

Social Movements and
Global Social Change

The Rising Tide

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Chapter One

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Social movements have changed the world. During the past two hundred years, social movements overthrew monarchies, won independence from colonial empires, and founded republics in postcolonial states. They established “republics”—constitutional governments based on popular sovereignty—first in the United States and then in a majority of countries around the world. In some new republics, political factions established dictatorships and one-party regimes that denied people their rights and inflicted cruelties on them. In recent years, however, social movements fought successfully to overthrow many dictatorships and democratize a majority of the republics. Social movements also fought to expand citizenship in the republics. At first, only a small minority of the people in the republics could exercise suffrage and claim their rights as citizens. But social movements soon demanded that citizenship and suffrage be extended to others, and today a majority of residents in the republics claim citizenship.

These three developments—the rise of the republics, the democratization of the republics, and the expansion of citizenship in the republics—had important consequences. The demise of dynastic states brought an end to the ferocious rivalry for control of colonial empires that erupted in successive world wars. The fall of dictators brought an end to the dirty wars, gulags, and routine violence that regimes inflicted on subject populations. The expansion of citizenship curbed the violence of private, nonstate actors and restrained the violence deployed by state officials in the republics.

Although these developments were important achievements, global social change has been partial and incomplete. Dynastic rulers still cling to their thrones, dictatorships in many republics retain their grip on power, and citizenship has *nowhere* been granted to *all* the residents of *any* republic. The expansion of *liberty* has been accompanied by persistent *inequality*.

When thinking about social change, it is important to keep in mind *both* developments—growing liberty and persistent inequality—at the same time. To understand why social change resulted in these two contradictory developments, it is necessary to examine not only how social movements advanced and assisted social change but also how they obstructed, delayed, and compromised the meaning of social change.

STATES IN 1800

In 1800, most of the states in the interstate system were governed by dynastic monarchies. The kings and queens who ruled these states claimed their power as an inheritance and relied for their authority on the “divine right of kings.” The United States was the only country in the world that identified itself as a “republic.” This new republic differed from dynastic states in two respects. In a republic, the government derived its authority from the “people,” not from “God,” and was based on “popular sovereignty,” not the “divine right” of kings. Moreover, the people used their sovereign authority to create a binding set of contractual agreements that defined relations between the people and the government. As a result, they created constitutional government based on popular sovereignty in the republic. By contrast, the rulers of dynastic states accepted no binding legal restrictions on their authority. Governments in dynastic states provided to their subjects only the privileges that kings and queens might allow.

During the next two hundred years, the idea of creating constitutional government based on popular sovereignty in a republic spread around the world. The subsequent rise of the republics was accompanied by the fall of dynastic states. Today, a vast majority of the 193 states that belong to the United Nations call themselves republics.¹ Only a handful of dynastic monarchies remain. The rise of the republics transformed the character of the capitalist interstate system from one dominated by dynastic states to one based on nation-state republics.

When republics were first established in the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia, military leaders and political parties frequently seized power and

established dictatorships. They abrogated constitutions, dissolved legislatures, manipulated elections, looted public treasuries, and arrested, tortured, and murdered their opponents. But social movements in the republics eventually forced dictators from power and (re)established constitutional government based on popular sovereignty in a majority of the republics by the end of the twentieth century. Of course, dictators remain in power in many states, including China, the world’s largest republic.² The democratization of the republics transformed the political character of republican governments around the world.³

When they first created republican government, the founders gave popular sovereignty to the “people.” But the elite group of merchants, planters, landlords, industrialists, and professionals who organized constitutional government insisted that citizenship and suffrage be given to only a small group of people like themselves. In the United States, the elite “1 percent” who created constitutional government granted citizenship to adult, white, Protestant men with property, who made up only “10 percent” of the population. They then divided the vast majority—the “90 percent”—of people into two subordinate groups—“denizens” and “subjects”—who were assigned a different legal and social status.

People assigned to the “denizen” population—adult men without property, immigrants, women, and children—were given some rights but were denied citizenship, suffrage, or both. Although members of these groups have, sometimes been described as “second-class” citizens, like passengers riding in coach on a train, they included immigrants, who were *residents* but not citizens, so it would be inappropriate to describe them as second-class *citizens*. Instead, they might be identified as “denizens,” as residents with some but not all of the rights extended to citizens.

