The Romanian Revolution
Romania 1989

TURNING POINT: The Romanian Revolution of 1989 was arguably the hastiest and bloodiest Communist overthrow during the late 1980s-early 1990s, but it also stands as a fascinating historical turning point. The Romanian Revolution of 1989 overthrew the Ceausescu regime, hastened the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and set the course for the contemporary Romanian pursuit of Western alliance.

SUMMARY: In the 1980s, the reigning leaders of Romania, Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu, decided to repay all of Romania's foreign debts. The consequences of this policy included food rations, power cuts, fuel shortages, media censorship, travel restrictions, and scores of abandoned children due to a ban on contraception and abortion. These hardships created anti-Ceausescu sentiment, which culminated into revolution in December 1989. After rumors that Father Lazlo Tokes would be exiled due to his criticisms of government policies, citizens gathered to protest. The attitude became heavily anti-government, and spread throughout Romania, despite the use of military force to stop the demonstrations. Nicolae Ceausescu attempted to ease tensions in the capital of Bucharest, but by then the army joined the citizens in their revolutionary crusade. The Ceacescus were captured after attempting to flee the country, and promptly executed. Afterwards, Ion Iliescu was elected president.


The August Coup  
Russia 1991

**TURNING POINT:** On August 18, 1991, high-ranking government and military officials pressured the head of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, to declare a state of emergency because they wanted to prevent the signing of the Union Treaty. He refused, so he was held under house arrest at his home in Crimea while the State Committee imposed martial law in Moscow, claiming that Gorbachev was sick and unable to return. Demonstrations were held and the Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, said the takeover was unconstitutional. Soldiers and KGB forces refused to act against the demonstrators and the coup (also known as the August putsch) failed by August 21.

**SUMMARY:** Through the second half of the 20th century Eastern Europe was dominated by Communist governments, including the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) which was centered in Moscow and made up of 15 soviet states.

In the mid-1980s Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, began to relax some political and economic restrictions. People in soviet states pushed for freedom from central rule, and negotiations began for a new Union Treaty which could have given these states more control. Several important officials such as the Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and head of the KGB opposed a Union Treaty because they wanted to keep central control.

Boris Yeltsin, a former political ally of Mikhail Gorbachev, was elected to the newly-created position of Russian President in May 1990. Yeltsin’s power rose with his support of the pro-democracy demonstrators and he suspended the Communist Party, blaming it for the coup attempt. Gorbachev returned but more and more control went to the Russian parliament; at the same time some soviet republics declared independence. By the end of the year Gorbachev had resigned and the Soviet Union was dissolved.


*RT- TV Novosti*, rt.com

*Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*, www.soviethistory.org

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The Partition of India
India and Pakistan 1947

**TURNING POINT:** The 1947 Partition of India granted India, Pakistan, and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) independence from British colonial control, ended 350 years of British dominance in the South Asian subcontinent, and ignited the postcolonial era. This led to tragic consequences but also set the course for modern India and Pakistan and established a model for other national independence movements to emulate.

**SUMMARY:** Indian nationalist movements began to gain momentum in the early 20th century. However, the British policy of “divide-and-rule”, which separated groups of people based on religious grounds, created tensions between Hindus and Muslims. These religious factors influenced the divergent development of two principal organizations: the Hindu-majority Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. In 1945, Great Britain announced that it would end its colonial rule in the South Asian subcontinent, in response to Indian nationalist protests, global recognition of the nationalist plights, and British economic exhaustion caused by the aftermath of World War II. In 1947, the English viceroy of India hastily transferred power to Muhammad Ali Jinnah of the Muslim League and Jawaharlal Nehru of the Indian National Congress. Between August 14th and 15th, East and West Pakistan, along with India, declared independence, and the official borders were drawn up a few days later. The border allocations separated religious affiliations from their “right” homelands, and in the ensuing scramble to migrate, millions of people were beaten, raped, and killed. India and Pakistan are still dealing with the consequences of partition to this day, which includes territorial disputes, particularly regarding Bangladesh and Kashmir, and developing strong, stable governments and economic systems in their respective states. However, this event also established the modern-day states of India and Pakistan, which are working towards becoming global super powers, and influenced other nation-state movements, most notably Israel, to follow a similar suit of action.


Professional Athletes Allowed in Olympics
Switzerland 1986

TURNING POINT: In 1986 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) met in Lausanne, Switzerland and approved changes to the Olympic charter that made it possible for professional athletes to compete in the Olympic Games.

SUMMARY: In 1971, the terms “amateur” and “professional” were removed from the charter, but paid athletes were still not allowed to take part in the Games. Even in 1986, the U.S. Olympic Committee was still opposed to opening the Olympics to all athletes, but in 1988 American pros competed in some sports for the first time.

With the changes, each sport’s international federation was allowed to decide for itself if professionals would be allowed in the Olympics.

Some objected to the change, arguing that it was against the spirit of the games. Those who argued for the change said that it was only fair, because some Olympic athletes didn’t play professionally but were supported by their nation’s government and could train full-time, giving them an advantage over other amateurs.


