

A Study Guide

compiled by Roberta McNair

for *A Place in the World*

California Film Institute



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About the Film

Persepolis (2007) 96 minutes

Directors Vincent Paronnaud, Marjane Satrapi

Producers Xavier Rigault, Marc-Antoine Robert

Writers Marjane Satrapi (comic), Vincent Paronnaud (scenario)

Editor Stéphane Roche



Cast (Voices)

Chiara Mastroianni—Marjane 'Marji' Satrapi, as a teenager and a woman
Catherine Deneuve—Mrs. Satrapi, Marjane's mother
Danielle Darrieux—Marjane's grandmother
Simon Abkarian—Mr. Satrapi, Marjane's father
Gabrielle Lopes Benites—Marjane as a child
François Jerosme—Uncle Anouche

Storyline

In 1970s Iran, Marjane 'Marji' Statrapi watches events through her young eyes and her idealistic family of a long dream being fulfilled of the hated Shah's defeat in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. However as Marji grows up, she witnesses first hand how the new Iran, now ruled by Islamic fundamentalists, has become a repressive tyranny on its own.

With Marji dangerously refusing to remain silent at this injustice, her parents send her abroad to Vienna to study for a better life. However, this change proves an equally difficult trial with the young woman finding herself in a different culture loaded with abrasive characters and profound

disappointments that deeply trouble her.

Even when she returns home, Marji finds that both she and homeland have changed too much. She then makes the heartbreaking decision to leave her homeland for France, optimistic about her future, shaped indelibly by her past.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0808417/fullcredits#cast>
<http://www.sonyclassics.com/persepolis/main.html>

Awards

80th Academy Awards

- Nominated: Best Animated Feature

65th Golden Globe Awards

- Nominated: Best Foreign Language Film

César Awards

- Won:** Best First Work (Vincent Paronnaud and Marjane Satrapi)
- Won:** Best Writing–Adaptation (Vincent Paronnaud and Marjane Satrapi)
- Nominated: Best Editing (Stéphane Roche)
- Nominated: Best Film
- Nominated: Best Music Written for a Film (Olivier Bernet)
- Nominated: Best Sound (Samy Bardet, Eric Chevallier and Thierry Lebon)

2007 Cannes Film Festival

- Tied:** Jury Prize
- Nominated: Palme d'Or

2007 European Film Awards

- Nominated: Best Picture

2007 London Film Festival

- Southerland Trophy (Grand prize of the festival)

2007 Vancouver International Film Festival

- Won:** Rogers People's Choice Award for Most Popular International Film

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persepolis_\(film\)#Awards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persepolis_(film)#Awards)
<http://www.sonyclassics.com/persepolis/>

Directors' Vision

Marjane Satrapi applied her art skills to creating comics (graphic novels) drawing from her experiences growing up in Iran.

The *Persepolis* comics detail Satrapi's life during the war between Iran and Iraq. *Persepolis* depicts Satrapi's childhood in Iran, and *Persepolis 2* depicts her high school years in Vienna, Austria, and her return to Iran where Satrapi attended college, married, and later divorced before moving to France, where she now lives.

Awards won by *Persepolis 2* include the Angoulême International Comics Festival Prize for Scenario in Angoulême, France, for its script and in Vitoria, Spain, for its commitment against totalitarianism. It has been translated into English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Greek, Swedish, and other languages, and has sold 1,500,000 copies.



When she decided to adapt her multi-part magnum opus *Persepolis* into a film—alongside French comic artist Vincent Paronnaud—in 2007, it made sense to translate Satrapi's spare but expressive drawings into animation.

Satrapi and Paronnaud wrote the script together, after which they focused on the animation. Paronnaud concentrated on designing the décor and backdrops, while Satrapi adapted the drawings from her comics into guides for the animators to use. Rather than opt for computer-generated animation techniques, the film used traditional, drawn animation with individual cels. Though more time consuming and labor intensive, the result held closely to the feel and density of the published comics.

<http://newyork.timeout.com/arts-culture/film/1971985/toronto-q-a-marjane-satrapi-and-vincent-paronnaud>
<http://twitchfilm.com/interviews/2007/12/persepolisinterview-with-vincent-paronnaud.php>

Review of *Persepolis*

By Roger Ebert, January 17, 2008

I attended the Tehran Film Festival in 1972 and was invited to the home of my guide and translator to meet her parents and family. Over tea and elegant pastries, they explained proudly that Iran was a "modern" country, that they were devout Muslims but did not embrace the extremes of other Islamic nations, that their nation represented a new way. Whenever I read another story about the clerical rule that now grips Iran, I think of those people, and millions of other Iranians like them, who do not agree with the rigid restrictions they live under, particularly the women. Iranians are no more monolithic than we are, a truth not grasped by our own zealous leader. Remember, on 9/11 there was a huge candlelight vigil in Tehran in sympathy with us.

That was the Iran that Marjane Satrapi was born into in 1969, and it was the Iran that ended in the late 1970s with the fall and exile of the shah. Yes, his rule was dictatorial; yes, his secret police were everywhere and his opponents subjected to torture. But that was the norm in the Middle East and in an arc stretching up to the Soviet Union. At least most Iranians were left more or less free to lead the lives they chose. Ironically, many of them believed the fall of the shah would bring more, not less, democracy.

Satrapi remembers the first nine or 10 years of her life as a wonderful time. Surrounded by a loving, independently minded family, living in a comfortable time, she resembled teenagers everywhere in her love for pop music, her interest in fashion, her Nikes. Then it all changed. She and her mother and her feisty grandmother had to shroud their faces from the view of men. Makeup and other forms of Western decadence were forbidden. At her age she didn't drink or smoke, but God save any women who did.

Satrapi, now living in Paris, told her life story in two graphic novels, which became best sellers and have now been made into this wondrous animated film. The animation is mostly in black and white, with infinite shades of gray and a few guest appearances, here and there, by colors. The style is deliberately two-dimensional, avoiding the illusion of depth in current animation. This approach may

sound spartan, but it is surprisingly involving, wrapping us in this autobiography that distills an epoch into a young women's life. Not surprisingly, the books have been embraced by smart teenage girls all over the world, who find much they identify with. Adolescence is fueled by universal desires and emotions, having little to do with government decrees.

Marjane, voiced as a child by Gabrielle Lopes and as a teenager and adult by Chiara Mastroianni, is a sprightly kid, encouraged in her rambunctiousness by her parents (voiced by Catherine Deneuve and Simon Abkarian) and applauded by her outspoken grandmother (Danielle Darrieux). She dotes on the stories of her spellbinding Uncle Anouche (Francois Jerosme), who has been in prison and sometimes in hiding, but gives her a vision of the greater world.

In her teens, with the Ayatollah Khomeini under full steam, Iran turns into a hostile place for the spirits of those such as Marjane. The society she thought she lived in has disappeared, and with it much of her freedom as a woman to define herself outside of marriage and the fearful restrictions of men. Sometimes she fast-talks herself out of tight corners, as when she is almost arrested for wearing makeup, but it is clear to her parents that Marjane will eventually attract trouble. They send her to live with friends in Vienna.

Austria provides her with a radically different society, but one she eventually finds impossible to live in. She was raised with values that do not fit with the casual sex and drug use she finds among her contemporaries there, and after going a little wild with rock 'n' roll and acting out, she doesn't like herself, is homesick, and returns to Iran. But it is even more inhospitable than she remembers. She is homesick for a nation that no longer exists.

In real life, Marjane Satrapi eventually found a congenial home in France. I imagine Paris offered no less decadence than Vienna, but her experiences had made her into a woman more sure of herself and her values, and she grew into—well, the author of books and this film, which dramatize so meaningfully what her life has been like. For she is no heroine, no flag-waving idealist, no rebel, not always wise, sometimes reckless, but with strong family standards.

It might seem that her story is too large for one 98-minute film, but *Persepolis* tells it carefully,

lovingly and with great style. It is infinitely more interesting than the witless coming-of-age Western girls we meet in animated films; in spirit, in gumption, in heart, Marjane resembles someone like the heroine is *Juno*—not that she is pregnant at 16, of course. While so many films about coming of age involve manufactured dilemmas, here is one about a woman who indeed does come of age, and magnificently.

