

# The Decline Of Extreme Poverty



Saurav Sarkar -

Source:

Globetrotter Media

04-15-2024 ~ One of the foremost accomplishments of the industrial age is the [“immense progress against extreme poverty.”](#)

“Extreme poverty” is defined by the World Bank as a person [living](#) on less than \$2.15 per day using 2017 prices. This figure has seen a [sharp decline](#) over the last two centuries—from almost 80 percent of the world’s population living in extreme poverty in 1820 to only about 10 percent living in these conditions by 2019. This is all the more astounding given that the population of the world is about [750 percent higher](#).

The causes of economic progress are clear. The laborers of past generations around the world—often against their will—gave us industrial revolutions. These industrial economies rely on, and generate, machinery, technology, and other capital goods. These are then deployed in an economy that requires less sacrifice of human labor and can generate more goods and services for the populations of the world, even as populations continue to grow.

Some ideologies, such as socialism, were most effective in fighting extreme poverty. Socialism is defined here as the state control of a national economy with an eye toward the welfare of the masses. Socialist regimes serve to counter and remove extreme poverty. Two regions illustrate this point well and account for billions of people who moved out of extreme poverty in the last century—all of them influenced by or under the rubric of socialism.

In the USSR and Eastern Europe, [extreme poverty declined from about 60 percent in 1930 to almost zero in 1970](#). In China too, extreme poverty has been [eliminated](#) to virtually zero today, though there are [debates over exactly what](#) produced those gains. Some argue that these gains are the product of capitalist reforms; but even if this were the case, those reforms took advantage of the groundwork laid by the post-1949 socialist economy.

There is also a certain logic to why socialist economies in the 20th century were able to eventually generate massive gains for those at the very bottom of their societies. While not the only ideology that can do so, socialism is particularly good at the kind of [state control and support of economies](#) that is required for successful industrialization. Moreover, because socialism sets itself up to be politically evaluated by what it delivers to those at the very bottom, the politics of socialist countries tend to moderate some of the inequality that comes with industrialization in a capitalist world. This makes it markedly different from other varieties of state control like colonialism, imperialism, state capitalism, and fascism.

Socialism's existence also seems to have pushed forward reductions in poverty in the capitalist sections of the world. The presence of the Soviet Union and internal left movements across the capitalist world put pressure on capitalist regimes to offer more goods and services to their working classes and underclasses. This is evident from several instances throughout the world, such as the [role of communists in fighting for civil rights for Black people](#) in the United States.

While there might have been an immense reduction in extreme poverty over the decades, a [series of setbacks](#) brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and various ongoing wars across the world have recently made a dire situation worse for those already struggling to make ends meet. According to a 2022 World Bank [report](#), "the pandemic pushed about 70 million people into extreme poverty in 2020, the largest one-year increase since global poverty monitoring began in 1990. As a result, an estimated 719 million people subsisted on less than \$2.15 a day by the end of 2020."

This means that the world is ["unlikely" to achieve](#) the UN target of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030. Consider what it looks like to live on less than \$2.15 per day. It means that you cannot even ["afford a tiny space to live, some minimum heating capacity, and food" that will prevent "malnutrition."](#) As we struggle to meet our goals, the majority of the world population has been forced to live on [under \\$10 a day](#), while 1.5 percent of the population receives \$100 a day or more.

Moreover, a racial analysis is also important to include given that extreme poverty is increasingly concentrated in [sub-Saharan Africa](#) and parts of South Asia. Poorer countries (which are home to the vast majority of Black and brown populations) are "encouraged" to produce the cheapest and simplest goods for

trade rather than developing self-sustaining economies or upgrading their economies and workforces. In fact, they are often pushed to [destroy existing economies](#).

The final rub in any discussion of poverty is that the preexisting solutions to it—industrialization—may not be feasible with the limitations of a warming planet. If sub-Saharan Africa needs to industrialize to eliminate extreme poverty in that region, who will pay for that carbon footprint? Presumably, the countries of the Global North that have the most historical carbon debt ought to, but it is hard to imagine a world in which they will voluntarily do so. After all, they have yet to make reparations for the stolen labor with which their wealth was built in the first place.

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## **Why Culture Is Not The Only Tool For Defining Homo Sapiens In Relation To Other Hominins**



*Deborah Barsky*

04-12-2004 ~ *We need a broad comparative lens to produce useful explanations and narratives of our origins across time.*

While the circumstances that led to the emergence of anatomically modern humans (AMH) remain a topic of debate, the species-centric idea that modern humans inevitably came to dominate the world because they were culturally and behaviorally superior to other hominins is still largely accepted. The global spread of *Homo sapiens* was often hypothesized to have taken place as a [rapid takeover](#) linked mainly to two factors: technological supremacy and unmatched complex symbolic communication. These factors combined to define the concept of “modern behavior” that was initially allocated exclusively to *H. sapiens*.

Up until the 1990s, and even into the early 21st century, many assumed that the demographic success experienced by *H. sapiens* was consequential to these two distinctive attributes. As a result, humans “behaving in a modern way” experienced unprecedented demographic success, spreading [out of their African homeland](#) and “[colonizing](#)” Europe and Asia. Following this, interpopulation contacts multiplied, operating as a stimulus for a cumulative culture that climaxed in the impressive technological and artistic feats, which defined the European Upper Paleolithic. Establishing a link between [increased population density and greater innovation](#) offered an explanation for how *H. sapiens* replaced the Neandertals in Eurasia and achieved superiority to become the [last survivor of the genus \*Homo\*](#).

The exodus of modern humans from Africa was often depicted by a map of the Old World showing an arrow pointing northward out of the African continent and then splitting into two smaller arrows: one directed toward the west, into Europe, and the other toward the east, into Asia. As the story goes, AMHs continued their progression thanks to their advanced technological and cerebral capacities (and their presumed thirst for exploration), eventually reaching the Americas by way of

land bridges exposed toward the end of the last major glacial event, sometime after 20,000 years ago. Curiosity and innovation were put forward as the faculties that would eventually allow them to master seafaring, and to occupy even the most isolated territories of Oceania.

It was proposed that early modern humans took the most likely land route out of Africa through the Levantine corridor, eventually encountering and “replacing” the Neandertal peoples that had been thriving in these lands over many millennia. There has been much debate about the dating of this event and whether it took place in multiple phases (or waves) or as a single episode. The timing of the incursion of *H. sapiens* into Western Europe was estimated at around 40,000 years ago; a period roughly concurrent with the [disappearance of the Neandertal peoples](#).

This scenario also matched the [chrono-cultural sequence for the European Upper Paleolithic](#) as that was defined since the late 19th century from eponymous French archeological sites, namely: *Aurignacian* (from Aurignac), *Gravettian* (from La Gravette), *Solutrean* (from Solutré), and *Magdalenian* (from la Madeleine). Taking advantage of the stratigraphic sequences provided by these key sites that contained rich artifact records, prehistorians chronicled and defined the typological features that still serve to distinguish each of the Upper Paleolithic cultures. Progressively acknowledged as a reality attributed to modern humans, this evolutionary sequencing was extrapolated over much of Eurasia, where it fits more or less snugly with the archeological realities of each region.