Reinstatement of Capital Punishment
United States 1976

TURNING POINT: In the case of Gregg v. Georgia, the Supreme Court issued a decision on July 2, 1976 which held that the death penalty did not violate the Constitution in all cases, ending a four-year moratorium on executions.

SUMMARY: In the case of Furman v. Georgia the Supreme Court had decided on June 29, 1972 that imposing the death penalty would violate the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments of the Constitution. (The 8th holds that “cruel and unusual punishments” should not be inflicted, and the 14th that no state shall “deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person...equal protection”.)

Following the Furman decision executions were halted in the United States for four years, but the Gregg decision led many states to resume executions.

Since 1976, there have been several more Supreme Court rulings that deal with the death penalty- for example, it is now against the law to execute a convicted person who is considered “mentally retarded” or who was under eighteen when they committed a capital offense. All of the current Supreme Court Justices say that they believe that the death penalty is constitutional in some cases. In the years since Gregg v. Georgia, 1,312 people convicted of murder have been executed in the United States, and 33 states plus the Federal government and U.S. Military allow for the death penalty.


Atari VCS
United States 1977

**TURNING POINT:** In 1977 the California company Atari released a game console for use at home. Atari games such as *Pong* and *Tank* were available on separate cartridges that could be switched out on the console, allowing players to have one system that played multiple games.

**SUMMARY:** Video games were already popular in the United States and elsewhere, and Atari was a successful game development company that also made hardware for both gaming and other computing.

The Atari VCS (Video Computer System) was designed for only 10 simple games, but its design also made it possible for other game developers to program compatible games. One such game was *Space Invaders*, which was more complicated and engaging than earlier games, and became the first arcade title licensed for home use. More than 30 million consoles were sold.

Other game systems would follow from makers like Nintendo, Amiga, and Sega, as well as several more made by Atari. Some of the most influential figures in computing and technology had their start in game development, such as Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak of Apple, who started out designing games for Atari. The video game industry today is made up of many more companies and involves many millions of players and billions of dollars.

**RESOURCES:**

The 1988 Chilean National Plebiscite
Chile October 5, 1988

TURNING POINT: Chileans voted in a national election (plebiscite: the direct vote of all the members of an electorate on an important public question such as a change in the constitution) to decide whether or not Augusto Pinochet would be allowed to extend his presidency for another eight years. Out of eligible voters about 98% participated, and about 56% voted No- meaning that Pinochet’s rule over Chile would end.

SUMMARY: In a 1973 coup d’etat supported by the Nixon administration, Army General Augusto Pinochet seized power from Salvador Allende, who was the democratically-elected, socialist President of Chile. Pinochet suspended Chile’s constitution and established his junta (a military or political group that rules a country after taking power by force) as the government of Chile.

Pinochet ruled as a dictator for the next 17 years. During this time the Junta brutally suppressed Chileans on the political left. Secret police operations were responsible for the torture of at least 29,000 people and roughly 3,200 were “disappeared”- some were never fully accounted for it’s believed all were murdered. There was also evidence that Pinochet was involved in the murders of several non-Chileans both in and outside of Chile. However, many Chileans supported Pinochet through his time in power and among some he is still highly regarded.

After the plebiscite of 1988, Pinochet held control until a new president was elected in March 1990; then Pinochet became senator for life as allowed by Chile’s 1981 constitution. Starting in 1998 Pinochet faced prosecution for human rights violations but never stood trial, and in 2006 he died of natural causes.


### The Halabja Massacre

*Iraq March 16, 1988*

**TURNING POINT:** The Iraqi military, under orders from President Saddam Hussein and led by his cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid, attacked a town in the Kurdish region of Iraq called Halabja. They used poison gas on the people, killing between 3,000 to 5,000 of the civilians there and injuring another 7,000 to 10,000 civilians.

**SUMMARY:** During the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988, Saddam Hussein targeted not only Iranian troops but also Iraqis who rebelled against his rule. In a series of genocidal government attacks against Iraqi Kurds in the north of the country that they called Al-Anfal, Saddam Hussein’s government forced people to move, destroyed towns, put people in concentration camps, and killed many people because some Kurdish rebel groups had sided with Iran. Some estimates have put the total number of people killed during Al-Anfal as high as 182,000. Ali Hassan al-Majid, nicknamed “Chemical Ali”, claimed “It could not have been more than 100,000”.

The Iraqi regime was the first in history to attack its own people with chemical weapons, which it did in several different attacks. The Halabja Massacre was related to, but not part of, the Al-Anfal campaign - it happened outside the original target zone.

The horrors of the Halabja Massacre were well-documented and reported around the world. The United States sided with Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War and did not act immediately in response to Halabja. Later when Hussein invaded Kuwait many experts believed that he thought he could do so without a reaction from the US. The American reaction was not as he might have expected; after failing to heed international warnings to leave Kuwait, the United States and international Coalition forces attacked Iraq.


