Twentieth-Century Europe: A Brief History, 1900 to the Present presents readers with a concise and accessible survey of the most significant themes and political events that shaped European history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For ease of comprehension, the book is carefully organized into four parts—two covering the period prior to World War II and two dealing with events of the war and postwar period up to the present. Each chapter begins with a helpful chronology of key events. A variety of supplemental illustrations, maps, tables, charts, and suggested readings enhances clarity. Highlights of this new third edition include a chapter setting Europe in the context of a post-Cold War world with an analysis of major trends in the two decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall and a chapter containing a detailed discussion of the cultural and intellectual currents since World War II. Combining accessibility with thoughtful scholarly insights, Twentieth-Century Europe offers readers an ideal introductory overview to the complexities of a century marked by great achievements and startling barbarity.

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Twentieth-Century Europe
This edition first published 2014
© 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Edition history: Harlan Davidson, Inc. (1e, 1999; 2e, 2005)
Harlan Davidson Inc. was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in May 2012.

Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148–5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Richards, Michael D.
Twentieth-century Europe : a brief history, 1900 to the present / Michael D. Richards,
Paul R. Waibel. – Third edition.
   pages cm
   Includes bibliographical references and index.
D424.R517 2014
940.5–dc23
2013041082

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: Funeral procession of former Czech President Vaclav Havel, Charles Bridge, Prague, December 21, 2011. © David Brauchli / Getty Images

Cover design by Simon Levy Associates

Set in 11/13pt Dante by SPI Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

1 2014
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Now that we are well into the twenty-first century, it has become necessary to change slightly the title of the third edition of what has been known for many years as *Twentieth-Century Europe: A Brief History*. Under its new title, it will remain a brief history and, as well, a readable and an accurate one.

As we have noted in previous prefaces, use of a brief but comprehensive survey permits one to assign outside readings and, we might add, other assignments that a feature-laden, very expensive textbook precludes. Readable is key, too. The more common ground students and their instructors have, the more likely class sessions can be exchanges of informed opinions and probing questions. Finally, accuracy is highly important. We have tried to create a text that will be a reliable introduction to European civilization from 1900 to the present.

Our approach is largely chronological. The book is divided into four parts. Two parts cover the period from 1900 to the outbreak of World War II. The third and fourth parts cover the period from the outbreak of the war to the present. Each part is introduced by an “Overview” summarizing the main themes of the period covered. Each part is then divided into three chapters. Two chapters, in parts two and four, respectively, provide a careful and thoughtful consideration of the most significant intellectual/philosophical currents and artistic trends of the twentieth century.

The carefully selected maps, tables, and illustrations aid the reader’s comprehension of information in the text. Four maps show
national boundaries at key points during the last 110 plus years. We have compiled tables to clarify certain events (such as the German inflation of 1923) or to provide an overview of key developments (e.g., the development over a half century of the European Community/European Union). Photographs, some from our own collections, are featured in every chapter to provide visual references.

Every chapter begins with a brief chronology to orient the reader and to serve as a reference. A list of “Further Reading” concludes each chapter. The titles featured are among the best and most interesting books available to the student or general reader who would like to pursue a topic in greater detail. A list of abbreviations and acronyms, which in this bureaucratic world grows longer with each edition, forms an appendix to the text. An extensive index, a valuable but often overlooked feature, rounds out the resources available in the text.

More than 30 years ago, Michael D. Richards, then a young professor at Sweet Briar College, published *Europe: 1900–1980: A Brief History*. Several years later, Paul R. Waibel came on board as co-author of the first edition of a new text, modeled on the original book but in its own right a careful, thoughtful reconsideration of Europe’s experience in the twentieth century. The second edition contained a completely new chapter (Chapter 11) and a substantially revised chapter (Chapter 12). This third edition contains two substantially revised chapters (Chapters 11 and 12). As noted for the second edition, all other chapters have been carefully reviewed to reflect current scholarship and some parts have been extensively revised.

We have each taught thousands of students in careers stretching over several decades. In the course of our careers, we have accumulated debts to our teachers, colleagues, and students we can never repay. This book is in some large part the product of many conversations both within and outside the classroom. Through it we hope to have a continuing conversation with many more colleagues and their students.

