The 35 Frequently Tested AP World History Terms & Concepts

Technological and Environmental Transformations (c. 8000 B.C.E. to c. 600 B.C.E.)

**1. Neolithic Revolution**

AKA the First [Agricultural Revolution](https://www.albert.io/blog/agricultural-revolution-ap-european-history-crash-course/). This was a long and drawn out historical process that began taking place around 10,000 BCE. Over the course of hundreds of years, human societies began to develop new farming techniques. Before this started taking place, humans were primarily hunter-gathers, spending all of their time and energy on finding food and on basic survival. But with new farming techniques, food was easier to come by. So, people began to settle down, form civilizations, and imagine more complex understandings of the world around them (new ideas about science, religion, etc.).

**2. Mesopotamia**

This is best thought of as the location of the Neolithic Revolution. You might also know the area as the “Fertile Crescent,” due to the fact that the rich soil and river water surrounding the area was perfect for the growth of human populations. The land was primed and ready for food production, water was plentiful, and therefore there were also plenty of animals to both raise and eat.

The word Mesopotamia literally means “between two rivers” in Greek, referencing not only the growth of agriculturally based societies, but the many empires and civilizations that developed within the region. Many of these civilizations, which included the Babylonians, the Assyrians, and the Persians, made countless contributions to the worlds of science, technology, astronomy, and art.

**3. Nile River Valley**

Speaking of prime civilization territory, the Nile River Valley helped to give rise to one of the most famous ancient empires: the Egyptians. Like Mesopotamia, the Nile River provided the perfect combination of water, food, and soil to allow to civilization to prosper. The early Egyptian dynasties began to take political control of the region around 3,100 BCE and also like Mesopotamia, contributed to the growth of science, culture, art, and technology.

**4. Code of Hammurabi**

As we noted, these growing ancient civilizations that merged around the rich silt and soil of powerful rivers gave rise to new advances in the arts, the sciences, etc. Well, they also did so in terms of political control and the law. This “code” was a set of laws that the Babylonian King Hammurabi used to rule his empire between 1792 and 1750 BCE. It is one of the oldest known examples of a code of law that assumes quasi-constitutional rights to a nation’s citizenry and even included a presumption of innocence.

Organization and Reorganization of Human Societies (c. 600 B.C.E. – c. 600 C.E.)

**5. Sanskrit**

Very basically, Sanskrit is the sacred language of Hinduism. But it has played an essential role in the formation of religious, cultural, and social cohesion in ancient India. Circa 300 BCE a form of the language called Vedic Sanskrit was used to compile a series of texts called the Vedas. These essentially became the founding pieces of literature that composed the Hindu religion. These texts included the references to reincarnation, Brahma, and helped to create the caste system of India.

**6. Daoism**

Daoism (or Taoism) has been one of the most influential philosophies of ancient China. It began to take shape in the Warring States period of Chinese history (late 4th century BCE) and draws heavily on the yin and yang. Eventually a number of key texts and schools of thought were created around its core belief of ethics based upon the cycles of the natural world. And emperors like Genghis Khan would use its tenets in their social, political and military rule.

**7. Greco-Roman Philosophy**

This is less of a concrete event and more of an essential concept that you’ll need to keep in mind for your AP World History exam. Where eastern philosophies like Daoism revolved around the natural world, the philosophies of the Greek and Roman empires were often based upon logic, empirical observation, and the nature of political power and hierarchy. Part of the reason for this difference was the Greco-Roman strive from imperial expansion and the quest for practical solutions to political control. This was accomplished with the help of great thinkers like Aristotle and Cicero.

**8. Pathogen**

This is one of those AP World History flashcard terms you are going to want to study for each era, but it’s particularly important when studying the ancient empires. A pathogen is basically anything that can produce disease. And as humans moved away from being hunter-gatherers, they moved into more cramped spaces, forming cities and civilizations. But this also meant the spread of disease. Disease often led to the shrinkage of some urban populations and contributed to the decline of some empires, included those of ancient Rome and China.

**9. The Qanat System**

These were underground waterways built by the Persian people around the 1st millennium BCE. Without technological advances like this and many other aqueduct systems built in the ancient world, human populations would not have spread so rapidly or easily. The Qanat acts as a representation of the ways that increased crop production of products like cotton and rice encouraged changes in farming and irrigation techniques. During your AP World History review before you take your exam, remember that this term is more important to remember as a representation of a larger theme or historical process rather than something you need to know every detail about. You can view the Qanat System in the same vein as the Roman aqueduct, the noria water wheel, and the shaduf well pole.

