

Unit 5: Revolutions, c. 1750–1900

Unit 5 covers the Enlightenment, the political revolutions it helped inspire, and the Industrial Revolution that transformed economies, societies, and governments worldwide. CED topics 5.1 through 5.9.

AP World History

Revolutions

About 15 minutes to read

How to use this guide

Read it in order the first time because the unit has two arcs that connect. First come the ideas and the politics: Enlightenment thinking challenged old authority, and that thinking fed the American, French, Haitian, and Latin American revolutions. Then comes the economic transformation: Britain industrialized first, industrial methods and technologies spread, governments responded in different ways, and workers pushed back with unions and new ideologies. The exam often asks you to connect one arc to the other, for example by linking nationalism to state expansion or technology to trade.

After the first read, use the trap boxes and the tables to review the distinctions that exam questions test most often. Finish with the practice questions, then complete the recall check on the last page out loud and note any items you cannot explain yet.

What this unit is worth. Unit 5 carries 12 to 15 percent of the AP exam, one of the heavier units. It also sets up Unit 6, since industrialization is the engine behind the imperial expansion you will study next. The revolutions here are the exam favorite for comparison questions, so learn what makes each one distinct, not just what they share.

5.1 The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was an 18th-century intellectual movement that applied reason and empiricist methods to the natural world, human relationships, and the public role of religion. It questioned established traditions in nearly every area of life, and its spread often came just before revolutions and rebellions against existing governments.

Empiricism is the approach to knowledge behind the movement. It says observation and experience, not tradition or authority, are the basis for knowing things. Enlightenment philosophers applied this method to human society as well as to nature, which is why their work reads like a critique of every institution that asked to be obeyed without evidence.

Two political ideas from the Enlightenment did the heaviest lifting in the revolutions that followed.

Natural rights are fundamental entitlements that all individuals possess simply by being human, and revolutionary documents invoked them to justify resistance to unjust rulers. The **social contract** is the idea that legitimate government rests on an agreement between rulers and the ruled, where people accept authority in exchange for protection of their rights. The sharp edge of the social contract is the implication behind it. If a ruler becomes tyrannical, the people can withdraw their consent.

Trap. Natural rights and the social contract are not the same claim. Natural rights say what people are owed. The social contract says where legitimate authority comes from. A question about withdrawing consent from a tyrant is testing the social contract, not natural rights.

Enlightenment ideas also fueled **reform movements** that pushed for an expansion of rights across the 19th century. The **abolition of slavery** drew on Enlightenment ideas of natural rights and human equality. The **end of serfdom**, the system that bound peasants to landowners' estates, was part of the same expansion of rights. So was **expanded suffrage**, the widening of voting rights to larger portions of the population, which the CED presents as one of the clearest signs of this rights expansion.

Women demanded a place in this expansion too. **Feminism** emerged in the 19th century asserting women's equality and rights, challenging political and gender hierarchies alongside demands for **women's suffrage**. Mary Wollstonecraft's **A Vindication of the Rights of Woman**, published in 1792, argued that women deserve the same education and rational rights as men, making it a foundational text of early feminism. The **Seneca Falls Conference** of 1848, a women's rights convention in New York organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, issued demands for women's equality including suffrage.

5.2 Nationalism and Revolutions in the Period from 1750 to 1900

Nationalism is the belief that people sharing a language, religion, social customs, or territory form a distinct nation that deserves self-rule. It became a major force shaping states and empires in this period. Governments sometimes harnessed it themselves to foster unity, which is why nationalism shows up both in revolutions against empires and in the empires that crushed them.

The revolutions that produced new **nation-states**, independent countries whose borders align with a shared people's identity, form the core of this topic. The **American Revolution** of 1776 to 1783 was the successful revolt of Britain's North American colonies that established the republic of the United States. It became a model and inspiration for many of the revolutions that followed. The **French Revolution** of 1789 overthrew France's monarchy in the name of liberty, equality, and popular sovereignty. The **Haitian Revolution** of 1791 to 1804 overthrew French colonial rule and created the independent state of Haiti, and it helped drive the emergence of independent states across the Americas. The **Latin American independence movements** of the early 19th century, inspired by democratic ideals and by writings such as Bolivar's Letter from Jamaica, ended Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule and created independent states across Latin America.

