

# A presentation of the “International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present”

Monday 27 April 2009, by [NESS Immanuel](#) (Date first published: 5 February 2009).

**“Introduction” from Immanuel Ness, *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present*, Malde, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2009.**

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## Introduction

This encyclopedia encompasses the most comprehensive examination of modern-era revolutions, uprisings, and protest movements. It chronicles the ideas, ideologies, and activists that propelled these movements, tracing their roots, goals, tactics, successes, and failures. While numerous manifestos, analytic perspectives, explanatory works, and compelling larger collections have been assembled previously, this sweeping work elucidates the impressive and path-breaking action of the subjugated, disenfranchised, and ideologically motivated in inciting social change throughout the world, from 1500 to the present era.

This project also examines how different revolutions, uprisings, and protest movements have influenced one another and how they compare politically, economically, socially, and culturally. Accordingly, it introduces readers to the historiography and conceptual debates such manifestations have provoked, suggesting new, critical paths of inquiry into their legacies. This project elevates the study of revolution and protest, comprising a review of actual human behavior and organizational practice, motivated and directed toward expanding historical and social science research on the subject. It seeks to be a definitive account of the actions of human beings that transformed their material and social conditions – actions that frequently transformed the world in the process.

## **Project Methods**

The primary goal of this project was to produce the most definitive exploration of protest and revolution to reflect the state of historical, political, and social science research, providing a reference for what can be called *revolutionary studies*. To attain historical objectivity and rigor, we assembled an extensive team of scholarly editors from every continent. Accordingly, this project includes an international panel of 60 editorial board members specializing in regional and thematic subfields of revolution and protest, who in turn enlisted hundreds of writers possessing the expertise and thematic specialization to frame sociohistorical conflicts; this involved recruiting scholars from every region of the world, all of whom were motivated by the goals and objectives of the project and subscribed to our effort to achieve a rigorous analysis in every entry in this undertaking.

We assigned contributions through an advisory board, rating each topic to build a general consensus of significance, searching for equivalent quality in each entry, and specifying inclusion of both historical rigor and relevance. Each entry passed through a process of peer review consisting of evaluations by at least two specialists in their respective geographic and thematic fields in addition to the general editor. All essays were meticulously reviewed and appraised for accuracy and compelling approaches. Fewer than half of invited submissions were accepted for publication on the basis of topical significance, original scholarship, and academic rigor, irrespective of ideological proclivity. The board called on contributors to apply historiographic balance and methodological precision in their analysis.

A central feature of this work, the first major project of its kind, is an examination of the interplay of history, modernization, economic conditions, politics, and social development through the lens of revolution, protest, and social movements. To achieve the goals of intellectual inclusiveness and historical significance the contributors to this work represent a broad range of disciplines: history, political science, sociology, area studies, anthropology, political economy, philosophy, the arts, languages, and journalism, among other fields of inquiry.

We endeavored to eliminate western or imperialist bias, commonly inherent in works of this kind, and brought together a global community of scholars, many writing on regions where they live and work, and thereby connecting regional perspectives and expertise to broader social-historical realities. We further sought balance and nuance in the approaches by selecting writers with an array of sometimes conflicting analytic perspectives. We searched out experts from specific regions of the world to write about the revolutions and protests, utilizing their distinctive regional and disciplinary contexts. Our intent was to provide a cross-referential frame of analysis, including specialists in the global North covering revolution and protest in the global South, and those in the global South covering the global North.

## **Significance of this Project**

Profound world-historical transformations have reshaped the way contemporary historians map the past, chronologically and thematically. One of the major qualitative leaps in scholarship of the past few decades has been the emergence of world history as a field, in the context of a productive dialogue between disciplines, regions, and continents. Theoretical, methodological, conceptual, and pedagogical concerns have irrigated a rich body of comparative research that is in the process of redrawing the way we look at historical change.