Of course, many people possessed few if any rights in the new republic. Convicts, sailors, indentured servants, and slaves were under the direct control of public officials or private authorities, the adult white men whose “liberty” consisted in part of dominion over others. The people who were placed under the control of public officials and private authorities might be identified as “subjects.”

Because the men who designed constitutional government divided people into three groups, with a minority of citizens on top and a majority of denizens and subjects arranged below, the social structure of the new republic resembled a three-tiered pyramid. Of course, denizens and subjects objected to their subordinate status and fought to claim citizenship and suffrage in the

United States and in other republics. Their efforts slowly expanded citizenries within the republics. By 1920, a majority of the people living in the United States could claim citizenship and suffrage. Although the expansion of citizenship and suffrage inverted the pyramid and changed the *shape* of society in the republic, it did not change the social *structure* of inequality, which remained intact. Today, a large minority of residents in the republics remain as denizens (children and immigrants) and subjects (convicts, orphans, and people with some mental disabilities or contagious diseases). Still, the expansion of citizenries within the republics transformed social and political life for people in republics around the world.⁴

These three developments—the rise of the republics, the democratization of the republics, and the expansion of citizenries within the republics—also contributed to a decline of violence among states and a reduction of violence by state officials and nonstate actors.

Why did these important global changes occur?

They occurred because diverse social movements struggled to create constitutional governments in colonial and postcolonial settings, because social movements fought to democratize the republics, and because social movements labored to expand citizenship within the republics.⁵ Of course, they were not always or everywhere successful. Indeed, their work is far from done. Still, their collective efforts to change society have transformed the interstate system and the social contours and political practices of individual states around the world.

THE RISE AND DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE REPUBLICS

People living two hundred years ago would find it difficult to imagine that these changes could occur. At the time, constitutional government based on popular sovereignty was a novel and fragile political innovation.⁶ In 1800, it had existed for only a few years in the United States, “a marginal republic perched on the edge of a vast continent on the fringes of the European commercial system.”⁷ In France, Napoleon Bonaparte had abruptly terminated the Second Republic in 1799 and installed a dictatorship in its place. In Haiti, rebellious slaves successively defeated indigenous armies led by white planters and mulattoes and invading armies from Great Britain, Spain, and France and, in 1804, established a republic. But a foreign embargo and indigenous dictatorship prevented the nascent state from recovering from the

brutal twelve-year war and consigned the postcolonial state to political isolation and economic penury.⁸

Despite these inauspicious beginnings, social movements subsequently fought to create republics around the world, first in the Americas during the nineteenth century, then in Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, and then, after World War II, across Africa and Asia. Today, a vast majority of the 193-plus states in the world identify themselves as republics.⁹ Significantly, diverse political movements—capitalist, socialist, Islamic—all adhere to the principle of constitutional government, though they qualify it by describing their state as the “Republic of Korea” (capitalist), the “Socialist Republic of Vietnam” (socialist), and the “Islamic Republic of Pakistan” (Islamic).

Of course, the struggle to overthrow dynastic states and colonial empires around the world was a difficult and protracted process. Moreover, the rise of the republics was marred or compromised by three troublesome developments. First, some of the new republics, like their dynastic peers, conquered and colonized other people, engaging in “imperialist” behavior that compromised their stated commitment to popular sovereignty and the “rights of man.” Second, dictators seized power in many republics, made subjects of their citizens, and prevented them from exercising popular sovereignty in any meaningful way. Third, great powers and indigenous groups partitioned postcolonial states or seceded from republican states and founded separate states of their own, a development that typically led to conflict within and between divided states and successor republics.¹⁰