**10. The Silk Road**

This was an ancient trade route that connected Asia with Europe. It acted as the central artery of cultural, economic, and political exchange that began to take shape around 200 BCE and remained in use until about 1400 CE. It connected many peoples from the Pacific Ocean on the shores of eastern China to those of Western Europe via the Mediterranean Sea.

The road was actually a product of imperial expansion. As the Han Dynasty of China sought to pacify its frontiers, the Emperor Wu sent a military mission out West that would run into the ancestors of Alexander the Great’s men. This whole process opened up trade between East and West.

Regional and Transregional Interactions (c. 600 C.E. – c. 1450 C.E.)

**11. Tenochtitlan**

In its prime, Tenochtitlan was the largest city in the pre-Columbian Americas. It acted as the capital city of the Mexican civilization beginning around 1325. By time the Spanish Conquistador Hernan Cortez reached the city in 1519, it has been estimated that Tenochtitlan was the largest city in the world, as much as five times the size of London. But that would soon end after the arrival of Cortez. The Spaniards besieged the city, dismantled its major buildings, and spread diseases amongst its populations effectively signaling the decline of the Aztec empire and the rise of the Spanish empire in the Americas.

**12. Inca Roads**

Around 25,000 miles of roads connected the Inca Empire (1438 – 1533). As with many of the world’s empires at this time, the Incas required a way to effectively maintain control, move armies, and facilitate trade across its territories. The result was one of the most impressive feats in pre-Colombian history. The road itself connected centers of Incan control, ranging from present-day Colombia to Chile. This technological and engineering feat was brought about by the growth of the Inca’s imperial power and the desire to instigate trade in commercial goods. But it also represented a significant state project that encouraged economic, political, and social growth simultaneously.

**13. Hanseatic League**

The Hanseatic League consisted of a confederation of merchant guilds and the towns that they operated between the 14th and 16th centuries. As European tastes for luxury and everyday goods expanded, so did the need for traders. Throughout the Baltic region, several producers of a variety of goods (from fishermen to farmers to silversmiths) created this league as a way to create a stronghold on the trading taking place. The League itself worked to guarantee the economic and diplomatic privileges of the guilds, using their own armies and even a separate legal system to maintain regional control.

**14. Feudalism**

The feudal system of the west came about with the fall of the great European empires, especially the Carolingian empire (think France, Germany, the United Kingdom, etc.). When these empires fell, Europe was left with a large and powerful military class without a strong state to govern them. Between the 9th and 15th centuries, society was structured around a series of exchanges. The military class of knights/vassals agreed with the moneyed lords that they would protect the lord’s land in exchange for land. These lands were called fiefs and were tilled and farmed by peasants who were allowed to live on the land in exchange for taxes.

**15. Delhi Sultanates**

For about 320 years beginning in 1206, five dynasties ruled over the city of Delhi in India. This kingdom has been coined the Delhi Sultanate. A former slave named Qutb-ud-din Aibak began the dynasty, spreading Delhi’s territory and influence across northern India. He also spread the influence of the Islamic religion throughout the region. After years of conquest, the Sultanate conquered and incorporated that majority of the Indian subcontinent. This resulted in a sort of unification process between the diverse peoples of the region, but also led to a split in Indian culture, as Hindus increasingly fought against the Sultanate in the 16th century, leading to its demise.

**16. Foot Binding**

Possibly one of the most visible reminders of Imperial Chinese upper-class visions of beauty, foot binding became a symbol of feminine attractiveness and extravagance. In 10th century China, upper-class court dancers began applying painful bindings to young women as a way to stunt the growth of their feet. The popularity of this act spread as the smaller foot represented not only beauty but the extravagance of the upper classes that did not need to use their feet to work. Often called lotus feet, the practice would not die out until the 20th century.

**17. Constantine The Great**

Constantine was one of the most influential figures in the history of the Roman Empire. He became the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity. He moved the empire’s headquarters to the city of Constantinople. And he restructured Roman political rule from the tetrarchy to one that followed dynastic succession. All of these contributed to the rise and dominance of the Byzantine Empire (often called the Eastern Roman Empire) and the foregrounding of the Crusades.

**18. Marco Polo**

Marco Polo became one of the most famous European travelers to make it to eastern China. He was by no means the first European to do this, but he has become the most famous. In the 13th century, Polo set out to China at the height of the Mongol Empire with the intent of opening cultural and economic trade. He did accomplish this after 24 years of traveling. He provided detailed, lurid, and often embellished accounts of his travels romanticizing his expeditions. Polo’s writings about his travels in fact inspired future explorers of the Age of Exploration, including Christopher Columbus.