Each of these cultural complexes denotes a geographically and chronologically constrained cultural unit that is formally defined by a specific set of artifacts (tools, structures, art, etc.). In turn, these remnants provide us with information about the behaviors and lifestyles of the peoples that made and used them. The Aurignacian cultural complex that appeared approximately 40,000 years ago (presumably in Eastern Europe) heralded the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic period that ended with the disappearance of the last Magdalenian peoples some 30,000 years later—at the beginning of the interglacial phase marking the onset of the (actual) [Holocene epoch](#).

The conditions under which the transition from the Middle to the Upper Paleolithic took place in Eurasia remains a topic of hot debate. Some argue that the chronological situation and features of [Châtelperronian](#) toolkits identified in

parts of France and Spain and the [Uluzzian](#) culture in Italy, should be considered intermediate between the Middle and Upper Paleolithic, while for others, it remains unclear whether Neandertals or modern humans were the authors of these assemblages. This is not unusual, since the thresholds separating the most significant phases marking cultural change in the nearly 3 million-year-long Paleolithic record are mostly invisible in the archeological register, where time has masked the subtleties of their nature, making them seem to appear abruptly.

The idea of a “[Human Revolution](#)” was introduced mainly from sites in South Africa, where a rich body of evidence revealed that the set of modern behaviors associated with *H. sapiens* was significantly older than the European Upper Paleolithic record. Coincident with the reign of the Neandertals in Eurasia and close to the period of the [emergence of \*H. sapiens\* in Africa](#) proposed subsequently, these remarkable finds comprise [evidence indicating advanced technological proficiency and symbolic behaviors](#), including finely fashioned stone points, specialized bone tools, as well as art, ochre, and shell beads. With some of the finds dating from more than [150,000 to around 70,000 years ago](#), these [Middle Stone Age \(MSA\)](#) discoveries were thought to provide the basis for the prevalence of our species on the world stage.

Today, new discoveries are rewriting the story of our ancestors. According to a 2017 Nature article, finds from the [Jebel Irhoud](#) site in Morocco, which are more than 300,000 years old, have pushed back the date for the emergence of our species by more than 100,000 years. Meanwhile, discoveries in Israel ([Misliya](#)) and Greece ([Apidima](#)) now suggest that members of the *H. sapiens* clade reached Eurasia far earlier than previously believed.

One major consequence of this “early arrival,” for example, is a far longer cohabitation period between AMHs and Neandertals than previously suspected. But there is more. Over a period spanning less than a quarter of a century, [at least six new species of \*Homo\*](#) dating to a timeframe that now overlaps with our own species, have been added to the human family tree. That *H. sapiens* had physical contact with some of them, like the [Denisovans](#) and the [Neandertals](#) present in Eurasia, has now been confirmed thanks to [advances made in genetic studies](#).

Moreover, a wide body of evidence now shows that Neandertal peoples were cognitively advanced and possessed highly developed technological know-how

and symbolic behaviors—once believed to be attributes exclusive to modern humans. The evidence ranges from [art](#) to [corporal decoration](#), with [advanced hunting capacities](#), also suggesting that Neandertals had an aptitude for complex language. In combination, these findings are important factors that are forcing us to rethink the cultural development processes for the Middle and the Upper Paleolithic.

Neandertal toolkits are ascribed to the [Mousterian](#) cultural complex (from the Le Moustier site, France), characterized by [stone flakes knapped from cores](#) that were often managed using specific techniques referred to as Levallois. This eponymous denomination (from Levallois-Perret, France) refers to a complex series of gestures used to knap a piece of stone (usually flint) to produce flakes with predetermined shapes and sizes. Contrastingly, modern human toolkits are generally classified as being “blade-based” because they consist of long, thin flakes knapped from carefully prepared cores to produce blades that provide greater raw material economy and efficiency. Throughout the Upper Paleolithic and into the Mesolithic, these blade industries included very small tools (microlithic) that were often combined with other materials to form composite tools.

This scheme, however, reflects the dominance of the Western European vision of prehistoric cultural evolution and does not always fit well with the archeological reality. For instance, [a recent study](#) shows that innovation in stone cutting-edge productivity was not a rapid and sweeping revolution that helped modern humans spread over Eurasia, but rather it occurred later, progressing in tandem with blade size reduction. Another case in point are the blade-based Middle Paleolithic toolkits of the [Amudian](#) culture, recognized to have been made by Neandertals, and also [Levallois products associated with the newly coined \*Nesher Ramla Homo\*](#), in the Levant. Moreover, flakes produced using Levallois core preparation techniques ascribed to the [Acheulian](#) techno-complex have been [documented in the North African Lower Paleolithic](#).

So what kinds of tools were the early *H. sapiens* from Jebel Irhoud making 300,000 years ago? Or the modern humans found at Apidima in Greece, nearly 200,000 years ago? What about the other hominins ranging over Eurasia prior to and during the arrival of *H. sapiens*?

In fact, these archaic humans are associated with a range of technologies and



behaviors that suggest a far more complex cultural framework than previously assumed. This annuls the hypothesis that modern humans replaced the Neandertals (and other hominin forms) thanks to the technological superiority of their blade-based industries and calls for a revision of how we perceive the role of culture in defining our own species in relation to other hominins.

These exciting finds have not only enlarged the human family but have also revealed complex patterns of migration and social interchange practiced by our ancestors. Just as these exchanges involved interbreeding and assimilation, culture was also shared and transferred among different hominin groups, effacing the usefulness of restrictive cultural labeling for defining *H. sapiens* and our cousin species.

These revisions to the archeological record tell us that the similarities and differences we observe in prehistoric cultures are not necessarily a yardstick for measuring the superiority of one human group over another.

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# Armenia's Escape From Isolation



# Lies Through Georgia



*John P. Ruehl  
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*04-11-2024 ~ Surrounded to its east and west by hostile neighbors and devoid of allies, Armenia's geopolitical situation faces severe challenges. A growing partnership with Georgia could help the small, landlocked country to expand its options.*

For the second time this year, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with his Georgian counterpart on March 24. The meeting, held [in Armenia's capital](#) of Yerevan, saw both leaders reaffirming their growing commitment to enhancing already positive relations. Armenia has placed greater emphasis on recognizing the untapped potential of Georgia in recent years, given Yerevan's increasingly challenging geopolitical circumstances.

Armenia underwent a significant foreign policy shift away from Russia and [towards Europe](#) following the 2018 Velvet Revolution and the election of Pashinyan. However, this shift exposed the country's security vulnerabilities. In 2020, neighboring Azerbaijan decisively defeated Armenian forces defending the Armenian-majority enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, followed by subsequent clashes in 2022 and 2023, leading to the dissolution of the enclave. With its current military advantage, Azerbaijan's forces are [instigating border confrontations](#) on Armenian territory and demanding the return of [several small Azerbaijani](#) villages in Armenia.