It has been a great pleasure to work once again with our long-time editor, Andrew Davidson. He guided us through a careful and thorough review of the text, chapter by chapter. Thanks to him this
Preface

The edition is far more than an update here and there of the previous edition. We want to acknowledge as well the assistance provided by Linda Gaio-Davidson in securing permissions and selecting illustrations for the text. She was both resourceful and endlessly patient.

Georgina Coleby, Project Editor, helped to move the project forward in so many ways. We are very grateful for her prompt and gracious assistance with our many queries. Lindsay Bourgeois, Editorial Assistant, was also most helpful. Leanda Shrimpton supplied many, many possibilities for the cover, including the one we all agreed was just right. Velayutham Satheesh oversaw the massive and essential task involved in copy-editing the book and preparing it to be printed. We also want to thank Leah Thompson for her efforts in marketing the book.

We are grateful for the support and encouragement of our families. Dr. Richards wishes to thank John M. Richards; David, Jeanne, Will, and Wes Richards; Arie, Rebecca, John C., and Caroline Richards; and Nancy D. Potter and John, Blake, and Owen Crumbliss. Dr. Waibel wishes to thank Darlene, Elizabeth Joy, and Natalie Grace Waibel.

We sincerely hope readers will find this book both informative and enjoyable.

Michael D. Richards
Paul R. Waibel
THE TWO DECADES FROM THE DAWN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY TO THE END OF WORLD WAR I FORMED THE ERA DURING WHICH EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION PEAKED. IT WAS ALSO THE PERIOD IN WHICH THE VERY FOUNDATIONS OF EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION BEGAN TO CRACK BENEATH THE WEIGHT OF INNER CONTRADICTIONS AND NEW CHALLENGES.

IN 1900, EUROPEANS COULD HAVE SAID, SOMewhat PARADOXICALLY, THAT EUROPE WAS THE WORLD AND THE WORLD WAS EUROPE’S. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY, A WORLD CIVILIZATION EXISTED, AND THAT CIVILIZATION WAS EUROPEAN. BY 1914, “EUROPEANS” CONTROLLED 84 PERCENT OF THE WORLD’S LAND SURFACE. ONLY JAPAN, WHICH SINCE 1871 HAD BEEN PURSUING A SELF-CONSCIOUS POLICY OF WESTERNIZATION, WAS ACCEPTED AS A “CIVILIZED” ALTHOUGH NON-WESTERN NATION.


IN EUROPE ITSELF, THE REMNANTS OF THE OLD ARISTOCRACY STILL OCCUPIED THRONES AND, IN SOME COUNTRIES LIKE RUSSIA, GERMANY, AND AUSTRIA-HUNGARY, STILL POSSESSED REAL OR POTENTIAL POWER. BUT THE PERIOD FROM
the end of the Napoleonic wars to the outbreak of World War I, the Great War, in 1914, was the golden age of the middle class, or bourgeoisie. They were the self-confident children of modernity, the Enlightenment tradition. Their ideology was classical liberalism, both political and economic. Their social status and, in some countries like Great Britain and France, political power derived from their growing wealth.

This Europe of Strauss waltzes and middle-class outings captured in impressionist paintings was being transformed just as it was reaching its fulfillment. Forces that had their origins in the nineteenth century were about to topple centuries-old dynasties and with them their archaic nobility. Likewise, the middle class, the real pillar of the existing order, was under serious attack. It was being challenged politically and economically by the emergence of a working class organized in increasingly powerful labor unions and political parties.

The Great War changed the course of European history. What began as a localized crisis resulting from the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire rapidly escalated into a world war. All participants felt they would be fighting a defensive war to save their homeland from an aggressor. All felt that the war, when it came, would be a brief one of motion, concluded in time for them to be home for Christmas. All were disappointed. The enthusiasm that greeted the outbreak of war in August 1914 soon changed to morbid resignation.