<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080117/REVIEWS/801170305>



About the Filmmakers

Marjane Satrapi

Written work:

In French

- *Persepolis* (2000), Paris: L'Association
- *Persepolis* v2, (2001), L'Association
- *Persepolis* v3, (2002), L'Association
- *Persepolis* v4, (2003), L'Association
- *Sagesses et malices de la Perse* (2001), with Lila Ibrahim-Ouali and Bahman Namwar-Motalg, Albin Michel
- *Les monstres n'aiment pas la lune* (2001), Nathan Jeunesse
- *Ulysse au pays des fous* (2001), with Jean-Pierre Duffour, Nathan Jeunesse
- *Adjar* (2002), Nathan Jeunesse
- *Broderies* (2003), L'Association
- *Poulet aux prunes* (2004), Paris: L'Association
- *Le Soupir* (2004), Bréal Jeunesse

In English

- "Persepolis" *The Story of a Childhood* (2003), New York: Pantheon Books
- "Persepolis" *The Story of a Return* v2, (2004), New York: Pantheon Books
- *Embroideries* (2005), Pantheon
- *Chicken with Plums* (2006), New York: Pantheon Books
- *Monsters Are Afraid of the Moon* (2006), Bloomsbury
- *The Sigh* (2011), Archaia

Films:

- *Persepolis* (2007), 2.4.7. Films, France 3 Cinéma, Sony Picture Classics, and others
- *Chicken with Plums (Poulet aux prunes)* (2011), Celluloid Dreams in association with The Manipulators, uFilm, Studio 37, Le Pacte,



Lorette Productions, Film(s), Arte France Cinema, ZDF-Arte

Marjane Satrapi grew up in Tehran in a family which was involved with communist and socialist movements in Iran prior to the Iranian Revolution. She attended the Lycée Français there and witnessed, as a child, the growing suppression of civil liberties and the everyday-life consequences of Iranian politics, including the fall of the Shah, the early regime of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and the first years of the Iran–Iraq War. She experienced an Iraqi air raid and Scud missile attacks on Tehran. According to *Persepolis*, one Scud hit the house next to hers, killing her friend.

Satrapi's family are of distant Iranian Azeri ancestry and are descendants of Nasser al-Din Shah, Shah of Persia from 1848 until 1896. Satrapi said that "But you have to know the kings of the Qajar dynasty, they had hundreds of wives. They made thousands of kids. If you multiply these kids by generation you have, I don't know, 10-15,000 princes [and princesses]. There's nothing extremely special about that." She added that due to this detail, most Iranian families would be, in the words of Simon Hattenstone of *The Guardian*, "blue blooded."

In 1983, at the age of fourteen, Satrapi was sent to Vienna, Austria by her parents to flee the Iranian regime. There she attended the Lycée Français de Vienne. According to *Persepolis*, she stayed in Vienna through her high school years, staying in friends' homes, but spent two months living on the streets. After an almost deadly bout of pneumonia, she returned to Iran. She studied visual communication, eventually obtaining a master's degree from Islamic Azad University in Tehran.

During this time, Satrapi went to numerous illegal parties hosted by her friends, where she met a man named Reza, a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War. She married him at the age of 21, but divorced him roughly three years later. Satrapi then moved to Strasbourg, France.

Satrapi is married to Mattias Ripa, a Swedish national. They have no children, and they live in Paris. Apart from her native language Farsi, she speaks English, Swedish, German, French, and Italian.

<http://www.literalmagazine.com/es/archive-L13satrapi.php?section=hive&lang=arces>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marjane_Satrapi

<http://en.qantara.de/Yearnings-for-a-Lost-Homeland/17541c18094i1p169/index.html>

Marjane Satrapi: Graphic novels & her family's influence

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7i9Vs97x7IU>

Persepolis 1 and 2: Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTFLTkbPhj4&feature=related>

Marjane Satrapi: "Persepolis" is a pro-Iranian humanist tale

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMwfzqEqVLk&feature=relmfu>

Persepolis—Exclusive: Marjane Satrapi

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9onZpQix_w&feature=related

Axis of Evil—Persepolis, by Marjane Satrapi

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjdBt5fBTEI>

Barbican Screentalk: Marjane Satrapi

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ6JVXvRfis&feature=related>

Vincent Paronnaud

Vincent Paronnaud was born Pascal Stadler in La Rochelle, France, in 1970. For his work as a comics artist, he is known as Winshluss. With Marjane Satrapi, Paronnaud has made two films, *Persepolis* (2007) and *Chicken with Plums* (*Poulet aux prunes*) (2011).

Working regularly for revues and anthologies such as *Jade*, *Ferraille*, or *Comix 2000*, Paronnaud as Winshluss has proven to be an amoral, macabre humorist. With his expressionistic line and the simplicity of his narration, Winshluss found his own space in the comics field. He is the author of the comics "Monsieur Ferraille," "Pat Boon Happy End," "Super Negra," "Welcome to the Death Club," "Smart Monkey," and "Wizz et Buzz." He has worked alone or in collaboration with scenarist Cizo for such publishers as Les Requins Marteaux, 6 Pieds sous Terre, and Delcourt.



<http://lambiek.net/artists/w/winshluss.htm>

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1749112/bio>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent_Paronnaud

<http://twitchfilm.com/interviews/2007/12/persepolisinterview-with-vincent-paronnaud.php>

<http://newyork.timeout.com/arts-culture/film/1971985/toronto-q-a-marjane-satrapi-and-vincent-paronnaud>



About Iran

Iran and ancient Persia have a long, creative, and glorious history. Unlike many other Middle East countries, Persia managed to remain independent throughout much of its history. Today, Iran has a population of about 70 million persons. Principal ethnic groups are Persian 51%, Azeri 24%, Gilaki and Mazandarani 8%, Kurd 7% and Arab 3%. Iran is a Muslim country, with 89% Shi'a and 10% Sunni Muslims. The remaining 1% belong to Jewish, Bahai, and Zoroastrian faiths. The Bahai and Zoroastrian faiths originated in Iran. Major languages of Iran are Persian (Farsi) and Persian dialects 58%, Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Baluchi 1%, Arabic 1%, and Turkish 1%. Since 1979, Iran is an Islamic republic.

Iran is situated east of Iraq, beyond the Tigris River, Shatt Al-Arab waterway and east of the Persian Gulf, across from Saudi Arabia. To the north, it borders on former Soviet Central Asian countries, including Armenia, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan, and the Caspian Sea. It also borders on Afghanistan and Pakistan in the east, and Turkey to the west.



Persepolis

Although there are some indications that the site of Persepolis was already a seat of government under Cyrus the Great (559-530 BCE) and his son Cambyses II (530-522 BCE), archaeological evidence gives Darius the Great the distinction as the true founder of Persepolis. Darius made Persepolis the splendid center of the Achaemenid empire, worthy of royal receptions and festivals. The wealth of Persia was to be visible in every aspect of its construction. Persepolis was a showcase for the fewer than 200 years it remained intact.



Aerial view of Persepolis

The first building phase may have lasted from 518 to 490 BCE. Darius' men leveled the rocky ground and created a terrace of nearly 1,500 by 1,000 feet, with a complex system of water channels and drainage was cut into it. On this terrace stood a large treasury and an audience hall. In the treasury, the booty of the conquered tribes and states and the annual tribute sent by the king's loyal subjects on the occasion of the New Year's festival were stored. By 467 BCE, no fewer than 1,348 people were employed in the treasury.

The square audience hall, which was at the heart of the terrace, is usually called the Apadana. Its eastern stairs depict the people of the empire. The hall could contain hundreds, probably thousands, of people at the same time. It was the largest and probably the most beautiful of the buildings at Persepolis. The seventy-two columns that supported the roof were twenty-five meters high, and thirteen still exist. The founding inscription reads:

Darius the great king, king of kings, king of countries, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenian, built this palace.

The second phase fell between 490-480 BCE, with buildings started by Darius but completed in the first years of the reign of his son and successor, Xerxes (486-465 BCE). Ultimately, Persepolis is mostly the work of this king. He tells us in an inscription:

When my father Darius went away from the throne, I became king on his throne by the grace of Ahuramazda. After I became king, I finished what had been done by my father, and I added other works.



