

10 1/2 Big Ideas for 20th Century Economic History

1. The twentieth century saw the [material wealth](#) of humankind explode beyond all previous imagining.
2. But these advances in technology, productivity, and organization--and resulting social dislocation and disquiet—also produced **tyrannies** that were the most brutal and barbaric in history.
3. The **relative economic gulfs** between different economies grow at a rapid and unprecedented pace.
4. Governments were **unable to manage** their economies to provide consistent, durable, distributed, and equitable advancing prosperity.
5. The great [Milanovic-Kuznets](#) inequality waves that characterized the century.
6. The [demographic and feminist transition](#) that raised women from the status of a subordinated caste.
7. How **societal status orders were steamed away**—no matter how established or ascribed, ethnicity, caste, and other sociological status groups lost much of their salience.
8. The [Polanyian perplex](#): creating a society in which the only rights that really mattered were property rights ran into people's very strong belief that they had rights to maintain their communities, receive their incomes, and work in their occupations--that the attempt of a market society to transform land, labor, and finance into "commodities" was, always and everywhere in the twentieth century, playing with fire.
9. The coming of **robots and the rise of the overclass**: was the potential replacement of human brains as cybernetic machine-management and routine transactions-processing cybernetic control mechanisms.
10. The **fall of formal empires** as strong nationalism spread from northwestern Europe to become a near-universal foundational belief in nearly all human societies.

And somewhere, lurking in the background, there is the mystery of the [Great Filter](#).