Even as such heuristic devices as nationalism, class formation, ethnicity, gender, and regionalism are reexamined, however, revolutionary movements and counterhegemonic protests are often

dismissed as localized, outdated phenomena, or else crises incidental to the forward march of market- and technology-driven modernization and transnational economic integration. Yet revolution and protest have altered human civilization in every region of the world. They have played central roles in the emergence and transformation of politics and societies, in war and peace, in the unfolding of knowledge production and spiritual traditions, and in representations of the past. They constitute a universal passageway of human history, one that has ushered in profound epochal changes, defined eras and civilizations, drawn and redrawn boundaries and galvanized peoples.

Revolutions and protest also shape our historical understanding of power and progress, law and justice, freedom and emancipation. Many of humanity's greatest ideas, such as democracy, equality, civil rights, cooperation, peace, and ecology, have been forged in the crucible of revolution and protest. It is impossible to understand the development of philosophy, economics, government, labor, social relations, and ecology without understanding the role that revolutions and protest have played in shaping them.

Not all protests and revolutions have proven beneficent; however, most of the progressive social change achieved over the past 500 years was brought about less by the benevolence of rulers than by the direct result of protest by the ruled. Were this not the case, then the world of throne and altar of the sixteenth century would likely still be in power. Human action, outside the sphere of the state, has always been a principal vehicle of social transformation. The ideas and practices of revolution and protest are almost always viewed by social scientists and historians as extraordinary, unusual, and frequently shocking events that interrupt the familiar institutional social regulation of human everyday life. But the contributions in this work definitively, and sometimes counterintuitively, demonstrate that among the more surprising elements of revolution and protest is the regularity of volatile and explosive conflicts commonly revealed during waves of protest.

We thus examine a past that has a sustained, if staccato, record and a broadly foreseeable trajectory highly contingent on the unfolding of events rooted in social conflict and resistance. This work brings together contributors who, in the aggregate, demonstrate the fact that revolution and protest are not just important moments in history but concurrently are integral to an accurate and comprehensive understanding of modern history and social science.

## **Defining Revolution and Social Protest**

Revolution and social protest destabilize and overturn predictable everyday patterns of social behavior and traditional practices that the powerful expect to continue in perpetuity to advance their entrenched socioeconomic interests. While revolutions and social protest are the dynamic forces churning and tearing the fabric of modern history, neither has an obvious and apparent definition that is universally accepted. There are many definitions of revolution, and each revolution attempts to define itself in the heat of conflict.

The justification and necessity for revolution and social protest are embedded in specific political ideology and normative values of justice. Since the sixteenth century, with antecedents rooted in the earliest recorded history, the ethical basis for popular protest and resistance against authority is located in the articulated human struggle for justice, equality, and individual rights. The ideology of protest extends across the spectrum from the political right to the left. During the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, liberal ideals were espoused to defend the private property rights of the bourgeoisie and then expanded to encompass the wider objective of extending popular collective ownership over all property, thereby fostering greater and genuinely universal equality. As capitalism grew more rapacious in the nineteenth century, socialists launched

a critique of the grave consequences of private ownership that dispossessed popular majorities of their capability to survive with dignity. The condemnation of capitalism by a range of opponents, from anarchists, liberals, and socialists, to communists of all ideological proclivities, justified efforts to achieve a broader objective of establishing a more egalitarian and just society through revolution and popular protest.

The emancipatory ideals of socialism were immediately and forcefully challenged by an expansive counterattack from capitalists who sought to resist efforts to create redistributive justice. Resistance to socialism typically was grounded in the individual right to own private property as a universal ideal without accounting for those denied and dispossessed of property or those deprived of the ability to survive, harnessed to unbridled capitalism.

This work also examines protests that follow the installation of governments based on unrealized lofty principles that appeared in the twentieth century. In many cases, protests are a consequence of the inherent lack of democracy within so-called egalitarian systems that have become bureaucratic, corrupt dictatorships, engaged in severe repression against opponents who not only question the systems but also potentially challenge the leaders, as in Stalin's Soviet Union and post-revolutionary Communist China.