Apadana ruins

Darius had the Apadana finished and a small palace added to its south. This is usually called Darius' palace, although he probably did not live to see the building finished. The ancient Persian name was Taçara, "winter palace." To the north of the Apadana, the Gate of All Nations (also known as Xerxes' Gate) was built, which was guarded by a pair of large bulls in the west and lamassus in the east (a lamassu is a bull with the head of a bearded man). Walls were constructed on the northern ridge of the terrace fortification. In front of Xerxes' gate was a monumental double-ramped stairway, which was designed in such a way that one could only proceed slowly and with dignity.



Lamassu from Gate of All Nations

Above these lamassus, an inscription was written:

A great God is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Xerxes king, one king of many, one lord of many.

I am Xerxes, the Great King, King of Kings, King of countries containing many kinds (of men), King in this great earth far and wide, son of King Darius, an Achaemenian.

Proclaims Xerxes the King: By the favor of Ahuramazda I built this Gateway of All Nations. I built many other beautiful things in Persia. I built them and my father built them. All beautiful things we built, we have built by the favor of Ahuramazda.

Proclaims Xerxes the King: May Ahuramazda protect me from harm, and this land, and whatever was built by me as well as what has been built by my father.

In the next decade came the third phase, 480-470 BCE. Xerxes' palace was built between the treasury and the Apadana, with the Persian name Hadiš, or "dwelling place." It was twice as large as the palace of Darius. Meanwhile, the western part of the treasury was reconstructed; this part became known as the Queen's Quarters. The women lived in their own rooms, situated around a spacious courtyard. In these years, the treasury—probably not big enough to store the booty of Xerxes' successful wars—was enlarged to the north. Many other buildings were



built on the southern edge of the platform; they may have been magazines.

The Eastern Stairs

In the fourth phase, the Palace of Artaxerxes I and the Hall of Hundred Columns were added. It was Persepolis' second largest building, measuring

230 by 230 feet. This throne hall was finished by Xerxes' son Artaxerxes I Makrocheir (465-424 BCE). At some point its function was changed and it became a store room, probably because the treasury was again too small to contain everything.

In about 450 BCE, the complex was more or less finished and there was probably no building activity for almost a century.

King Artaxerxes III Ochus (358-338), who was in a sense the last ruler of the Achaemenid empire, added a Hall of Thirty-two Columns, a corridor, the tomb of Artaxerxes II, and his own tomb. The rock-cut tomb has a relief, which shows the king worshipping before a fire altar; this is inspired by the tombs of Darius the Great and his successors at Naqš-e Rostam, which is one hour's walk north of Persepolis. The corridor connected the Gate of All Nations with the Hall of a Hundred Columns, through which delegations from the subject countries passed to bring their tribute to their ruler.



Gate of All Nations

Artaxerxes III Ochus' successors Artaxerxes IV Arsies (337-336) and Darius III Codomannus may have done something to build a large gate; but this gate was still unfinished when the Macedonian king Alexander the Great captured Persepolis in the first weeks of 330 BCE. He destroyed several but not all palace buildings in April, because he was not yet sole ruler of the Persian empire, and it was too dangerous to leave the enormous treasures behind, where his enemies could recapture them. The Palace of Xerxes seems to have received a special treatment, because it was damaged more severely than other buildings; it is likely that the Greek soldiers in Alexander's company had their revenge for the destruction of Athens in 480 BCE. When Alexander returned several years later and saw the ruins, he regretted this act.



Damaged frieze of Xerxes

Modern Iran

For over 100 years, the domination of Iran has been deeply woven into the fabric of global imperialism, enforced by the U.S. and other powers through covert intrigues, economic bullying, military assaults, and invasions. This history provides the backdrop for U.S. hostility toward Iran today—including the real threat of war, even nuclear war. European imperialists waged a rivalry, up through World War I, over who would control Iran and its oil. The U.S. Participated in the overthrow of the nationalist secular government of Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953 and restored its brutal and oppressive—the Shah—to power. The U.S. and Western powers feared the influence the Soviet Union could wield over an elected government in the Cold War climate. The 25 years of U.S. influence under the Shah's reign paved the way for the 1979 revolution and the founding of the Islamic Republic.

1779 to 1799

After the death, in 1779, of Mohammad Karim Khan Zand, who was the Zand dynasty ruler of southern Persia, Agha Mohammad Khan, a leader of the Qajar tribe in the north, reunified the country, defeated numerous rivals and brought all of Iran under his rule, establishing the Qajar dynasty. By 1794 he had eliminated all his rivals, and had retaken former Iranian territories in Georgia and the Caucasus. Agha Mohammad established his capital at Tehran, a village near the ruins of the ancient city of Ray. In 1796 he was formally crowned as Shah, but he was assassinated in 1797 and was succeeded by his nephew, Fath Ali Shah.

Fath Ali Shah went to war twice against Russia, which was expanding from the north into the Caucasus Mountains. Iran suffered major military defeats in both wars, necessitating ceding to Russia Georgia, the north Caucasus, and the eventually the

the entire area north of the Aras River, which includes present day Armenia and Azerbaijan. Fath Ali Shah died in 1834 and was succeeded by Mohammad Shah. He died in 1848 and was succeeded by Naser o-Din Shah.

Naser o-Din Shah was the ablest of the Qajar rules. He introduced Western science, technology, and educational methods and began the modernization of Iran. He tried to play off the imperial powers, Great Britain and Russia, to preserve Iran's independence, but he was not able to prevent Britain and Russia from encroaching into regions of traditional Iranian influence. In 1856 Britain prevented Iran from reasserting control over Herat, and helped make Herat part of Afghanistan. By 1881, Russia had conquered present-day Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, bringing Russia's frontier to Iran's northeastern borders and severing historic Iranian connections to Bukhara and Samarkand. Trade concessions by Iran put the Iranian economy largely under British control. Naser o-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896 by Mirza Reza Kermani in 1896, and his son Mozaffar o-Din assumed the throne.

Mozaffar o-Din Shah was a weak and ineffectual ruler. Public anger was fueled by the shah's willingness to grant concessions to Europeans in return for generous payments to him and his officials. The shah failed to respond to protests by the religious establishment, the merchants, and other classes and instituted repressive measures. In August 1906, the shah was forced to issue a decree promising a constitution. In October an elected assembly convened and drew up a constitution that provided for strict limitations on royal power, an elected parliament, or Majles, with wide powers to represent the people, and a government with a cabinet subject to confirmation by the Majles. The Shah signed the constitution on December 30, 1906, but died five days later. Supplementary Fundamental Laws approved in 1907 provided, within limits, for freedom of press, speech, and association, and for security of life and property. The Constitutional Revolution marked the end of the medieval period in Iran.

Mohammad Ali Shah, son of Mozaffar o-Din took office in 1907. With Russian backing, he attempted to rescind the constitution and abolish parliamentary government. In June 1908 he used his

Russian-officered Persian Cossacks Brigade to bombard the Majlis building. He arrested many of the deputies, and closed down the assembly. Resistance to the Shah, however, coalesced in several cities, and elsewhere. In July 1909, constitutional forces marched from Rasht and Esfahan to Tehran, deposed the Shah, and re-established the constitution. The ex-Shah went into exile in Russia.

The upheavals of the Constitutional Revolution and civil war had undermined stability and trade. The ex-Shah, with Russian support, landed troops in Iran in July 1910 in an attempt to regain his throne. The hope that the Constitutional Revolution would inaugurate a new era of independence from the great powers ended when, under the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907, Britain and Russia agreed to divide Iran into spheres of influence. The Russians were to enjoy exclusive rights to pursue their interests in the northern sphere, the British in the south and east; both powers would be free to



compete for economic and political advantage in a neutral sphere in the center.

A crisis was precipitated when Morgan Shuster, a United States administrator hired as treasurer general by the Persian government to reform its finances, sought to collect taxes from powerful officials under Russian protection. He attempted to send members of the treasury gendarmerie into the Russian zone. The Russians issued an ultimatum demanding Shuster's dismissal, Russian troops, already in the country, moved to occupy the capital. To prevent the Russian takeover, on December 20 1911, Bakhtiari chiefs and their troops surrounded the Majles building, forced acceptance of the Russian ultimatum, and shut down the assembly,

once again suspending the constitution. A period of government by Bakhtiari chiefs ensued until Ahmad Shah, who was 11 when he acceded to the throne, came of age.

