In the spring of 1987 the Serbs of Kosovo were feeling like victims of discrimination. Kosovo was a province of Serbia, within the multiethnic state of Yugoslavia. The province had been Serbia’s heartland during its glory days in the Middle Ages.

But by the 1980s ethnic Albanians (mostly Muslims) had long made up a majority of Kosovo’s population. The neighborhood had changed. Yugoslavia’s postwar constitution had given Kosovo special “autonomous” status. In 1974 ethnic Albanians got fuller control of the province. Serbs began to complain about employment discrimination and unfair treatment by the police.

On 24 April 1987 a Serb politician named Slobodan Milosevic gave a speech from the balcony of the House of Culture in Kosovo Polje, a town a few miles outside the provincial capital. His speech was supposed to encourage the town’s significant Serb minority, but also to calm them down:

“You should stay here,” he told them. “This is your land. These are your houses, your meadows and gardens. Your memories. You shouldn’t abandon your land just because it’s difficult to live.”

The line people most often quote from Milosevic’s speech that day is: “No one should dare beat you.”

At first glance, Milosevic’s language seems pretty tame. But it was rare for a high-ranking Yugoslav official to talk about ethnic tensions. Many heard this as a call to the Serbs to confront the ethnic Albanians running the province. That line, historians say, helped bring Milosevic to power, first in Serbia, and then in Yugoslavia.
How Yugoslavia Was Created After World War I

One of the new states to emerge after World War I was Yugoslavia. It was made up of several distinct peoples who had lived under different empires. They had little in common, really, except being near one another. You could say that Yugoslavia held together more because of pressures on it from outside than by any internal unity.

The country lasted rather longer than many expected, in fact. When it did come apart, in the twentieth century’s final years, it raised dark questions for Europeans. Among them: Had they really learned the terrible lessons of two world wars?
The Former Yugoslav Republics of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro

The peoples who became part of Yugoslavia all had very independent histories. The Slovenes had been part of the Frankish Kingdom. The Franks fought in the Crusades. Later the Slovenes were part of the Austrian Empire. They kept wrestling with the question of nationhood.

Some of the Croats had briefly been independent before falling under Hungarian and Austrian rule. The Croats in Dalmatia, on the Adriatic coast, were at various times under Byzantine, Venetian, and French rule, as well.

The Serbs briefly rivaled the Byzantine Empire during the Middle Ages. But then they fell under Turkish domination for 500 years. Only in the late nineteenth century did they emerge independent of Ottoman rule after the Russians defeated Turkey in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78.

The Montenegrins lived for centuries under a dynasty of bishop-priests. They defended their mountain homeland against all foreign aggressors. As for the Bosnians, their distinction was that so many of them had converted to Islam after the Turks invaded.

**Fast FACT**

Montenegro is Italian for “black mountain.” Montenegrins, who speak a Slavic language, call their country Crna Gora (CHUrna GOHrah), which has the same meaning.

This bridge over the Ibar River divides the Serbian and Albanian sections of Mitrovica, Kosovo.

Photo by Andy Nelson / © 1999 The Christian Science Monitor

Back in the Middle Ages, Kosovo was the center of the Serbian empire. It was in Kosovo that invading Ottoman Turks defeated the army of Serbian Prince Lazar.
Macedonia was home to many different ethnic groups over the centuries. As the Ottoman Empire weakened, Serbs, Bulgars, Greeks, and Albanians all began to jockey for power there. So did the major European powers.

Finally, a few words about Kosovo: Its people were Albanian. It had been something of an Ottoman backwater until the early twentieth century. But back in the Middle Ages it had been the center of the Serbian empire. Many important Serb religious sites were in Kosovo. These included a number of architecturally significant Serbian Orthodox monasteries. It was in Kosovo that invading Ottoman Turks defeated the army of Serbian Prince Lazar.

These territories ended up as the six republics of Yugoslavia:
- Bosnia and Herzegovina—a single republic with a two-part name
- Croatia
- Macedonia
- Montenegro
- Serbia, including the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina
- Slovenia.

**The Threat of Italian Expansionism to Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia Following World War I**

World War I pitted the Croats and the Slovenes against the Serbs. But during the war they began to think of an independent southern Slav state that would bring them all together.

This began to seem like an even better idea once Bolshevik Russia disclosed the supposedly secret 1915 Treaty of London. The treaty was between Italy and the Triple Entente—Britain, France, and Russia. It was basically a deal to bring Italy into the war on the Allied side.

In return, the Entente would award territory to Italy after the war. Italy had its eye on many attractive pieces of real estate. But Yugoslavia’s future founders were especially concerned about certain of their territories going to the Italians under this deal. One of them was Istria, the westernmost part of Croatia. It’s a peninsula across the Adriatic from Venice. In addition to Istria, the three Entente allies had also promised to hand over to Italy much of Dalmatia, another part of Croatia along the Adriatic coast. The Slovenian lands, too, were to go to Italy.

The people who lived in those places weren’t happy about this. They didn’t want to come under Italian rule. Croat nationalist leader Ante Trumbic and others formed the London-based Yugoslav Committee. Its mission was to promote the creation of a south-Slav state.

