fully democratic by the time the century ended. Some dictators managed to stay in power; some democratic countries seemed to have trouble living up to their own ideals. Italian politics became notorious for corruption and instability, much of it down to Italy's particular form of democratic structure. France's democracy seemed very shaky during the crises of the 1960s. Even American democracy was tainted, first by President Nixon's involvement in the Watergate scandal, next by sex scandals involving democratic darling Bill Clinton, and in 2000 by extraordinary scenes in the presidential election which seemed to suggest the sophisticated voting system in Florida had broken down and that the wrong candidate was declared President.

More worryingly, some groups even denied that democracy was necessarily the best way to rule. In particular, some religious groups argued that if democracy allowed people the freedom to deny and attack their religious faith, then democracy was not as good as it was cracked up to be. And the spectacle of democratic countries appearing to *force* democracy on countries like Vietnam or Iraq tarnished democracy's reputation for many people.

A violent century

Thinking that as time progresses, people become more civilized and humane in the way they treat each other is natural. Natural, but wrong. The twentieth century saw some really inventive thinking in how to harm people.

✔ **Bigger and bigger bombs:** Blowing people up is a very old idea, but the twentieth century came up with ways of doing it on a much bigger scale than ever before. Artillery bombardments in France and Belgium in the First World War were so enormous that they could be heard in London. Then the Second World War perfected ways of dropping bombs from aircraft to destroy whole cities, a technique that reached its destructive height with the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Then came the hydrogen bomb, hundreds of times more destructive than the atom bomb, and then instead of planes dropping nuclear bombs, the boffins worked out how to attach nuclear warheads to missiles that could take off at the press of a button and travel from one continent to another.

✔ **Chemical warfare:** People have long used contaminated material to hurt their enemies, but the twentieth century really took to this ghastly way of fighting. Both sides in the First World War used poison gas, and Mussolini used it against the Abyssinians. In the Second World War it was used to murder millions of people in concentration camps. The Americans used a burning chemical jelly called *Napalm* against villages in the Vietnam War, as well as an acid called *Agent Orange* to destroy forest vegetation. President Saddam Hussein used gas to murder thousands of Iraqi Kurds in the 1980s. And by the 1990s all major nations, and quite a few less major ones, had huge stockpiles of nerve gas and biological and chemical weapons.

✔ **Terrorism:** The twentieth century was *the* century of terrorism, which means making people so afraid of you that they'll do whatever you want them to. The most effective way to scare people is to kill *randomly*, so no-one can feel safe. Significant terrorist campaigns occurred in Russia before the revolution, in Palestine in the 1930s, in colonial Africa, in the Middle East, South America, the Caribbean, and western Europe. Can terrorism work? Yes, it can: It forced a number of countries to change their policies and many terrorist leaders went on to become political leaders. But not always: Governments have learned a lot about how to fight terrorism, especially by using informers.

✔ **Knives:** The twentieth century found new ways of using this simple old weapon, with global implications, and at the end of the century the humble knife was the most successful weapon of mass murder. Stabbing never went out of fashion on the streets, but in the 1990s knives and machetes were used in the mass killings in Rwanda, when Hutus turned on their Tutsi neighbours and literally hacked them to death. A few years later, the 9/11 hijackers used knives to take over the planes they then flew into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Old faiths, new beliefs – Christianity

The nineteenth century, at least in the Western world, was a great age of religious faith. Everyone expected the twentieth century to be very different, especially after the appalling suffering of the First World War left many people questioning how a loving God could allow it to happen. But in fact religion turned out to be a very important factor in world history, that no ruler, however powerful, could afford to ignore.

God is dead! (Or so they say)

When the century started, the smart thinking was suggesting that God was dead: The new go-ahead techno age would have no need for superstition and archaic ritual. None of the new beliefs that people were turning to – communism and fascism – had any time for religion. The Nazis claimed to be standing up for Christian civilization, but in reality, they persecuted anyone who actually believed in God and did their utmost to destroy the Jewish

religion completely. Communist regimes in Russia and China closed down churches and arrested anyone who preached belief in God. When someone once pointed out to Stalin that he should be careful of offending the pope, he snorted and asked sneeringly, 'How many divisions has the pope?'

