



Did the West Define the Modern World?

YES: William H. McNeill, from *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (University of Chicago Press, 1991)

NO: Philip D. Curtin, from *The World and the West: The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2000)

ISSUE SUMMARY

YES: Professor of history William H. McNeill states that in 1500, Western Europe began to extend influence to other parts of the world, resulting in a revolution in world relationships, in which the West was the principal beneficiary.

NO: History professor Philip D. Curtin states that the amount of control the West had over the rest of the world was mitigated by the European colonial process and the reaction it engendered throughout the world.

It seems to be widely accepted that beginning in 1500, Western Europe embarked on a course of world domination, the effects of which are still with us today. Due to factors such as superior military technology, immunity to diseases which ravaged others, and a strong will to succeed, Europeans were able to extend their influence over people in other parts of the world. An immediate result of this was the trans-Atlantic slave trade where Europeans traded products, including firearms, for human cargo. Finding African leaders willing to participate in this horrific practice, the Europeans did not even have to penetrate into the heart of Africa to make their profits. The slaves-to-be were brought to coastal fortresses called "factories" to wait for the western ships and the inhumane exchange to take place. It would not be until the 19th century that Europeans would begin to directly assert themselves into African affairs in what has been called the "Age of Imperialism."

In Asia, the system was different, but with similar economic results. Trading posts were set up throughout Asia, especially in India—and later—China, where the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British established commercial

rivalries. These led to greater control over larger areas where the Europeans exploited the existence of local rivalries and corrupt, incompetent leaders to further their economic interests. These too would lead to a more direct control over some of the nations of Asia during the 19th century, and a more indirect control over others.

Many have assumed that the capitalism and democracy that are so prominent among the world's nations today are part of the legacy that non-Western nations inherited from their contact with the West. In this view, the Western way was the wave of the future. Also, the West's technological and military superiority over the past 500 years has naturally led generations of Western historians to view the last half-millennium through the eyes of their own worldview. When the civilizations of the non-Western world were considered at all, they were simply included in a marginal and ancillary way.

All of this changed with the end of colonialism, an important result of World War II. The former colonies, mandated territories, and Western-controlled areas were now free and independent nations, ready to determine their own destinies—and interpret their own histories. In this process they were joined by a generation of new Western historians who did not see the world through Eurocentric-colored glasses. Together, they forced the historical profession to reevaluate the Eurocentric view of the world's last five hundred years.

William McNeill's book *The Rise of the West*, first published in 1962, has achieved classic status among world history books. In the following selection from that book, McNeill operates from the thesis that from earliest historical times, world civilizations have had contact with one another. He refers to this process as *ecumene* (from the Greek, meaning one world). From these contacts, came exchanges of all types which altered those civilizations in particular, and the world in general. He states that this process has affected the scope of history, although it is the West—as the title of his book implies—that has benefitted the most from the process. McNeill concludes that this superiority began during the Age of Exploration of the sixteenth century and continues to influence the current world.

Philip D. Curtin covers the same time span, and sees similar results—Western domination which extended throughout the world. However, he discovers as a result of this process, the limited control the West was able to exert over the world. This was due to (1) the nature of the various types of institutional control established by the West; (2) the responses of the world's nations to this European intrusion which lessened their control. It is interesting to note that in place of the more common "The West and the World" titles given to books and chapters in textbooks when describing this period, Curtin uses as his title, *The World and the West*.

The Far West's Challenge to the World, 1500–1700 A.D.

The year 1500 A.D. aptly symbolizes the advent of the modern era, in world as well as in European history. Shortly before that date, technical improvements in navigation pioneered by the Portuguese under Prince Henry the Navigator (d. 1460) reduced to tolerable proportions the perils of the stormy and tide-beset North Atlantic. Once they had mastered these dangerous waters, European sailors found no seas impenetrable, nor any ice-free coast too formidable for their daring. In rapid succession, bold captains sailed into distant and hitherto unknown seas: Columbus (1492), Vasco da Gama (1498), and Magellan (1519–22) were only the most famous.

The result was to link the Atlantic face of Europe with the shores of most of the earth. What had always before been the extreme fringe of Eurasia became, within little more than a generation, a focus of the world's sea lanes, influencing and being influenced by every human society within easy reach of the sea. Thereby the millennial land-centered balance among the Eurasian civilizations was abruptly challenged and, within three centuries, reversed. The sheltering ocean barrier between the Americas and the rest of the world was suddenly shattered, and the slave trade brought most of Africa into the penumbra of civilization. Only Australia and the smaller islands of the Pacific remained for a while immune; yet by the close of the eighteenth century, they too began to feel the force of European seamanship and civilization.