Since no one had expected the outbreak of the war in 1914, none of the participants were prepared. By 1916, as the war at the front turned into one of attrition in which each side tried to bleed the enemy to death, governments began to organize their home fronts. Governments assumed a broader and more direct role in their economies and in the private lives of their people—to a level unknown before the war. Scarce economic resources vital to the war effort were carefully rationed, as were consumer goods. Government-sponsored propaganda, together with censorship, was employed to mobilize “human resources” for more than just military service. Civil liberties often received only a polite wink, as the need to combat the spirit of defeatism grew.
The year 1917 was a momentous year. In February, the German High Command persuaded the Kaiser to authorize a resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. This move, intended to bring about the defeat of Great Britain, resulted in the United States coming into the war in April, thus assuring Germany’s eventual defeat. In March, revolution broke out in Russia, where the Russian soldiers had voted against the war, as Lenin said, with their feet when they deserted in large numbers. But the Provisional Government of well-meaning liberals failed to govern effectively. In November, the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia, thus setting the stage for one of the dominant themes in twentieth-century European history.

The appearance of fresh American troops in large numbers tipped the scales in favor of the Allies on the Western Front. Allied armies broke through the Siegfried Line in July 1918. The Central Powers began to collapse. Revolution broke out in Germany. On November 9, the Kaiser abdicated and went into exile in Holland. Two days later, on November 11, Germany signed an armistice. The “guns of August” were finally silenced. The task of peacemaking lay ahead.

Germany had signed the armistice expecting to participate in the peace conference. It was not invited to do so. The victors who gathered in Paris to draft a treaty that they felt would be a fitting conclusion to the war fought to end all wars were divided between new world idealists and old world realists. What came out of the peace conference was a “victors’ peace,” one that was to poison the future and make a second world war almost a certainty, if not a necessity.
At 6:30 p.m. on January 22, 1901, Queen Victoria died at Cowes on the Isle of Wight. Although her son Edward, the Prince of Wales, was present, she died in the arms of her favorite grandson, Wilhelm II. The German Kaiser had rushed from Berlin to be at her side.
Deeply moved that the Kaiser conducted himself with such stately dignity at the Queen’s funeral, the new king, his “Uncle Bertie,” made him a British field marshal.

Victoria (1819–1901) was more than the queen of an empire upon which the sun never set. Many throughout the world viewed her as the beloved sovereign, at least symbolically, of the civilized world. Even those peoples who were not regarded as “civilized” by Europeans revered her. Four hundred million people spread over 12 million square miles of land were her subjects. Leaders from around the world paid homage to her memory. Even in the United States, flags flew at half-mast and newspaper editorials eulogized the late queen and the age to which she gave her name.

There was something very reassuring about Queen Victoria’s funeral. Royalty and government leaders from all over Europe, including her grandson the Kaiser and his cousin Nicholas II, Tsar of Russia, gathered to say farewell. To have been present, or even to view the film footage of the funeral, was to be caught up in the solemn splendor of such a gathering of the world’s political leadership. The observer might be pardoned for equating the pomp with power and concluding that the future was safe and secure. But such a feeling would have been only an illusion. The fabric of European civilization was already tearing at the seams and coming unraveled.

**Europe and the World**

Europeans before the Great War divided the world into “civilized” and “uncivilized peoples,” much as we today speak of “developed” and “developing” nations. To be considered among the civilized nations meant being “Westernized,” which in turn meant accepting the world view and lifestyle of Europeans. “Westernized” peoples included more than the residents of Europe itself but also those of such nations as the United States and Canada in North America and Australia and New Zealand in the South Pacific Ocean. The words “Western,” “European,” and “civilized” were often used interchangeably.

Despite the smug arrogance of the imperialists, to a certain degree, Europe’s sense of moral superiority was justified. Europe’s
moral values, fundamentally religious in origin, were taken over and secularized by the eighteenth-century intellectuals. Emerging from the Enlightenment as inalienable human rights, these values were summarized by John Locke and Thomas Jefferson as the individual’s right to life, liberty, and property (or happiness), the foundation of classical liberalism. In practice, during the nineteenth century, the enjoyment of these purportedly inalienable rights was often qualified by considerations of property and gender.