In the Communist bloc

Across the communist bloc, people held to their religious faith as a way of resisting the regime. The election of Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyla as Pope John Paul II in 1978 had an immediate impact in Poland and encouraged the Poles to resist the communist regime. Churches played an important role in encouraging anti-communist resistance in East Germany and Czechoslovakia as well.

In South American countries

Religion could also work *alongside* socialists and communists. In South America, many Catholic priests were shocked at the way the rich kept down and exploited the poor; many workers had to live in shanty towns while their bosses lived in luxury villas. Priests preached a revolutionary style of Christianity called *Liberation Theology*. Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador spoke out against the harsh military regime that had taken control of the country, and called for human rights to be restored and for safeguards for the poor. In 1980, he was assassinated while saying Mass in his cathedral; most people agree that the murder was carried out on behalf of the military government. Chapter 13 has more on the conflicts in Latin America.

Christianity and civil rights

Archbishop Desmond Tutu of Cape Town won respect from around the world for the way he stuck to the Christian gospel in his condemnation of the apartheid regime in South Africa. The leading American Civil Rights campaigner, Dr Martin Luther King, was a Baptist preacher whose Christian faith lay at the heart of his campaigns against racial segregation in the American South; his experience as a preacher made him a very powerful political orator.

King and Tutu both preached non-violent resistance to oppression and they got that idea from another religious leader, Mohandas Gandhi, known as the Mahatma ('Great Soul'), who led Indian resistance to British rule over India. Gandhi was a devout Hindu who rejected violence and believed that British violence undermined their moral position, so he provoked as much of it as he could. And he was right – world opinion decided that a government that had to use so much violence to enforce its authority didn't deserve that authority in the first place.

Not all twentieth-century Christians believed in non-violence. Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland bombed and shot each other, sometimes in churches; in America, the Ku Klux Klan claimed to be defending Christian values as it attacked black Americans and fire-bombed their churches; and in Lebanon, Christian militia carried out an appalling massacre of Palestinians in two camps, Sabra and Chatila, in 1982.

Old faiths, new beliefs – Islam

While Christianity seemed to adapt very successfully to the twentieth century, Islam seemed to be stuck in the Middle Ages: It hardly played any role in political events until the last quarter of the century. Even in their long wars with Israel, the Arab states were fighting more for land and national pride than for Islam. In fact, the Arab world seemed to be becoming more westernised and secular. By the 1960s and 1970s, many Arab states were immensely rich, thanks to their oil reserves, and 'oil sheikhs' splashed their money around in the casinos and luxury hotels of the West.

Iran: Reviving Islam

The westernising of the Arab world came to an abrupt halt in January 1979 when the Iranians rose up and finally got rid of the corrupt and tyrannical regime of the Shah. While they were celebrating, an elderly Islamic leader called Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini arrived back in Tehran from exile in Paris. Khomeini had visions for Iran, and Western influence and culture did not feature in them. He set about making Iran a strictly Islamic state, with harsh punishments for anyone who offended against Islam's strict moral codes. Women were forced to stop wearing Western clothes and adopt full Islamic dress. They also had to accept traditional Islamic restrictions on what they were allowed to say and do. Violently anti-American, Ayatollah Khomeini called America 'the Great Satan' and his supporters attacked the American embassy in Tehran and took its staff hostage.

Just whose side are these guys on?