The Eurovision Song Contest
Europe 1955

**TURNING POINT:** Eurovision is a campy but beloved song contest held annually in various “European” locales, and has served as the first “big break” for artists such as ABBA and Celine Dion. Despite its frivolous appearance, Eurovision is redefining Europe and creating a “New Europe” by addressing controversies relating to politics, geopolitical relations, and identity through the medium of song, dance, and glitz.

**SUMMARY:** In 1955, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) devised an international song contest in which countries would compete against one another in order to claim the title of “best musical act in Europe.” The contest, which featured almost exclusively Western European nations, soon became a symbol of post-war European unity. However, the fall of the Iron Curtain dramatically altered the dynamics of the Eurovision song contest. Eurovision participants jumped from twenty-two participants in 1990 to 42 participants in 2009 as a result of former East Bloc and Soviet Union nations joining the spectacle. These new members have dominated the contest in the past decade, this has led to some tensions between Western and Eastern Europe. In addition, some of the more contemporary participants have garnered controversy for not being “European.” These countries, particularly Turkey, Algeria, Israel, and the Caucus nations, raise questions about what it means to be European. Throughout its history, Eurovision has been wrought with political implications and controversies, such as fixed results, interrupted broadcasts, and songs that do not disguise the animosity held between certain nations. Nonetheless, it has also had its share of highlights and inspirational moments.


The EPLF Capture of Asmara
Eritrea 1991

**TURNING POINT:** In 1991, the thirty-year long Eritrea-Ethiopia War ended after the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front captured the city of Asmara. The capture of Asmara not only concluded the war, but also led to the creation of an independent Eritrean nation-state, and has greatly affected the political, social, and economic structure of the Horn of Africa.

**SUMMARY:** Eritrea, a nation located in the Horn of Africa, has a long history of colonization due to its strategic location on the coast of the Red Sea. At the end of the 19th century Italy established a colony in Eritrea, but after World War II, Britain took temporary control of Eritrea from 1941 to 1952. The UN, influenced by the territorial and strategic interests of the USA and Ethiopia, decided to integrate Eritrea and Ethiopia into a federation in 1953. In 1962, the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie forcibly annexed Eritrea, and turned it into a self-governing autonomous region under the influence of the Ethiopian monarchy; this action violated the terms of the federation and the UN treaty.

In order to retaliate against Ethiopian domination, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was formed, and began to fight back against Ethiopia in 1961. However, inter-organizational fighting led to a civil war and the eventual creation of a reformist branch, the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), in 1977. Simultaneously, the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution inspired thousands of Eritreans to join the EPLF and other resistance groups. Throughout the 1980s, Eritrean armies defeated Ethiopian troops on several occasions, gaining control of an increasing amount of Eritrean territory.

Finally, on May 24, 1991, the EPLF gained control of the capital city of Asmara, which ended the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and led to the establishment of an independent Eritrean nation-state on April 23, 1993. Since independence, Eritrea has experienced a turbulent history but has maintained its independence.


Sputnik I

Soviet Union 1957

TURNING POINT: Sputnik I, the world’s first artificial satellite, was successfully launched by the Soviet Union on October 4, 1957. The launch of the Sputnik marked the beginning of the US-USSR space race, intensified the Cold War, and implied that the US was falling behind the Soviet Union in developing new technology in the 1950s.

SUMMARY: In the 1950s, the US and the Soviet Union were both working on developing new technology. Few in the US had expected that the Soviets would be the first to send a satellite into space, and even those who had anticipated this event were truly impressed with the technological complexity of the Sputnik. The US was already working on its first satellite project - the Vanguard project - and immediately after the launch of the Sputnik in October, the US Defense Department approved funding for its second satellite project - the Explorer project. However, before the unsuccessful launch of the Vanguard in December 1957 (the satellite exploded on the launch platform), the Soviets were able to successfully launch Sputnik II on November 3. Sputnik II was much heavier and advanced than Sputnik I and carried the first animal (a dog called Laika) into space. On January 31, 1958, the US successfully launched its first satellite - the Explorer I - which discovered magnetic radiation fields around the Earth.

The launch of Sputnik I and II led to the establishment of NASA (name originates from National Aeronautics and Space Act or the “Space Act” of July 1958). The launch of Sputnik bolstered the space race and the arms race, which refers to the competition between the US and USSR for creating new methods of attacking each other.

Sputnik I was the size of a beach ball, weighed 184 pounds, and took 98 minutes to orbit the Earth.


http://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/Sputnik
The Bay of Pigs
Cuba 1961

**TURNING POINT:** On April 17, 1961 a brigade of CIA backed Cuban exiles landed at the Bay of Pigs and attempted an invasion of Cuba. The Kennedy administration hoped that the news of their arrival would spark uprisings inside Cuba and trigger the fall of the government in Havana. However, every action that the United States took against Castro increased his support. The Cuban army quickly ended the invasion and there were no uprisings. The Bay of Pigs incident resulted in the Russians establishing a larger presence in Cuba. Roughly a year after the Bay of Pigs, the Soviet Union started secretly importing nuclear missiles to Cuba, initiating the Cuban Missile Crisis.

