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In the parade of highlights with which many have tried to sum up the twentieth century, the overarching patterns and fundamental transformations often fail to come into focus. The Columbia History of the 20th Century, however, is much more than a chronicle of the previous century's front-page news. Instead, the book is a series of twenty-three linked interpretive essays on the most significant developments in modern times--ranging from athletics to art, the economy to the environment.

Rather than presenting a linear narrative, each author uncovers patterns of worldwide change. James Mayall, for example, writes on nationalism from the rise of European fascism to the rise of Asian and African nations; Sheila Fitzpatrick traces the history of communism and socialism in Moscow and Havana. In her chapter on women and gender, Rosalind Rosenberg covers the progress of women's rights throughout the world, from Middle Eastern activism to the American feminist movement. Jean-Marc Ran Oppenheim's history of sports traces the spread of Western sports to all corners of the globe and the West's appropriation of such activities as martial arts. In each, the important strands of history--events, ideas, leading figures, issues--come together to offer an illuminating look at cultural connection, diffusion, and conflict, showing in stark relief how this period has been unlike any preceding era of human history.

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