If the Muslims in Iran were anti-American, they must be pro-Soviet, right? That's what the Russians thought, but they were wrong. Muslims hated atheistic communism too, so when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the Muslim *mujaheddin* fought back – and won. 'They're anti-Soviet: They must be on our side!' thought the Americans. Wrong again. After the Russians had gone, the mujaheddin set up an Islamic government in Afghanistan run by a student group known as *taliban*, who hated America and helped plan the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

When the Islamic revolution broke out in Iran both the Americans and the Russians were still thinking in old-fashioned Cold War terms of East v. West. The militant Muslims were thinking in *religious* terms, of God v. Satan, and Satan could be Western secular society or godless Russian communism. Muslim extremists hated American support for the state of Israel, but even more they hated American presence and influence in the Muslim world, especially in Saudi Arabia, home of Islam's holiest shrines. See Chapter 17 for more about how the dangerous conflict in the Middle East developed.

Islam in the West

After Europe's worldwide empires collapsed, many people from the former colonies moved to the West in search of a better life, so some Western

countries gained substantial Muslim populations. As the new generation of Muslims went to school and grew up in Western culture, most people in the West thought their Muslim neighbours were just as liberal and relaxed about religion as they were. So it came as a shock when Western Muslims, especially young people, started supporting the most extreme voices coming out of the Middle East. Some supported terrorist attacks on Western targets; some even helped carry them out. Most Muslims condemned such violence, but the fact that some could launch terrorist attacks showed that there were serious issues to address about relations between Western society and Islam by the time the century ended.

Mars, Venus, and their kids in the twentieth century

For centuries, men had ruled and women had followed. Not any more. Twentieth-century women wanted a bigger role in society and men had to change their attitudes pretty sharpish. Young people changed too. They weren't so ready to do everything their parents told them to. The twentieth century was the Age of the Teenager.

This is a man's world

The nineteenth century had been very much a man's world: Men ruled the home and the world, women had to submit to their will. People in the industrialised West liked to accuse other cultures of oppressing their womenfolk, but Western society could be just as oppressive. Fashion dictated that well-born women should wear suffocating corsets (no wonder Victorian women were always fainting) and stay at home looking decorative, while the man of the house was out at work. Working-class women were expected to do manual work, but they got paid less for it than men.

Nevertheless, attitudes were changing. The idea that men and women should have equal rights was gathering pace as women gained access to higher education and to professions such as medicine and teaching. As cities expanded, shops, offices, and telephone exchanges all provided employment for young women looking for an income and a bit of independence. New Zealand and Finland even managed to grant women the vote without shaking the foundations of civilisation, but other countries needed a bit more persuasion. Britain and America only conceded female suffrage after the First World War, French women didn't get the vote until 1944, and Swiss women had to wait until the 1970s.

Communist countries boasted that they treated men and women equally, though all too often this just meant that women had to do a day's work in the factory alongside the men before doing all the cooking and cleaning when they got home in the evening.

Girl power

The big changes for women started in the 1960s with what was then called 'Women's Liberation', or 'Women's Lib' for short. It began in the USA with campaigns in favour of abortion and against the general stereotype of women as bimbos or airheads; The movement also demanded that the authorities take rape and violence against women much more seriously. The most radical feminists symbolically burned their bras, which increased male interest in the movement considerably.

The women's movement made real progress in the Western world, getting sex discrimination outlawed, securing tougher laws on sexual violence, and getting women into male-only work, from bus driving to politics. But by 2000, much still remained to do. In many areas of work, women found they were prevented from reaching the top by a 'glass ceiling', a barrier of prejudice which wasn't apparent when you first started work but was when you tried to rise higher.

Meanwhile, what about men? By the 1990s, they were under pressure to become 'new men', eating quiche, being there when their children were born, and doing the washing up. Some men took to going off together deep into the woods at weekends to bond and get in touch with their primaeval masculinity, but they had to be back in time to pick up the children.

Making whoopee

People fell in love, got married, fell out, and got caught in the eternal triangle all through the twentieth century. Western countries eventually relaxed their attitudes towards gays and lesbians, though other countries, especially in Africa and the Islamic world, didn't. For most of the century having – or being – an 'illegitimate' child carried an enormous social stigma; many children born out of wedlock were taken away and their mothers were sometimes locked up in institutions. By the 1990s, the world had got more used to the idea of couples living together before marriage or even without getting married at all.

