HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS
(1914–1945)
FEATURED IN
Teaching World History Thematically
Essential Questions and Document-Based Lessons to Connect Past and Present
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**Event:** World War I, 1914–1919

**Document:** The Survivors, Käthe Kollwitz, 1923 (See Figure 7.2)

Figure 7.2. Käthe Kollwitz, The Survivors

*Source:* Culture Matters UK. (n.d.). The survivors, Courtesy Käthe Kollwitz Museum Berlin. https://www.culturematters.org.uk/media/k2/items/cache/6be84fda5cf0dc80a7c6b782ad45be3c_XL.jpg
**Event:** Quit India movement, 1942

**Document:** Quit India, Mahatma Gandhi, 1930

Ours is not a drive for power, but purely a non-violent fight for India’s independence. In a violent struggle, a successful general has been often known to effect a military coup and to set up a dictatorship. But under the Congress scheme of things, essentially non-violent as it is, there can be no room for dictatorship. A non-violent soldier of freedom will covet nothing for himself, he fights only for the freedom of his country. The Congress is unconcerned as to who will rule, when freedom is attained. The power, when it comes, will belong to the people of India, and it will be for them to decide to whom it placed in the entrusted. [. . .]

I believe that in the history of the world, there has not been a more genuinely democratic struggle for freedom than ours. I read Carlyle’s French Revolution while I was in prison, and Pandit Jawaharlal has told me something about the Russian revolution. But it is my conviction that inasmuch as these struggles were fought with the weapon of violence they failed to realize the democratic ideal. In the democracy which I have envisaged, a democracy established by non-violence, there will be equal freedom for all. Everybody will be his own master. It is to join a struggle for such democracy that I invite you today. Once you realize this you will forget the differences between the Hindus and Muslims, and think of yourselves as Indians only, engaged in the common struggle for independence.

Then, there is the question of your attitude towards the British. I have noticed that there is hatred towards the British among the people. The people say they are disgusted with their behavior. The people make no distinction between British imperialism and the British people. To them, the two are one. [. . .] Our quarrel is not with the British people, we fight their imperialism. The proposal for the withdrawal of British power did not come out of anger. It came to enable India to play its due part at the present critical juncture. It is not a happy position for a big country like India to be merely helping with money and material obtained willy-nilly from her while the [Allies] are conducting the war. We cannot evoke the true spirit of sacrifice and valor, so long as we are not free. I know the British Government will not be able to withhold freedom from us, when we have made enough self-sacrifice. We must, therefore, purge ourselves of hatred. Speaking for myself, I can say that I have never felt any hatred. As a matter of fact, I feel myself to be a greater friend of the British now than ever before. One reason is that they are today in distress. My very friendship, therefore, demands that I should try to save them from their mistakes. As I view the situation, they are on the brink of an abyss. It, therefore, becomes my duty to warn them of their danger even though it may, for the time being, anger them to the point of cutting off the friendly hand that is stretched out to help them. People may laugh, nevertheless that is my claim. At a time when I may have to launch the biggest struggle of my life, I may not harbor hatred against anybody.

Event: Famine in the Ukraine, 1931–1932

Document: Modernize or Perish, Joseph Stalin, 1931

It is sometimes asked whether it is not possible to slow down the tempo a bit, to put a check on the movement. No, comrades, it is not possible! The tempo must not be reduced! On the contrary, we must increase it as much as is within our powers and possibilities. This is dictated to us by our obligations to the workers and peasants of the USSR. This is dictated to us by our obligations to the working class of the whole world.

To slacken the tempo would mean falling behind. And those who fall behind get beaten. But we do not want to be beaten. No, we refuse to be beaten! One feature of the history of old Russia was the continual beatings she suffered because of her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol khans. She was beaten by the Turkish beys. She was beaten by the Swedish feudal lords. She was beaten by the Polish and Lithuanian gentry. She was beaten by the British and French capitalists. She was beaten by the Japanese barons. All beat her because of her backwardness, military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, industrial backwardness, agricultural backwardness. They beat her because to do so was profitable and could be done with impunity. Do you remember the words of the prerevolutionary poet: “You are poor and abundant, mighty and impotent, Mother Russia.” Those gentlemen were quite familiar with the verses of the old poet. They beat her, saying: “You are abundant; so one can enrich oneself at your expense. They beat her, saying: “You are poor and impotent” so you can be beaten and plundered with impunity. Such is the law of the exploiters—to beat the backward and the weak. It is the jungle law of capitalism. You are backward, you are weak—therefore you are wrong; hence, you can be beaten and enslaved. You are mighty—therefore you are right; hence, we must be wary of you. That is why we must no longer lag behind.