REVOLUTION	WHAT SETS IT APART
American (1776-1783)	Colonial revolt that produced a republic. The model for later revolutions.
French (1789)	Overthrew a domestic monarchy in the name of popular sovereignty. Its declaration influenced resistance worldwide.
Haitian (1791-1804)	Enslaved people overthrew colonial rule and founded an independent state. The only one of the four led by the enslaved.
Latin American (early 1800s)	Ended two empires colonial rule at once, Spanish and Portuguese, across a whole hemisphere.

Trap. When a question asks what made one revolution different from the others, reach for the table above, not for what they shared. They all drew on Enlightenment ideas. What the exam tests is the distinguishing feature, so for each revolution name who revolted, against whom, and what kind of state resulted.

Three documents carried Enlightenment ideas into these revolutions. The **American Declaration of Independence** of 1776 declared the colonies' break from Britain on the basis of natural rights and the social contract, and it inspired later revolutions. The **French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen** of 1789 proclaimed liberty, legal equality, and popular sovereignty, applying Enlightenment ideas to justify resistance to the old regime. **Bolivar's Letter from Jamaica**, written in 1815, laid out the case for Latin American independence from Spain and spread Enlightenment-inspired resistance to colonial rule.

Alongside nationalism, two ideologies grew out of discontent with monarchist and imperial rule. **Democracy** is government in which power ultimately rests with the people, typically through elected representation. **19th-century liberalism** emphasized individual rights, constitutional government, and limits on state power.

5.3 Industrial Revolution Begins

The **Industrial Revolution** was the late-18th-century shift to machine-based manufacturing that began in Britain and transformed how goods were produced. Britain went first for a cluster of reasons the CED lists together: waterways, coal and iron deposits, urbanization, improved agriculture, private property protections, foreign resources, and accumulated capital. No single cause explains it. Exam questions reward answers that name several of these together.

Two linked changes defined the new production. The **factory system** concentrated workers and machines in a single location, which increased output. That concentration made the **specialization of labor** increasingly common, the division of production into narrow, repetitive tasks assigned to individual workers.

Trap. The factory system is the place and the organization. Specialization of labor is what the workers do inside it. A question describing one worker repeating one task all day is testing specialization of labor, not the factory system itself.

5.4 Industrialization Spreads in the Period from 1750 to 1900

The **First Industrial Revolution** is the initial wave of steam-powered industrialization, centered in Britain and northwestern Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It redrew the world economic map. The **shift in global manufacturing shares** is the name for that redrawing: steam-powered production raised the manufacturing shares of Europe and the United States, while the shares of the Middle East and Asia, which kept producing manufactured goods, declined.

The **spread of industrialization** then carried industrial production methods from northwestern Europe to other parts of Europe, the United States, Russia, and Japan during the 19th century. The exam likes this list because it is specific. Industrialization did not spread everywhere evenly, and the places named are the ones the CED requires.

5.5 Technology of the Industrial Age

New energy sources made the industrial age possible. The **steam engine** converts the energy of pressurized steam into mechanical power, and it drove factories, railroads, and steamships, making it possible to exploit fossil-fuel energy on a vast scale. The **internal combustion engine** burns fuel inside itself to produce power. Together with steam power, it let societies tap fossil fuels, especially petroleum products like gasoline, diesel, and kerosene. Solid coal cannot be burned inside it, which is the detail that separates the two engines on the exam. The **fossil fuels revolution** is the harnessing of coal and oil, energy stored over geological time, by these engines. It greatly increased the energy available to human societies.

The **Second Industrial Revolution** was the late-19th-century wave marked by new methods for producing steel, chemicals, electricity, and precision machinery. It followed the steam-powered first wave, and questions distinguish the two by technology: steam belongs to the first, steel and electricity to the second.

TECHNOLOGY	WHAT IT CHANGED
Railroads	Steam-powered rail networks moved goods and people quickly over land. They opened interior regions to development, trade, and migration.
Steamships	Ships powered by steam rather than wind. They made long-distance and river transport faster and more reliable, boosting global trade and migration.
Telegraph	An electrical system for sending coded messages over wires almost instantly. It revolutionized long-distance communication and tied distant regions into global trade networks.

Trap. Railroads and steamships both moved things, but over different terrain. Railroads opened interiors. Steamships sped ocean and river routes. The telegraph moved information, not goods or people. Match the technology to what it carried.

5.6 Industrialization: Government's Role from 1750 to 1900

Not every state left industrialization to private enterprise. **State-sponsored industrialization** describes government-directed programs to build modern industry, adopted by a small number of states as the Industrial Revolution's influence grew. Rulers used state power to push industrialization from above.

