**An Abbreviated History of Modern Iran**

In the 1920s, Iran had become dependent on economic support from Britain and other countries, which angered many of the citizens. The loans from Britain were not of disinterested generosity, but rather calculated to produce a profit from oil ventures. On February 21, 1921, Reza Khan and 3,000 men marched into Tehran and “requested the shah appoint a young civilian reformer, Sayyid Tabatabi, as prime minister”. Tabatabi was merely a figurehead; Reza Khan eventually strong-armed him out of his position and took over himself.

The public that was angered and active before the reign of Reza Shah, though hesitant at first, came to respect and revere Reza Shah as a national icon. The conception of the Pahlavi dynasty is said to be signaled when “Reza Shah, a former officer in the Cossack Brigade, seized the royal crown and placed it on his own head”. The former Qajar dynasty was dissolved in all aspects by 1925.

Reza Khan was a reformer who concerned himself with bringing Iran into the modern industrialized marketplace. In 1935, the name of the country was officially

changed from “Persia” to the modern-day “Iran.” Reza Shah focused on revitalizing the army, drawing on the masses of peasants for use as moldable bodies and minds. The need to educate the soldiers in order for them to perform their duties increased literacy and led to a focus on education within Iran as a whole. For a time, it appeared that Iran was flourishing.

Then, amongst the turmoil of World War II, Reza Shah made the fateful decision not to deport German nationals. This led to the Allied occupation of Tehran and the abdication of the Shah; he was exiled to South Africa and remained there until he died in July 1944. Reza Shah’s son, Mohammed Reza came into power proving him to be more connected to books and theories than the needs and pulse of the Iranian people.

After a power struggle between other political factions, the shah eventually

regained power and in a measure to further modernize Iran enacted what has become known as “The White Revolution.” The Revolution is called white because there was no bloodshed during this transition. Agriculture, railways and ports, literacy, education and labor organizations became the focus of the government. The shah granted women increased rights and sought to Westernize Iran as much as possible. SAVAK, the shah’s security service, became increasingly brutal, peaking after the White Revolution with the Shah relying on their services to make problems “disappear” quickly and quietly. All of these elements combined to lead to the eventual conservative backlash in which the Revolution of 1979 was rooted. The Revolution brought back Islamic ideals and mores, which were welcomed at first before becoming constricting and overbearing. Iran has always been an Islamic theocracy in some fashion; the time period after the Revolution of 1979, during which Persepolis is set, is demonstratively one of the more severe upswings in the enforcement of fundamentalist Islam.

It is here that Satrapi’s book begins. Knowing the topography of the political landscape in Iran is crucial to not only understanding what Persepolis is all about but also crucial to effectively educating students about it as well. Intertwined with the history of Iran is the history of Islam. It is imperative that one is informed on the myths and realities of Islam in order to express only truthful assertions to students as well.