**SUMMARY:** Cuba was ruled by Fulgencio Batista for twenty-five years and degenerated into a repressive dictatorship. By 1952, Fidel Castro and a variety of other opposition forces rose against Batista's government. Moscow backed the communist party of Cuba, which supported the Batista government. When Castro did finally come to power, it was not a result of communist help. Facing resistance, Batista fled Cuba in December 1958 and named Jose Miro Cardona as the new prime minister. However, Castro’s armed revolutionaries were the ones who actually held the power and within a few weeks Cardona resigned and Castro took his place.

As Castro began to attack the interests of the anti-Batista middle classes, large numbers fled to Miami and other US destinations. As US-Cuban relations worsened, the CIA began recruiting these exiles. In 1961, Castro openly identified himself as a Marxist-Leninist and when the US and its Western allies refused to sell arms and cut sales of petroleum to Castro he turned to the Soviets for an alternate source of supply.

The Bay of Pigs was another failed attempt to topple Castro, yet this attempt by force gave Cuba and the USSR an excuse to increase their defensive measures against the US.


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TURNING POINT: The end of French rule over the south of Vietnam came in the spring of 1954 at the battle of Dien Bien Phu. The Vietminh attacked on March 13, 1954, much sooner than the French were expecting. The area proved indefensible for the French and fell on May 7, 1954, the day before the Geneva conference on Far Eastern affairs. France agreed at the Geneva conference to withdraw all its forces in Vietnam.

SUMMARY: The First Indochina War began in December 1946 when Ho Chi Minh’s Vietminh forces believed France would not agree to an eventual independent Vietnam. France was hopeful that the nationalist government headed by ex-emperor Bao Dai could hold out against the Vietminh, but the support of China and eventually the USSR proved too much for the French.

Within a week of the fighting at Dien Bien Phu, General Paul Ely of the French General Staff for National Defense flew to Washington to ask for US help. The future of Vietnam was a concern for the US as well as the French since it raised to question of whether the West could defend its sphere of influence. The United States increased its aid to the French yet the Western powers were unable to co-ordinate a military solution and Dien Bien Phu fell on May 7, 1954.

The Geneva conference partitioned the country into two zones at the 17th parallel with the north given to the Vietminh as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh, and the south becoming the State of Vietnam under the emperor Bao Dai. However, the US-supported southern government opposed the Geneva agreement and claimed the North was killing Northern patriots and terrorizing people in both the north and south. This situation, combined with the US fear of communism, eventually would lead to the Vietnam War (Second Indochina War).


Óscar Romero Becomes Archbishop of San Salvador
El Salvador 1977

**TURNING POINT:** Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez became the fourth Archbishop of San Salvador on February 23, 1977 in the midst of the lead-up to the Salvadoran Civil War. His predecessors had put the support of the Catholic Church in El Salvador behind the government of El Salvador, but Archbishop Óscar Romero bravely spoke out against the government.

**SUMMARY:** Throughout the 20th century, El Salvador experienced several periods of war and unrest during which tens of thousands of civilians were killed. In the 1970s, the government was elected without the support of the people, who protested this government’s taking power and its actions.

Citizens who opposed the government were persecuted harshly and many thousands were killed. Members of the Catholic Church faced severe retaliation from government forces whenever they spoke out against it; clergy members were tortured and disappeared.

Romero gathered together clergy who supported his efforts to stop the brutality of the government, which had the official support of the United States government. He traveled the country to organize peaceful protests to petition the government for a return of rights and to stop the kidnappings and murders. He also wrote an open letter to US President Jimmy Carter asking that Carter cut off military aid to the Salvadoran regime. Romero was assassinated shortly thereafter. Though the civil war and killing of clergy and civilians persisted for years after Romero’s death, his work was important in strengthening Church and citizen resistance and drawing worldwide attention to the atrocities in El Salvador.

**SOURCES:**


The Collective End of the People’s Temple: The Jonestown Massacre Guyana 1978

**TURNING POINT:** On a November day in 1978, the leader of the People’s Temple, Jim Jones, ordered his congregation in their Guyana settlement to commit mass suicide, marking the first major mass cult death ritual. The Jonestown massacre, which reflected many key social issues in 1950s-1970s America, not only stands out as a horrific event, but also brought awareness to the danger of cult groups and the power of mind control techniques.

**SUMMARY:** In the 1950s, a charismatic religious leader known as Jim Jones established the People’s Temple, an organization dedicated to such social causes as racial harmony and helping the poor. In the 1960s, the congregation moved from Indiana to California, where it attracted hundreds of new members and gained prominence. However, rumors began to spread about abuses within the church, fear tactics to enforce loyalty to the Temple, and the erratic, even sociopathic, personality of Jim Jones. Jones ordered the People’s Temple to relocate to the jungles of Guyana, where they established “Jonestown”, an idyllic communal settlement. In 1978, upon rumors that several Jonestown members were being held against their will, Congressman Leo Ryan and a small group of reporters visited the site. They stayed for an evening and a day, and mainly heard praise about Jonestown. However, two families slipped notes to Ryan requesting to leave, which were discovered in the settlement. After Ryan and his crew left, they were ambushed at the airstrip, resulting in five deaths. Meanwhile, Jim Jones announced the need to commit “revolutionary suicide”, and concocted cyanide-laced drinks for all. Some complied; others were shot or were forcibly injected. In all, over 900 people died that day, an event that horrified people all over the world.