Azerbaijan has [refused to participate](#) in EU or U.S.-initiated peace talks in recent months. Meanwhile, Russia has largely ignored Armenia's plight amid its struggles in Ukraine to punish Yerevan. Instead, Russia has sought closer ties

with Azerbaijan, as evidenced by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Moscow [immediately after Russia recognized the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics in Ukraine](#). During the 2022 visit, [pledges were made](#) to increase military and diplomatic cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan and to resolve remaining border issues.

Russia [maintains a military base](#) in Armenia, [controls parts](#) of its border, and wields significant [economic influence](#) in the country. Despite this, Armenia [opposes Moscow's](#) mediation in peace talks and continues to seek closer ties to the West. While Western countries have shown sympathy to Armenia's plight and criticized Azerbaijan, Armenia has received little tangible assistance. Azerbaijan's emergence as a vital transport corridor and source of natural resources, combined with the limited ability of the West to project power in the Caucasus region, has prevented the West from taking harsher measures against it.

The small American military force sent for a [joint military exercise](#) with Armenia, for example, concluded on the day of the 2023 war which marked the end of Nagorno-Karabakh's existence. Despite its presence, the force was powerless to dissuade Azerbaijan. Additionally, while U.S. President Joe Biden initially declared his intention to withhold U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan due to its actions against Armenia in 2020, he later [reversed this decision](#)—a pattern consistent with previous U.S. administrations since [the early 1990s](#). The decision is currently pending ratification despite domestic opposition in the U.S.

France, motivated by its desire to retaliate against Moscow [for its role](#) in pushing French forces out of Africa and to assert itself as a leader in EU foreign policy and military affairs, has directed European efforts to support Armenia. France has led bilateral and [EU-led initiatives](#) and criticized Azerbaijan for its actions against Armenia. However, like Washington, France has failed to offer tangible support and continues to engage with Azerbaijan in [natural resources](#) projects.

The only NATO member capable of exerting influence in the region is Turkey, which maintains close ties with Azerbaijan and has also closed its border with Armenia. Turkey and Azerbaijan aim to establish a direct link between Azerbaijan and its exclave, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, bordering Turkey. The proposed [Zangezur corridor](#) would go through Armenia, severing Yerevan's access to Iran, but Iranian objections caused [Azerbaijani](#) and [Turkish](#) officials to abandon it and sign a deal linking the exclave via Iran [in October](#) 2023.

The Iran corridor would potentially help safeguard Armenia's fragile territorial integrity. However, Azerbaijan and Turkey are hesitant to increase Iran's leverage over them and may be waiting for the opportunity to exert more pressure on Armenia. While a full-scale invasion by Azerbaijan is unlikely for now, the fear of escalation leading to further concessions by Armenia amid [Azerbaijani irridentist](#) rhetoric to expand its borders is a realistic concern, especially considering Armenia's diplomatic isolation.

Given concerns over potential escalations in the region and Yerevan's isolation, there has been a notable refinement in Armenia's approach to its other neighbor, Georgia. Armenia has recognized that it can drastically increase ties with Georgia without sacrificing its relationship with either the West or Iran, while lessening its economic dependency on Russia and military vulnerability to Azerbaijan and Turkey.

While maintaining neighborly relations for decades, both Armenia and Georgia are also members of [GUAM](#), an organization established after the Soviet collapse to bolster economic and political ties among them and fellow member states Ukraine and Moldova. Despite previously overlooking Georgia's potential in favor of Russia, Armenia has evidently recognized that Georgia can offer greater access to the Black Sea and the West, particularly if Georgia's EU aspirations continue to [gradually develop](#).

During Pashinyan's visit to Tbilisi in January, he and the Georgian Prime Minister at the time, Irakli Garibashvili, signed [a strategic partnership](#) agreement in Tbilisi to promote further economic, diplomatic, and security cooperation, as well as to expedite the border delimitation process. Pashinyan [also noted](#) that the volume of trade between Armenia and Georgia grew to over \$1 billion in 2023. During the meeting [in March](#), Pashinyan reiterated his commitment to intensifying the delimitation process.

Only Russia and Azerbaijan [have succeeded](#) in signing a border treaty in the region, with numerous border disputes existing across the former Soviet Union. Georgia faces similar but somewhat more significant border issues [with Azerbaijan](#) that it does with Armenia. Furthermore, Azerbaijan's successful seizure of its Azerbaijani-majority villages in Armenia would disrupt vital [transport corridors](#) between Georgia and Armenia, with Georgian officials emphasizing the importance of resolving this issue peacefully and expressing

concern over Azerbaijan's actions.

Azerbaijan's insistence on asserting control over these villages would also disrupt Iran's access to Georgia, with which Iran maintains [positive relations](#) and conducts millions of dollars in bilateral trade. Neither country wants to see their access to the other severed, as it would impede Iran's access to the Black Sea and Georgia's access to the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf. In this context, Armenia can maintain its status as a crucial link between Georgia and Iran.

Iran is actively seeking to diversify trade routes to Europe, aiming to reduce dependence on those that go through [Turkish](#) territory or Azerbaijani and Russian territory, like the International North-South Transport Corridor ([INSTC](#)). In 2016, Iran proposed the [Persian Gulf-Black Sea project](#) that highlights Armenia's role and has already begun transporting small amounts of goods between Armenia and Georgia. This initiative further strengthens the economic ties between the three countries and has even gained modest support from [the EU](#).

Moreover, Iran is [motivated to diminish](#) Azerbaijan's influence in the region. With a large Azerbaijani minority population, Iran is also wary of Azerbaijan's [close relationship](#) with Israel. Following Armenia's decision to expel Russian border guards from Yerevan airport [in March 2024](#), Iran's foreign minister [promptly flew to Armenia for discussions](#). Iran has [subtly warned](#) Azerbaijan repeatedly against seizing Armenian territory, and this trend will intensify if Armenia can further demonstrate its importance to Iran through Georgia.

Yerevan's geopolitical ambitions face several significant obstacles. Despite Armenia's efforts to distance itself from Russia, much of Georgia's political landscape has [sought improved relations](#) with Russia in recent years. While the outcome of Georgia's upcoming elections [in 2024](#) may influence this trend, Russia's enduring economic influence in both [Georgia](#) and Armenia is expected to persist, limiting their ability to deepen ties with the West.

Armenia's pivot to the West has also put a ceiling on its relationship with Iran, which, in turn, is increasingly inclined toward increasing trade with Russia [amid their deepening partnership](#). Furthermore, in an effort to evade Western sanctions, Tehran has collaborated with Azerbaijan to develop new rail and road [projects](#).

