

GROWTH OF WESTERN DEMOCRACIES**Biography**

Victoria reigned as queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from 1837 to 1901, longer than any other British ruler. The period of her reign became known as the Victorian age and was a time of great social and political growth and change. During that time, Great Britain became the most powerful nation on the globe. ♦ *As you read, think about the great changes that took place in society during Queen Victoria's reign. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Queen Victoria (1819–1901)

Queen Victoria was born Alexandrina Victoria on May 24, 1819. Her uncle, William IV, was the king of Great Britain. Because Victoria's uncle had no children, she was his heir. When William IV died in 1837, Victoria became queen. She was only 18 years old.

Two years after Victoria ascended the throne, she met her cousin, Prince Albert of Saxony. She found him to be "extremely handsome" and, with the consent of her advisers, she proposed marriage. Victoria and Albert were married in 1840 and, later that year, she gave birth to the first of nine children. During her many pregnancies, she allowed Albert to take on many of the responsibilities of the monarchy.

Queen Victoria ruled an extensive and growing empire. Along with Great Britain and Ireland, the British empire included Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, and colonies in the Middle East and Africa. Believing it was her right to rule, Victoria worked hard to hold on to her power. Much of her time, though, was spent dealing with the ceremonial affairs of her country. Political decisions were left to her prime ministers. As a result, the role of the monarch lost some of its political power.

Victoria brought to her rule the ideals of respect for laws, modesty, manners, and hon-

esty. Her patriotism, morality, and dedication to family life made her an important symbol and model for the time—a period marked by a deeply conservative morality. Although many changes took place during her rule, Victoria's reign was not characterized by acceptance of technological and mechanical innovations.



Queen Victoria,
about 1845

When Albert died in 1861, Victoria went into mourning and removed herself from public life for more than 10 years. Her absence from the public damaged her popularity for a while. During the final two decades of her reign, however, Victoria returned to the public arena. Her Golden Jubilee, the fiftieth anniversary of her reign, was a cause for celebration throughout the United Kingdom in 1887. At the end of her life, Victoria spent a great

amount of time visiting troops and military hospitals and attending medal ceremonies.

Victoria's legacy was as an icon of middle-class values, stability, and continuity during a period of rapid change. She made the monarchy a model of respectability and guaranteed its ongoing role as a British institution. Several of her children and grandchildren married heirs to the thrones of European countries, continuing her line of royal descendants to the present day.

Questions to Think About

1. How did Victoria become queen?
2. What effect did Queen Victoria's concentration on ceremonial functions have on the monarchy?
3. **Draw Conclusions.** Why do you think Queen Victoria developed into such an icon of stability during this period? How could that have helped society?