The **Meiji Era** is the required example. From 1868 to 1912, internal reforms in Japan, prompted partly by expanding U.S. and European influence in Asia, supported rapid industrialization and made Japan a growing regional power.

5.7 Economic Developments and Innovations in the Industrial Age

The Industrial Age replaced one economic order with another. **Mercantilism** was the old system, in which governments tightly regulated trade, often through colonies and trade surpluses, to accumulate national wealth and power. Western European countries began abandoning it in favor of free trade during the Industrial Age. Note that mercantilism appeared earlier too: the Unit 4 version covered the 1450 to 1750 policies for expansion and control, while here it is the system being abandoned.

What replaced it was **laissez-faire capitalism**, the doctrine associated with **Adam Smith**, the Scottish economist whose theories of free markets influenced Western European governments to abandon mercantilism. Laissez-faire holds that markets work best when governments minimize interference, and its growing acceptance pushed Western Europe toward **free trade**, trade between countries with minimal tariffs or government restrictions, and free markets.

The new economy ran on **industrial capitalism**, the system built on private ownership of industrial production. The CED credits it with raising living standards for some and with making **consumer goods**, manufactured products bought for personal use, more available, affordable, and varied. Scale required new finance. **Transnational businesses**, large companies operating across national borders, grew with the global nature of trade and production. **Limited-liability corporations** let investors risk only the money they put in rather than their personal assets, which helped these businesses raise capital. **Stock markets**, where company shares are bought and sold, were among the new financial instruments that funded large-scale business.

Trap. Laissez-faire capitalism and industrial capitalism are related but not identical. Laissez-faire is the doctrine about government staying out. Industrial capitalism is the system of private ownership of factories and industry. Adam Smith attaches to the first, not the second.

5.8 Reactions to the Industrial Economy from 1750 to 1900

Industrial capitalism produced organized opposition. **Labor unions** were organizations of workers formed to improve conditions, limit hours, and win higher wages. **Workers movements** were the broader collective efforts, including unions and political parties, that promoted alternative visions of society in response to industrial capitalism.

Karl Marx, the philosopher whose critique of industrial capitalism inspired socialist and communist movements, gave the opposition its sharpest theory. **Socialism** advocates collective or state control of production to reduce inequality. **Communism**, associated with Marx, calls for the abolition of private ownership of production and a classless society. Both grew out of discontent with industrial capitalism's inequalities, but they are not the same demand.

Trap. Socialism wants collective or state control of production. Communism wants private ownership abolished and classes gone. On the exam, the stronger claim belongs to communism. Do not treat the two as synonyms.

Some states answered discontent with reform rather than revolution. **Reforms in industrial societies** were the political, social, educational, and urban reforms promoted by governments, organizations, and individuals in response to the changes industrial capitalism brought. Outside the industrial core, the **Ottoman and Qing reform efforts** were attempts to reform and modernize economies and militaries

5.9 Society and the Industrial Age

Industrialization remade social structure. The **middle class** was the new class of merchants, managers, and professionals that grew with industrialization. Middle-class families could live on one income, which increasingly confined middle-class women to household and child-rearing roles. The **industrial working class** was the new class of wage laborers employed in factories and mines, where women and children typically had to take wage-earning jobs to supplement family income.

Urbanization was the rapid growth of cities driven by industrialization and global capitalism. It brought a cluster of challenges the CED names together: pollution, poverty, increased crime, public health crises, housing shortages, and strained infrastructure. When a question asks for the effects of industrial urbanization, this list is the answer.

Women roles in industrial society split by class, and the exam tests the split, not a single story. Working-class women and children typically held wage-earning jobs to support their families, while middle-class women were increasingly limited to household roles and child development.

Trap. Industrialization did not move all women in the same direction. The class split runs opposite ways: working-class women entered wage labor while middle-class women were confined to the home. A question that asks about women and industrialization without specifying class is usually testing whether you know both halves.