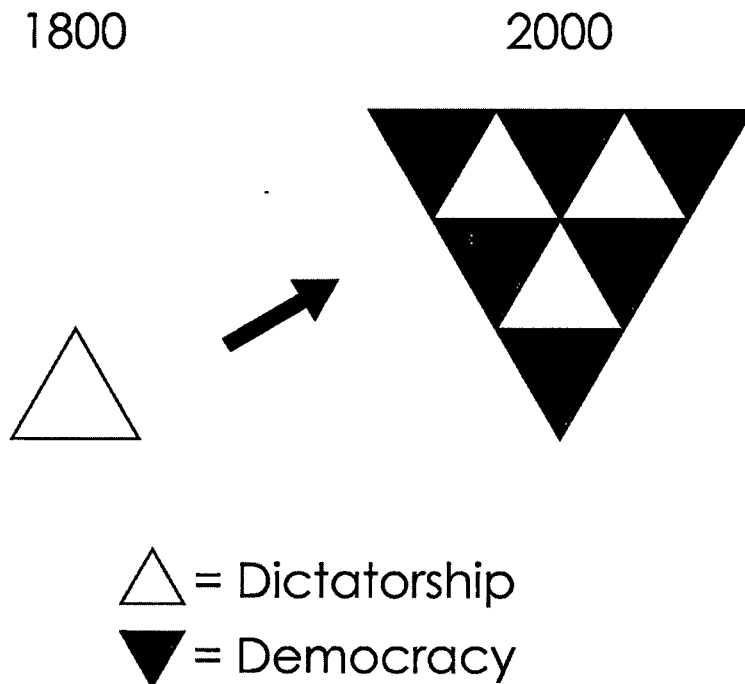
After World War II, the two most powerful republics—the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—together created the United Nations and other institutions to curb imperialism, prevent war, and promote decolonization, developments that contributed to the demise of dynastic states and the rise of republics in their place. Then, starting in the 1970s, the fall of dictators in capitalist countries in southern Europe, across Latin America, and in East Asia and the collapse of communist regimes in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union led to the widespread democratization of the republics, a process still under way in North Africa and the Middle East.¹¹ Unfortunately, the division and subdivision of states as a result of partition and secession accelerated during the past twenty years, most recently in Sudan.¹² In 2011, South Sudan seceded from Sudan and became an independent republic. But fighting has erupted between the two countries and between ethnic groups in South Sudan, where “heavily armed militias . . . are

now marching on villages and towns with impunity, sometimes with genocidal intent. 'We will kill everyone,' the representative of one ethnic militia vowed. 'We are tired of them.'"¹³

Of course, imperialism, dictatorship, and the conflicts associated with partition are still problems in many republics. Nonetheless, the spread and democratization of the republics has transformed the interstate system from one dominated by dynastic empires and their colonial empires to one dominated by sovereign and increasingly democratic republics.

THE EXPANSION OF CITIZENSHIP

The rise and democratization of the republics was accompanied by the expansion of citizenship within the republics. Initially, the architects, the men who designed constitutional government, reserved citizenship—the right to exercise popular sovereignty and to vote, bear arms, represent oneself in court, acquire and dispose of property, and make contracts—to a *minority* of



The Rise and Democratization of the Republics

residents in the republic. In the United States, they awarded citizenship only to adult, white, Protestant men with property, both as a matter of principle and of practice. In *principle*, they argued that citizenship should be restricted to responsible actors, to men capable of making rational political decisions without constraint (property ownership was thought to free men from coercion by landlords or employers). In *practice*, they believed that "liberty" for citizens was based, in part, on their dominion over others, the liberty to exercise their authority over wives, children, employees, servants, and slaves. So from the outset, the architects extended the rights associated with citizenship only to a minority of residents and denied some or all of these rights to a majority of people, who were divided into two large groups.

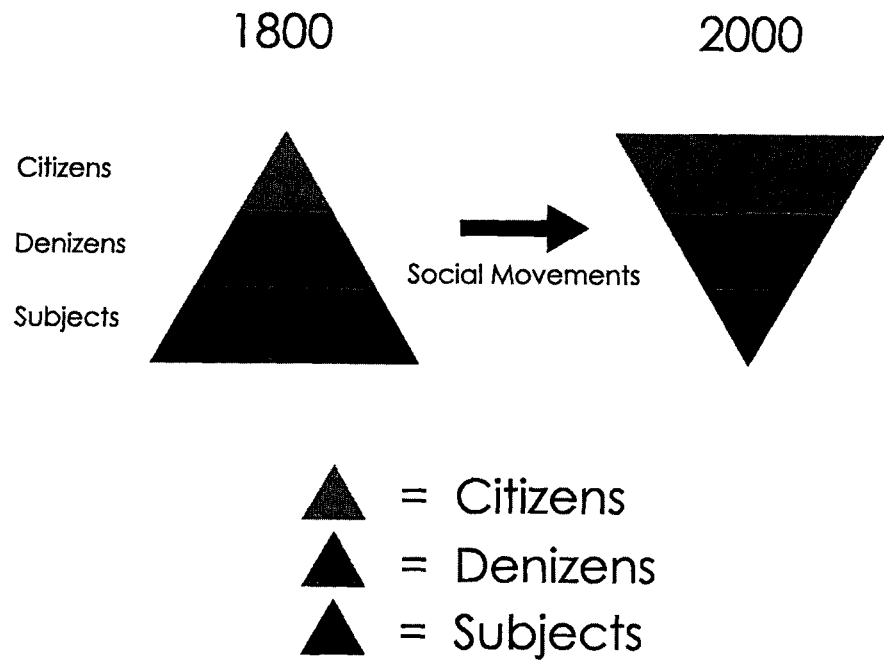
The architects gave some rights to "denizens," a group composed of women, children, and immigrants. People in this group were not allowed to vote, though they could sometimes inherit and dispose of property. Male children and immigrants might eventually become citizens when they reached their majority or if they naturalized. But authorities denied virtually all of the rights and opportunities associated with citizenship to "subjects." They made indentured servants, convicts, orphans, slaves, and people whom they viewed as threats to public health (people with mental disabilities or contagious diseases) or public safety (Native Americans, political dissidents, Japanese Americans) the subjects of state authorities. They also allowed *private* citizens the legal authority to control the denizens and subjects in their charge. By delegating state authority to nonstate actors, the architects gave husbands, fathers, employers, ship captains, and slave owners the right to assault, abuse, and even kill their wards without fear of legal consequence.