Children of Thalidomide
Europe & North America 1950s

TURNING POINT: In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the drug thalidomide gained notoriety for its connection to thousands of cases of babies born with severe birth defects. The creation and distribution of thalidomide not only left children with birth defects, it also altered drug regulation standards all over the world.

SUMMARY: The development and history of thalidomide has disputed origins, though many believe that it was first developed in either Germany or Great Britain in the 1940s. German pharmaceutical company Grunenthal obtained a patent for the drug in 1954, and began marketing it in 1957. The company advertised thalidomide as a sedative, but it became particularly well known for relieving morning sickness which made it a very popular drug for pregnant women. However, thousands of babies throughout Europe and Canada were born with severe birth defects; a lack of limbs or abnormally shortened ones became the most famous symptoms of the phenomenon. In 1961, a British physician noted that long-term thalidomide usage resulted in damaged nerves in the fingers and toes, and suspected that thalidomide was damaging fetuses and causing birth defects. After two other prominent doctors announced studies linking thalidomide usage and birth defects, the drug was removed from markets all over the globe.

Although drug regulations were made stricter all over the world in response to the event, the reaction from the United States was monumental. The United States had only a few affected children, as the drug never got approved for widespread market distribution, but the scandal inspired such policies as the Consumer Bill of Rights which protected rights to safety, information, choice, and free speech; new FDA amendments that stressed greater drug efficiency and safety; and increased research into drug usage during pregnancy. Thalidomide was later found to have positive effects, particularly in the treatment of leprosy and AIDS-induced sores, but it will forever be associated with the thousands of birth defects prominent in the 1950s and 1960s.

http://www.nyu.edu/classes/jaeger/thalidomide.htm
http://multinationalmonitor.org/hyper/issues/1987/04/thalidomide.html
The Antarctic Treaty
Washington, D.C. 1959

TURNING POINT: The Antarctic Treaty came to prominence in 1959-1961, as several nations agreed to designate Antarctica as a demilitarized zone for science and environmental preservation. The Antarctic Treaty not only determined the role of Antarctica in the late 20th century, but also marked a milestone in which multiple nations agreed to set aside political, economic, and legal differences in the name of scientific integrity.

SUMMARY: In the context of a post-World War II world and nuclear warfare build-up, several countries advocated for the establishment of a natural reserve in Antarctica. Their objectives included demilitarization, environmental protection, setting aside territorial disputes, and an emphasis on scientific research. Therefore, in 1959, twelve member nations with an active history in Antarctica congregated in Washington D.C. in order to sign the Antarctic Treaty. They stressed scientific research and peaceful cooperation on the continent for an indefinite amount of time.

The treaty, which came into effect in 1961, stands out as one of the most successful multinational agreements in recent history, and continues to remain in effect. The treaty has preserved many aspects of the Antarctic environment, and stands as one of the greatest diplomatic achievements of the modern era. In fact, since the original signing, the number of member countries has increased to forty six nation-states, proving that countries can unite for a common cause; in this case, the peaceful and scientific upholding of Antarctica.


Peanuts
United States 1950

TURNING POINT: On October 2nd, 1950 the daily comic strip Peanuts debuted in seven newspapers. Charles Schulz, the strip’s creator, portrayed in his comics a humor that appealed to people around the world. Over the course of fifty years Schulz personally wrote some 17,897 strips that have been published in 2,600 newspapers in 75 countries in 21 languages.

SUMMARY: Charles Schulz, a native of St. Paul, Minnesota, upon returning from the Second World War undertook his life long passion of cartooning. Peanuts, his life’s work, started as a struggling strip for the St. Paul Pioneer Press titled Lil’ Folks. While working for the Art Instructors Inc. and continuing to write, Schulz eventually was recognized and syndicated. Eventually moving beyond newspapers the characters in Peanuts became part of television specials, Broadway musicals, and exhibits in Paris’s Louvre gallery.

Through the 1960’s Peanuts reflected the changes within American society as a whole. The character Woodstock is an allusion to the music festival of the same name. The character Franklin was introduced in 1968 as a means of commenting on the Civil Rights movement within America. Schulz progressive social stance within Peanuts in part facilitated an audience that became an estimated 100 million readers by the early 1970’s.


Polio Vaccine
United States 1955

**TURNING POINT:** In April 1955, the results of the largest clinical trial ever held up to that point were published confirming the first effective prevention of polio. A team of scientists at Pittsburgh University under the direction of Jonas Salk had developed the inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV). Upon conclusive evidence that Salk’s vaccine, as it came to be known, was effective it was licensed within two hours and began the course towards the elimination of polio on several continents along with an almost complete eradication world wide.