Confusions That Cost Points

PAIR	THE DISTINCTION
Natural rights vs. social contract	Rights are what people are owed. The contract is where legitimate authority comes from and how consent can be withdrawn.
American vs. Haitian Revolution	American colonists revolted against Britain and formed a republic. Enslaved Haitians overthrew French colonial rule and founded an independent state.
Factory system vs. specialization of labor	The system is the organized workplace. Specialization is the narrow repetitive task each worker performs inside it.
First vs. Second Industrial Revolution	First is steam power, centered in Britain and northwestern Europe. Second is steel, chemicals, electricity, and precision machinery in the late 19th century.
Steam engine vs. internal combustion engine	Steam burns fuel outside to make pressurized steam. Internal combustion burns fuel inside itself. Solid coal cannot burn inside the second.
Laissez-faire vs. industrial capitalism	Laissez-faire is the doctrine that government should stay out of markets. Industrial capitalism is the system of private factory ownership.
Socialism vs. communism	Socialism seeks collective or state control of production. Communism seeks abolition of private ownership and a classless society.
Mercantilism (Unit 4) vs. mercantilism (Unit 5)	Unit 4 mercantilism is the 1450 to 1750 policy for expansion and control. Unit 5 mercantilism is the old system being abandoned for free trade.
Middle class vs. industrial working class	The middle class lived on one income and confined women to the home. The working class needed women and children in wage labor.

Practice Questions

Original questions written for this guide in the style of the AP exam. Answers and explanations are on the next page, so complete the questions before checking them.

- 1.** A pamphlet circulating in 1788 argues that a king who rules without protecting the rights of his subjects has broken the agreement that justifies his authority, and that the people may therefore replace him. This argument most directly reflects which Enlightenment idea?

 - A. Empiricism
 - B. The social contract
 - C. Nationalism
 - D. Laissez-faire capitalism
- 2.** A student claims that the Haitian Revolution differed from the American Revolution most fundamentally in which respect?

 - A. It was inspired by Enlightenment ideas while the American Revolution was not
 - B. It was led by enslaved people who overthrew colonial rule
 - C. It occurred earlier in the 18th century
 - D. It preserved the existing monarchy under a new constitution
- 3.** In 1850, a textile worker spends her entire shift feeding thread into the same machine, performing the same motion thousands of times a day. This best illustrates

 - A. the factory system
 - B. state-sponsored industrialization
 - C. specialization of labor
 - D. the fossil fuels revolution
- 4.** An engineer in 1890 is choosing a motor for a new automobile. She needs a design that burns its fuel inside the motor itself rather than heating water to make steam. She should select

 - A. a steam engine
 - B. an internal combustion engine
 - C. a telegraph relay
 - D. a water frame

- 5.** A government in the 1860s removes most tariffs on imported goods, arguing that trade between countries should face minimal government restriction. This policy best reflects
- A. mercantilism
 - B. socialism
 - C. state-sponsored industrialization
 - D. free trade
- 6.** A political writer in 1848 argues that the only lasting cure for industrial inequality is the complete abolition of private ownership of factories and the creation of a society without classes. This position is best described as
- A. communism
 - B. liberalism
 - C. socialism
 - D. nationalism
- 7.** In the late 19th century, officials in the Ottoman Empire attempted to modernize the military and the economy but found their efforts blocked by entrenched members of the government. This situation best illustrates
- A. the spread of industrialization to every region evenly
 - B. Ottoman and Qing reform efforts and elite resistance to them
 - C. the abolition of serfdom across the empire
 - D. workers' movements demanding shorter hours
- 8.** A historian studying an industrial city in 1880 finds that middle-class wives spend their days managing households while working-class mothers and their children labor in textile mills. This contrast best illustrates
- A. expanded suffrage
 - B. the class split in women's roles in industrial society
 - C. the end of serfdom
 - D. feminism as a unified movement