Westernization offered more than a few benefits. Europeans were better housed, better fed, and better clothed than people anywhere else in the world. They lived longer and their infant mortality rate was lower than in the non-Western world. Nearly 100 percent of the population of northwestern Europe was literate, whereas in much of the non-Westernized world, the literacy rate was barely above 0. Europeans no longer lived in fear of unseen forces. Scientific knowledge had given them mastery over nature, showering upon them a cornucopia of material blessings. They also governed themselves, while virtually the entire non-Western world was subject to the more advanced Europeans.

By 1900, the “relics of barbarism,” such as slavery, infanticide, blood sports, and torture, were expunged from the European nations. Even women, who were still denied the vote and full equality with men in employment and education, possessed the same human rights as every other human being. And where human rights clashed with cultural or religious practice, human rights were deemed superior. European women were not subjected to such barbarous practices as genital mutilation or suttee, the burning of a Hindu widow on her husband’s funeral pyre. Nor were they condemned to a lifetime of illiteracy and unquestioned submission to the arbitrary will of father or husband. This message of universal and inalienable human rights went, if not always practiced, wherever the might of European imperialism was felt.

There were, of course, other civilizations in the world whose ancestry reached further back than Europe’s. China, India, Japan, and the Middle East all possessed the characteristics associated with being civilized, for example, literacy, cities, monumental architecture, a socioeconomic class structure, and systematic
philosophical and religious thought. By the mid-1800s, however, all of the great non-European civilizations were but shadows of their past glory and vulnerable to an industrialized West in need of markets and resources to fuel its rapid development. Of the ancient non-European civilizations, only Japan survived the threat of the new imperialism from the West, and it did so only by rapid Westernization.

The humanitarian impulse was often used as a justification for imperialism. Although for some it was a sincere motivation, for many others, it served as an excuse for European domination and exploitation of the non-Western world. Christian missionaries brought Christianity to non-European nations, and they and other humanitarians built hospitals, orphanages, and schools for both boys and girls. Such people often saw the native peoples as child-like and backward, souls in need of “uplifting” from the darkness in which they seemed to exist and an introduction to the benefits of civilization, whether or not they wished such. This aspect of imperialism was romanticized by such ardent imperialists as the English writer Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), many of whose works are set in India and relate the interactions of British colonials and subject Indians.

Kipling preached the “glories” of imperialism in his widely popular fiction and poetry. The best known of Kipling’s proimperialist poems is *The White Man’s Burden* (1899, pp. 290–291), composed to commemorate the United States’ victory in the Spanish–American War (1898) and America’s annexation of the Philippine Islands. In it, Kipling urged the United States to join Britain in the pursuit of empire and the spread of Western civilization:

```
Take up the White man’s burden –
Send forth the best ye breed –
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives’ need;
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild –
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child.
```
However much one wishes to extoll the benefits of European imperialism enjoyed by subject peoples, there was a dark side, as imperialism’s primary and most influential motivations always boiled down to economic exploitation and national prestige.

The rapid industrialization in the West increased the demand for raw materials, some of which, like petroleum and rubber, were necessary for the modernization of existing industries and the creation of new ones. As the standard of living slowly increased for the working classes, the demand for items from distant parts of the world such as coffee and tea increased. As mass production and distribution of products grew, so too did the need for reliable supplies of raw materials and new and expanding markets for finished goods. The seemingly insatiable need for new markets was in part due to the unequal distribution of wealth in the industrialized nations of the West. The concentration of wealth in fewer hands, combined with the inability of the working classes to purchase ever-increasing quantities of the goods they produced, pushed the investment of excess capital abroad.

The need to protect the profits of existing industries and protect those of emerging ones led the governments of turn-of-the-century industrialized nations to abandon free trade in favor of neomercantilism. The result was the creation of colonial empires that served as large, worldwide trading communities. Tariffs on imported goods, combined with restrictions on competition within the colonial empires, served to protect the luxurious lifestyle of the upper classes while providing limited improvements in the lifestyle of the working classes of the imperial powers. With the exception of the British Empire, however, the economic model fell short, as the cost of colonies often surpassed any economic benefit they provided for the mother country. More important, therefore, was what colonies meant in terms of national prestige and national rivalry among the great powers, themselves.