Certainly, popular protest for justice extends well beyond the revolutionary challenges to achieve social equality. This project documents the array of movements to achieve rights and equality for those oppressed on the basis of their original or ascribed identity, including race, gender, religion, ethnic and national status, sexuality, and political beliefs. The contributions in this work also examine the practical actions of resistance. Revolutionary and protest movements materialize and are expressed through peaceful and violent means. Among the peaceful forms of civil disobedience in the host of entries are: hunger strikes, establishing alternative communities and lifestyles, leafleting, mass meetings, marches and parades, demonstrations, boycotts, slowdowns, strikes, sit-ins and occupations, displaying flags, banners, distinctive objects, and attire that reveal opposition to oppressive norms, music that mobilizes popular forces to act, conscientious literature, philosophy, and art that is critical of power structures.

Indeed historically, popular recourse to force is typically only used after all forms of non-violent means have been exhausted, or in reaction to the use of force by those in power. In some cases force and violence erupt without organizational support through popular uprisings, often referred to as riots. Specific forms of violent resistance included in this work are popular rebellions, insurrections, revolts, guerilla warfare, armed struggle, liberation armies, and more centralized military coups and interventions.

## **Organization of This Work**

Organized in an alphabetic A-Z format, this project draws together histories and themes of revolution and protest in a broad historical and geographic frame. To guide readers, this work includes a lexicon that draws together the histories and themes that are organized alphabetically throughout this encyclopedia. Concurrently, each entry includes cross-references to the countries, regions, people, and themes with which these contributions entwine. As such, cross-referencing serves as a seamless guide to reading the alphabetic historical and thematic entries. We decided on an alphabetic presentation as the most comprehensive means of organization, given the overlapping nature of many of the entries.

The references to related books and readings serve as a guide to exploring in greater depth the histories and interpretations of events, subjects, and themes. Thus readers will gain access to a

detailed historical analysis and to the most significant literature of the field, which in some cases, on certain subjects, particularly in the global South, are documented scarcely, if at all.

## **Geographic Organization**

Geographically, this work encompasses every populated continent from the sixteenth century to the present. The objective is to comprise and characterize the major social and political struggles in the modern era. In this context the criteria for selection have been influence and qualitative significance in the unfolding of history. Thus, the coverage of protest and revolution is representative rather than exhaustive, and absorbs those forces that are most influential, especially transcendent events, movements, and personalities. This project includes every inhabited continent and region of the world: North Africa, Central Africa, Southern Africa, North America, the Caribbean, Latin America, Eastern and Western Europe, Southwest Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, the Far East, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. As many social struggles are interconnected from the 1970s to the early twenty-first century, the project covers important global justice movements.

We sought to be geographically inclusive and endeavored to ensure representation of the most significant protests and movements. We have also sought to reveal the global character of revolution that spans every region of the world. In this context, we have underscored those popular movements specific to regions during particular eras. Thus, nationalist movements for independence range from the American Revolution to the early twenty-first-century struggles for independence in the global South. The independence movements selected for inclusion are based on representation and importance.

We draw attention to independence movements where colonialism and imperialism in the last 500 years were most extensive and lasting, for example Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. In evaluating anti-colonialism, we also asked contributors to consider those movements which advanced multiple ideas of popular liberation beyond simple independence: including racial equality, indigenous struggles, peasant movements, labor and working class, women's rights, student movements, and the religious, ethnic, and ideological thrusts that propelled them forward.

## **Temporal Organization**

The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to Present examines world history from the sixteenth to the early twenty-first centuries. The only thing that is true of all protests and revolutions is that they have no universal blueprint but are highly contingent on the peculiarities of specific historical eras and geographic areas. The entries demonstrate that while specific protests are almost always uneven and sporadic on a global scale, revolution and protest have persistent and unrelenting roots that are never a consequence of a single original historic episode, but spring from multifarious events and social forces, revealing themselves as intensely and historically ingrained arcs of revolt. The timeline provides comprehensive documentation of the central historical events over the past five centuries and serves as a helpful contextualizing tool for readers.

These arcs of historical protest are considered both thematically and regionally. We examine the sixteenth-century struggles of peasants and indigenous peoples, fighting against racial, religious, and monarchic oppression, and explore how these uprisings and revolts continue and also evolve over the centuries into globally and socially diverse expressions of anti-authoritarianism, democracy, liberalism, and anti-imperialism. In surveying the history of revolution and protest beyond its traditional regional and temporal boundaries, we are able to investigate the intricate connections that link these movements across time and space. The nineteenth century, for example, marks the rise and expansion of ideological social struggles for material justice across the globe, including the socialist, anarchist, and communist movements, movements which continue to develop in philosophy and momentum to this day. With the emergence of the global justice movement in the late twentieth

century, protest and revolution have redefined themselves as powerful tools of the global collective, extending beyond territorial borders to petition for human rights and social justice for all, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, or social class.

