

Summary: Egypt Today

From Ancient to Modern Times

The Suez Canal was the project of Egyptian ruler Ismail Pasha. He wanted to make Egypt the equal of Western nations. But the cost was high. Egypt was bankrupt. Great Britain bought shares in the canal. That gave the country some control over Egypt. This control lasted until 1956.

Egypt had foreign rulers for 2,500 years. The Ottomans ruled from 1517. In the late 1700s, Britain and France took over. In 1922, Britain gave up some power. For a time, Egypt had its own king.

In 1952, Gamal Abdel Nasser overthrew King Farouk. Nasser led Egypt from 1954 to 1970. He built the Aswan High Dam. The dam stopped the Nile's floods. It gave Egypt more electrical power. There was a tradeoff, though. Without floods, the river valley lost its rich soil. Farmers used fertilizers, which polluted the water.

Since 1956, women have voted and held office. In 1979 under Anwar Sadat, Egypt was the first Arab state to sign a treaty with Israel. In 2000, Hosni Mubarak worked to end conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Not everyone in Egypt shares the same views. The Muslim Brotherhood is an extremist group that favors rule by Islamic law. They say that Egypt is being untrue to Islam by working with Israel and the United States.

The Land and the People

Much of Egypt is desert. Most people live near the Nile or in oases. Some live in cities. Some raise cotton near the Nile. More than half live in poor villages. The fellahin, or peasant farmers, have little food. Most can't read or write.

Cairo is Egypt's capital and Africa's largest city. It is polluted and crowded. Each year, thousands of villagers go there to find work, but many are unsuccessful. Many unemployed poor live in older parts of the city. The educated live in modern parts.

Egypt is the Arab world's cultural leader. In the 1950s, it was the first Arab country to require children to go to school. It has a strong women's movement. Egypt's media influences Arabs throughout the region.

Before You Read

Underline each vocabulary word. Tell about a time when you made a tradeoff.

tradeoff *noun*, giving up one thing to get something else

fellahin *noun*, Egyptian peasant farmers

After You Read

REVIEW How did the role of women change under Nasser's leadership?

Highlight the sentence that tells when Nasser led Egypt. Then highlight the sentence that tells about women's rights.

REVIEW What is the main reason for Cairo's increase in population? Draw a box around the sentence that tells why people move to Cairo.