The 1960s and 1970s saw a huge shift in attitudes towards sex, especially among young people. The contraceptive pill was available from your local doctor, and you could get condoms from the chemist or even the supermarket. Of course sexual shenanigans had been going on throughout the century – terrible worries about sexual morality existed in the 1920s, every bit as fierce as anything the sixties had to offer – but it did *seem* as if people were being a lot more open about sex in the 1960s and 1970s than they had ever been before. Only with the advent of AIDS in the 1980s did people begin to exercise a bit of restraint.

A question of black and white

The twentieth century saw some of the most open and violent racial conflict in history. Some enormous advances were made, but saying that racism had been eradicated by the year 2000 wouldn't be true. What we probably can say is that the experiences of the twentieth century made it publicly unacceptable to hold the sort of racist views and make the sort of racist comments that, earlier in the century, were commonplace. Since racist acts always start with racist thoughts and ideas, perhaps that's more of an achievement than it looks.

The trouble with young people today . . .

Childhood used to stop at about fourteen, when young people started wearing adult clothes and going out to work; only the lucky few were able to stay on at school. That situation changed in the 1950s as young people in different countries stayed on longer in education and were able to get better-paid work at the end of it. The young person with money to spend was a new phenomenon and many companies moved in to sell to this exciting new market. Thanks to American capital and worldwide advertising, Levi jeans, casual shirts, Coca-Cola, and above all pop music became the common culture of teenagers around the world. Not very far below the surface was a flourishing subculture of drugs and sex. Older people shook their heads, banged on the ceiling with a broom, and wondered where it would all end.

Apart from a few ageing hippies, where it all ended was with all these groovy young people growing into grey-haired accountants with mortgages, reminiscing about Woodstock, worrying about what their own teenage children were getting into, and wondering where it would all end.

What will they think of next? A scientific century

If you wanted to sum up the difference between the twentieth century and all its predecessors, you'd have to look at science and technology. If you want a list of top inventions of the twentieth century, look at Chapter 22, but here's a very quick overview of the impact science had over the course of it:

✔ **Biologists** wasted time at the start of the century coming up with theories about racial hierarchies and eugenics, but thanks to chemists' discovery of DNA, the structure of living organisms, they've been able to work in the controversial field of genetic engineering and cloning.

- ✔ **Chemists** not only discovered DNA, but they led the field in working out effective remedies for infections and diseases. For the first time in history it was possible for most people to expect to overcome illnesses that would have killed off their ancestors.

- ✔ **Engineering** can chalk up the car and the aeroplane as the inventions which have transformed the lives of people the world over – though not always for the better, of course.

- ✔ **Electronics** has probably had the most immediate and widespread impact on the lives of everyone on the planet. Nowadays we just *expect* homes to have radios, television, hi-fi, Internet access, and mobile phones, and it's difficult to imagine a time when people didn't have them.

- ✔ **Medical science** benefited enormously from work in the other sciences, but one highly influential development was the cultivation of an entirely new branch of science, Psychology. Twentieth-century scientists explored the brain the way nineteenth-century travellers explored Africa, with the same sense of embarking on uncharted territory. Above all, this work allowed for proper recognition and treatment, for the first time in human history, of mental illness.

- ✔ **Physicists** were able to show the structure of matter and energy both on Earth and out in space, thus making it possible to create and harness nuclear power.

These advances came at a cost in terms of pollution and, more recently, changes in the climate. One thing we can be sure of: The twenty-first century will pick up the tab for the twentieth.

The More Things Change, the More They Are (Basically) the Same

'The fundamental things apply', goes the song in the film *Casablanca*, 'as time goes by'. And as time goes, a century, even one as full of incident and change as the twentieth century, isn't that long. Why, there are people who *lived* through all of it. So, before we start getting excited about all the changes the century saw, let's look at a few fundamentals that didn't change.