Moreover, 2024 trade data between Armenia and Georgia points to a decline

compared [to 2023](#), while Georgia's trade relationship with Azerbaijan [remains strong](#). Georgia and Azerbaijan also cooperate in key pipeline networks, such as the [Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline](#), while many parallel [railways](#) in Georgia are owned by Azerbaijan. Armenia's exclusion from the [Association Trio](#) consisting of fellow GUAM member states and signed in 2021, is further evidence of its ongoing regional isolation.

Ethnic Azerbaijanis also outnumber Armenians in Georgia ([6 to 5 percent](#) of Georgia's population), limiting the ability of the Armenian minority to influence Georgian policy. Tensions also persist [over the rights](#) of the Armenian minority in Georgia, centered around Javakheti. And as a result of limited births in Armenia and high emigration, Azerbaijan's population has gone from roughly double Armenia's population in 1991 to almost quadruple today.

Azerbaijan's increasing military and diplomatic clout amid Armenia's isolation have allowed it to press its advantages without constraint. Armenia has only recently begun to explore Georgia's potential to bring greater regional connectivity and ensure its territorial integrity. Together with Iran, improved relations with Georgia would secure Armenia's access to three major bodies of water and international trade. And in the absence of greater relations with the West, Armenia could pivot back toward Russia by assuming a more prominent role in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, which signed a free trade deal with Iran [in January 2024](#). Georgia could form a clear land bridge for Armenia to facilitate greater regional trade between Iran and the bloc.

Armenia, with the support of Iran, could in turn serve as a useful gateway for Georgia to gain greater access to [Indian](#) and [Chinese](#) economic initiatives in the Caucasus. Yerevan could also help [revitalize Soviet-era transport networks and mechanisms](#) to further complement regional connectivity, increase [mineral exports](#) to Georgia, offer its services as a growing status as a [tech hub](#), and allow Tbilisi to enhance its diplomatic status by inviting it to take a more active role in its conflict with Azerbaijan. While the potential for stronger relations exists, it will require an even more proactive approach from Yerevan.

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# The Myth That India's Freedom Was Won Nonviolently Is Holding Back Progress



*Justin Podur - Source: York University - [podur.org](#)*

*04-10-2024 ~ Some struggles can be kept nonviolent, but decolonization never has been—certainly not in India.*

If there is a single false claim to “nonviolent” struggle that has most powerfully captured the imagination of the world, it is the claim that India, under Gandhi’s leadership, defeated the mighty British Empire and won her independence through the nonviolent method.

India’s independence struggle was a process replete with violence. The nonviolent



myth was imposed afterward. It is time to get back to reality. Using recent works on the role of violence in the Indian freedom struggle, it's possible to compile a chronology of the independence movement in which armed struggle played a decisive role. Some of these sources: Palagummi Sainath's [\*The Last Heroes\*](#), Kama Maclean's [\*A Revolutionary History of Interwar India\*](#), Durba Ghosh's [\*Gentlemanly Terrorists\*](#), Pramod Kapoor's [\*1946 Royal Indian Navy Mutiny: Last War of Independence\*](#), Vijay Prashad's edited book, [\*The 1921 Uprising in Malabar\*](#), and Anita Anand's [\*The Patient Assassin\*](#).

Nonviolence could never defeat a colonial power that had conquered the subcontinent through nearly unimaginable levels of violence. India was conquered step by step by the British East India Company in a series of wars. While the British East India Company had incorporated in 1599, the tide turned against India's independence in 1757 at the battle of Plassey. A century of encroaching Company rule followed—covered in William Dalrymple's book [\*The Anarchy\*](#)—with Company policy and enforced famines murdering tens of millions of people.

In 1857, Indian soldiers working for the Company rose up with some of the few remaining independent Indian rulers who had not yet been dispossessed—to try to oust the British. In response, the British murdered an estimated (by Amaresh Mishra, in the book [\*War of Civilisations\*](#)) 10 million people.

The British government took over from the Company and proceeded to rule India directly for another 90 years.

From 1757 to 1947, in addition to the ten million killed in the 1857 war alone, another 30-plus million were killed in enforced famines, per figures presented by Indian politician Shashi Tharoor in the 2016 book [\*Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India\*](#).

[A 2022 study](#) estimated another 100 million excess deaths in India due to British imperialism from 1880 to 1920 alone. Doctors [like Mubin Syed believe](#) that these famines were so great and over such a long period of time that they exerted selective pressure on the genes of South Asian populations, increasing their risk of diabetes, heart disease, and other diseases that arise when abundant calories are available because South Asian bodies have become famine-adapted.

By the end, the independence struggle against the British included all of the methods characteristic of armed struggle: clandestine organization, punishment



of collaborators, assassinations, sabotage, attacks on police stations, military mutinies, and even the development of autonomous zones and a parallel government apparatus.

*A Chronology of India's Violent Independence Struggle*

[In his 2006 article](#), "India, Armed Struggle in the Independence Movement," scholar Kunal Chattopadhyay broke the struggle down into a series of phases:

*1905-1911: Revolutionary Terrorism.* A period of "revolutionary terrorism" started with the assassination of a British official of the Bombay presidency in 1897 by Damodar and Balkrishna Chapekar, who were both hanged. From 1905 to 1907, independence fighters (deemed "terrorists" by the British) attacked railway ticket offices, post offices, and banks, and threw bombs, all to fight the partition of Bengal in 1905. In 1908, Khudiram Bose was executed by the imperialists for "terrorism."

These "terrorists" of Bengal were a source of great worry to the British. In 1911, the British repealed the partition of Bengal, removing the main grievance of the terrorists. They also passed the Criminal Tribes Act, combining their anxieties over their continued rule with their ever-present racial anxieties. The Home Secretary of the Government of India is quoted in Durba Ghosh's book *Gentlemanly Terrorists*:

"There is a serious risk, unless the movement in Bengal is checked, that political dacoits and professional dacoits in other provinces may join hands and that the bad example set by these men in an unwarlike province like Bengal may, if it continues, lead to imitation in provinces inhabited by fighting races where the results would be even more disastrous."

Ghosh outlines some more of these cases:

"In Bengal, the Alipore Conspiracy Case, Midnapore Conspiracy Case, the Howrah Gang Case, and other conspiracy trials enabled the government to detain those involved with secret and underground political groups. Relying on a century-old piece of security legislation that included the Regulation III of 1818, the government also passed the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908 and the Defence of India Act in 1915 to bring political violence against the state under control."

But, as Ghosh argues, the imperialist response wasn't solely to pass draconian laws. On the contrary, they made concessions—growing concessions—toward independence and other demands by the “terrorists,” and tried to disproportionately reward their “nonviolent” interlocutors from the Congress. Bengal was reunited; the British moved their capital from Calcutta to Delhi to get away from the terrorist movement in that province.