**SUMMARY:** With evidence of polio’s existence that dates back to Egyptian hieroglyphs, the disease had been a blight upon humanity since antiquity. In the early 20th century, polio was one of the most feared diseases in industrialized countries, paralyzing thousands of children every year. Soon after the introduction of effective vaccines in the 1950s and 1960s, polio was practically eliminated as a public health problem in some countries. Surveys during the 1970s revealed that the disease was also prevalent in developing countries. As a result, routine immunization was introduced worldwide as part of national immunization programs.

In the late 1980’s the World Health Association launched an initiative to have the disease completely eradicated that was part of what led to polio being eliminated from the Americas by the 1990’s and Europe in the early 2000’s. The international project to eradicate polio has been one that has included charities, international bodies, business associations, and as national governments.


Polioandprevention/Historyofpolio.aspx


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The Introduction of the Euro to World Financial Markets
Frankfurt, Germany 1999

**TURNING POINT:** On January 1, 1999, the euro was introduced to world financial markets as a currency. It is administered by the European Central Bank located in Frankfurt. European coins and bills entered circulation on January 1, 2002, eventually becoming the world’s second largest reserve currency and the second most traded currency after the US Dollar.

**SUMMARY:** The new currency replaced the separate national currencies of 11 European Union Member States.

The optimum currency area (OCA) theory suggests that economic efficiency is maximized if the entire OCA shares a single currency. Supporters of the euro believe that creating a common currency increases competitiveness and efficiency, cuts costs for businesses and lowers prices. Opponents of the euro think that a single currency increases unemployment and slows down economic growth by making national governments unable to adjust interest rates to reflect local economic conditions.

Today, euro is the official currency of the eurozone. The eurozone consists of 17 out of 27 countries of the European Union. Around 330 million citizens use the euro.

The introduction of the euro has tied closer together, economically and politically, the countries of the eurozone. It also meant the shared responsibilities, benefits and struggles. The ongoing sovereign debt crisis in Greece, Spain, Ireland, Portugal and Italy has left a big stain on the euro’s reputation.


www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/jun/09/euro.eu1
The Formation of the World Trade Organization and Free Trade Ideology
Geneva, Switzerland 1995

TURNING POINT: On January 1, 1995, after years of negotiations, the World Trade Organization was formed. From 1986-1994 the international community met at a series of negotiations called the Uruguay Round negotiations to work out a new trade agreement based on the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, which was formed shortly after the end of World War II. Thus the World Trade Organization was formed and has reigned over international trade since.

SUMMARY: The principle purpose of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is to regulate international trade and hold states accountable to the international trade agreement signed by all members of the WTO. At its core, the WTO is based on the idea that opening markets by eliminating barriers to trade is the best way to encourage trade and spur economic growth globally. According to its website: “The WTO provides a forum for negotiating agreements aimed at reducing obstacles to international trade and ensuring a level playing field for all, thus contributing to economic growth and development.”

The driving ideology behind the WTO is called free trade, which, in its purest state, aims to eliminate as many barriers to trade as possible so as to open markets for international investment. The WTO is not, however, a pure free trade organization. The organization allows flexibility in many cases as with developing nations. However, there is much opposition to the way the WTO operates. In general, opponents claim that free trade and the WTO’s policies lead to wealthy corporations reaping the benefits while public revenue and the incomes of the poor and middle class fall. Other concerns include environmental degradation and developmental issues such as poor working conditions and low wages.

Whether the policies of the World Trade Organization are the right policies does not change the fact that they have shaped the way international trade has been done for nearly two decades, and these policies have had a dramatic effect, both positive and negative, on economic and trade policy in all member states.

Nelson Mandela and the End of Apartheid
South Africa 1990

**TURNING POINT:** After years of opposition to legalized segregation and racism in South Africa, on February 2, 1990 the South African president repealed apartheid in front of an international audience, reversing the decades-long policies of oppression.

**SUMMARY:** During the seventeenth century, South Africa was colonized by several European powers all vying for a stake in the country’s natural wealth. Eventually, England relinquished control of the country to Afrikaans—Dutch descendants who had lived in South Africa for generations. The colonization of South Africa had bred intense racism and a distinct upper-class white population and poor, lower-class non-white population.

In 1948, the Afrikaans government enacted *apartheid*, a legal system of racism and segregation meant to keep the native black population completely separate from the white population. Under apartheid, non-whites became citizens of ten distinct “homelands” separate from the country of South Africa. Laws were written under apartheid governing every aspect of non-whites’ lives.

Opposition came from organized political groups, labor unions, student groups and individuals. In June 1976 a group of students gathered to protest the apartheid law that all classes must be taught in Afrikaans. The peaceful protest became violent when police fired at the crowd, killing unarmed students. Riotous protests became the norm in South Africa. International attention focused on South Africa and placed economic sanctions. Nelson Mandela, an outspoken and widely respected political activist, became the face of the opposition, uniting local and international pressure to end racism and segregation.