Answer Key

- 1. B.** Withdrawing consent from a ruler who broke the agreement is the social contract in action. A is about basing knowledge on observation, not about authority. C is about nations deserving self-rule, which fits the pamphlet setting but is not the mechanism the argument uses. D is an economic doctrine about markets, not about political legitimacy.
- 2. B.** The Haitian Revolution was led by enslaved people who overthrew French colonial rule and founded an independent state, which no other Atlantic revolution did. A reverses the truth: both revolutions drew on Enlightenment ideas. C gets the order wrong: the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) came after the American (1776-1783). D describes something neither revolution did.
- 3. C.** One worker repeating one narrow task is specialization of labor. A names the organized workplace where it happens, which is the trap: the question describes what the worker does, not where she does it. B is government-directed industrialization, which does not fit a British textile mill. D is about energy sources, not work organization.
- 4. B.** The internal combustion engine burns fuel inside itself, and solid coal cannot be burned inside it. A is the trap: a steam engine heats water to make steam, which is exactly what the engineer does not want. C moves information, not vehicles. D is a spinning machine from the early textile industry, not a motor at all.
- 5. D.** Removing tariffs so trade faces minimal restriction is free trade. A is the opposite policy: mercantilism tightly regulates trade to accumulate national wealth. B calls for collective control of production, not open borders. C is government directing industry from above, not government stepping back from trade.
- 6. A.** Abolition of private ownership plus a classless society is communism. C is the trap: socialism wants collective or state control of production, which is a weaker claim than abolishing ownership entirely. B emphasizes individual rights and constitutional limits, the opposite direction. D is about nations and self-rule, not about who owns factories.
- 7. B.** Ottoman reform efforts to modernize the economy and military were often resisted by government members and established elites, which is exactly the scenario. A contradicts the CED: industrialization spread unevenly, not everywhere. C names a different reform from a different context. D describes workers in industrialized states, not Ottoman officials.
- 8. B.** Industrialization split women experience by class: working-class women held wage jobs while middle-class women were confined to household roles. A is about voting rights, not work. C is about peasants bound to estates, a different reform. D is the trap: feminism existed, but the question shows women divided by class, not united in one movement.

When you check your answers, note which distinction each miss came from. Make a flashcard for that distinction and drill it spaced out over the next few days instead of rereading the whole section. If you missed one of these questions, the same distinction is worth practicing again in Rycal, where the Revolutions deck has flashcards for it and more practice questions use the same kinds of traps.

One-Page Recall Check

Say each answer out loud before you look back, and mark the ones you cannot finish. Anything you cannot say out loud yet belongs in your flashcard deck. In Rycal, add those items to the Revolutions deck and let spaced review bring them back over the next few days.

- Explain empiricism and give one example of applying it to human society.
- State the social contract in one sentence, then explain how it justifies removing a tyrant.
- Name three 19th-century rights expansions tied to Enlightenment ideals.
- Explain how Wollstonecraft's 1792 work and the 1848 Seneca Falls Conference connect to feminism.
- For each of the four revolutions, name who revolted, against whom, and what resulted.
- Explain why nationalism could both break empires apart and hold them together.
- List four factors that helped Britain industrialize first.
- Distinguish the factory system from specialization of labor with one example each.
- Explain the shift in global manufacturing shares during the First Industrial Revolution.
- Name the regions the CED lists for the spread of industrialization.
- Distinguish the steam engine from the internal combustion engine, including the coal detail.
- Name the technologies of the Second Industrial Revolution and contrast them with the first.
- Explain what the Meiji Era shows about government role in industrialization, with dates.
- Explain why Western Europe abandoned mercantilism and what replaced it.
- Distinguish laissez-faire capitalism from industrial capitalism, and place Adam Smith correctly.
- Name two financial innovations that funded large-scale business and explain what each did.
- Distinguish socialism from communism and place Karl Marx correctly.
- Explain what resisted Ottoman and Qing reform efforts.
- List four challenges of industrial urbanization from the CED.
- Explain the class split in women's roles in industrial society.

Where to go next. Turn every missed item above into flashcards and drill them spaced out over several days rather than in one sitting. In Rycal, open the Revolutions deck under AP World History. The deck covers the terms in this guide, and its practice questions target the same traps named here. If you have a test date, add it in the Test Planner. You can also start your next review with a Brain Dump, then check what you missed against this guide.

Key terms for this unit

The Enlightenment, empiricism, natural rights, social contract, reform movements, abolition of slavery, end of serfdom, expanded suffrage, Women's suffrage, feminism, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Seneca Falls Conference (1848), nationalism, nation-states, democracy, 19th-century liberalism, American Revolution, Haitian Revolution, Latin American independence movements, French Revolution, American Declaration of Independence, French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, Bolivar's Letter from Jamaica, Industrial Revolution, factory system, specialization of labor, First Industrial Revolution, shift in global manufacturing shares, spread of industrialization, steam engine, internal combustion engine, fossil fuels revolution, Second Industrial Revolution, railroads, steamships, telegraph, state-sponsored industrialization, Meiji Era, mercantilism, laissez-faire capitalism, free trade, transnational businesses, industrial capitalism, consumer goods, Adam Smith, limited-liability corporations, stock markets, labor unions, Workers' movements, Karl Marx, socialism, communism, reforms in industrial societies, Ottoman and Qing reform efforts, middle class, industrial working class, urbanization, Women's roles in industrial society.