By dividing the populace and assigning groups different sets of rights, the architects created a pyramid-shaped, three-tiered social hierarchy. A minority of citizens sat on top of the pyramid. Denizens occupied the middle tier, and subjects formed the base of the pyramid. Together, denizen and subject populations made up a majority of residents in the early republics.¹⁴

During the next two hundred years, groups of denizens and subjects fought to claim citizenship. In the United States, for example, adult white men without property claimed citizenship in the early nineteenth century. Adult black men acquired citizenship in the mid-nineteenth century, and adult women, white and black, won citizenship in the early twentieth century, at least in the North. These successive expansions made citizenship available to a majority of people living in the republic. Over time and around the world, citizenship expanded in the republics, and today a majority of people

in a majority of the republics count themselves as citizens. This was a significant achievement. Still, it is important to recognize that large groups of people (chiefly minors and immigrants) are still treated as denizens, and a large number of people (convicts, orphans, illegal aliens, and people with mental disabilities or contagious diseases) remain the subjects of state authority. The acquisition of liberty and equality by a majority of people in the republics has been accompanied by persistent and durable subordination and inequality for a minority of people.¹⁵

The rise of the republics resulted in the demise of dynastic states and their colonial empires, a development that transformed the interstate system. The expansion of citizenship within the republics reshaped the social contours of countries around the world. Still, the rise and democratization of the republics did not eliminate dynastic states (Saudi Arabia) or bring an end to dictatorships in the republics (China). Moreover, the expansion of citizenship did not eliminate denizen and subject populations in either residual dynastic states or in democratic republics (the United States, France).



Social Change and Social Movements

Why has liberty and equality advanced? Why has subordination and inequality endured? The argument here is that social movements have been responsible for *both* developments. To understand the totality of global social change, it is necessary to examine the role that social movements have played in both advancing and retarding change. Social change during the past two hundred years has been the product of a multisided struggle among different types of social movements.

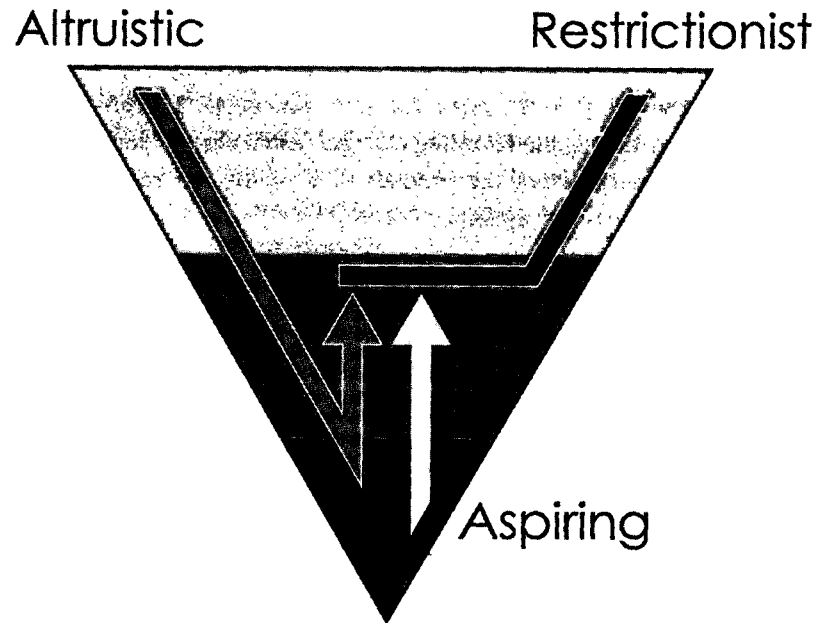
SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The architects of constitutional government in the republics invited citizens to exercise popular sovereignty in the new republics. They also invited people in dynastic states to create republics in which they might exercise popular sovereignty and claim "the rights of man." In the republics, citizens organized political parties and social movements to claim the opportunities provided by institutions in the state and civil society. Of course, the architects did not extend this invitation to denizens and subjects, whom they regarded as incapable of responsibly exercising popular sovereignty. Nevertheless, denizens and subjects in the republics and in dynastic states and their colonies fought to claim the rights and opportunities associated with citizenship, even though they were not invited or permitted to do so.