Ahmad proved to be incompetent and was unable to preserve the integrity of Iran. The occupation of Persia during World War I (1914-18) by Russian, British, and Ottoman troops was a blow from which his government never effectively recovered.

A coup d'état in February 1921 established Reza Khan, a soldier who led the coup, as ruler. After suppressing several rebellions, he became Shah in 1925, ruling until 1941 as Reza Shah Pahlavi. Reza Shah's government transformed Iran in many positive ways, but his dictatorial politics caused unrest and hatred, and his foreign policy failed to keep Iran independent, while managing at the same time to alienate both the Soviets and the British.

Reza Shah had ambitious plans for modernizing of Iran, including large-scale industries, major infrastructure projects such as railroads, a national public education system, a reformed judiciary, and improving health care. He wanted a strong, centralized government managed by educated personnel to carry out his plans. He sent hundreds of Iranians including his son to Europe for training. Reza Shah's numerous development projects transformed Iran into an industrial, urbanized country. Public education progressed rapidly, and new social classes—a professional middle class and an industrial working class—emerged. In 1935, the name of the country was changed from Persia to Iran.



Reza Shah Pahlavi

Reza Shah tried to avoid involvement with Britain and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Though many of his development projects required foreign technical expertise, he avoided awarding contracts to British and Soviet companies. Britain, owner of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and through it, controlled all of Iran's oil resources, but Reza Shah shunned Britain and got technical assistance from Germany, France, Italy, and other European countries. In 1939, when WW II broke out, Reza Shah proclaimed Iranian neutrality. However, Britain insisted that German engineers and technicians in Iran were spies and demanded that all German citizens must be expelled. Reza Shah refused, claiming this would adversely impact his development projects. The suspicion was not absent that in fact the Shah had concluded a secret agreement with Nazi Germany.

After Britain and the Soviet Union became allies in WW II, they turned their attention to Iran. Both countries eyed the newly opened Trans-Iranian Railroad as an attractive route for transport from Persian Gulf to the Soviet region. In August 1941, because of Iranian refusal to expel German nationals, Britain and the USSR invaded Iran. They arrested and exiled Reza Shah and took control of Iranian communications and railroad. In 1942, the United States sent a military force to Iran to help maintain and operate sections of the railroad.

The British and Soviet authorities constrained constitutional government and permitted Reza Shah's son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, to succeed to the throne on September 16, 1941.

In January 1942, Britain and Russia signed an agreement with Iran to respect Iran's independence and to withdraw their troops within six months after the end of the war. The 1943 Tehran Conference with the U.S. reaffirmed this commitment. In 1945, the USSR refused to announce a timetable to leave Iran's northwestern provinces of East Azerbaijan and West Azerbaijan, where Soviet-supported autonomy movements had developed. The USSR withdrew its troops in May 1946; this episode was one of the harbingers of the emerging Cold War.

Iran's political system began to mature. Political parties were organized, and the 1944 Majlis elections were the first genuinely competitive elections in over 20 years. Foreign influence and interference remained very a sensitive issue for all

parties. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), owned by the British government (now known as BP), continued to extract and market Iranian oil. At the end of the war, Iranians began to demand nationalization of the oil industry, a demand that became the centerpiece of Iranian nationalism.

Despite his vow to act as a constitutional monarch who would defer to the power of the parliamentary government, Mohammad Reza Shah increasingly involved himself in governmental affairs and opposed or thwarted strong prime ministers.

In 1951, the Iranian Parliament voted to nationalize the oil industry. Legislators backing the law elected its leading advocate, Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq, as prime minister following the assassination of his predecessor. Britain responded with threats and sanctions. However, Britain could not persuade the US, under the Truman administration, to take any action at the time. Mosaddeq was an aging and eccentric academic, immensely popular because of his stands for the common people. He was a nationalist, and not a communist. Nonetheless, the British and US governments were eventually able to persuade themselves that Mosaddeq was about to align Iran with the USSR.



Mohammad Mosaddeq

Dr. Mosaddeq took very inflexible positions and was unable to compromise with Britain, which won the support of the major oil companies in imposing an effective global boycott on Iranian oil.

Dr. Mosaddeq became an anti-imperialist hero to the developing world. Raised by a wave of popularity, Mosaddeq showed signs of demagoguery and dictatorial government. When the

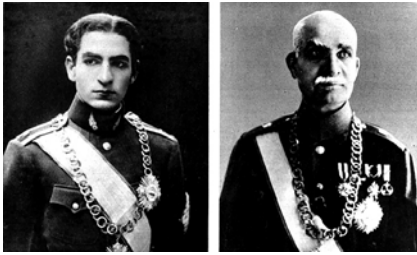
Shah refused his demand for control of the army forces in 1952, Dr. Mosaddeq resigned. He was reinstated in the face of popular riots, as he very probably knew he would be. Next he conducted a national referendum to dissolve parliament.

By 1953, General Eisenhower had become president of the United States. Anti-communist hysteria was reaching its peak. An Iranian general offered to help in the overthrow of Mosaddeq, and the British were able to persuade the American CIA to go ahead with the coup in August. With very scant resources and a shoestring operational plan, the CIA set out to remove Mosaddeq. The plan almost failed, and the Shah, never very resolute, had fled to Baghdad and had to be enticed to continue playing his part from there. The army was loyal to the Shah and Mosaddeq was overthrown and arrested. This coup earned the US and Britain the lasting hatred of large sectors of Iranian public opinion, uniting communists, nationalists, and Shia clerics behind enmity to foreign meddling. Mosaddeq became a folk hero of Iranian nationalism.

In the context of regional turmoil and the Cold War, the Shah established himself as an indispensable ally of the West. In the Middle East, Iran stood out as one of the few friends of Israel, a friendship that allegedly extended to Israeli help in running the SAVAK, the hated Iranian secret police. Domestically, he advocated reform policies, culminating in the 1963 program known as the White Revolution, which included land reform, the extension of voting rights to women, and the elimination of illiteracy.

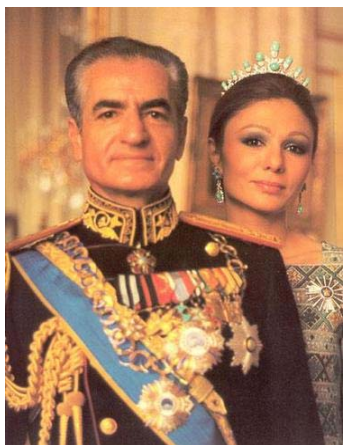
These measures and the increasing arbitrariness of the Shah's rule provoked both religious leaders who feared losing their traditional authority and intellectuals seeking democratic reforms. These opponents criticized the Shah for violation of the constitution, which placed limits on royal power and provided for a representative government, and for subservience to the United States. The Shah saw himself as heir to the kings of ancient Iran. In 1967, he staged an elaborate coronation ceremony, styling himself "Shah en Shah"—King of Kings. In 1971, he held an extravagant celebration of 2,500 years of Persian monarchy. In 1976, he replaced the Islamic calendar with an "imperial" calendar, which began with the foundation of the Persian empire around

500 BC. These actions were clearly aimed at sidelining the Islamic religion and excited the opposition of Muslim groups, which rallied around the Ayatollah Khomeini.



Mohammad Reza Shah and Reza Shah

The Shah suppressed and marginalized opponents with the help of Iran's security and intelligence organization, the SAVAK, using arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, exile, and torture, and exciting profound and widespread discontent. Islamic leaders, particularly the exiled cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, channeled this discontent into a populist Islamist ideology. Ayatollah Khomeini had been exiled in 1964 and had been living Najaf, Iraq, since 1965, and from 1978 in France. In Najaf, Khomeini expounded his ideology of absolutist theocratic rule, Velayat e Faqih, led by a supreme leader, an authority worthy of emulation, the Marj al Taqlid. This ideology was spread through books and cassettes smuggled into Iran. However, beginning about 1978, Khomeini began publicizing more democratic views and pretended that he envisioned democratic rule in Iran and that he would not be a leader of the government. Riots erupted in Iran, ignited by various real or manufactured pretexts.



Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and wife

Suffering ill health, the Shah left Iran on January

16, 1979. He announced that he was leaving for an eighteen-month leave of absence. He had appointed Shapour Bakhtiar as Prime Minister. Bakhtiar was unable to keep order, even with the help of Supreme Army Councils. Inexplicably, Bakhtiar not only allowed the Ayatollah Khomeini to return to Iran, he publicly invited him to return. Bakhtiar was eventually exiled to France and was assassinated, probably by Iranian agents, in 1991.

The Islamic Revolution

Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran on February 1, 1979, by invitation of Shapour Bakhtiar, prime minister of the interim government. Bakhtiar had invited the means of his own destruction. He soon went into hiding, and was eventually exiled in Paris. Mass purges of supporters of the Shah began, and hundreds were executed. A revolutionary court set to work almost immediately in a school building in Tehran. Revolutionary courts were established in provincial centers soon after. The Tehran court passed death sentences on four of the Shah's generals on February 16, 1979, and all four were executed by firing squad. More executions, of military and police officers, SAVAK agents, cabinet ministers, Majlis deputies, and officials of the Shah's regime followed.

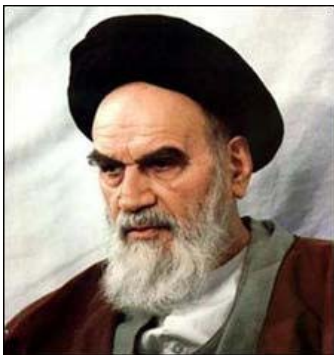
In March of 1979, a referendum was held regarding the new form of government to be established in Iran. Only one form of government, the Islamic Republic, appeared on the ballot, and it was approved by 98% of the voters in non-secret elections.

A revolutionary and anarchic situation gripped Iran. Semi-independent revolutionary committees, not answerable to central authority, took over various governmental tasks. Factory workers, civil servants, white-collar employees, and students were often in control, demanding a say in running their organizations and choosing their chiefs. Governors, military commanders, and other officials appointed by the prime minister were frequently rejected by the lower ranks or local inhabitants. At the same time, the Ayatollah Khomeini, who headed the Revolutionary Council, ran his own version of the government, pushing Iran in the direction of an Islamist theocracy. He mobilized street mobs to force his program on the government.

Iran was soon plagued by ethnic unrest as Kurds, Arabs, Turkomans, and other minorities demanded varying degrees of autonomy. Beginning in August 1979, the revolutionary courts tried and passed death sentences on members of ethnic minorities involved in these disturbances.

In May 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini created the Pasdaran (Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Islami, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or Revolutionary Guards or IRGC). The Pasdaran was conceived as a force loyal to the Revolution and the clerical leaders, as opposed to the regular army, which was thought to be loyal to the civil government. Soon after, Khomeini also ordered the creation of the Basij volunteers. These two groups were to function both as internal police protecting the government and as a politically reliable army against foreign foes. The IRGC was also used to foment revolution and "resistance" abroad, particularly in Lebanon, where it helped to found and train the Hezbollah.

The revolutionary government began veering to the right as power was concentrated around the clerics. Leftist newspapers were banned, and rallies of the National Democratic Front were broken up. Opposition leaders were arrested. As the powers of the clerics increased, the state began a program of nationalization and also of religious repression in particular against women. Students and others who thought they were eliminating the Shah to bring democracy to Iran would eventually be bitterly disappointed.



Ayatollah Khomeini

The Ayatollah Khomeini and other clerics delivered extremist and threatening speeches against the United States and against its Persian Gulf allies. On the other hand, the government was still nominally headed by Mehdi Bazargan, who had been appointed prime minister upon the Shah's departure. Bazargan tried to maintain good relations

with the United States, especially as the US supply of spare parts for the army and the oil industry was desperately needed.

Whatever good will remained between Iran and the US was shattered on November 1, 1979, as Bazargan met with US President Jimmy Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski to confirm continued US cooperation, and the Shah—still on "leave"—sought and received medical treatment in the US for his cancer. Fearing this was an opportunity to enlist US support to overthrow the Islamic Republic, hundreds of thousands of Iranians



demonstrated in Tehran, demanding the extradition of the Shah.

Revolution, 1979

The Iranian press denounced Bazargan for meeting with a key US official. On November 4, Iranian Islamic students stormed the US embassy, taking 66 hostages, mostly Americans. Fourteen were released before the end of November. Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan resigned, and no prime minister was named to replace him.

The Revolutionary Council took over the prime minister's functions until Abolhassan Bani Sadr, an independent associated with Ayatollah Khomeini, was elected. Initially he had the support of Khomeini, but as he tried increasingly to reassert the rule of law and civil rights, he clashed with Mohammad Ali Rajai, a protege of the revolutionary council, who was appointed Prime Minister. Fresh waves of purges gutted the civil service and the army.

Meanwhile, the hostage crisis was exacerbating poor relations with the United States and western European countries. President Carter froze several billion dollars of Iranian assets held by American banks in the United States and abroad. Bani Sadr's various attempts to resolve the crisis failed. The Shah made his way to Panama. Bani Sadr and Foreign Minister Qotbzadeh attempted to arrange for the Shah to be arrested by the Panamanian

authorities and extradited to Iran. But the Shah left Panama for Egypt on March 23, 1980, before anything could be done.

In April, 1980 the United States tried to rescue the hostages by secretly landing aircraft and troops near Tabas, along the Dasht-e Kavir desert in eastern Iran, at a base known as "Desert 1." The attempt was bungled however. Two helicopters malfunctioned, and when the mission commander decided to abort the mission, a helicopter and a C-130 transport aircraft collided, killing eight US servicemen. Fresh plots against the Iranian government, real or imagined, were discovered in the army and wide purges followed.



Negotiations for release of the hostages began on September 14, 1980, in West Germany, and they were successfully concluded in January 1981. Possibly to humiliate outgoing President Carter, the hostages were released only after Ronald Reagan took the oath of office as president on January 20, 1981.

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<http://www.angelfire.com/home/iran/>

About Tehran and Iranian Society

Prior to the Revolution of 1979, political connections were considered a key measure of one's social status. In other words, the amount of access that one was perceived to have to the highest levels of decision making was the major determinant of prestige. Wealth was important, but acquiring and maintaining wealth tended to be closely intertwined with access to political power. Consequently, members of the political elite were generally involved in numerous complex interrelationships. For example, some members of the Senate (the upper house of the parliament, or Majlis), a legislative body that included many members of the political elite appointed by the shah, were also on the boards of several industrial and commercial enterprises and were owners of extensive agricultural lands. Since being part of an elite family was an important prerequisite for entry into the political elite, marital relationships tended to bind together important elite families.



Iran Green

The other classes attempted to emulate the political elite in seeking connections to those with political power, whether on the provincial, town, or village level. By the 1970s, however, the nonelite of all classes perceived education as important for improving social status. Education was seen as providing entry into high-status jobs that in turn would open up opportunities for making connections with those who had political power. Despite a great expansion in educational opportunities, the demand far outstripped the ability or willingness of the elite to provide education; this in turn became a source of resentment. By the late 1970s, the nonelite groups, especially the middle classes, rather than admiring the elite and desiring to emulate them, tended to resent the elite for blocking opportunities to compete on an equal basis.

As a result of the lack of field research in Iran

The Upper Classes

The postrevolutionary upper classes consisted of some of the same elements as the old elite, such as large landowners, industrialists, financiers, and large-scale merchants. They remained part of the upper class by virtue of having stayed in Iran and having retained a considerable part of their wealth. For the most part, however, such persons no longer had any political influence, and in the future the absence of such influence could impede the acquisition of new wealth. The element of the upper classes with greatest political influence was a new group, the senior clergy. Wealth was apparently no longer an attribute of authority, as the example of Khomeini demonstrated. Religious expertise and piety became the major criteria for belonging to the new political elite. Thus, key government administrators held their positions because of their perceived commitment to Shia Islam. They were part of the new political elite, although not members of the old social elite.

