

Interpreting the 20th Century: The Struggle Over Democracy

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Synopsis

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Consider the intense and rapid changes that transformed the political, social, and economic struggles of the world during the 20th century: the first flight and space flight, the Manhattan Project and the welfare state, Nietzsche and Freud, the Great Depression and inflation, moving pictures and home computers, the Cold War and terrorism - and war and peace. These 48 comprehensive lectures examine this extraordinary history and provide a multidisciplinary understanding of how the modern world came to be and how democracy has emerged as a political ideal, although the parameters of a truly democratic world order are still being vigorously contested. You'll see how the 20th century can be read as a history of ideas, and how those ideas both influenced events and were in turn influenced by them to shape today's world. Professor Radcliff not only distills political and economic trends from a century of world history, but she explains them with clarity, drawing on other disciplines as necessary to make key points come alive. She defines the perspective of this course as including what she calls the "Enlightenment Project" - the adoption of liberal, democratic, rationalist principles in much of the world - while emphasizing the unresolved nature of the struggle for democracy. As you move chronologically through the century, you'll explore a range of ideas in depth, including the "crisis of meaning" unleashed by World War I, the different approaches of Fascism and Communism to organizing and mobilizing masses, and how art provided a window into the psychological forces swirling through public life. Detailed case studies also bring history's ideas alive.

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