Global Interactions (c. 1450 C.E. – c. 1750 C.E)

**19. Joint-Stock Companies**

These companies became the house in which capitalism was built. In the 15th century, European businessmen, investors, and politicians were getting together to invest in companies premised upon stock ownership. The amount of stock you received depended on how much money you invested. And the amount of stock you owned defined how much sway you had in the company itself. These businesses helped to fund exploration projects throughout the world, where investors worked with colonists to extract goods from various locales for profit. One of the most famous of these was the British Virginia Company that began the English colonization of North America.

**20. Mercantilism**

Europe was dominated by mercantilist economics, policies, and philosophies throughout the “Global Interactions” era. The concept itself basically created political power through the economy. Instead of justifying state power via the divine authority of kings or through strict military dominance, mercantilist economic theory argued that governments should regulate that economy and use beneficial trade to oust rival nations. But it also entailed so much more as the mercantilist states often found themselves going to war with one another over resources and resorting to colonial expansion in order to maintain political supremacy.

**21. The Atlantic System**

One of the many results of the mercantilist economic and political theory was the Atlantic System. But this one was particularly harsh since it involved the trading and transportation of African slaves into the Americas (it’s also been called the Atlantic Triangular Slave Trade). This system was created around a series of transactions being made between colonial powers in Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Take for example, the sugar trade. Sugar plantations in the Caribbean used African slave labor to produce refined sugar can products like molasses. The molasses was then shipped to Europe, where it would be turned into rum. That rum would be traded for manufactured goods/profits and shipped to western Africa. Those goods/profits would then be traded for slaves and shipped to the Caribbean.

**22. Cash Crop**

In an era defined by money and profit, cash was king. Therefore, any crop or agricultural product that created the cash flow tended to be produced. To a detrimental degree. A cash crop is just that—a crop grown for cash instead of subsistence. Sugar (see The Atlantic System) was one of these cash crops. Before the arrival of Europeans into the Americas, sugar plantation was only a small part of the regional agricultural system. But after European arrival, it became the primary crop. These crops had devastating effects on the environment, local economy, and health of many populations. They also typically included coerced or forced labor systems in order to maximize profit.

**23. Sikhism**

As people moved around during the “Global Interactions” era, their beliefs came with them. This partially helps to explain the creation and rise of Sikhism in South Asia. Sikhism itself was based off of the spiritual teachings and leadership of the 15th century Guru Nanak. But the historical origins of the religion can be seen as a mix of both Hindu practices and Muslim traditions in a region that increasingly witnessed interactions between the two religions. Sikhism has emphasized monotheism, meditation, and selfless service for all of mankind.

**24. Encomienda System**

Spain’s colonial endeavors in the Americas revolved around what has been called the Encomienda System. This was a political, economic, and military relationship between the indigenous peoples of Central and South America and their Spanish overlords. Almost immediately upon arrival in the Americas, the Spanish crown began granting encomiendas to conquistadors and officials as a sort of reward for their efforts in the New World. This meant that they were granted land and various communities to govern over. The people under their watch were to work the land and provide tribute to their Spanish overseers in exchange for protection, instruction in Christianity, and infrastructure growth. Unfortunately, the system instead often resulted in violence and exploitation.

**25. The Manchus**

The Manchu were the people of what is now called Manchuria. They had always been an ethnic minority under Han Chinese control until they revolted and started the Qing Dynasty in the 17th century. This dynasty would last until 1912. While in control, the Manchu celebrated their culture and ideas despite being minorities. This included the “queue” hairstyle that became associated with Chinese culture of the elite classes. However, as global influences spread foreign pressure from European put strains on the Empire. Their outsider status proved to be a detriment as many Chinese began to blame these “Manchu foreigners” for giving European powers too much control in their country.

**26. Thirty Years War**

More than just one war, this was a series of conflicts that took place in Central Europe between 1618 and 1648. It has been remembered as being one of the most brutal events in European history, leading to utter destruction. After the Protestant Reformation, religious hostilities exploded in Europe. The Holy Roman Empire attempted to force Catholic practices on its peoples, but that didn’t sit well with the followers of Protestantism. Two factions formed as the violence snowballed. Famines spread, starvation was rampant, and disease proliferated during the conflicts. The War ended with the Peace of Westphalia, but European power had shifted with France emerging as the most powerful state in Europe.

Industrialization and Global Integration (c. 1750 C.E. – c. 1900 C.E.)

**27. United Fruit Company**

This US company, from in the late 19th century, dominated the international fruit and banana trade throughout the early twentieth century. Businesses like the United Fruit Company have been called banana republic due to the amount of influence they exerted towards the politics, economics, and social structures of many Latin American nations. These companies often encouraged the growth of infrastructure, including roads and telecommunications. But they also represented the influence of multinational corporations in the affairs of impoverished countries.