The Middle Classes

After the Revolution of 1979, the composition of the middle class was no different from what it had been under the monarchy. There were several identifiable social groups, including entrepreneurs, bazaar merchants, professionals, managers of private and nationalized concerns, the higher grades of the civil service, teachers, medium-scale landowners, military officers, and the junior ranks of the Shia clergy. Some middle-class groups apparently had more access to political power than they had had before the Revolution because the new political elite had been recruited primarily from the middle class.



Students at the University of Tehran

Prior to the Revolution, the middle class was divided between those possessed of a Western education, who had a secular outlook, and those suspicious of Western education, who valued a role for religion in both public and private life. In general, the more secularly oriented tended to be found among those employed in the bureaucracy, the professions, and the universities, while the more religiously oriented were concentrated among bazaar merchants and the clergy. Among entrepreneurs and especially primary and secondary school teachers, the secular and religious points of view may have had roughly equal numbers of proponents. Since the Revolution, these two outlooks have been in contention. The religious outlook has dominated politics and society, but it appears that the secular middle class has resented laws and regulations that were perceived as interfering with personal liberties.

The middle class was divided by other issues as well. Before the Revolution, an extremely high value had been placed upon obtaining a foreign education. The new political elite, however, regarded a foreign education with suspicion; accordingly, many members of the middle class who were educated abroad have been required to undergo special Islamic indoctrination courses to retain their jobs. In some cases, refusal to conform to religiously prescribed dress and behavior codes has resulted in the loss of government jobs. As a result of these tensions, thousands of Western-educated Iranians have emigrated since 1979.

The Working Class

The working class has been in the process of formation since the early twentieth century. The industrialization programs of the Pahlavi shahs provided the impetus for the expansion of this class. By the 1970s, a distinct working-class identity, *kargar*, had been established, although those who applied this term to themselves did not actually constitute a unified group. The working class was divided into various groups of workers: those in the oil industry, manufacturing, construction, and transportation; and mechanics and artisans in bazaar workshops. The most important component, factory workers, numbered about 2.5 million on the eve of the Revolution, double the number in 1965, and they accounted for 25 percent of Iran's total employed labor force.



Iranian workers

The workers within any one occupation, rather than sharing a common identity, were divided according to perceived skills. For example, skilled construction workers, such as carpenters, electricians, and plumbers, earned significantly higher wages than the more numerous unskilled workers and tended to look down upon them. Similar status differences were common among workers in the oil industry, textile manufacturing, and metal goods production. The heaviest concentration of unskilled workers was in construction, which on the eve of the Revolution employed 9 percent of the entire labor force. In addition to relatively low wages, unskilled construction workers had no job security.

The unions played only a passive role from the viewpoint of workers. Under both the monarchy and the Republic, union activity was strictly controlled by the government. Both the shah and the government of the Islamic Republic considered strikes to be unpatriotic and generally suppressed both strikes and independent efforts to organize workers. Although strikes played an important role in undermining the authority of the government during the final months of the monarchy, once the Republic had been established the new government embraced the view of its royalist predecessor regarding independent labor activities. Thus the government has considered strikes to be un-Islamic and has forcibly suppressed them. A long history of factionalism among different working-class occupational groups and between skilled and unskilled workers within an industry traditionally has contributed to the relative success of governments in controlling the working class.

The Lower Class

Members of the urban lower class can be

distinguished by their high illiteracy rate, performance of manual labor, and generally marginal existence. The lower class is divided into two groups: those with regular employment and those without. Those who have regular work include domestic servants, bath attendants, porters, street cleaners, peddlers, street vendors, gardeners, office cleaners, laundry workers, and bakery workers. Thousands work only occasionally or seasonally at these or other jobs. Among the marginally employed there is much reliance on begging. In the past, some members of this group also resorted to prostitution, gambling, smuggling, and drug selling. Since the Revolution, there have been severe penalties for persons convicted of moral offenses, although newspaper reports of the uncovering of various crime rings would indicate that the new codes have not eliminated such activities.



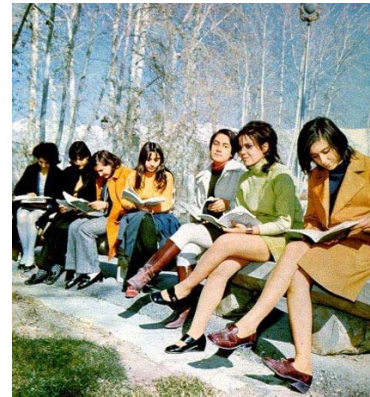
Tehran bazaar

At the time of the Revolution, it was estimated that as much as one-third of the population of Tehran and one-quarter of the population of other large cities consisted of persons living on the margins of urban society. Life was typified by squalid slums, poverty, malnutrition, lack of health and educational facilities, and crime. In 1987 there was no evidence of measures undertaken by the new government to alleviate conditions in the urban slums.

Traditional Attitudes Toward Segregation of the Sexes

With the notable exception of the Westernized and secularized upper and middle classes, Iranian society before the Revolution practiced public segregation of the sexes. Women generally practiced use of the chador (or veil) when in public or when males not related to them were in the house. In the traditional view, an ideal society was

one in which women were confined to the home, where they performed the various domestic tasks associated with managing a household and rearing children. Men worked in the public sphere, that is, in the fields, factories, bazaars, and offices. Deviations from this ideal, especially in the case of women, tended to reflect adversely upon the reputation of the family. The strength of these traditional attitudes was reflected in the public education system, which maintained separate schools for boys and girls from the elementary through the secondary levels.



Iran in the 1970s

The traditional attitudes on the segregation of women clashed sharply with the views and customs of the secularized upper and middle classes, especially those in Tehran. Mixed gatherings, both public and private, were the norm. During the Pahlavi era the government was the main promoter of change in traditional attitudes toward sexual segregation. It sought to discourage veiling of women at official functions and encouraged mixed participation in a variety of public gatherings. The result was to bring the government into social conflict with the Shia clergy, who sought to defend traditional values.



Iranian woman wearing burka

Impact of Western Ideas on the Role of Women

Among the ideas imported into Iran from the West was the notion that women should participate in the public sphere. The Pahlavi government encouraged women to get as much education as possible and to participate in the labor force at all levels. After 1936, when Reza Shah banned the chador, veiling came to be perceived among the minority of elite and secular middle-class women as a symbol of oppression. Before the Revolution, Iranian society was already polarized between the traditionally minded majority and a minority of involved women who were dedicated to improving the status of women. As early as 1932, Iranian women held a meeting of the Oriental Feminine Congress in Tehran at which they called for the right of women to vote, compulsory education for both boys and girls, equal salaries for men and women, and an end to polygyny. In 1963 women were given the right to vote and to hold public office.

Female Participation in the Work Force

Prior to the Revolution, three patterns of work existed among women. Among the upper classes, women either worked as professionals or undertook voluntary projects of various kinds. Whereas secular middle-class women aspired to emulate such women, traditional middle-class women worked outside the home only from dire necessity. Lower-class women frequently worked outside the home, especially in major cities, because their incomes were needed to support their households.



Women and revolution

Women were active participants in the Revolution that toppled the shah. Most activists were professional women of the secular middle classes, from among whom political antagonists to the regime had long been recruited. Like their male counterparts, such women had nationalist

aspirations and felt that the shah's regime was a puppet of the United States. Some women also participated in the guerrilla groups, especially the Mojahedin and the Fadayan. More significant, however, were the large numbers of lower-class women in the cities who participated in street demonstrations during the latter half of 1978 and early 1979. They responded to the call of Khomeini that it was necessary for all Muslims to demonstrate their opposition to tyranny.

Following the Revolution, the status of women changed. The main social group to inherit political power—the traditional middle class—valued most highly the traditional role of women in a segregated society. Accordingly, laws were enacted to restrict the role of women in public life; these laws affected primarily women of the secularized middle and upper classes. Hejab, or properly modest attire for women, became a major issue. Although it was not mandated that women who had never worn a chador would have to wear this garment, it was required that whenever women appeared in public they had to have their hair and skin covered, except for the face and hands. The law has been controversial among secularized women, although for the majority of women, who had worn the chador even before the Revolution, the law probably has had only negligible impact.