**Lesson 4**  The Creation and Collapse of Yugoslavia
Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian Leaders Form Yugoslavia

In July 1917 Croat leader Trumbic and Nikola Pasic of Serbia signed the Declaration of Corfu. This document called for a union of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The new state would be a constitutional monarchy. The king would be from the Karadjordjevic dynasty, which had been ruling Serbia. But the new state would be democratic, too, with a parliamentary system.

Serbs and Croats speak essentially the same language. But Serbs use the Cyrillic alphabet. Croats use the Latin. The Declaration of Corfu provided equal recognition for both. The three predominant religions—Roman Catholicism, Serbian Orthodoxy, and Islam—would also get recognition in the new state.

A major question remained unsettled: Would the new state be centralized or federal? Trumbic pressed for a federation, one that would grant the regions some power of their own. Pasic wanted a centralized state.
The issue moved forward when Austria-Hungary, defeated in World War I, lost authority over its south-Slav lands in October 1918. A National Council of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs became, for all practical purposes, the region’s government. As the war ended, Italy started grabbing parts of Dalmatia. The Allies gave it the city of Trieste. This was what the south Slavs had feared. Those trying to organize the new state knew they had to act quickly. Additional territories, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, joined the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs.

On 1 December 1918 Prince Regent Alexander Karadjordjevic announced the founding of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The new kingdom won recognition from the Paris Peace Conference the following May. Alexander’s father, Peter I, ruled the kingdom until his death in 1921, when Alexander assumed the throne.

**How World War II Affected Yugoslavia**

The kingdom faced big problems from the start: ethnic hatred, religious rivalry, language barriers, and cultural conflicts. The question of central versus federal authority bitterly divided the Serbs and Croats. The logic of Yugoslavia (as the country was known from 1931 on) was “economy of scale.” A unified Balkan state could make the most of the region’s resources. And it would provide collective strength against external threats.

But the new state’s political leaders lacked vision and experience in parliamentary government. They weren’t good at compromise either. In 1929 King Alexander took over as a dictator. He canceled civil liberties and abolished local self-government. He decreed strict laws against *sedition*—words or deeds meant to stir up rebellion against the government. He also made it illegal to promote communism.

The king changed the country’s unwieldy original name to Yugoslavia—“the land of the south Slavs.” He unified the six regional legal systems. He restructured government ministries. To ease separatist pressures, he did away with traditional provincial boundaries.

At first, he had wide support. It is not uncommon for a new democracy to lean on a monarch. (King Juan Carlos helped set Spain firmly on a democratic track after Franco, for instance.) Alexander’s actions seemed to make government more efficient and less corrupt. He has gone down in history as “the unifier.” But some have seen him as a fascist.

The tension between the center and the parts is one of the threads through Yugoslav history. The Serbs wanted a centralized government that they could dominate. The Croats wanted a federal system, to give them (and the many other ethnic groups) more autonomy. This was the balance that Yugoslavia never got right. The lack of it eventually tore the country apart.
From the beginning, Serb dreams of restoring their medieval glory dominated the new state. They wanted to bring back “Greater Serbia.” What did it mean when a Serbian prince became king of a new state made up of many disparate peoples? Was that unity in the Balkans—or a Serbian takeover? A takeover, clearly, some would say. And they would see this as part of a pattern that would play out later under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito and beyond that of Slobodan Milosevic.

Many of Yugoslavia’s neighbors, notably the Italians, wanted the new state to fail. Rome supported various separatists to hasten Yugoslavia’s end. Then in October 1934 a Bulgarian agent of the Croat fascists assassinated King Alexander in Marseille, France. The assassin had received help from Italy and Hungary. Yugoslavs genuinely mourned their king. Even his opponents feared that his death would lead to Yugoslavia falling apart.

Other forces were at work, too. The king’s efforts toward unity backfired in the end. They set off more ethnic strife, which continued through the 1930s. Only as another European war threatened in 1939 did Serbs and Croats get serious about reaching a settlement. But by then it was too late.

World War II broke out on 1 September 1939. The Yugoslavs were desperate for allies. They had hoped for help from the French. But the fall of France in 1940 put an end to that. Hitler pressed the Balkan countries to ally with the Axis powers—Germany, Italy, and Japan. Romania did so in November 1940. Bulgaria followed in March 1941. Almost surrounded by enemies, Yugoslavia turned to the Soviet Union. It decided to recognize the Soviet government and sign a nonaggression pact with it.

But Hitler kept pressing Yugoslavia to join the Axis. Convinced the country’s military situation was hopeless, the government finally agreed. It did so despite pro-Western public opinion. The government won a promise from Hitler to leave Yugoslavia alone. Germany would not demand military assistance from Yugoslavia, violate Yugoslav sovereignty, or station the German army on Yugoslav territory.

On 27 March 1941 military officers ousted the government that had made a deal with Hitler. General Dusan Simovic was the new prime minister. Anti-German fervor swept Belgrade. Demonstrators flew British, French, and American flags along with their own. Crowds shouted out slogans against the Axis. All this began to make the new Simovic government nervous. It affirmed Yugoslav loyalty to the agreement its predecessor had made.

But Hitler was unimpressed. On 6 April 1941 the Luftwaffe, the German Air Force, bombed Belgrade, killing thousands. Axis forces invaded, the Yugoslav army collapsed, and the king and government fled. On 17 April the remaining resistance forces surrendered unconditionally.
The invasion caused panic in Yugoslavia. Foreign occupiers partitioned the country and terrorized its people. The next four years would be very bloody. The Communist-led Partisans came to dominate the country’s resistance movement. By the end of the war, they would be in firm control of the entire country.