In the past we had no fatherland, nor could we have one. But now that we have overthrown capitalism and power is in our hands, in the hands of the people, we have a fatherland, and we will defend its independence. Do you want our socialist fatherland to be beaten and to lose its independence? If you do not want this you must put an end to its backwardness in the shortest possible time and develop genuine Bolshevik tempo in building up its socialist system of economy. There is no other way. That is why Lenin said on the eve of the October Revolution: “Either perish, or overtake and outstrip the advanced capitalist countries.”

We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall be crushed.

**Event:** International Alliance of Women meets in Istanbul, 1935

**Document:** Speech to the Congress of International Women, Una Marson, 1935

Our country is a British colony. We speak English. We are subject to English laws. We were given the right to vote automatically without asking for it. Since the abolition of slavery 100 years ago, women have progressed. We have women doctors and lawyers. But the situation in rural areas is not so good. However, our organization is doing its best to overcome this and provide help for progress. Some of our women are unpaid laborers who work for low wages and live under unhygienic conditions. [. . .]

I talk on behalf of all Negroes of the world not only Jamaicans. Although I don’t know much about Africa, I consider it part of my being because my forefathers came from there. There is a lot we have to do for Africa. Whatever the color, human beings have the same heart. [. . .] It is necessary that the great powers who have taken in their hands the destinies of Africa should think also of assuring the status of women of that vast continent. And they must do this in all spheres, social, religious and educational. [. . .]

You know the situation of American Negroes. I am pleased that in recent years articles in the press have appeared defending their rights. Negroes are asking for things common to all humans. They want justice. How can you accuse people who are being lynched of being “barbarian”? There is no worse barbarism than the act of lynching. In America the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People demands a law which shall put an end to the barbarous habit of lynching. Our alliance ought to be able to collaborate in this work.

Even in London one sometimes sees discrimination against black people, even those who are British subjects. Negroes are suffering under enormous difficulties in most countries in the world. We must count up on all countries where there are Negroes—for women always possess a better developed sense of justice—to obtain for them a life more pleasant and less severe. Apart from this, however sad the Negroes may be, they smile and hope always when they see the Negro women side by side with the women of the universe that will reinforce their hopes and make them feel that for them too happiness is not far off. [. . .] I get the impression that representatives gathered here are big-hearted and will defend and help my race.

Event: Mass conversion of Dalits to Buddhism, 1950s


There are two aspects of conversion; social as well as religious; material as well as spiritual. [. . .] In order to have a clear understanding of untouchability and its practice in real life, I want you to recall the stories of the atrocities perpetrated against you. [. . .] What is at the root cause of their tyranny? [. . .] This is not a feud between rival men. The problem of untouchability is a matter of class struggle. It is the struggle between caste Hindus and the Untouchables. That is not a matter of doing injustice against one man. This is a matter of injustice being done by one class against another. [. . .] This struggle starts as soon as you start claiming equal treatment with others.

The reason for their anger is very simple. Your behaving on par with them insults them. The untouchability is not a short or temporary feature; it is a permanent one. [. . .] It is eternal, because the religion which has placed you at the lowest level of the society is itself eternal, according to the belief of the Hindu caste people. [. . .] And unless you think over it, there is no way out. Those who desire to live in obedience to the dictates of the Hindus, those who wish to remain their slaves, they do not need to think over this problem. But those who wish to live a life of self-respect, and equality, will have to think over this. [. . .]

[. . .] To reform the Hindu society is neither our aim nor our field of action. Our aim is to gain freedom. [. . .] If we can gain freedom by conversion, why should we shoulder the responsibility of reforming the Hindu religion? And why should we sacrifice our strength and property for that? [. . .]

According to me, this conversion of religion will bring happiness to both the Untouchables as well as the Hindus. So long as you remain Hindus, you will have to struggle for social intercourse, for food and water, and for inter-caste marriages. And so long as this quarrel continues, relations between you and the Hindus will be of perpetual enemies. By conversion, the roots of all the quarrels will vanish [. . .].

The Hindu religion does not appeal to my conscience. It does not appeal to my self-respect. However, your conversion will be for material as well as for spiritual gains. [. . .]