F.W. de Klerk, president of only months, announced an official end to the regime of apartheid and opened the door to democracy. Mandela, who had spent the last twenty-seven years as a political prisoner, was released from jail and began to negotiate with the government for equal rights and democratic elections. In 1994, Mandela was elected president of a desegregated and democratic South Africa.


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Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
United Nations 1968

**TURNING POINT:** In 1968 the Non-Proliferation Treaty was passed by the United Nations General Assembly. The treaty bans non-nuclear states from acquiring or engineering nuclear weapons, gives power to the International Atomic Energy Agency to oversee the peaceful use of nuclear technology, and promotes disarmament in nuclear-capable states.

**SUMMARY:** The start of the nuclear arms race coincided with the desire to gain the upper-hand during World War II, and by the 1960's five countries had nuclear weapon capabilities including The Soviet Union, The United States, France, The United Kingdom and China. Many non-nuclear countries were working vigorously to reach nuclear capability.

The fear of nuclear annihilation was palpable world-wide, especially between the Soviet Union and the United States, who had the largest arsenals of nuclear weapons. As the fear of nuclear devastation grew internationally, the desire to control the spread and use of nuclear weapons grew as well. Years of negotiations and proposals culminated in the passage of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1968.

The US and Russia have the most nuclear weapons and are signees. India, Israel, and Pakistan have nuclear weapons but have not signed the treaty and North Korea withdrew from it in 2003. Although not all players on the international stage have agreed to the terms of the treaty, it remains the foundation for international non-proliferation to this day, most significantly providing the International Atomic Energy Agency with the authority to oversee nuclear technology development in states party to the treaty.


FDA Approves Antiretroviral Drug to Treat HIV
Maryland, USA 1987

**TURNING POINT:** After decades of going undetected and then untreated, the FDA approved the use of the drug AZT to fight HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. The success of this drug in clinical trials led to the expansion of research and development into the treatment of HIV, saving countless lives around the world. Today, getting diagnosed with HIV is not a death sentence; HIV positive people with access to treatment can live full, normal lives.

**SUMMARY:** The HIV virus is believed to have been contracted from chimpanzees in western Africa sometime during the late 19th or early 20th century and spread via human to human contact throughout the world.

Auto Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was first found in the United States in 1981 when young homosexual men began to die of infections that would normally not be fatal to healthy individuals. Medical professionals began to search for the cause of the wasting disease, and the HIV virus was isolated and found to be the cause of AIDS between 1983 and 1984.

Previous to and during this time, incidence of AIDS had cropped up all around the globe, effecting tens of thousands of people. At the time, contracting HIV was a virtual death sentence because there was no way to stop the virus from turning into AIDS, which ravishes the immune system, turning minor infections into life-threatening illnesses. As reports of the disease grew exponentially, the global medical community continued to look for a cure.

In 1985 the first blood test to screen for HIV was patented, which was used to stop the spread of the virus via blood transfusions. Soon after, the drug AZT was approved by the FDA for the treatment of HIV. This breakthrough led to the research and development of many other drugs used to fight HIV. Today, with proper medical care, HIV-positive people live full, healthy lives.

The Iranian Revolution

1979

**TURNING POINT:** January 16, 1979, Shah Mohammad Reza Pavlavi, who was the last monarch of Iran, left the nation after months of civilian protests, resulting in the formation of an Islamic Republic.

**SUMMARY:** More than two years of protests and demonstrations against the Shah’s policies, including what was seen as his being too friendly and open to Western ways, concern that Iran was becoming too secular, and worsening economic conditions, led to his leaving the country and the adoption of a new constitution and government led by a Supreme Leader.

Relationships between the new Iran, headed by revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini, and the West, particularly the United States, deteriorated rapidly. The most acute example is the US hostage crisis which lasted for 444 days.

This rapid and dramatic change in the nature and outlook of the Iranian government brought forth by the revolution carried long term implications for the lives of the people of Iran, the region, as well as the world. Possible areas of effect includes military, diplomatic, economic, and social-cultural.

**RESOURCES:**
First Weather Satellite Launched
Cape Canaveral, Florida 1960

**TURNING POINT:** April 1, 1960 the first weather satellite, TIROS-1, was launched by NASA. The TIROS-1 used multiple television cameras to film Earth from above and transmitted thousands of photos back to be studied.

**SUMMARY:** The first, called TIROS-1 for Television Infrared Observation Satellite, lasted only 78 days and could only film in daylight but in that time showed that satellites could be used to monitor large weather systems from space.

This important event signaled the possibilities of human exploration of space, and formed the basis for future development of weather forecasting capabilities with important implications for agriculture, disaster prevention, travel, military, and so on.


Silent Spring
United States 1962

Turning Point: The book Silent Spring by Rachel Carson, published in September 27, 1962, chronicled the relationship between unregulated use of chemical pesticides and the environment, particularly the possibility that such uses killed birds – and hence, other creatures.