The Partition of Yugoslavia by Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria

After the invasion, Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria dismembered Yugoslavia. Germany occupied parts of Serbia, including parts of Vojvodina, an autonomous Serbian province. It created a puppet state, the “Independent State of Croatia,” which also included Bosnia and Herzegovina. Germany also annexed northern Slovenia, bordering Austria, which Germany had already taken over.

Italy took southern Slovenia and much of Dalmatia. In addition, Italy joined Kosovo with its Albanian puppet state and occupied Montenegro.

Hungary occupied part of Vojvodina and the Slovenian and Croatian border regions. Bulgaria took Macedonia and part of southern Serbia.
The Violence, Massacres, and Devastation in Yugoslavia During World War II

World War II was a brutal time for all Yugoslavs. Northern Slovenia faced a reign of terror and “Germanization” under German control. The Nazis cleared Slovenes off their own farms and replaced them with German colonists. They resettled the Slovenes in Serbia. Southern Slovenia fared somewhat better. The Catholic hierarchy there collaborated with the Italian occupiers, who were less brutal than the Germans.

In the Croatian puppet state—the Independent State of Croatia known by its initials as the NDH—the Nazis installed a new leader because the previous one wasn’t willing to collaborate. The new man, Ante Pavelic, sent out storm troopers from the Ustase (oo-STAH-sheh)—a fascist Croatian group—to eliminate 2 million Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies. They accomplished this through forced religious conversion, deportation, and murder. The violence was enough to appall even the Nazis. Berlin feared that the bloodbath would prompt further resistance from the Serbians.

Jews and Serbs were also massacred in areas occupied by the Albanians and Hungarians. Thousands of Serbs who had been living elsewhere in Yugoslavia fled back to Serbia. The German puppet regime there was under General Milan Nedic’s leadership. He thought of himself as a custodian rather than a collaborator. He tried to keep violence under control.

In Macedonia, many people welcomed the Bulgarian occupation force. They expected to be granted some autonomy from Sofia, the Bulgarian capital. Instead, they bore the brunt of a harsh campaign to “Bulgarianize” Macedonia.

The Yugoslav Resistance Movement and Tensions Between Serbs and Croats

Serb-Croat tensions had made it hard to run a country. But they made it even harder to try to run a national resistance campaign in a country under military occupation. Even during the ghastly violence of World War II, Yugoslavia’s Serbs and Croats seemed more interested in fighting each other than in fighting the Germans. This ethnic strife eventually led the Western Allies to shift their support from the Serb nationalists to the Communists.

Resistance in Yugoslavia developed mostly in scattered units of the Yugoslav army and among Serbs fleeing genocide in the Nazi puppet state of Croatia. Armed groups in Serbia organized under the name Cetnik (CHET-nik), meaning “detachment.”

The best known were the followers of Colonel Draza Mihajlovic. He was a Serb nationalist, monarchist, and staunch anticommunist. Mihajlovic expected that the Allies would soon invade the Balkans. He advised his troops to avoid small clashes with the Axis forces. Instead, he said, they should prepare to rise up in force to back up the Allied push when it took place.
In October 1941 the British recognized Mihajlovic as the Yugoslav resistance leader. In 1942 the Yugoslav government-in-exile in London promoted him to commander of its armed forces. The Cetnik forces in effect became Yugoslavia’s defense forces.

But Serb-Croat tensions within the government-in-exile were extreme. They were so bad that the British began to look around for someone other than Mihajlovic to back in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav cabinet made decisions unanimously rather than by majority vote. That sounds “inclusive,” as people say today. But the cabinet could grind to a halt over even a minor decision. On major issues—such as genocide against Serbs in the Nazi puppet state of Croatia—it was hopeless.

The British were keen to stabilize the Balkans. They wanted a steady Yugoslavia to anchor the region. But stability was not what they saw in the squabbling ministers-in-exile in London. In 1943 the Allies, led by the British, ended their support of Mihajlovic. They planted their hopes for a secure, multiethnic, postwar Yugoslavia in Josip Broz Tito and his Communist Partisans.

**The Role of Josip Broz Tito in Uniting Yugoslavia After World War II**

Josip Broz was born in Croatia in 1892. He was the son of a poor Croat-Slovenian peasant family. He was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I. The Russian Army captured him and held him prisoner in Russia. During his time there, he converted to communism. He fought in the Red Army during the Russian Revolution. He returned to the new state of Yugoslavia a member of the Communist Party.

“Tito,” a Croatian form of “Titus,” was an alias he used during his time underground. It became the name by which he is remembered.

**How Tito Led the Communist Resistance Movement During World War II**

If you’d seen the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) in the mid-1930s, you might not have guessed that 10 years later it would be running the country. The government had banned the CPY in 1921. It endured years of police repression and internal conflict. Stalinist purges didn’t help, either. Membership was down to only a few hundred.
But under Tito, the party had a real rebirth. He became a member of its Central Committee in 1934. In 1937 he rose to secretary general of the still-outlawed party. In the four years before the war, he built a strong organization of 12,000 full party members, plus 30,000 youth members.