I tell you all very specifically, religion is for man and not man for religion. To get human treatment, convert yourselves. Convert, for getting organized. Convert, for becoming strong. Convert, for securing equality. Convert, for getting liberty. Convert, for that your domestic life may be happy. [. . .] It is now for you to decide and discharge your responsibility.

**Event:** Nazi Third Reich, 1933–1945

**Document:** Obersalzberg Speech, Adolf Hitler, 1939

Our strength lies in our quickness and in our brutality; Genghis Khan has sent millions of women and children into death knowingly and with a light heart. History sees in him only the great founder of States. As to what the weak Western European civilization asserts about me, that is of no account. I have given the command and I shall shoot everyone who utters one word of criticism, for the goal to be obtained in the war is not that of reaching certain lines but of physically demolishing the opponent. And so for the present only in the East I have put my death-head formations [a division of the Nazi army] in place with the command relentlessly and without compassion to send into death many women and children of Polish origin and language. Only thus we can gain the living space [lebensraum] that we need. Who after all is today speaking about the destruction of the Armenians? [. . .]

I experienced those poor worms Daladier and Chamberlain in Munich. They will be too cowardly to attack. They won’t go beyond a blockade. Against that we have our autarchy and the Russian raw materials.

Poland will be depopulated and settled with Germans. My pact with the Poles was merely conceived of as a gaining of time. As for the rest, gentlemen, the fate of Russia will be exactly the same as I am now going through with in the case of Poland. After Stalin’s death—he is a very sick man—we will break the Soviet Union. Then there will begin the dawn of the German rule of the earth. [. . .]

The attack upon and the destruction of Poland begins Saturday early. I shall let a few companies in Polish uniform attack in Upper Silesia or in the Protectorate. Whether the world believes it is quite indifferent. The world believes only in success.

For you, gentlemen, fame and honor are beginning as they have not since centuries. Be hard, be without mercy, act more quickly and brutally than the others. The citizens of Western Europe must tremble with horror. That is the most human way of conducting a war. For it scares the others off.

**Event:** Sharawi founds Egyptian Feminist Union, 1923

**Document:** Pan-Arab Feminism, Huda Sharawi, 1944

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Arab woman who is equal to the man in duties and obligations will not accept, in the twentieth century, the distinctions between the sexes that the advanced countries have done away with. The Arab woman will not agree to be chained in slavery and to pay for the consequences of men’s mistakes with respect to her country’s rights and the future of her children. The woman also demands with her loudest voice to be restored her political rights, rights granted to her by the Sharia and dictated to her by the demands of the present. The advanced nations have recognized that the man and the woman are to each other like the brain and heart are to the body; if the balance between these two organs is upset the system of the whole body will be upset. Likewise, if the balance between the two sexes in the nation is upset it will disintegrate and collapse. The advanced nations [. . .] have come to believe in the equality of sexes in all rights even though their religious and secular laws have not reached the level Islam has reached in terms of justice towards the woman. [. . .] The woman, given by the Creator the right to vote for the successor of the Prophet, is deprived of the right to vote for a deputy in a circuit or district election by a (male) being created by God. At the same time, this right is enjoyed by a man who might have less education and experience than the woman. And she is the mother who has given birth to the man and has raised him and guided him. The Sharia [. . .] has made her equal to the man in all rights and responsibilities, even in the crimes that either sex can commit. However, the man who alone distributes rights, has kept for himself the right to legislate and rule, generously turning over to his partner his own share of responsibilities and sanctions without seeking her opinion about the division. The woman today demands to regain her share of rights that have been taken from her and gives back to the man the responsibilities and sanctions he has given to her. Gentlemen, this is justice, and I do not believe that the Arab man who demands that the others give him back his usurped rights would be avaricious and not give the woman back her own lawful rights, all the more so since he himself has tasted the bitterness of deprivation and usurped rights.

*Source:* Moynagh, M. (2012). Documenting First Wave Feminisms: Volume I. Retrieved from https://books.google.de/books?id=r5_47lZOMHQC&pg=PT295&dq=Huda+Shaarawi+and+Arab+Feminist+Conference&hl=en&sa=X&ei=AnbvVOTFN8a6ggT2zYGQ&ved=0ahUKEwiPqJLw0FDRAhXI1p8KHQzPCQgQ6AEwCAY&usg=AFQjCNHcjxj94HtO1AE-p-A5KthetaHh3g