By the 1840s, steam-propelled ships equipped with the new screw propellers were revolutionizing both merchant and naval vessels. So-called tramp steamers were carrying goods from port to port around the world, often not returning to their home ports for a year or more. At first, the steam-powered ships were overshadowed by
the fast-sailing and graceful clipper ships. But the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the very year that the most famous clipper ship, Cutty Sark, was launched, doomed the sailing vessels. As the colonial empires expanded, sea power became increasingly important. The growth of large navies, especially the naval race between Great Britain and Germany after 1898, was a major cause of the outbreak of the Great War in 1914.

One individual who clearly understood the interrelationship between seaborne commerce, large naval forces, and imperial expansion was US Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914). Mahan presented his analysis of the importance of sea power in a series of lectures published in 1890 as The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783. After reading Mahan’s magnum opus, Kaiser Wilhelm invited Mahan to lunch aboard his yacht, the Hohenzollern, and then ordered that copies of the book be placed aboard every ship in the German navy. The Japanese adopted The Influence of Sea Power on History as a textbook in their military and naval academies.

In defending America’s annexation of Hawaii (1898), Mahan argued that sea power was the key element in determining a nation’s position in the world and its prosperity. Big navies, seaborne commerce, economic prosperity at home, and foreign colonies were all bound up together. Behind it all lay the influence of Social Darwinism. In this application of what was at the time a popular school of thought in the West, the greatness of a nation or a people was determined by struggle, ultimately struggle won or lost on the battlefield. The argument went that, naturally, the “fittest” people would triumph in any such conflict, to the betterment of both parties. To bring the supposition to its ironic—and ultimately tragic—conclusion, if peace were to prevail, then progress would stop, and Western civilization would stagnate.

Even though the colonial peoples were mere pawns in the high-stakes power struggle between the great powers, a significant majority of the citizens of the great powers were caught up in the romantic image of colonialism as preached by Kipling and others. Tales of explorers opening up the interior of Africa, still labeled the “Dark Continent” on many maps, or encounters
Before the Deluge

with the mysterious ancient civilizations of Asia fed the popular imagination. One well-known example of how popular support for imperialism was encouraged, or even manufactured, was the highly publicized search to find the Scottish missionary and explorer David Livingstone (1813–1873), who was reported missing somewhere in Africa. Sir Henry Morton Stanley (1841–1904), himself an explorer, convinced the editors of the New York Herald and London’s Daily Telegraph to sponsor his search for Livingston. The editors hoped to increase the daily circulation of their newspapers; Stanley sought both fame and fortune. Both were successful.

Europeans, as well as Europeans living abroad in North America and elsewhere, took pride in the fact that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the West’s faith in progress and optimism was about to triumph over ignorance and darkness and usher in a new era of universal peace and prosperity. The humble peasant or laborer took pride in knowing that their country’s flag was around the world, on the high seas and in the far corners of the globe. Their pride was nowhere more clearly voiced than the chorus of the popular hymn “Rule, Britannia” (http://www.hymns.me.uk/rule-britannia-lyrics.htm):

Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves!
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.

But there was a not so romantic reality to the new imperialism, the best-known example of which was the Belgian King Leopold II’s private rubber plantation in Central Africa, commonly referred to as the Congo Free State.

Leopold II (1835–1909) was a firm believer in the notion that a nation’s greatness was tied to its possession of a colonial empire. When neither the Belgium government nor the Belgium people showed interest in Leopold’s vision, he created a private holding company in 1876. With the help of Henry Morton Stanley, Leopold laid claim to 905,000 square miles of central Africa with an estimated population of 30 million. This chunk of territory was recognized internationally as Leopold’s personal property. There were no legal restrictions on how
he chose to exploit the Congo or its people. The methods employed by Leopold’s agents, including forced labor and brutal mutilation, decimated the population and eventually aroused the conscience of many.