*Revolutionary Struggles 1914-1918:* With the end of the Swadeshi movement of 1905 to 1907 began what was called, simply, the “Terrorist Movement” from 1907 to 1917. The terrorists opened with an attack on Bengal Lieutenant Governor Andrew Fraser in Midnapore in 1907. During WWI, the Ghadar movement tried to overthrow British rule multiple times—a (foiled) rebellion in February 1915 led by Rash Behari Bose and another (foiled) raid in Calcutta planned for Christmas Day 1915. Revolutionaries in Bengal raided arms depots, obtained military assistance from Germany, fought a pitched battle against the British in September of 1915 at Chasakhand, and even operated internationally in places like the U.S. and Japan. Revolutionary leaders Chittapriya Ray Chaudhuri and Jatindranath Mukherjee both died in this battle.

The response by the British to the terrorist movements in their colonial possessions was to pass wartime laws: the Defence of the Realm Act in Ireland, and the Defence of India Act. But also to make concessions.

*Turning point in 1919:* The Amritsar massacre of 1919 was a massacre of hundreds of protesters dissenting from Britain's desire to extend wartime measures indefinitely through the 1919 Rowlatt Act. After the slaughter, the British engaged in an orgy of racial violence and ritual humiliation, making Indians crawl on their knees down streets, for example. After 1919, Gandhi also led a nonviolent campaign, the non-cooperation movement. What is less known, documented by Durba Ghosh, is that the terrorist movement was in constant contact with Gandhi and the Nehrus (both Motilal and Jawaharlal) throughout this period. The British passed the repressive 1919 Rowlatt Act, but also passed the first Government of India Act and the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms, promising self-government in some distant future.

Also, recall that in 1919 the British also fought an unsuccessful war with Afghanistan and unsuccessfully invaded the new Soviet Union. These violent, military conflicts set the context for the changes the imperialists were forced to

make in India.

### *Interwar Revolutionary Struggle*

In the history of the 1920s, the most visible face of the Indian struggle was Gandhi's non-cooperation movement. But there was an uprising in South India as well, in Malabar in 1921, which the British tried to steer in a communal direction and ended up crushing by force.

The 1920s and 1930s were a time of constant acts of armed struggle. In the 1920s, the Hindustan Republican Association engaged in "patriotic robberies" like one in Kakori, after which four of the leaders were hanged and three others sentenced to life in prison. In 1929, Bhagat Singh and Batukeswar Dutt threw a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly.

In 1925 and 1930, the British passed two Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Acts. The 1930 amendment was put in force on March 25. On April 18, the Indian Republican Army with Surya Sen and 60 terrorists led a raid on the Chittagong Armory:

"The raid was an elaborately planned attack in which revolutionaries managed to occupy major colonial sites, including the European club, police armoury, and the telephone and telegraph office. The raiders cut off all communications with officials in other parts of India, gathered arms, and hoped to terrorize the British while they enjoyed a Friday evening at their club."

Also in 1930, Odisha saw a tribal uprising against the British in which villagers battled police—Sainath talked to some of the veterans of this uprising in *Last Heroes*, chapter 2.

In 1931, the British hanged Bhagat Singh, Shivaram Rajguru, and Sukhdev Thapar. They murdered Chandra Sekhar Azad in a park in Allahabad. They passed the Bengal Suppression of Terrorist Outrages Act in 1932, but terrorism continued.

In 1935, the British made a major concession, another Government of India Act, which expanded the franchise and promised the Congress leaders that they would eventually become the rulers (on the British imperialist timeline). The *quid pro quo* was that these Indian leaders would suppress the terrorists. Among the British weapons was nonviolence, including the Civil Disobedience movement.

The Congress leaders knew, however, that without some terrorism, their leverage with the British would be zero. So they played their own game, quietly supporting the terrorists at times, publicly denouncing them at others, while conducting civil disobedience within a framework of rules that involved jail time for nonviolent actors and British assassination and hanging for terrorists who wouldn't play the civil disobedience game. Violent struggle was the price paid by the "terrorists" so that the nonviolent could sit at the table to negotiate with the imperialists.

In Chapter 4 of *Lost Heroes*, Sainath spoke to bomb-maker Shobharam Gaharwar, active in Rajasthan and elsewhere in the 1930s and 1940s, who confirmed the ubiquity of bomb-making activity during the independence struggle:

"We were in great demand at that time! I have been to Karnataka. To Mysore, Bengaluru, all sorts of places. See, Ajmer was a prominent centre for the Quit India movement, for the struggle. So was Benares [Varanasi]. There were other places like Baroda in Gujarat and Damoh in Madhya Pradesh. People looked up to Ajmer, saying the movement is strong in this town and that they would follow the footsteps of the freedom fighters here. Of course, there were many others, too."

*Quit India 1942 and Disillusionment: For Lost Heroes*, Sainath spoke to veterans of the armed struggle in Punjab as well as in the south in the Telangana People's Struggle, led by Sundarayya. Known as the Telangana Uprising of 1946, it was a multiyear struggle over an immense area, and in addition to battles with feudal landlords, police, and hired *goondas*, he reports:

"At its height, the Veera Telangana Porattam spread across almost 5,000 villages. It touched over three million lives across some 25,000 square kilometres. In the villages under their control, this people's movement set up a parallel government. That included the creation of gram swaraj committees or village communes. Close to one million acres of land were redistributed amongst the poor. Most official histories date the Communist-led uprising as occurring from 1946-51. But great agitations and revolts were already underway there from late 1943."

Another southern state, Tamil Nadu, was the site of an immense anti-feudal struggle at the same time as the Quit India movement of 1942. Sainath spoke to veteran R. Nallakannu:

"We'd fight them at night, throw stones—those were the weapons we had—and chase them away. Sometimes, there would be pitched battles. This happened

several times during the protests that came in the 1940s. We were still boys, but we fought. Day and night, with our kind of weapons!”

In one village in Odisha in August 1942, activists took over and declared themselves magistrates, beginning to administer justice. They were quickly arrested, but once locked up they immediately began organizing the prisoners, as they told Sainath:

“They sent us to a prison for criminals. We made the most of it... In those days, the British were trying to recruit soldiers to die in their war against Germany. So they held out promises to those who were serving long sentences as criminals. They promised that anyone who signed up for the war would be given 100 rupees. Each of their families would get 500 rupees. And they would be free after the war.

We campaigned with the criminal prisoners. Is it worth dying for Rs 500 for these people and their wars? You will surely be amongst the first to die, we told them. You are not important for them. Why should you be their cannon fodder?

After a while, they began to listen to us. They used to call us Gandhi, or simply, Congress. Many of them dropped out of the scheme. They rebelled and refused to go.”

In West Bengal, Bhabani Mahato organized logistics for underground fighters in the Quit India struggle. Activist Partha Sarati Mahato told Sainath how it went:

“Only a few better-off families in the village were to prepare meals for however many activists in hiding there [in the forest] were on a given day. And the women doing this were asked to leave the cooked food in their kitchen.