Women at demonstration



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About Political Prisoners

The turbulent history of modern Iran begins with the fall of the Qajar dynasty's traditional polity in 1925, followed by the westernizing policies of Reza Shah and Muhammad Reza Shah, who ruled until the Islamic revolution in 1979. The revolution introduced a new ruler, Ayatollah Khomeini, who created an Islamic republic that was a hybrid of tradition and modernity.

The Qajar Shahs had ruled autocratically in a traditional Iran where due process of law was unknown and punishment was swift, involving physical torment and at times violent death. Hardly anyone was sentenced to prison. Torture was a part of the process by which the guilt of the accused was established. With the arrival of European-style "modernity," the Pahlavi dynasty adopted new policies. Reza Shah, who ruled from 1926 to 1941, created a centralized administration, a standing army, a police force for cities, and a gendarmerie for the countryside. In the absence of legal safeguards, however, these paraphernalia of a modern state were abusive of the rights of citizens.



Protest against nuclear development

The state built prisons and created the category of political prisoners. The new elite who employed Western-designed instruments of power without much hesitation, were much more distrustful of Western-style safeguards such as constitutional limits of authority, representative assemblies, individual liberties, and due process of law. The Shah felt comfortable with adopting Western instruments of power for he did not see them as a cultural imposition much different from what was known in the past. Their safeguards, however, were rejected as Western cultural intrusions. The same

selective borrowings in the interests of those who wield power have continued under the Ayatollahs into the twenty-first century.

Under Reza Shah, the number of political prisoners was small, although a few men were murdered for political reasons. However, political and economic abuses of the modernizing elite generated resentment among the country's relatively small, modern middle class. Thus emerged a counter elite of nationalistic and populist persuasions. The ensuing political confrontations did not create an evolutionary process toward a more democratic state. Instead, they increasingly engendered political violence. As the severity of the challenge increased, so did the use of torture and execution. At the beginning of this process under Reza Shah, the confrontations lacked the intensity that they later assumed under his son, Mohammad Reza Shah. The latter's rule, in turn, appears far less violent when compared with what awaited the people under the Ayatollahs. There seems to be a correlation between the increasing commitment to conflicting ideologies and the escalating level of violence.

Faced with the state's forceful modernization of educational norms and the Westernization of the public space (e.g., the removal of the veil), traditionalist Shiite clerics offered some resistance. This was put down with little killing and a relatively minimal use of torture. When a group of Marxists arose in 1938 to present a secular challenge, the state charged them with antistate sedition. None of them was executed, and after the initial harsh interrogations, accompanied by the use of physical pressure, the prisoners settled into routine, monotonous prison life. Iranian prisons lacked the brutalities that were associated with military dictatorships throughout the Third World in the second half of the twentieth century. The regime did not torture its imprisoned opponents. In the words of historian Ervand Abrahamian, the regime "was more interested in keeping subjects passive and outwardly obedient than in mobilizing them and boring holes into their minds. Reza Shah had created a military monarchy—not an ideologically charged autocracy" (1999, p. 41).

After Reza Shah's abdication in 1941, the country experienced a period of political openness, during which the influential leftist Tudeh Party ("Masses" party) was formed. The CIA induced a

coup in 1953 that brought the almost-deposed Mohammad Reza Shah back to Iran, but which also ended the period of openness, forfeiting the possibility of a gradual democratic process. The leftists were prosecuted without due process of law and were subjected to torture. Overall, whatever mistreatments and physical abuses the nationalists and leftists experienced from 1953 to 1958, these proved to be only a dress rehearsal for the array of state-sanctioned tortures that were imposed in the 1970s.

Both Mohammad Reza Shah and his opponents became increasingly ideological. The Shah's new doctrinaire drive to recreate the greatness of ancient Persia moved him far away from the liberal tendencies of modernization theory and into the intolerant impulses of single-party authoritarianism. Across the deepening ideological divide of the 1970s, the apparently overconfident Shah faced a new generation of leftist activists whose political leanings were enmeshed in the rising tide of revolutionary movements throughout the Third World. Young and inexperienced, these activists announced their arrival on the political scene with a marked militancy in the mid-1970s, when the Shah's administration was being hailed as a model of progress by his conservative backers in Washington. Nevertheless, the number of dissidents and the range of their activities remained relatively small, compared with what was being seen in some Latin American countries at the time. By the time that the country was going through the seismic political changes that led to the Islamic Republic in 1979, some 400 guerrillas had lost their lives, and hundreds of others were imprisoned and tortured.

The Shah's political police, known by the acronym SAVAK, was designed to strike fear in the hearts of the regime's young opponents. A new generation of torturers creatively honed their craft. It appeared as if SAVAK was deliberately flaunting its brutality. Tehran's Evin Prison symbolized SAVAK's merciless image. It is not clear how much of SAVAK's brutality actually occurred and how much was the result of the deliberately cultivated image of SAVAK violence or the creative allegations of political opponents. In the end, the brutality and the reputation of SAVAK fed upon each other.

Torture was used to extract confessions and

recantations. More significantly, torture began to cast a dark shadow over the lives of the leading activists. The torture-induced confessions, broadcast nationally, were meant to break the resolve of the activists and dissuade university students from entering the forbidden political arena. In many cases, however, it had the opposite effect. In this convoluted world, which would outlast the dynasty and continue into the Islamic Republic, having been tortured—and not any independent act of bravery or a prolonged service to political causes—became the arbiter of who would rise as heroes and who would fall into infamy. Dying under torture created real martyrs.



Executed prisoners

Martyrs' photos adorned the revolutionary banners of the organizations that helped to overthrow the Shah in 1979. In this time of confession and recantation, Evin Prison linked the Shah's regime with that of the Ayatollah's. Interestingly, the man who shaped the prison life under the Ayatollah's regime had been himself a prisoner in Evin during the Shah's rule. When the monarchy was overturned, the prison was quickly emptied of the Shah's opponents and packed instead with high officials who had previously served the monarchy.

The Ayatollah presented his revolutionary state as Islamic and thus unlike any other in modern history. However, in the early years of the consolidation of the Islamic Republic, many of human rights violations had very little to do with Islam, or even with the politicized clerics' reading of it. The politically shrewd mullahs moved aggressively to eliminate any real or imagined challenges to the legitimacy of the newly established state. Their actions corresponded with the revolutionary patterns that had been created by totalitarian states elsewhere in the world. The

mullahs merely added their own Islamic terminology to rationalize actions whose motivations lay in the realities of the contemporary nation-state in the context of an illiberal political culture. For political prisoners who crowded the prisons in the 1980s, the judiciary was characterized by the absence of justice, Islamic or otherwise.

Summary executions are the signature of all revolutionary states, as are torture-induced confessions and repentance. The tactics used by the Ayatollah's mullahs to extract information and to break the resolve of political prisoners were thus almost identical to those used by other revolutionary states, from the Stalinist Soviet Union, to the U.S.-supported juntas in Latin American countries during the cold war. The Islamic Republic's ideological fervor, however, was matched by an unprecedented intensification of executions and torture, and in their wake, many came to absolve the Shah of his own unsavory record, which paled in comparison.



Prisoners being held in Evin Prison

The young activists who opposed Ayatollah Khomeini were ill-prepared for what awaited them in prison. They based their expectations on their own experiences in the Shah's prisons, or on what they had heard from previous generations of political prisoners. The Shah's tactics of repression offered no realistic measure of what followed with the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini to power, however. By 1985, approximately thirteen thousand individuals who politically opposed the Ayatollah had been executed.

In a creative interpretation of medieval Islamic laws, the clerics found a way to justify torture as Islamic *Ta Ezir* ("discretionary punishment" in ShiDite jurisprudence). A prisoner who "lied" to interrogators could receive *Ta Ezir* of as many as

seventy-four lashes until the "truth" was extracted. Many well-known individuals of all ideological persuasions were displayed on national television giving "voluntary interviews": confessing, recanting, denouncing their past political associations, and praising the Ayatollah as the "Leader of the Islamic Revolution." In these broadcasts, the mullahs far out-performed the showmanship of the Shah's SAVAK. By extracting formal recantations, the clerics intended to show that God was on their side, and that history, with its teleological direction and ultimate destiny, had vindicated them. Captives were forced to deliver a version of history that rendered them, prior to their repentance and return to Islam, as the essence of all evils, ancient and modern.