Among those who called attention to the methods employed to meet the demands for rubber were Joseph Conrad (1857–1924) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930). Conrad published *Heart of Darkness* in 1902, a novel based on his personal experiences as a steamboat captain on the Congo River. He recorded in fiction the cruelty that characterized daily life in the Congo Free State. Doyle, best known as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, provided descriptions and photographs of the atrocities in *The Crime of the Congo* published in 1909. It was not until November 1908 that the government of Belgium ended Leopold’s personal rule and made the Congo Free State a colony. The estimated death toll resulting from Leopold’s rule between 1876 and 1908 is variously given as between 8 and 30 million. The Congo may well have been an extreme example of the new imperialism, but there were other such examples in colonies that were state controlled from the beginning.

Germany was a latecomer to the contest for colonies. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) at first opposed ventures outside Europe but in 1884 yielded to popular clamor. The first German colony was Angra Pequena, later named German South-West Africa. Other possessions followed in Africa and the Pacific. Resistance to German rule was dealt with swiftly and decisively. When the Herero, a native pastoral people, revolted in 1904, the German forces suppressed the revolt and while doing so reduced the Herero population from an estimated 80,000 to an estimated 15,000. Similarly, in German South-East Africa, the Maji uprising of 1905–1907 was put down at the cost of between 80,000 and 100,000 African lives.

The “rules of the game,” for the new imperialism, were agreed to at the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, hosted by Bismarck. Representatives of 14 nations, including the United States and Turkey, attended the conference. One of the primary reasons for the conference was to assure all parties convened free access to the Congo Free State by recognizing Leopold’s private ownership of the territory. But there was more. The so-called Principle of Effectivity was agreed to for further exploitation of Africa. In order
Before the Deluge

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to claim an area as a colony, the interested power had to make treaties with the local leaders, establish a police force, administer the area, and, perhaps most important, provide for the economic “development” of the area.

By 1895, Africa was carved up among the European powers. Only two states remained independent in 1900. On the west coast, Liberia, sponsored by the United States as a refuge for freed slaves who wished to immigrate to Africa, remained independent. In the northeast of the continent, known as the Horn of Africa, the ancient kingdom of Ethiopia (Abyssinia) remained the only independent, native-ruled nation on the African continent.

Asia suffered a similar fate. The kingdom of Siam (modern Thailand) maintained its independence by a clever diplomacy that argued the need for a buffer between British and French imperial expansion in southern Asia. In order to avoid being a victim of imperialism, Japan underwent a reform referred to as the Meiji Restoration that resulted in the modernization, or Westernization, of Japan. By the mid-1890s, Japan was itself an imperial power, one with expanding influence in Korea and Manchuria, as well as an emerging competitor with the United States for control of the Pacific Ocean.

No matter what standard one adopted, the world before the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 was Westernized. The traditional great powers of Europe, joined by the United States, were the masters of the world. But the changing power alignment and force of nationalism in Europe, exacerbated by colonial competition, were about to shatter the illusion of La Belle Époque.

The Great Powers

On the surface, at least, the European great powers in 1900 were the same powers regarded as such in 1815. They were the traditional five, Great Britain, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary (the Habsburg Monarchy), and Germany (formerly Prussia). Italy was considered by many in 1900 to be a great power, but as the events of the Great War were to demonstrate, this was more a clever ruse on Italy’s part than an accurate assessment of its resources. And for that matter,
there were, technically, only three great powers, since both Russia
and Austria-Hungary lagged behind in those areas vital to maintaining
great-power status into the twentieth century. Both had resisted
the modernist ideas that came out of the Enlightenment, especially
liberalism. There were some signs of industrialization and urbaniza-
tion in the Austrian portion of the Habsburg lands and in Russia
around St. Petersburg and Moscow, in Russian Poland, and the
Donbas in the south. Still, both remained predominantly agrarian
states of a few fabulously wealthy landlords and a multitude of pov-
erty-stricken peasants.

