

Archives Unbound: Socialism and National Unity in Yugoslavia, 1945-63



During World War II, Yugoslavia was divided between the Axis powers and their allies.

A determined communist resistance under the Partisans, with Soviet and Anglo-American help, liberated all of Yugoslavia by 1944. In an effort to avoid Serbian domination during the post-war years, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Montenegro were given separate and equal republican status within the new socialist federation of Yugoslavia; Kosovo and Vojvodina were made autonomous provinces within Yugoslavia. Despite the attempts at a federal system of government for Yugoslavia, Serbia played the leading role in Yugoslavia's political life for the next 4 decades. Yugoslavia remained independent of the U.S.S.R., as Tito broke with Stalin and asserted Yugoslav independence. Tito went on to control Yugoslavia for 35 years. Under communist rule, Yugoslavia was transformed from an agrarian to an industrial society.



In spite of ongoing conflict and fragmentation, many aspects of life in the country underwent improvement in the post-World War II period. A fundamentally agrarian society was industrialised and urbanised, and standards of living rose dramatically in most regions after 1945. The literacy rate increased steadily, school instruction in the country's several minority languages became widespread, and the university system expanded. In these same years, Yugoslavia adopted a unique economic planning system (socialist self-management) and an independent foreign policy (non-alignment) to meet its own domestic and security needs. However by the last quarter of the 20th Century, Yugoslavia, "the land of the South Slavs," had become an international metaphor for ethnic strife and political fragmentation. The metaphor was based on diversity in almost every aspect of Yugoslav national life--historical experiences, standard of living, the relationship of the people to the land, and religious, cultural, and political traditions--among the six republics and the two provinces that constituted the federal state.

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Images: 85,000 Years Covered: 1945-1963

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