The crowds who gathered to demonstrate against the pact with the Axis in the spring of 1941 included Tito’s Communists. “Death to Fascism, Freedom to the People” was the Partisans’ slogan. Tito’s appeal was “pan-Yugoslav.” It spoke to all of Yugoslavia rather than just one ethnic group. He drew recruits from across the country. The Partisans eventually became the largest, most active resistance group.

In July 1941 the Partisans launched uprisings that won control of much of the countryside. But in September the Axis struck back. Germany warned that it would execute 100 Serbs for every German soldier the resistance killed. At Kragujevac, the Germans showed they meant what they said. They killed several thousand civilians in a single reprisal.

Tito believed that such actions would only backfire against the Germans, bringing the Partisans more recruits. He ignored the threat and continued his tactics. His rival Mihajlovic, leader of the Cetniks, feared that German reprisals would turn into a Serb holocaust. He ordered his forces not to engage the Germans. Soon he turned on Tito and the Partisans. They became his main enemy. Cetnik units began cooperating with the Germans and Italians to keep Tito from winning.

At this point Stalin began to worry that the Partisans’ activity might make the Allies lose trust in the Soviet Union. So Moscow refused to supply arms to Tito. Instead, the Soviets maintained ties to the government-in-exile in London. This, you may recall, was made up of the ministers the British were losing faith in.

In November 1942 the Partisans held the first meeting of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia. They were eager to gain political legitimacy. The council was known by its Serbo-Croatian initials, AVNOJ, and was a sort of provisional government.

The following year was a turning point in the war. In March the Partisans outmaneuvered the German army and defeated the Cetnik forces decisively in Herzegovina and Montenegro. Then German, Italian, Bulgarian, and Croatian forces launched a major attack on the Partisans. But they escaped. When the Italians surrendered in 1943, the Partisans captured their arms, gained control of much of the coast, and began receiving supplies from the Allies fighting in Italy.

A second session of AVNOJ in November 1943 laid the groundwork for the postwar government of Yugoslavia. The council named Tito marshal of Yugoslavia and prime minister. The session also dealt with King Alexander’s son, Peter II, who had been living in exile in London since 1941. It issued a declaration forbidding King Peter to return to the country until a referendum had been held on the status of the monarchy.
At the Tehran summit meeting in December 1943 Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin decided to support the Partisans. The British then worked to reconcile Tito and Peter. In September 1944 the king yielded to British pressure. He called on all Yugoslavs to back the Partisans.

As the Soviet Union’s Red Army moved toward Yugoslavia in September 1944, Tito traveled secretly to Moscow to make a deal with Stalin. They agreed that Soviet troops would enter Yugoslavia but leave as soon as the country was secure. Stalin gave his word that his army would keep out of domestic politics.

And so it happened. Soviet troops crossed the border on 1 October. A joint Partisan-Soviet force liberated Belgrade on 20 October. After that, most of the Red Army went on to Hungary. The Partisans and Western Allies were left to crush the remaining German, Ustase, and Cetnik forces.
The Formation of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945

At the end of the war, the Communists, under Tito, emerged as Yugoslavia’s sole rulers. They had received only limited help from the Soviets, so there wasn’t much Soviet presence in the country after the war. This was unlike the situation in other parts of Europe, where the Soviets made the most of their position as an occupying power.

Tito did yield to Allied pressure, however, on one point. He agreed to work with Ivan Subasic, a noncommunist Croat, to form a new government. Subasic was a compromise between the royalists and the communists. On 7 March 1945 a provisional Yugoslav government took office. Tito was prime minister and war minister. Subasic was foreign minister. Tito supporters held most of the rest of the cabinet posts.

A Communist-dominated Provisional Assembly—a legislature—convened in August. The government held elections for a Constituent Assembly in November. New laws required all candidates to be nominated by the Communist-controlled People’s Front. The police harassed noncommunist politicians—as they had earlier harassed Communists. They also suppressed noncommunist newspapers.

Subasic and other noncommunist ministers resigned in protest. Many parties boycotted the elections. As a result, of the votes cast, the People’s Front won 90 percent.
On 29 November 1945 the new Constituent Assembly dissolved the monarchy. In its place, it established the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. Soon after, it adopted a Soviet-style constitution. This provided for a federation. It would have six republics under a strong central government. The new regime took a number of steps to hold the Serbs in check:

- It made Montenegro and Macedonia full-fledged republics
- It created within Serbia an ethnically mixed autonomous province of Vojvodina
- Kosovo, whose people were mostly ethnic Albanians, also became an autonomous province within Serbia.

The constitution set up a rubber-stamp Federal Assembly and a presidential counsel to administer the federal government. But Tito was the one in charge of it all—party, government, and armed forces.

**How Tito Led Efforts to Repair Wartime Damage**

World War II claimed 11 percent of Yugoslavia's prewar population: 1.7 million lives. Only Poland lost a higher share of its people. Another figure may be even more stunning: About 1 million of Yugoslavia's war dead—a clear majority—were killed by other Yugoslavs.

Yugoslavia's major cities, production centers, and communications systems were in ruins. Starvation was widespread. A quarter of the population was homeless.

Tito's government was in charge of repairing it all, with help from the United Nations. By 1946 Yugoslavia's national income had recovered to its 1938 level.

But that 1938 income level was no great achievement. Yugoslavia was one of Europe's most underdeveloped countries. Its per capita income that year was 30 percent below the world average.