Through a temporal examination of the modern era from 1500 to the present, revolutions and protest movements seldom have a discernible specific origin or a sudden ending, and in fact frequently spill over on a regional and global scale. The origins of revolutions are nuanced and complicated, as are the other stages of social revolution which defy one-dimensional explanation, historical turning points and watershed moments notwithstanding. Virtually all revolutions in the last 500 years have enduring consequences that, in evolving form, have remained moral forces to this day. Accordingly, we have provided multiple scholarly explanations and ideological perspectives to explain the phenomenon.

### **Thematic Organization**

The thematic coverage includes environment and ecology, gender and sexuality, religion, utopianism, non-violent protest, labor, peace and anti-war, indigenous, student and youth, abolitionism and civil rights, the philosophy and theory of protest and revolution, anarchism, socialism, communism, liberalism, democracy, nationalism and anti-imperialism, peasant and agrarian, anti-fascism, antitaxation, urban uprisings, human rights, global justice, and beyond. In addition to the thematic essays, we included biographies of leading artistic and cultural figures on the basis of their intersection with popular protests and revolutions. Assessments for inclusion were not based on artistic innovation but the degree to which the genre or artist was a force in specific protests and revolutionary movements. As such, this project includes numerous biographies of influential social actors and theorists who helped shape the theory and practice of revolution and protest.

### **Conclusion**

The academic rigor and editorial expertise that have shaped this project have resulted in a truly definitive and comprehensive work. The encyclopedia is the product of a community of diverse scholars, whose compelling ideas about and analysis of human behavior were motivated by a need to expand historical and social science research on the subject beyond its traditional boundaries, exploring the interplay of history, politics, economics, and social development through the lens of revolution and protest.

As the general editor of this project, I am confident that this work adds clarity and nuance to the massive and disparate corpus of research and scholarship on the subject of revolution and protest. The “End of History” was proclaimed by many following the collapse of the Soviet Union beginning in 1989. This laid the foundation for what could become a disparagement of revolution and protest. It was believed that a new age had dawned in which popular uprisings would no longer challenge either existing power structures or the global dominance of free markets or liberal “bourgeois” democracy.

But improbably, this entire discourse sidestepped the major questions of the past 200 years: whether “another world was possible” that could alleviate the grinding misery that remains pervasive throughout the world. It has become apparent that a new global movement dedicated to social justice and human rights has sprung from the ashes of the sociopolitical and cultural experiments of the twentieth century. This work, we hope, will serve as a contribution to that struggle.

**Immanuel Ness**

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## About the Editor

Immanuel Ness is Professor of Political Science at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, United States.

He is also the Director of the Graduate Political Science Program at the Brooklyn College Graduate Center for Worker Education in New York City, and has taught at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Union Leadership Program and Cornell University Institute for Labor Relations. His current research examines the working class and labor unions from an historical-comparative perspective in a regional, national, and global context.

Ness is a graduate of New York University and Columbia University, and holds a PhD in Political Science from the City University of New York. He is author of scholarly articles, chapters, review essays, and books on labor organizing, trade unions, migration, and unemployment, including *Immigrants, Unions, and the New U.S. Labor Market* (Temple University Press, 2005), and *Chains of Migration* (forthcoming), and (as editor) the *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements*, recipient of an American Library Association Best Reference Award in 2005. In 2006, Ness received the Christian Bay Award for best written paper presentation in New Political Science from the American Political Science Association.

Since 1999, Ness has been editor of *Working USA: The Journal of Labor and Society*, a peer-review quarterly social science journal on labor and class. He is founder of the Lower East Side Community Labor Coalition, which received a Proclamation from the City Council of New York in 2001 for advancing labor standards in low-wage occupations.

Ness lectures widely at universities and research institutes in the United States, Caribbean, Europe, East and South Asia.

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