They did not know who it was who came and picked up the food. Nor did they know who the individuals were that they were cooking for. The resistance never used people from the village to do the transportation. The British had spies and informants in the village. So did the feudal zamindars who were their collaborators. These informants would recognize locals carrying loads to the forest. That would endanger both the women and the underground. Nor could they have anyone identifying the people they sent in—probably by nightfall—to collect the food. The women never saw who it was lifting the meals.

That way, both were shielded from exposure. But the women knew what was

going on. Most village women would gather each morning at the ponds and streams, tanks—and those involved exchanged notes and experiences. They knew why and what they were doing it for—but never specifically for whom.”

### *The Toofan Sena*

In 1943, the Toofan Sena, the armed wing of the *prati sarkar* (or provisional government) of Satara, declared independence from British rule in the Indian state of Maharashtra. Sainath describes the reach of this autonomous zone:

“With its headquarters in Kundal, the *prati sarkar*—an amalgam of peasants and workers—actually functioned as a government in the nearly 600 villages under its control, where it effectively overthrew British rule. Hausabai’s father, the legendary Nana Patil, headed the *prati sarkar*. Both *sarkar* and *sena* had sprung up as disillusioned offshoots of the Quit India movement of 1942.

Nana Patil, as well as other leaders, including Captain Bhau, led a bold train robbery on June 7, 1943. “It is unfair to say we looted the train,” the captain told Sainath. “It was money stolen by the British rulers from the Indian people that we took back.” Captain Bhau also objected to the notion that the *prati sarkar* was an “underground movement.”

“‘What do you mean underground government?’ growls Captain Bhau, annoyed by my use of the term. ‘We were the government here. The Raj could not enter. Even the police were scared of the Toofan Sena.’... It organized the supply and distribution of [food grain], set up a coherent market structure, and ran a judicial system. It also penalized moneylenders, pawnbrokers, and landlord collaborators of the Raj.”

Another Toofan Sena member [reported to Sainath](#) how they went about punishing informers:

“When we discovered one of these police agents, we encircled his home at night. We would take the informer and an associate of his outside the village.

We would tie up the ankles of the informer after placing a wooden stick between them. He was then held upside down and beaten on the soles of his feet with sticks. We touched no other part of his body. Just the soles.’ No visible marks were there on the body from the feet up. But ‘he couldn’t walk normally for many days’. A powerful disincentive. And so came the name *patri sarkar* [note: in

Marati, the word 'patri' means 'wooden stick']. 'After that we would load him on the back of his associate who would carry him home.'

### *The Indian National Army*

In 1938, the Indian National Congress saw Subhas Chandra Bose become president. He was immensely popular, with an independent power base. While respectful of Gandhi, he was not committed to nonviolence. He was ousted from the party in 1939. In 1941, during World War II, Bose formed the Indian National Army, backed by Imperial Japan, whose goal was to liberate India by force. The same year, Nehru was transferred to Lucknow Jail where he spent time with many imprisoned terrorists. When Gandhi's Quit India movement was crushed in 1942 within months, Bose and the INA fought on, and Bose was killed in 1945.

Imprisoned for journalism, Bengaluru-based H.S. Doreswamy described his encounter with Indian National Army prisoners whose massacre he witnessed in 1943:

"Once, when we were in prison in Bengaluru (1942-43), it was midnight, and a group of captives was brought in. They came in shouting slogans, and we thought they were more of our people. But they weren't. They were Indian military personnel. We were told they were officers but didn't know for sure. We didn't know their ranks.

There were fourteen of them—from different states. They had decided to leave the British Indian military and join Netaji Bose's Indian National Army (INA). They tried to leave the country. And were on their way to Burma [now Myanmar] when they were arrested. All fourteen of them. They were brought to Bengaluru and court-martialled. And sentenced to death by hanging.

We interacted with them. They wrote down, with their blood, a letter to all of us. It said, 'We are so happy that you are 500 here. This country, this Bharat Mata, requires the blood of so many people. We are also a part and parcel of that effort. We have also pledged to give our lives to this country's cause.' That is what they wrote... 'We heard that all of them were lined up in a row and shot dead—all of them—at one time... They knew it. That they were going to their death. But they were very cheerful. That's why they gave us that letter written in blood addressed to all of us.'"

When the British tried to execute INA officers for treason at the symbolic Red



Fort in Delhi, they ended up with an uprising. In 1946, a Naval Mutiny centered in Mumbai was suppressed at huge cost to the British: Their Indian Empire had unraveled. In his book on the naval mutiny, Pramod Kapoor notes that while Quit India was called in 1942, Independence followed very quickly after the 1946 Naval Mutiny. A look at the chronology suggests that the mutiny was more decisive than the nonviolent campaign in bringing about Independence.

The British quickly partitioned the subcontinent, poisoned the chalice, and handed it over to their chosen Indian Congress interlocutors.

As H.S. Doreswamy put it: “When the Britishers left the country, they did so with three formulae. One, to form Pakistan and Hindustan. Two, to keep the people in both countries divided on communal lines. And three: those 562 princely states—they were free to join or stay out of this Indian Union.” The princely state plot was foiled by the post-independence government, but the communal plot and the partition plot both succeeded. So did the sponsorship of the myth that Indian independence sprung from a series of nonviolent campaigns, and not the same processes of armed national liberation struggle that occurred in India as everywhere else in the world that faced a similar situation.

### *The Harm Caused by the Nonviolence Myth*

*The nonviolence myth helped preserve feudalism.* Like slavery and segregation in the U.S., colonialism in India was overthrown by violence. But also like the U.S., the myth of nonviolence has done real damage to India’s polity. Gandhi’s spiritual successor, Vinoba Bhave, traveled the country trying to convince landowners to conduct a voluntary land reform (contrast this with the violent land reforms enacted in neighboring China, described in [Fanshen](#) by William Hinton).

Vinoba Bhave’s was a nonviolent campaign of land reform which kept feudalism largely intact in India. Ironically, Vinoba Bhave [was known to have threatened the landowners with violence](#)—explicitly stating that by voluntarily giving up some land, the landowners could save themselves from future violent revolution. Again, we see nonviolent leaders putting the poor in the position of the supplicant, asking for crumbs from the rich based on some distant possibility of revolution instead of working to organize the poor for that revolution.

*The nonviolence myth does not produce nonviolent societies.* One of the central arguments for nonviolence dating at least back to Gandhi is that nonviolent

means lead to better ends. Noam Chomsky put it this way in [the 1967 debate with Hannah Arendt](#):

“It seems to me, from the little we know about such matters, that a new society rises out of the actions that are taken to form it, and the institutions and the ideology it develops are not independent of those actions; in fact, they’re heavily colored by them, they’re shaped by them in many ways. And one can expect that actions that are cynical and vicious, whatever their intent, will inevitably condition and deface the quality of the ends that are achieved. Now, again, in part this is just a matter of faith. But I think there’s at least some evidence that better results follow from better means.”