Thousands of rank and file activists whose "interviews" had no additional propaganda value, were nonetheless subjected to a crude combination of physical torture, psychological pressure, Islamic "teachings," and public confession, all aimed at remolding their thoughts and conscience. The Islamic Republic added a new term with clear religious undertones to Iran's prison lexicon: *Tawaban* (singular *tawab*) were prisoners who had recanted. In fact, the clerics wished to turn the entire secular population of Iran into *tawaban*. The result was a severe violation of the right of political prisoners to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as well as the freedom to hold opinions without interference.

Prior to his death, Ayatollah Khomeini's crowning achievement was the prison massacre of 1988, unique in the annals of the country's brutalities. For reasons not entirely clear, the Ayatollah decided to dissolve the category of "political prisoners" by dispatching them to death or setting them free. The political prisoners faced an inquisition that had no proper judicial task other than inquiring about their thoughts on Islam and the central institution of the Islamic Republic. No consideration was given to the prisoners' alleged crimes or to the sentences under which they had been serving since the early 1980s. Instead, the inquisitors passed judgment on the prisoners' apostasy. Each prisoner was asked, "Are you Muslim, and do you perform your daily prayers." The prisoners understood the true meaning of the question: "Will you renounce your conscience and live?" Many held fast to their beliefs, and were

hung the same day.

In the prisons, the prosecutors asked those who had confirmed their faith in Islam to prove it by performing the required daily prayers. If they refused, they would receive twenty lashes for each of the daily five sets of prayers—a total of one hundred lashes every twenty-four hours. Both male and female prisoners were subject to this daily regimen of whippings. One judge told the prisoners that the punishment for a female infidel was death under prolonged whipping. In fact, however, the clerics treated women differently from men. Men were considered responsible for their apostasy and had to be killed. Women, on the other hand, were not believed to be competent enough to take total responsibility for their actions, so the clerics would punish them with imprisonment until they repented. Thus, one misogynist rule saved many women's lives. Female members of the Mojahedin—an anti-clerical Islamic organization—were not so fortunate. They were executed for continuing to support their exiled leaders.



Political prisoners in Rejaei Shahr prison

In contrast to the early years of the Ayatollah's regime, the executioners stopped publishing the body counts for their daily activities in 1988. An official veil of secrecy shrouded the ongoing massacre, and the rulers denied that mass killings continued to take place inside the prisons. Many scholars accept the estimate of 4,500 to 5,000 dead for the entire country that year, although some have alleged that the figure was much higher—as many as 10,000 to 12,000. Opposition publications abroad, however, claimed a national death toll of 30,000.

Like human rights violators in other ideological states, the Islamic rulers of Iran engaged in extrajudicial activities. Scores of intellectuals and journalists were killed in this fashion. From 1990

onward, these crimes were committed by members of the shadowy groups who either worked for or were loosely associated with the Intelligence Ministry. These extrajudicial actions made a mockery of the due process of law, even when considered in terms of purely Islamic, or *shariDah*, law. Because of this, the Intelligence Ministry tried very hard to conceal its murderous, extra-judicial actions from the public. Even the reformist president, Khatami, elected in 1997, was unable to put an end to these activities, although the intelligence officials became more circumspect.

Although there were similarities between the Islamic Republic and more secular authoritarian regimes in their use of violence and repression, there were also major differences that created new patterns of human rights violations. These differences originated from the invocation of *shari Eah*, or rather from the much larger and loosely structured cultural habits and norms derivative of the *shari Eah* paradigm. One major new category of human rights violations resulted from the reimposition of Islamic punishments such as flogging, amputation, and stoning to death of adulterers and common criminals.

The Ayatollah's revolution was Islamic, and the majority of its victims were Muslim Iranians, but non-Muslim Iranians suffered repression and persecution unlike any in modern Iranian history. Iran's Islamic tradition recognizes followers of three monotheistic religions—Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity (Armenians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans)—as people of the book. The Islamic Constitution recognizes them, as "the only religious minorities who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education." To put it differently, they are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, but only within the limits of Islamic *shari Eah*. Nonetheless, discrimination against non-Muslim people of the book became blatant. A majority of each community saw no future for themselves in Iran and left.

The largest religious community in Iran was not named in the constitution, however. This was the Bahā'ī, whose faith was never recognized in Iran, its troubled birthplace. Because Bahā'ī were assumed to have been Muslims before accepting their "false"

revelation, the Iranian Bahā'īs were considered to be apostates. By omitting them from constitutional recognition, the clerics' hoped to destroy the conditions needed for their survival as a community with a distinct religious identity. They attacked BaháDís on all possible grounds and in all spheres of public life, from elementary education to professional occupations, from marriage ceremonies to cemeteries. More than 200 of their leaders were murdered. Although many fled the country, the community endured and survived the harshest years of the 1980s.



Iranian actress jailed and lashed for role in Australian movie, 2011

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Iran had already defeated Islamic fundamentalism. A majority of the people were patiently waiting for a nonviolent institutional and legal transformation that would allow the young population to experience personal freedoms and a measure of democracy. The regime lost its Islamic mooring and its institutions completed with each other. The land of ancient Persia had lost the imperial, monarchic facade that was once a source of national pride.

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1988 executions of Iranian political prisoners

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1988_executions_of_Iranian_political_prisoners

People's Mujahedin of Iran

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People's_Mujahedin_of_Iran

Questions for Research and Discussion

1. What is the significance of *Persepolis* as the title of Marjane Satrapi's comics (graphic novels) and film?

Read through the section on Persepolis (pp 8–10) and learn the significance the city had for ancient Persians. Try to draw connections between the historical Persepolis and the meaning you think the name has for Satrapi and other modern Iranians.

2. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi fancied himself to be a "descendant" of the great Persian kings and "[i]n 1967, he staged an elaborate coronation ceremony, styling himself 'Shah en Shah'—King of Kings. In 1971, he held an extravagant celebration of 2,500 years of Persian monarchy" (p 13).

Imagine that you are a member of the Iranian middle class, are not particularly political, and you are there in 1967, when the Shah crowns himself King of Kings. How would you react? Would you start thinking differently about your country's government?

Although we live in a democratic republic, not under a monarchy, our political figures like to invoke past leaders, from Ronald Reagan, to Abraham Lincoln, to George Washington, drawing connections between their philosophy about governing and those leaders of the past. How different is this from what the Shah did declaring himself King of Kings? Could we have anything comparable to the Shah's self-aggrandizement in this country? Why or why not?

3. In 1817, English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote the poem *Ozymandias* about the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II. Like the Shah, Darius the Great, and Xerxes, Ozymandias (a transliteration of the Greek name for Ramses) declares himself to be the King of Kings.

Read the poem (a sonnet in iambic pentameter), and pay particular attention to the last three lines. What is the point of the poem? How does it have relevance to the legacies of the ancient Persian kings, the Shah, and other rulers who believe their legacies are great enough to endure through the ages?

Do modern rulers (or presidents) believe their reigns will have lasting significance? Why or why not? If so, are they right?

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

4. Marjane Satrapi's story is a serious one, and yet she chose to write it in the form of a comic. Even though graphic novels have gained respect over the years since Art Spiegelman wrote *Maus*, a biography of his father, a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor, in 1992, does the comic book format trivialize Satrapi's story? Why or why not?

What comics or graphic novels have you read that should have been written as books instead or couldn't have gotten their stories across in any form other than a graphic novel?

5. Think about the school scenes in *Persepolis*. If you lived in the same kind of situation, in which you were expected to dress, speak, and act a certain way, could you do it? Why or why not?

If you knew it could make the difference between your or your family's life and death, could you conform to the kind of society Marjane Satrapi faced in 1979? Would being a boy or a girl in that kind of society make a difference, and would one gender have an advantage over another? Explain your opinion.

6. In the film, not much time passes between the time Marji meets Uncle Anouche and his arrest and execution. Would life have been easier for Marji if she hadn't met Uncle Anouche, so that she wouldn't have to experience that great loss? Why or why not?

Marji is still a child when she goes to see Uncle Anouche in prison. What was your reaction to that scene? Would your parents have allowed you to visit a loved one alone, knowing that you might be the last family member to see them alive? Would you want to go? Explain your answers.