Austria–Hungary

The Dual Monarchy, as Austria-Hungary was often called,
maintained a cumbersome form of government with separate
parliaments for Austria and Hungary. Common to both halves of
the empire were ministries for war, finance, and foreign affairs.
Uniting the vast multinational realm was the emperor, Franz
Joseph (1830–1916), who had come to the throne in 1848 and who
would stubbornly resist death until November 21, 1916. Like
Queen Victoria, Franz Joseph was the much beloved symbol of a
great historic tradition. The House of Habsburg was the oldest
and most prestigious dynasty in Europe. But unlike Queen
Victoria, Franz Joseph was committed to, and lived in, a world that
no longer really existed.

Austria-Hungary did not possess an overseas empire. It was a mul-
ticultural land empire held together by soldiers, bureaucrats,
parades, and a living symbol of past glory. It was being torn apart by
nationalism. Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croatians, and Ruthenians
were only the more numerous of the minorities who inhabited the
Habsburg lands. There were over 51 million inhabitants in 1911,
who spoke at least 10 different languages. Among them were Roman
Catholic and Greek Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

Following defeat in the Austro-Prussian War (1866), Franz Joseph
avoided dissolution of the empire by appeasing the Magyars
(Hungarians). The result was the Dual Monarchy. By 1900, the
Czechs were pressing for a further reorganization. Habsburg foreign
policy was aimed at three goals: maintain and expand the empire at the expense of Turkey; prevent the spread of Russian influence in the Balkans; and combat the growth of nationalism among the South Slavs, especially the Serbian desire to create a Great Serbia.

One solution to the problem of trying to appease so many minority populations was a triple monarchy with the organization of an autonomous Yugoslav (South Slav) state from portions of Austria and Hungary. Another was a federal state composed of a number of largely autonomous units. The greatest obstacle to any of the various solutions proposed was Magyar intransigence. Magyar elites dominated Hungarian politics and opposed any reorganization of the empire. Many contemporary observers felt that only the aging emperor himself held the empire together.

Russia

Russia had much in common with Austria-Hungary. It, too, was a land-based empire after the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1868 for $7.6 million, slightly less than 2 cents per acre. Russia's status as a great power in 1900 rested upon its immense size—it stretched across the whole of Eurasia from the eastern border of Germany to the Pacific Ocean—and the fact that it had defeated the great Napoleon in 1812. Like Austria-Hungary, Russia was an old-fashioned agrarian state. The Romanovs, who ruled Russia since 1613, devoted their energies to the maintenance of autocratic rule. The current Tsar, Nicholas II (1868–1918), upon ascending the throne in 1894 promised: "I shall preserve the principle of autocracy as firmly and undeviatingly as did my father" (Sulzberger 1977). The ideas of the Enlightenment, especially any thought of liberal political reform, were dismissed by Nicholas II as simplistic nonsense. Handsome and devoted to his family but weak-willed and easily dominated by those around him, his one goal in life was to leave to his son and heir an unchanged Russia. He was not well suited to rule Russia in the troubled years before the Great War.

The century began badly in Russia with an economic recession, strikes, peasant disorders, and acts of terrorism. The government's difficulties increased after Russia became involved in war with Japan
in 1904. Repeatedly defeated in battle by the Japanese, the Russian government faced a rising tide of discontent at home among workers, peasants, intellectuals, and members of minority nationality groups. The Revolution of 1905 was triggered by “Bloody Sunday” in January of that year. It involved a peaceful procession to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, organized by a Russian Orthodox priest, to present a petition by workers to the Tsar. As the peaceful crowd marched to the Winter Palace respectfully singing “God Save the Tsar,” they were fired on by troops and dispersed with a great loss of life. The event touched off waves of strikes and disturbances that led eventually to the Tsar’s issuing the October Manifesto (1905).

The October Manifesto, the document establishing the Duma or parliament, was seen by many as the beginning of a new era in Russian history. The revolutionary forces split. Most moderates and liberals were hopeful that a true parliamentary system would evolve. A party of moderates, the Octobrists, was founded on that hope. The major group of liberals, the Kadets, was more skeptical of the government, but it, too, hoped for the best. Some of the socialists, however, especially the Marxist revolutionaries, wanted to continue the revolution.