Since Gandhi’s nonviolence argument was based on the notion that means and ends are inseparable and that the choice of violent means would lead to violent ends, it should follow that the central importance of nonviolence in the Indian freedom struggle led to India being a particularly nonviolent country after independence. Italian communist author Domenico Losurdo, in his book [Nonviolence: A History Beyond the Myth](#), answers that one: “[F]ar from being the embodiment of the ideal of non-violence, India today is one of the most violent countries on earth. Armed clashes between the different religious and ethnic groups are widespread; in particular, massacres of Muslims and Christians are recurrent.”

The inseparability of means and ends is an argument *against* nonviolence. Nonviolence is a means that involves begging the powerful for concessions and inviting them to do violence without consequences for themselves: it leads to a society with an elite that feels complete impunity to do horrific violence while facing opponents that will try, at worst, to melt their hearts through an example of suffering. It turns oppressors into worse people, drunk on power and feeling no consequences.

### *Decolonization Is a Violent Process, and India Was No Exception*

As Losurdo tells it in his book, nonviolence is an ideal that was developed in the UK and U.S. to ensure that resistance to slavery would be ineffective—for keeping resistance to one of the most vile institutions ever invented within controllable bounds. Christian pacifists and Quakers developed it because they did not want to participate in the violence of slavery. Very few of them were moved to fight slavery violently.

Gandhi's Indian enemies have argued that it is these Christian, Anglo-American roots from which Gandhian nonviolence springs, and not from Hindu notions of *ahimsa* or *satyagraha*. In the end, Indian people did not behave like otherworldly sages. They did what all colonized people do: they fought an armed struggle for independence.

Shorn of the myth of nonviolence, what are the lessons of the real Indian independence struggle and how do they fit into our understanding of social change? It is clear that some struggles—for improved wages or working conditions, better municipal services, or other struggles for equality *within* a community—can be kept on the nonviolent plane. Colonialism, based on racial oppression and dehumanization, cannot be, and India is not an exception. Like colonialism itself, the absence of a nonviolent solution to colonialism is tragic, but the sooner the reality is recognized by advocates of social change, the better.

*By Justin Podur*

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# Big Oil Ignores Millions Of

# Climate Deaths When Billions In Profit Are At Stake



*C.J. Polychroniou*

04-08-2024 ~ *As the world burns, radical climate change activism is our only hope.*

Human activity in a profit-driven world divided by nation-states and those who have rights and those who don't is the primary driver of climate change. Burning fossil fuels and destroying forests have caused inestimable environmental harm by producing a warming effect through the artificial concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. [Carbon dioxide \(CO2\)](#) has risen by 50 percent in the past 200 years, much of it since the 1970s, raising in turn the Earth's temperature by roughly [2 degrees Fahrenheit](#).

Indeed, since the 1970s, the decade which saw the rise of neoliberalism as the dominant economic ideology in the Western world, CO2 emissions have increased by about [90 percent](#). Unsurprisingly, average temperatures have risen more quickly over the past few decades, and the last 10 years have been the warmest years on record. In fact, a National Aeronautics and Space Administration analysis has confirmed that [2023](#) was the warmest year on record, and all indications are that 2024 could be even hotter than 2023. In March, scientists at Copernicus Climate Change Service said that [February 2024](#) was the hottest February, according to records going back to 1940.

The world is now warming faster than any point in recorded history. Yet, while the science of climate change is well established and we know both the causes

and the effects of global warming, the rulers of the world are showing no signs of discontinuing their destructive activities that are putting Earth on track to becoming uninhabitable for humans. Emissions from Russia's war in Ukraine and Israel's utter destruction of Gaza will undoubtedly have a significant effect on climate change. [Analysis](#) by researchers in the United Kingdom and United States reveals that the majority of global emissions generated in the first two months of the Israeli invasion of Gaza can be attributed to the aerial bombardment of the Gaza Strip. Indeed, the destruction of Gaza is so immense that it exceeds, proportionally, [the Allied bombing of Germany in World War II](#).

Further evidence that the rulers of the world view themselves as being separate and distinct from the world around them (in spite of the fact that all life on Earth is at risk) came during the recent [CERAWeek oil summit](#) in Houston, Texas, where executives from the world's leading fossil fuel companies said that we should "abandon the fantasy of phasing out oil and gas." Who from the likes of ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell, BP and TotalEnergies gives a damn if the emissions from the burning of fossil fuels until 2050 causes [millions of deaths](#) before the end of the century? Oil and gas companies made [tens of billions](#) in annual net profit in 2023 as they continued to expand fossil fuel production.

Of course, none of the above is to suggest that the game is over. The rulers of the world (powerful states, huge corporations, and the financial elite) are always pulling out all the stops to resist change and maintain the status quo. But common people are fighting back, and history has repeatedly shown that they will never surrender to the forces of reaction and oppression. We have seen a remarkable escalation of climate and political activism in general over the past several years — indeed, a sharp awakening of global public consciousness to the interconnectedness of challenges in the 21st century that leaves much room for hope about the future. Struggles against climate change are connected to the fight against imperialism, inequality, poverty and injustice. These struggles are not in vain, even when the odds seem stacked against them. On the contrary, they have produced some remarkable results.

Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon rainforest is falling dramatically since [President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#) came into office — a victory not only for the Brazilian people but for those across the world who care about the environment and justice. In North America, [Indigenous communities](#) scored major victories in 2023 in the struggle for conservation, protecting hundreds of thousands of acres of

forest land and sacred and culturally significant sites from mining. Climate activists in [Europe and the U.S.](#) won major legal victories throughout 2023, such as the youth [victory](#) against the state of Montana. Similar climate litigation like [Juliana v. United States](#) is only expected to grow in 2024. As actor and climate activist Jane Fonda aptly put it on “Fire Drill Fridays,” a video program that was launched in 2019 by Fonda herself in collaboration with Greenpeace USA, “These lawsuits are not just legal maneuvers ... but are at the crux of climate reckoning.”

These victories for our planet are more than enough proof that activism pays off and should be an acute reminder that the kind of transformational change we need will not start at the top. In 2018, the climate protest of a 15-year-old Swedish student captured the imagination of her own country and eventually “aroused the world,” to use the words of British broadcaster and naturalist Sir David Attenborough. Indeed, just a year later, Greta Thunberg would be credited with leading the [biggest climate protest in history](#).

It is grassroots environmental activism that created the political space for President Joe Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act — the largest investment in clean energy and climate action in U.S. history. (It’s important to point out that the law stripped out many social and economic programs in the original draft that are critical for low-income communities and communities of color, and the law lacks a deep decarbonization pathway.) Environmental movements such as Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil, and Letzte Generation have sparked a global conversation on the climate crisis and have opened up new possibilities for forcing the transition away from fossil fuels across Europe even in the face of a growing backlash by hard-line conservative and far right groups, and even as European governments [crack down](#) on climate protests.