The lands of the south Slavs had begun the twentieth century as a feudal society. Or perhaps it would be better to say, as a collection of different feudal societies. German, Austrian, and Hungarian families owned vast estates in Slovenia, Croatia, and Vojvodina. Turkish feudalism remained in Kosovo and Macedonia. In Bosnia, Christian sharecroppers worked farms owned by Muslim landlords. In Dalmatia, some tenant farmers followed a system going back to ancient Rome. Serbia was a jumble of independent small farms.

After Yugoslavia was established in 1918, it put its farm sector through a radical reform. The new state may have erased reminders of a system that much of the rest of Europe had left behind centuries before, but it failed to relieve rural poverty. Furthermore, land reform gave peasants plots too small to farm efficiently. More than 75 percent of the population lived in poverty, dependent on tiny farms.

This was the picture on the eve of World War II. And these were the problems that Tito had to address immediately after the war's end.
The Institution of Land Reform and the Establishment of a Soviet-Style Economic System

In August 1945 Tito’s new government seized large and medium-size land holdings. It also took property belonging to banks, churches, monasteries, absentee landlords, private businesses, and the German minority, which had been expelled. Half the land went to peasants. The other half went to state-owned enterprises.

The authorities held off on forced collectivization for a time. But once they started, they did a thorough job. In January 1949, 94 percent of farmland was in private hands. The next year, 96 percent was in the hands of the social sector. What’s more, the government required farmers to sell surpluses from private plots to the state at prices below the market. Peasants got incentives to join state or cooperative farms.

Yugoslav planners thought that all this would boost food production, improve standards of living, and get people off the farm so they could work in industry. But it didn’t pan out that way. They abandoned the program after just a few years.

The Communists also followed the Stalinist model for rapid industrialization. By 1948 they had nationalized almost all wealth. The Yugoslavs also practiced central planning, like Stalin. State officials set wages and prices. They created elaborate five-year plans. These stressed use of domestic raw materials and the development of heavy industry. They also tried to foster economic growth in the parts of the country that needed it most.

The Yugoslavs generated capital through a combination of war reparations—the act of making amends for an injury, often through payments to the injured party—along with Soviet credits, and exports—foodstuffs, timber, minerals, and metals. They traded mostly with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

How Yugoslavia Dissolved Into Seven Independent Countries

As time went on, Yugoslavia’s path split from the Soviet Communists’ course. Or rather, it followed Tito’s path. During the 1940s Tito made several key foreign policy decisions without checking with Moscow. So Moscow threw Yugoslavia out of the Soviet bloc. This was a major split. It left Tito free to accept support from the Marshall Plan. This was the American aid program that helped rebuild Western Europe after World War II. The Soviets had forbidden the new Communist states in Eastern Europe from accepting such aid.

Yugoslavs also, under Tito, developed their own economic system. They called it “socialist self-management.” Its slogan was “Factories to the workers!” Workers’ councils, rather than party officials, ran factories and other enterprises.
For a time, Yugoslavia represented a “third way.” It followed a path down the middle, you might say. On one side was Western capitalism, with booms and busts, and winners and losers. On the other side was Soviet communism. Rigidity and inefficiency—to say nothing of a lack of freedom—plagued this route.

At first, the “third way” worked. In the early decades, Yugoslav standards of living improved greatly. But by the late 1970s the system, like other socialist economies, was running out of steam. It was clear as well that a system held together by the iron leadership of one man would not survive his death. At least, it wouldn’t last without some big changes. After Tito died, shortly before his 88th birthday in 1980, ethnic tension reasserted itself.

The country soon began to fall apart. It blew up rather spectacularly, in fact. As the United States and its European allies saw this happen, the question was, What does all this mean for us? What is the Western interest in preserving Yugoslavia as a unified entity?

Yugoslavia sat on the edge of Europe. But it was clearly part of Europe. On the other hand, it belonged to neither NATO nor the EU. Nor was it part of the Communist Warsaw Pact. It was part of no regional “club” that could influence events.

Western efforts to prevent war from ever happening again in Europe had focused on developing the EU and maintaining the NATO alliance. Western military planners had zeroed in on the Soviet threat. Their scenarios featured Russian tanks rolling across Germany. They were unprepared to confront ethnic strife in the Balkans.
But Americans and Europeans both knew the lessons of history. They wanted to avoid repeats of fascist aggression and Nazi genocide. Was Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian leader who emerged after Tito, another Hitler, they wondered? And they recalled that a political assassination in Yugoslavia had touched off World War I.

The Rise of Serb Nationalists and Slobodan Milosevic After Tito’s Death

Yugoslavia under Tito looked like a federal system. Power appeared to be shared. But for the four decades of the Tito era, Serbian Communists ruled Yugoslavia’s political life. This was so even though Tito’s own roots were outside Serbia.

Tito had kept a firm lid, though, on Serb and other ethnic nationalism. Communists generally opposed nationalism. As head of such a fractious country, Tito had more reason than most to feel that way.

After Tito’s death, however, a new leader arose who was quite willing to break the taboo on nationalism. This was Slobodan Milosevic. His speech at Kosovo Polje in April 1987 was all over the news in Belgrade that evening. It made him a popular hero overnight. It was highly unusual for an official of his high rank to talk about ethnic tensions. He seemed to be calling on the Serbs of Kosovo to take on the ethnic Albanians of their local Communist Party.