Liberal and moderate hopes were soon dashed. As the government regained confidence in 1906, it worked to limit the powers of the Duma and to repress any remaining signs of the revolution. In June 1907, the electoral laws were changed to disfranchise many workers and those persons from non-Russian parts of the empire. The various revolutionary groups were either destroyed or forced underground.

Pyotr Stolypin (1862–1911), the minister of the interior between 1906 and 1911, carried through an important series of measures that allowed a peasant to claim his land from the village commune as a unified, independent holding. The idea behind the measure was that the peasants would be more conservative politically if they had property of their own. Furthermore, if they farmed as independent farmers free of the restrictions of the commune, or mir, they would be more productive.

Some historians, in assessing Russia in 1914, point to the changes that the Stolypin land reforms were making, the spontaneous revival
of the industrial economy, and the continued existence of institutions of parliamentary government, to justify an optimism about the solidity of the empire before the advent of its destruction with the Great War. Others, however, emphasize continuing problems in the countryside with low productivity and overpopulation, the precariousness and ineffectiveness of the Duma, the chasm between educated society and the government, and the hostility between urban workers and society to buttress their case that even had the war not come, the collapse of the empire was inevitable. They also point to the lack of political leadership in Russia after the assassination of Stolypin in 1911. As with Austria-Hungary, Russia’s future did not appear bright.

Germany

Germany after 1900 was the dominant power on the continent and Great Britain’s leading rival in the world. On the eve of war, Germany produced nearly a third more pig iron and twice as much steel as Great Britain and only slightly less coal. Having industrialized much later than Great Britain, German industry was able to take advantage of new sources of power and new techniques. Hence, its electrical and chemical industries flourished. German industry produced far more than could be consumed within the Reich. After 1880, Germany rapidly increased its share of world trade. By the outbreak of war in 1914, the nation’s merchant marine was the second largest in the world behind Great Britain’s.

Germany’s surge to world-power status was not due only to its industrial development. Germany led the world in scientific development. Although no longer simply the land of “poets and philosophers,” it still held a commanding lead in intellectual and cultural affairs. Its educational system from elementary schools through graduate universities was the model for, and envy of, all other developed countries. The number of German university students in 1911 was nearly twice the number of students enrolled in universities in any other of the European great powers.

In other areas, too, Germany appeared to be the most progressive nation in the world. Under Otto von Bismarck’s leadership as the
first chancellor (1871–1890) of the German Reich, Germany was the first nation to develop a system of social insurance. Designed to win the support of the working class, which it failed to do, the system provided for accident and sickness insurance, old-age pensions, and unemployment benefits. English workers would have to wait until 1906–1914, and American workers until Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal (1933–1939), to receive such benefits.

But Germany was far from being a liberal democratic country in the same mold of Great Britain and France. Political liberalism was defeated in Germany in the revolutions of 1848. After that, German liberals expended their energies on developing economic liberalism. The task of achieving national unity was carried out by conservatives with the enthusiastic support of the masses. Consequently, Germany emerged from the nineteenth century as one of the world’s great industrial powers but with a governmental system that one might best describe as a pseudoconstitutional absolutism. Outwardly, Germany appeared to be a liberal constitutional monarchy, but this was only an illusion based upon the fact that the Reichstag, or parliament, was elected on the basis of universal manhood suffrage of all citizens over the age of 25. In fact, the Reichstag possessed little real power other than to refuse to pass the federal budget. Past experience in the Prussian parliament (1862–1866), however, left liberals with the conviction that this one “real” power was best left untested in the Reichstag.

The German Reich was in fact a federal union of individual German states in which real power was divided between Prussia, the largest state, and the Bundesrat, or federal parliament. Sovereignty was vested by the constitution in the Bundesrat, which was presided over by the Reich chancellor who was appointed by, and accountable to, the Kaiser (the King of Prussia). The delegates were appointed by the individual state governments and voted en bloc as directed by their governments. All really significant measures required approval by Prussia. Any attempt to amend the constitution could be defeated by 14 votes in the Bundesrat—and Prussia had 17 votes.

The period from 1890 until Germany’s defeat in 1918 is referred to as the “Wilhelmian era,” for it was the Kaiser who determined the course of events in Germany. In foreign policy, Wilhelm II