The rulers of the world won’t save the planet. They have a vested interest in maintaining the existing state of affairs, whether it be oppression of the weak or continued reliance on fossil fuels. Radical political action is our only hope because voting alone will never solve our problems. Organizing communities, raising awareness and educating the public, and developing convincing accounts of change are key elements for creating real progress in politics. Indeed, as the recent history of environmental politics shows, climate activism is the pathway to climate defense.

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## **How Elite Infighting Made The Magna Carta**





*Magna Carta Libertatum 1215 -  
British Library*

04-06-2024 ~ *Although the Magna Carta typically is depicted as the birth of England's fight to create democracy, the 13th-century struggle was to establish what would become the House of Lords, not the House of Commons.*

The papacy's role as organizer of the Crusades empowered it to ask for—indeed, to demand—tithes from churches and royal tax assessments from realms ruled by the warlord dynasties it had installed and protected. England's nobility and clergy pressed for parliamentary reform to block King John and his son Edward III from submitting to Rome's demands to take on debts to finance its crusading and fights against Germany's kings. Popes responded by excommunicating reformers and nullifying the [Magna Carta](#) again and again during the 13th century.

*The Burdensome Reign of King John*

John I (1199-1216) was dubbed "Lackland" because, as Henry II's fourth and youngest son, he was not expected to inherit any land. On becoming his father's favorite, he was assigned land in Ireland and France, which led to ongoing warfare after his brother Richard I died in 1199. This conflict was financed by loans that John paid by raising taxes on England's barons, churches, and monasteries. John fought the French for land in 1202, but lost Normandy in 1204. He prepared for renewed war in France by imposing a tallage in 1207; as S.K. Mitchell details in his [book](#) on the subject, this was the first such tax for a purpose other than a crusade.

By the 13th century, royal taxes to pay debts were becoming regular, while the papacy made regular demands on European churches for tithes to pay for the Crusades. These levies created rising opposition throughout Christendom, from churches as well as the baronage and the population at large. In 1210, when John imposed an even steeper tallage, many landholders were forced into debt.

John opened a political war on two fronts by insisting on his power of investiture to appoint bishops. When the Archbishop of Canterbury died in 1205, the king sought to appoint his successor. Innocent III consecrated Stephen Langdon as his own candidate, but John barred Stephen from landing in England and started confiscating papal estates. In 1211 the pope sent his envoy, Pandulf Verraccio, to threaten John with excommunication. John backed down and allowed Stephen to

take his position, but then collected an estimated 14 percent of church income for his royal budget over the next two years—£100,000, including [Peter's Pence](#).

Innocent sent Pandulf back to England in May 1213 to insist that John reimburse Rome for the revenue that he had withheld. John capitulated at a ceremony at the Templar church at Dover and reaffirmed the royal tradition of fealty to the pope. As William Lunt details in [Financial Relations of the Papacy with England to 1327](#), John received England and Ireland back in his fiefdom by promising to render one thousand marks annually to Rome over and above the payment of Peter's Pence, and permitted the pope to deal directly with the principal local collectors without royal intervention.

John soon stopped payments, but Innocent didn't protest, satisfied with having reinforced the principle of papal rights over his vassal king. In 1220, however, the new pope "[Honorius III instructed Pandulf to send the proceeds of the \[tallage of a\] twentieth, the census \[penny poll tax\] and Peter's Pence to Paris for deposit with the Templars and Hospitallers.](#)"[1] Royal control of church revenue was lost for good. The contributions that earlier Norman kings had sent to Rome were treated as having set a precedent that the papacy refused to relinquish. The clergy itself balked at complying with papal demands, and churches paid no more in 1273 than they had in 1192.

The barons were less able to engage in such resistance. Historian [David Carpenter](#) calculates that their indebtedness to John for unpaid taxes, tallages, and fines rose by 380 percent from 1199 to 1208. And John became notorious for imposing fines on barons who opposed him. That caused rising opposition from landholders—the fight that Richard had sought to avoid. The Exchequer's records enabled John to find the individuals who owed money and to use royal fiscal claims as a political lever, by either calling in the debts or agreeing to "postpone or pardon them as a form of favor" for barons who did not oppose him.

John's most unpopular imposition was the scutage fee for knights to buy exemption from military service. Even when there was no actual war, John levied scutage charges eleven times during his 17-year reign, forcing many knights into debt. Rising hostility to John's campaign in 1214 to reconquer his former holdings in Normandy triggered the First Barons' War (1215-1217) demanding the Magna Carta in 1215.

Opposition was strongest in the north of England, where barons owed heavy tax debts. As described in J.C. Holt's [classic study](#) *The Northeners*, they led a march on London, assembling on the banks of the Thames at Runnymede on June 15, 1215. Although the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langdon, helped negotiate a truce based on a "charter of liberties," a plan for reform between John and the barons that became the Magna Carta, the "rebellion of the king's debtors" led to a decade-long fight, with the Magna Carta being given its final version under the teenaged Henry III in 1225.

### *Proto-Democratic Elements of the Magna Carta*

There were proto-democratic elements in the Charter, most significantly the attempt to limit the king's authority to levy taxes without the consent of a committee selected by the barons. The concept of "no taxation without representation" appears in the original Chapter 12: "No scutage or aid is to be levied in our kingdom, save by the common counsel of our kingdom," and even then, only to ransom the king or for specified family occasions.

The linkage between debt, interest accruals, and land tenure was central to the Charter. Chapter 9 stated that debts should be paid out of movable property (chattels), not land. "Neither we [the king] nor our bailiffs are to seize any land or rent for any debt, for as long as the chattels of the debtor suffice to pay the debt." Land would be forfeited only as a last resort, when sureties had their own lands threatened with foreclosure. And under the initial version of the Charter, debts were only to be paid after appropriate living expenses had been met, and no interest would accrue until the debtor's heirs reached maturity.

### *Elite Interests in the Charter*

The Magna Carta typically is depicted as the birth of England's fight to create democracy. It was indeed an attempt to establish parliamentary restraint on royal spending, but the barons were acting strictly in their own interest. The Charter dealt with breaches by the king, but "[no procedure was laid down for dealing with breaches by the barons.](#)" In Chapter 39 they designated themselves as Freemen, meaning anyone who owned land, but that excluded rural villeins and cottagers. Local administration remained corrupt, and the Charter had no provisions to prevent lords from exploiting their sub-tenants, who had no voice in consenting to royal demands for scutages or other aids.

The 13th-century fight was to establish what would become the House of Lords,

not the House of Commons. Empowering the nobility against the state was the opposite of the 19th-century drive *against* the landlord class and its claims for hereditary land rent. What was deemed democratic in Britain's 1909/10 constitutional crisis was the ruling that the Lords never again could reject a House of Commons revenue act. The Commons had passed a land tax, which the House of Lords blocked. That fight against landlords was the opposite of the barons' fight against King John.

*Note:*

1. William Lunt, "Financial Relations of the Papacy with England to 1327. (Studies in Anglo-Papal Relations during the Middle Ages, I.)," (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1939) pp. 597-598 and pp. 58-59.

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*Source:* Human Bridges

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