Early on, three *types* of social movements emerged: aspiring, altruistic, and restrictionist. These three types of movements have defined the field of social movements around the world during the past two hundred years. Like the "ideal types" used by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, these types identify movements that mark the boundaries or corners of the field. As a practical matter, particular social movements have often combined features from different types of movements and drawn participants from different corners of the field. Moreover, different types of social movements have often changed their character or location on the field over time. Many aspiring movements have adopted restrictionist positions once they became citizens or acquired state power.

Aspiring Movements

Denizens and subjects have frequently organized aspiring movements in response to the inequalities imposed on them by state officials and private authorities. They have fought to create republics in dynastic states and colo-



Types of Social Movements

nial empires, struggled to democratize republics, and demanded that citizenship be expanded to include subaltern groups. Historically, *status*-based “nationalist” movements such as Sinn Fein and the Indian National Congress and *class*-based “socialist” movements such as the Bolsheviks and the Chinese Communist Party fought to create republics, while Solidarity in Poland and the African National Congress in South Africa struggled to democratize them. In the United States, slaves, workers, feminists, and civil rights activists fought to expand citizenship and participate as equals in civil society and in state institutions. The upward thrust of aspiring movements has propelled social change around the world. Aspiring movements sometimes acted alone, but they were sometimes assisted by altruistic movements. In altruistic movements, people from higher-status categories (citizens and denizens) assisted subordinate groups (denizens and subjects).

Altruistic Movements

Citizens and denizens have often assisted subordinate groups who lacked the legal standing, political capacity, or economic resources they needed to act

effectively on their own behalf. It may be difficult for subaltern groups (denizens or subjects) to organize politically without triggering a response by state officials and private surrogates who have been authorized to use violence to defend the social hierarchy. Historically, the altruistic movements from “above,” which collaborated with people from “below,” included male citizens who supported women’s suffrage, female denizens who participated in movements to abolish the slave trade and slavery, and citizens who organized on behalf of incarcerated prisoners and death-row inmates, battered women, and trafficked children. They have included “relief” organizations such as the Red Cross, Oxfam, and Doctors without Borders; legal aid groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; and resource-mobilizing, philanthropic organizations such as the Rockefeller, Gates, and Soros Foundations.

Although altruistic movements have been motivated by an aversion to injustice, they have also been motivated by self-interest, which has complicated their relations with subaltern groups and aspiring social movements. In recent years, some scholars have excluded altruistic movements from the study of social movements, arguing that their privileged status makes it difficult or impossible for them to appreciate the lived experience or “standpoint” of less-privileged groups or to meaningfully assist them. Many scholars assume that people in social movements act rationally in their own self-interest. If they act on behalf of others, they may be doing so either because they are acting against their own self-interest, which is irrational, or because they are really acting in their own self-interest but are doing so covertly, which is dishonest. Either way, many scholars often treat altruistic movements, which they describe as “conscience constituents,” as unreliable social actors or as ineffective agents of real social change.

But altruistic movements should be included in the study of social movements both because they have, for better or worse, collaborated with aspiring movements and because they have contributed to significant social change.

Restrictionist Movements

Social change has also been shaped by restrictionist movements that opposed the creation of constitutional government, imposed dictatorship and resisted democratization in the republics, fought to prevent the extension of citizenship to denizens and subjects, and worked to preserve social inequality as a political principle and social practice. Their collective efforts have changed the direction, slowed the pace, and compromised the meaning of social