**28. A Vindication of the Rights of Women**

Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her A Vindication of the Rights of Woman in 1792. This work contains one of the earliest arguments for a feminist philosophy although the term feminist would not have been used at this time). Wollstonecraft used Enlightenment ideals regarding freedom and equality to argue that women deserved the same fundamental rights as men. She argued that women were essential to the nation because they educated children, that women deserved the right to an education, and that women should be seen as companions to men rather than ornamental wives. Wollstonecraft’s book became a symbol for the feminist movements that developed in the 19th and 20th centuries.

**29. Anarchism**

Throughout the 19th century, alternative visions of political and social power were being theorized all over the world. One of these was the political philosophy of anarchism. Brought on by intellectuals like William Godwin, Mikhail Bakunin, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon anarchism represented the antithesis to the growing centralization of state bureaucracies. Anarchists believed in stateless societies, where workers controlled the means of production and political rule was meted out by the people. Many anarchists also believed in the power of revolutionary violence, leading to several assassinations (like that of Archduke Ferdinand) and the growth of revolutionary movements (like that of the Paris Commune).

**30. Opium Wars**

The Opium Wars were actually two wars that occurred between France and China and England and China. Both of these happened during the Qing Dynasty of the 19th century. European influence in Eastern Asia greatly increased as trade multiplied during the 18th and 19th centuries. But this trade also brought along conflict. Both England and France were victorious during these wars, severely reducing the power of the Qing Dynasty and increasing European power in the region. All of this influence ultimately encouraged the rise of a republican mentality in China, resulting in the demise of Chinese imperialism.

**31. Montesquieu**

Montesquieu has been considered one of the great thinkers of [the Enlightenment](https://www.albert.io/blog/the-enlightenment-ap-european-history-crash-course/). Born in 17th century France, Montesquieu became an influential lawyer, political thinker, and author. He helped to coin the term despot, which he used to criticize the rulers of Europe at that time. He also celebrated republican visions of the separation of powers and constitutionalism. He argued that the citizenry of a state had a contractual relationship with the government to obey its authority in exchange for protection and law-based rights. Big thinkers like Montesquieu would help to give intellectual breath into the lives of the American and [French Revolutions](https://www.albert.io/blog/the-french-revolution-ap-european-history-crash-course/).

Accelerating Global Change and Realignments (c. 1900 C.E. – Present)

**32. Green Revolution**

Unlike the [Russian Revolution](https://www.albert.io/blog/the-russian-revolution-ap-european-history-crash-course/) or the American Revolution, the Green Revolution did not involve violence or warfare. This was a revolution in the technology of agriculture and how food was being produced. Between the 1930’s and 1960’s, a series of innovations completely altered how food was grown and produced across the world. New disease resistant and high-yielding varieties of crops were being developed, particularly for wheat, corn, and grains. The result has been that nations have been able to grow more than what has been required to feed their populations, leading to a growing agriculture industry and increased access to food across the world.

**33. Ho Chi Minh**

Ho Chi Minh will most famously be remembered for being the Vietnamese Communist revolutionary leader during the Vietnam War. But he also represented so much more. His movement mimicked other decolonization efforts across the globe after [World War II](https://www.albert.io/blog/important-world-war-2-leaders-for-ap-us-history/). In particular, he turned to the leaders of the democratic world, including the US and France, for help to become a sovereign nation. But in their denial, he turned to revolution as a response. He also represented the Cold War binaries that decolonization efforts ran into in their efforts for sovereignty. He was stuck between the Communism of Russia and the Democracy of the United States. The war itself would turn out to a major blight in France and the United States’ histories, leading to social and political pressure against efforts in colonialism and Cold War interventionism.

**34. Military-Industrial Complex**

This term became popular after American President Dwight D. Eisenhower used it in his 1961 presidential address to the nation. During that address, Eisenhower warned his listeners that the intimacy between the defense industry and the nation’s military could potentially lead to some very serious and dangerous policy decisions on part of the US government. In other words, he warned that technology companies could easily profit off of war and thus encourage war for more profit. Protesters of the Vietnam War, in particular, used this speech as a way to criticize the US’s presence in the region.

**35. Pan-Africanism**

Pan-Africanism has been less of an event and more of an intellectual movement of the 20th and 21st centuries. Built around the notion that all people of African descent have a shared history, they too have a shared destiny for the future. The movement itself has been particularly strong in Central and North America where the African Slave Trade affected entire populations. Using a shared history of enslavement, Pan-Africanism finds empowerment in an African identity. The beliefs have been diverse, though, ranging from Rastafarianism to Black Power. The African Union can also be seen as an instance of Pan-Africanism.