He had become the head of the Serbian Communist Party the year before. But his speech transformed his public image. He went from a colorless party hack to a firebrand of Serb nationalism. He seemed to have acquired charisma. He turned out to be a skillful exploiter of mass media, too. In 1989 he became president of Serbia.

The Declarations of Independence From Yugoslavia in the Early 1990s

With Tito gone, Yugoslavia’s constituent republics decided, one by one, to pursue their future outside the federation. Each took a different way out. In the end, Serbia was alone.

Slovenia

Slovenia became Yugoslavia’s most prosperous republic. It was the model of Yugoslavia’s “third way.” But political and economic power remained concentrated in Belgrade. This only increased after Tito’s death.

Meanwhile, however, Slovenia was going its own way. Its democracy flourished. Its cultural, civic, and economic realms opened up to a degree unheard of in the communist world.

Croatia

Croatia was the second Yugoslav republic to declare its independence. Things didn’t go nearly as smoothly as in Slovenia’s case, however. While there were few Serbs in Slovenia, there were many in Croatia.

In 1990 Croatia held its first multiparty elections since World War II. Longtime Croat nationalist Franjo Tudjman won the presidency. A year later, Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia. Conflict between Serbs and Croats within Croatia escalated. Then, just a month after Croatia had declared its independence, actual war broke out. You’ll read more about this later in this lesson.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia’s story wasn’t exactly one of seeking independence from a larger entity. At least, it wasn’t at first. Rather, it faced secession from within. Slovenia and Croatia had both declared independence in June 1991. On 1 March 1992 the Bosnian government held an independence vote. It passed. On 5 April 1992 the parliament declared Bosnia’s independence.

The Bosnian Serbs had other ideas, however. Back in late September 1991 Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb leader, had proclaimed four “Serb Autonomous Regions” in Bosnia. By the next month, Karadzic’s group announced the formation within Bosnia of a “Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina.” It would have its own constitution and legislature. Then in January 1992 Karadzic proclaimed an independent “Republic of the Serbian People in Bosnia-Herzegovina.”

Bosnian Serbs backed Karadzic. They had already voted in their own referendum to remain within Yugoslavia, so they did not support the Bosnian government’s March 1992 independence vote. With support from Serbia, the Bosnian Serbs responded to the 1992 Bosnian move with armed force. The Bosnian Serbs’ goal was partition. They wanted to divide the republic along ethnic lines to create a “Greater Serbia.”

Slovenia—a Model for Jefferson?

A 16th-century French political philosopher named Jean Bodin described in his writings an unusual Slovenian custom. His account suggests that democracy there grows from deep roots. For almost 1,000 years, until the late fourteenth century, the dukes of Carinthia, in Austria, governed Slovene farmers. Each time a new duke was installed, the farmers gave formal consent to being governed.

The Declaration of Independence refers to governments “deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Some scholars think Bodin’s account of the Slovene farmers may have influenced Thomas Jefferson in drafting the Declaration.

LESSON 4 ■ The Creation and Collapse of Yugoslavia
Nonetheless, the United States and most of Europe recognized the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 7 April 1992. It joined the United Nations on 22 May 1992.

**Macedonia**

Macedonia’s culture and language had flourished in Tito’s Yugoslavia. But as communism was collapsing throughout Eastern Europe, Macedonia decided to leave Yugoslavia in late 1991. Macedonia’s exit was the only one not marred by some sort of armed conflict. The only blot was that the country’s ethnic Albanians chose not to take part in the independence referendum. The new Macedonian constitution took effect on 20 November 1991.
Montenegro
The breakup of Yugoslavia left Montenegro in a difficult position. Montenegro and Serbia were the last republics left. On 27 April 1992 they passed a new Constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This reaffirmed Montenegro’s tie to Serbia. But the Montenegrins kept their own identity. They were a check on Milosevic and his nationalist campaign against Kosovo (more on that later).

Ten years later, the two states redefined their relationship once again. But on 3 June 2006, after a referendum, Montenegro declared independence.

With that, the Republic of Serbia was alone. There was no more Yugoslavia.

After the Breakup, Seven Independent Governments
Tito’s Yugoslavia had six republics. But seven different national governments now occupy its territory. Here’s how the situation looks today:

As an independent republic, Slovenia has pursued stabilization and further openness. It has joined both NATO and the EU.

Croatia has been through a number of peaceful elections since President Tudjman’s death in December 1999. One government after another has worked to carry out peace agreements. They have promoted national reconciliation and democracy. Croatia is a candidate member of the EU. It joined NATO in April 2009.

Bosnia and Herzegovina today consists of two “entities.” You might think that they are “Bosnia” and “Herzegovina.” But they are the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska. The first is largely Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) and Croat. The second is mostly Serb. In the most recent national elections, wartime nationalists lost ground to more moderate groups. But the latter, too, relied heavily on ethnic messages to win votes. The national government is a six-party coalition.

A strong civilian and military international presence still resides in Bosnia. This stems from the Dayton Peace Agreement. This agreement ended the ethnic wars of the early 1990s. In December 1995 NATO deployed 60,000 troops to Bosnia to oversee the carrying out of the accord. A smaller presence remained until 2004. At that point the EU took over from NATO. Some 2,000 EU troops remain there now.

Macedonia was the only republic to break away without fighting. Kiro Gligorov, its first post-independence president, became the first head of state in a former Yugoslav republic to leave office. He stepped down in November 1999 after serving eight years.