Summary: Carson started as a marine biologist who worked for the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries and became the author of several best-selling books about the natural environment.

Her book Silent Spring is credited with direct US government action to regulate the uses of pesticides such as DDT, and marks the turning point for modern US environmental movements. Possible implications include political, economic, as well as global/international relations.


**Toy Story**

United States 1995

**TURNING POINT:** On November 22, 1995, Disney-Pixar’s *Toy Story* was released in theaters becoming the first feature length computer animated film. It was met with massive financial and critical success, becoming the highest grossing film of the year and earning three Academy Award nominations.

**SUMMARY:** In 1979, George Lucas, the creator *Star Wars*, founded The Graphics Group as part of his Computer Division at Lucasfilm hoping to develop groundbreaking and innovative computer technology for the film industry.

In 1984, a year after John Lasseter joined the group, a partially completed *The Adventures of Andre & Wall B.* was screened. This short-film marked the first work by the group as well as a breakthrough in technology in film. Two years later, Steve Jobs purchases the Computer Graphics Division from Mr. Lucas, establishing it as a new company which he named Pixar. Jobs played an influential role in the shaping of the company and the work it was doing.

In 1991, following years of successful computer animated short-films, Disney and Pixar announced a deal to create and release a computer generated animated movie. The eventual product (*Toy Story*) was a a critical and financial hit and started a relationship between the two companies that continues to this day.

Since the release of *Toy Story*, computer generated animated films have become commonplace in the film industry, with better and better technology. Some of the highest grossing films in history have been animated, a fact that was inconceivable before 1995.

Watergate
Washington, D.C. 1972

**TURNING POINT:** On June 17, 1972 five men are arrested for breaking into the Democratic National Convention headquarters at the Watergate office complex. A month later, it was revealed by journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein that the burglars were connected to the Committee to Re-elect the President. This marked the first step in the revealing of one of the greatest political scandals in American history that would result in the resignation of President Richard Nixon and the erosion of trust in the government.

**SUMMARY:** In January 1972, a campaign intelligence plan was created by the Committee for the Re-Election of the President (CRP) that involved a variety of illegal activities against the Democratic Party. Following two failed break-in attempts to the Watergate Complex, the team placed wiretaps on the phones of the leaders of the Democratic National Committee, but found the information to be of no use. This led to another break-in attempt on June 17. After realizing that someone had tampered with the locks, the security guard called the police and five men were arrested and charged and then indicted for conspiracy, burglary, and violation of federal wiretapping laws.

Two days after the break-in, it was revealed that the intruders had a connection to the CRP. This led to the uncovering of a cover up of the scandal by President Nixon and his staff. After it was revealed that Nixon had tape-recordings of relevant conversations in his office, he was ordered to turn them over. These tapes implicated the President in the scandal and led to his resignation as he was facing near certain impeachment.
Jackie Robinson’s Debut
United States 1947

**TURNING POINT:** On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson made his major league debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers, becoming the first black player in baseball history and effectively breaking the sport’s color barrier.

**SUMMARY:** In the mid 1940s, Branch Rickey, president and general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, looked to the Negro leagues in hopes of finding a black ballplayer for his club. He took an interest in Jackie Robinson and set up an interview, as he wanted to make sure that whoever he signed could withstand the racial abuse that was sure to follow. After being assured Robinson was this man, Rickey signed him to a contract with the Dodgers.

After a very successful year in the minor leagues with Montreal, Robinson was called up to the major league club. Following his debut, he would go on to win the Rookie of the Year award in 1947, and the MVP two years after that. After a ten year career, he was inducted into the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame.

Jackie Robinson’s debut was not just a turning point in baseball history or sports history, but one in civil rights history as well. His debut changed the complexion of the game of baseball forever and helped change the makeup of a nation in the process.


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The Assassination of Juvenal Habyarimana and Cyprien Ntarymira
Rwanda 1994

**TURNING POINT:** On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying Habyarimana, the president of Rwanda, and Ntarymira, the president of Burundi, was shot down near the Kigali International Airport in Rwanda. While the circumstances surrounding are still in dispute, the death sparked the mounting conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, turning it into a civil war that killed as many as 1,000,000 Rwandans in the span of 100 days.

**SUMMARY:** The Tutsi-Hutu conflict is one that is centuries old. Throughout the history of Rwanda, conflict between the two ethnic groups has been both prevalent and damaging. Belgian colonialism played a large role in establishing the divide when they favored the Tutsi and gave them most of the power while relegating Hutus to forced labor. A civil war between the two groups broke out on October 1, 1990 and ended in August of 1993 with the signing of the Arusha accords. While the Arusha Accords were in the process of being implemented, tensions began to again boil up between the Hutus and Tutsis, leading to the Hutus committing mass killings of Tutsis following the assassination of President Habyarimana.

Today, the country has made remarkable progress and both Hutu and Tutsi have been, at the very least, functioning with one another without much problem under the rule of Paul Kagame, the leader of the Rwandese Patriotic Front, a Tutsi group during the
genocide.