Not feeding the world: Famine

Food is one of the basics of human existence and nothing in the twentieth century changed that. Styles of eating changed enormously as mass production and fast food began to make their presence felt, but the *need* for food

didn't change. Neither did famine. That for all the twentieth century's technology, it was still faced with disastrous famine is a sobering thought.

Contrary to popular misconceptions, famine is very rarely the result of a straightforward natural phenomenon such as a drought; natural factors are nearly always combined with human activity, usually war. Russia was the scene of horrific famine in the 1920s during the civil war that followed the Russian Revolution; the famines that regularly struck Africa through the century were nearly always the result of civil war, like in Biafra in the 1960s and Ethiopia in the 1980s. It seems incredible that over eighty years into the century it should still have been necessary to market a charity record calling on everyone to 'feed the world', but it was.

Home (not so) Sweet Home

As cities expanded in the nineteenth century, so city authorities had to build somewhere for all these new people to live. The trouble was, they generally went for the cheapest and dodgiest options, so that as the twentieth century dawned, millions of people around the world lived in filthy, crowded slums, whole families to a single room, with no sanitation and often ankle-deep in human waste. Many of them were still living in such conditions at the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. The war destroyed so many homes in Europe and Asia that the post-war years were very busy for architects and builders the world over. But they couldn't keep up with a world population that didn't stop growing and moving about in search of work. In South America people lived on enormous rubbish heaps on the outskirts of the big cities; in Europe the homeless sheltered in cardboard boxes or slept in doorways; in Asia they slept in the street. Mumbai, India's hi-tech financial capital, boasts the largest slum in Asia, and if you take a taxi from the airport you'll spend most of your journey going through it.

War: What is it good for?

The twentieth century saw many attempts to outlaw war altogether, but none of them succeeded. Here are some of the most destructive wars of the century:

✔ **First World War:** People assumed the war would be intense and destructive but short. Well, they got the first two right. In fact the First World War, or 'Great War' as people called it at the time, was so appalling that many people could hardly believe the world would survive. They began to call the conflict 'the war to end all wars', mainly because they hoped it would. But it didn't.

ON THE ONE HAND

When is a world war not a world war?

What should the world wars be called? That's not a silly question: Names matter and they haven't always been called the First and Second World Wars. At the time, people called the 1914–18 war the Great War, which summarises very neatly its symbolic importance for them: They'd have been very shocked if someone had told them that actually it was only the *first* world war! The war that broke out in 1939 didn't get called the Second World War until much later; at the time, people in Western countries tended to talk of the 'first and second German wars', while the Russians still refer to it as the 'Great Patriotic War', which suggests that the war was essentially about defending Russia, with a few unimportant sideshows in other parts of the world. More recently, historians outside the West have objected to the 'world war' label: They point out that the war may have involved Africans and Asians but only because their countries were European colonies and argue that it would be more accurate to talk of the 'European Civil Wars'. They have a point, though 'European Civil Wars' rather ignores Japan and America. Personally, I'll stick with 'World Wars', but feel free to disagree.

REMEMBER

- ✔ **Second World War:** This one proved even more destructive than the First, with cities destroyed from the air and a death toll that ran into millions. When it ended, public opinion around the world demanded a more effective way of keeping peace in future.

 After the First World War, US President Woodrow Wilson drew up plans for the League of Nations – a sort of world government which would make sure countries resolved their disputes peacefully instead of resorting to war. The League didn't work. After the Second World War, the United Nations was born, and every country in the world joined up. United Nations' peacekeeping troops have been sent into trouble spots all round the world, but they haven't been able to stop wars breaking out or spreading. You can read more about the UN and the League of Nations in the earlier section 'All together now: A world government (of sorts)'.

- ✔ **The Korean War:** While most think of wars as being between countries, the Korean War was different. In this case, the UN itself went to war, in 1950, with North Korea. The war lasted four years, cost an estimated half a million lives, and ended up with both sides back where they'd started.

Massacre and genocide constitute another grim phenomenon that continued right through the century. In the worst cases of the late twentieth century, like Bosnia and Rwanda, even the UN couldn't prevent wholesale massacre.