Macedonia’s history since independence hasn’t been all peaceful, however. Its bouts of ethnic violence didn’t come until several years later. In late 2000 many ethnic Albanians there began to wonder where they fit in. Tensions erupted into actual fighting in February 2001.
Mediators brokered a cease-fire. Then all parties, with help from US and EU diplomats, agreed to end the fighting in August 2001. They also worked out agreements to give minority groups improved civil rights.

Like other new democracies in Europe, Macedonia wants to join the EU and NATO. Macedonia is an official candidate member of the EU. And at a NATO summit in April 2008 all members agreed that Macedonia had qualified to join the alliance. They did not reach consensus on inviting Macedonia to join, however. As you read in Lesson 2, Greece still disputes the new country’s use of the name Macedonia.

Montenegro adopted its first post-independence constitution in October 2007. Its leaders seek to connect with Europe. They have taken first steps to join the EU. The government continues to promote reforms. It’s made considerable progress since independence. But Montenegro still has some ethnic tensions. Rule of law is not yet fully established. And economic development is uneven throughout the country.

Serbia and Kosovo
Demonstrating crowds helped bring Slobodan Milosevic to power in the late 1980s. Crowds brought him down a decade later. In October 2000 he was forced to concede defeat. He had—officially—won the presidential election the month before. But it had become clear that his victory was fraudulent. Citizens took to the streets to march for his opponent, Vojislav Kostunica, a democrat.

Serbians were very happy to see Kostunica replace Milosevic. Initial reform efforts went well. But within a couple of years, happiness had slid into apathy. Things were not going well in Serbia. The new president was in open conflict with his prime minister. Elements from organized crime assassinated the prime minister. Elections took place but drew too few voters to be valid.
More recently Serbia has moved onto a better path. It has yet another constitution, adopted in 2006, to reflect its solo status. It’s more democratic and more oriented toward Europe. But the Kosovo issue remains a delicate one. Even progressive-minded Serbians see the province as an integral part of their country.

Kosovo is the seventh national government in the former Yugoslavia. It was part of Serbia—the heart of the country, Serbs would say. It was a province, not a republic. It broke away from Serbia several years after the constituent republics had decided to pull out. You will read more about Kosovo’s struggle for independence in the next section.

The History of Ethnic Cleansing in the Balkans

In addition to moves toward independence, ethnic cleansing has also marked Balkans’ history. Ethnic cleansing is the very dark side of a people wanting “a homeland of their own.” President Woodrow Wilson’s call for “self-determination” was a strong influence as Europe’s map was redrawn after World War I. A nation’s borders should align with its people, the logic goes. Poland should be one country where the Poles live, for instance. Poland shouldn’t be split among three different empires, as it was before World War I.

But people move around. Minority groups will always exist. A modern, pluralistic country must be able to accommodate them.

Children gather around a US Air Force staff sergeant as she hands out coins and candy during a humanitarian mission in the Novo Brdo region of Kosovo.

Photo by 1st Lt. Maksym Nedria, Ukrainian Army

While Serbia today is more democratic and oriented toward Europe, the Kosovo issue remains a delicate one. Even progressive-minded Serbians see the province as an integral part of their country.
Yugoslavia was from the beginning an artificial country. But as it broke apart, many politicians wanted more than just independence from Belgrade. They wanted a homeland of their own with no ethnic minorities. They wanted to “cleanse” their turf from peoples unlike them. Estimates of the numbers of people affected have run up to 2.5 million people.

The Conflicts Between Serbs and Croats in Croatia


But the following year, fighting broke out again. The Croats were trying to get back land they had lost the year before. A second cease-fire followed in May 1993. A more formal “joint declaration” of peace between Croatia and Yugoslavia came some months later. The Serbs had established something they called the “Republic of Krajina” within Croatia, however. In September 1993 the Croatian Army went on an offensive against this new entity.

March 1994 brought the third Serb-Croat cease-fire in as many years. But it, too, was broken twice the following year, in May and August 1995. At this point, Croatian forces regained parts of the border region known as the Krajina. After that, thousands of Serbs poured out of the area.

In November 1995 Croatia signed the Erdut Agreement, arranged by the UN. It called for the return of Serb-held territories to Croatia. These territories rightfully belonged to Croatia. That is, they were within Croatia’s internationally recognized borders, even though Serbs held them.

In December 1995 Croatia signed the Dayton Peace Agreement. This committed it to a permanent cease-fire and the return of all refugees. The agreement also called on Croatia to reintegrate these Serb-held territories peacefully, over three years. In other words, Croatia got its land back, but was asked to be patient about it. This took place as promised, and was completed in November 1998.

The Tensions and Conflicts Between Muslims, Serbs, and Croats in Bosnia

You read earlier about Serb attempts to take a chunk out of Bosnia as well. Croats, meanwhile, had similar ideas about carving up Bosnia. They wanted to combine the Bosnian Croats’ territory with Croatia itself.

This move did not go well for the Croats, or for Croatia. When they attacked, the Bosnian army pushed back. The Bosnians drove the Croatian army out of several different towns and brought it to the verge of total defeat. They killed an estimated 7,000 Croats. Some 200,000 others ended up as refugees in small, isolated enclaves.
On the diplomatic front, the attempt at a land grab cost Croatia its international standing. It drew threats of sanctions from some European Community members. It destroyed the domestic popularity of Franjo Tudjman and his ruling party.

Eventually the Croat-Bosnian clash came to an end. In March 1994 Muslims and Croats in Bosnia signed an agreement creating the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This simplified a three-way conflict. Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks had all been fighting one another. The accord put Bosniaks and Croats on the same side against the Serbs. The Serbs had cut off food and other supplies to Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital, in 1992. The United States and 20 other countries began an airlift to keep the people of Sarajevo from starving. Meanwhile, NATO created a no-fly zone for Serbian aircraft over Bosnia.

The fighting continued through most of 1995. Soldiers committed many atrocities. One of the worst was by the Army of Republika Srpska in and around Srebrenica in July 1995. They murdered about 8,000 unarmed Bosniak men and boys.

When Bosnian Serb forces shelled Sarajevo again in August 1995, NATO began a bombing campaign against Bosnian Serb positions. Soon after that, Bosniak, Bosnian Croat, and Bosnian Serb officials met in Geneva, Switzerland to hammer out a cease-fire. The presidents of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia then met at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio, and negotiated the Dayton Peace Agreement of 21 November 1995. This agreement ended the conflicts in Bosnia and Croatia.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague, Netherlands, indicted Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic. It charged them with genocide and crimes against humanity for their roles in the Srebrenica massacre. Serbian authorities—the post-Milosevic authorities—apprehended Karadzic in July 2008. They turned him over to the tribunal. Mladic remains at large at this writing.

The Displacement of Albanian Workers in Serbia
Ordered by Slobodan Milosevic

To pick up another strand of the tangled story of the Balkans—the story of Kosovo—you have to return to 1989. In that year Milosevic, as Serbia’s new president, eliminated Kosovo’s autonomy. From then on, he decreed, the province would be ruled directly from Belgrade. Belgrade ordered the firing of large numbers of ethnic Albanian state employees. Serbs then took their jobs.

In response to this, the Kosovo Albanians began a peaceful resistance movement. They established a parallel government, too. They funded this mainly with money from Albanians outside the country.
The Kosovo Liberation Army’s War for Independence From Serbia

After a while, however, the Kosovars—Albanians living in Kosovo—lost patience with peaceful resistance. The international peace efforts in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s failed to deal with their concerns. And so in 1997 the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) began armed resistance. Its main goal was independence for Kosovo.

The Police and Military Force Used Against the KLA and NATO’s Intervention

In late 1998 the Milosevic regime unleashed a brutal campaign against the KLA. Serbian soldiers and police forces committed atrocities against civilians. They displaced or even killed large numbers of them. Ethnic Albanians fled in terror to the border with Albania. Experts estimate that Serbians drove 800,000 ethnic Albanians out of Kosovo during this time.
Intense mediation efforts led to the Rambouillet Accords. These called for autonomy for Kosovo. They also provided for a NATO presence to keep the peace. Milosevic rejected the accords, however. He refused to sign them.

This provoked nearly 80 days of bombing by NATO air forces, from March to June 1999. On 10 June 1999 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1244. This authorized an international presence in Kosovo. This would include civilian officials as well as military forces. The UN would take charge for a time. Resolution 1244 also called for a political process to determine Kosovo’s status.

After Milosevic surrendered, two international forces moved in to Kosovo. One was the UN Mission in Kosovo. The other was a NATO-led security force known as KFOR (Kosovo force).

Meanwhile, as ethnic Albanians returned to their homes, some elements of the KLA abducted or killed ethnic Serbs and Roma in Kosovo. Thousands of people from these minority groups fled Kosovo during the latter half of 1999. Many remained displaced 10 years later.

As of this writing, about 14,000 KFOR troops from NATO and its partners remained in Kosovo. Despite Serbia’s opposition, Kosovo declared its independence in February 2008. The United States recognized the new state the next day. By June 2009, 60 countries had done so. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund admitted Kosovo as a member that same month.
After Milosevic fell from power, the new Serbian government arrested him. It turned him over to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in 2001. He died in jail in March 2006 during the fourth year of his trial.

For several decades the Serbs dominated the Yugoslav federation. But in the end, Serb nationalism went too far. It caused the exact opposite of what the Serbs had hoped for. It created seven independent countries instead of a Serb-run central state. With the independence of Kosovo, the defeat of radical Serb nationalism seemed complete—at least for the time being. Given the history of the Balkans, one can never be sure.
Lesson 4 Review

Using complete sentences, answer the following questions on a sheet of paper.

1. Why was Kosovo important to the Serbs?

2. Why were the people of Istria, Dalmatia, and the Slovenian lands not happy about the promises made in the 1915 Treaty of London?

3. What did Hitler promise Yugoslavia when its government signed on to the Axis?

4. Serb-Croat tensions during World War II eventually led the Allies to do what?

5. What deal did Tito make with Stalin in September 1944?

6. What steps did the postwar Yugoslav regime take to hold the Serbs in check?

7. What effect did Milosevic’s April 1987 speech at Kosovo Polje have? What topic did it show him willing to talk about?

8. Who was Radovan Karadzic, and what did he do in September 1991?

9. Which agreement ended the fighting in Bosnia and Croatia?

10. What happened after Milosevic refused to sign the Rambouillet Accords?

Applying Your Learning

11. Explain why the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was a flawed idea. Name some other countries in the world that have the same flaws.