Western Europe, of course, was the principal gainer from this extraordinary revolution in world relationships, both materially and in a larger sense, for it now became the pre-eminent meeting place for novelties of every kind. This allowed Europeans to adopt whatever pleased them in the tool kits of other peoples and stimulated them to reconsider, recombine, and invent anew within their own enlarged cultural heritage. The Amerindian civilizations of Mexico and Peru were the most conspicuous victims of the new world balance, being suddenly reduced to a comparatively simple village level after the directing classes had been destroyed or demoralized by the Spaniards. Within the Old World, the Moslem peoples lost their central position in the ecumene as ocean routes supplanted overland portage. Only in the Far East were the effects of the new constellation of world relationships at first unimportant.

From a Chinese viewpoint it made little difference whether foreign trade, regulated within traditional forms, passed to Moslem or European merchants' hands. As soon as European expansive energy seemed to threaten their political integrity, first Japan and then China evicted the disturbers and closed their borders against further encroachment. Yet by the middle of the nineteenth century, even this deliberate isolation could no longer be maintained; and the civilizations of the Far East—simultaneously with the primitive cultures of central Africa—began to stagger under the impact of the newly industrialized European (and extra-European) West.

The key to world history from 1500 is the growing political dominance first of western Europe, then of an enlarged European-type society planted astride the north Atlantic and extending eastward into Siberia. Yet until about 1700, the ancient landward frontiers of the Asian civilizations retained much of their old significance. Both India (from 1526) and China (by 1644) suffered yet another conquest from across these frontiers; and the Ottoman empire did not exhaust its expansive power until near the close of the seventeenth century. Only in Central America and western South America did Europeans succeed in establishing extensive land empires overseas during this period. Hence the years 1500–1700 may be regarded as transitional between the old land-centered and the new ocean-centered pattern of ecumenical relationships—a time when European enterprise had modified, but not yet upset the fourfold balance of the Old World.

The next major period, 1700–1850, saw a decisive alteration of the balance in favor of Europe, except in the Far East. Two great outliers were added to the Western world by the Petrine conversion of Russia and by the colonization of North America. Less massive offshoots of European society were simultaneously established in southernmost Africa, in the South American pampas, and in Australia. India was subjected to European rule; the Moslem Middle East escaped a similar fate only because of intra-European rivalries; and the barbarian reservoir of the Eurasian steppes lost its last shreds of military and cultural significance with the progress of Russian and Chinese conquest and colonization.

After 1850, the rapid development of mechanically powered industry enormously enhanced the political and cultural primacy of the West. At the beginning of this period, the Far Eastern citadel fell before Western gunboats; and a few of the European nations extended and consolidated colonial empires in Asia and Africa. Although European empires have decayed since 1945, and the separate nation-states of Europe have been eclipsed as centers of political power by the melding of peoples and nations occurring under the aegis of both the American and Russian governments, it remains true that, since the end of World War II, the scramble to imitate and appropriate science, technology, and other aspects of Western culture has accelerated enormously all round the world. Thus the dethronement of western Europe from its brief mastery of the globe coincided with (and was caused by) an unprecedented, rapid Westernization of all the peoples of the earth. The rise of the West seems today still far from its apogee; nor is it obvious, even in the narrower political sense, that the era of Western dominance is past. The American and Russian

outliers of European civilization remain militarily far stronger than the other states of the world, while the power of a federally reorganized western Europe is potentially superior to both and remains inferior only because of difficulties in articulating common policies among nations still clinging to the trappings of their decaying sovereignties.



From the perspective of the mid-twentieth century, the career of Western civilization since 1500 appears as a vast explosion, far greater than any comparable phenomenon of the past both in geographic range and in social depth. Incessant and accelerating self-transformation, compounded from a welter of conflicting ideas, institutions, aspirations, and inventions, has characterized modern European history; and with the recent institutionalization of deliberate innovation in the form of industrial research laboratories, universities, military general staffs, and planning commissions of every sort, an accelerating pace of technical and social change bids fair to remain a persistent feature of Western civilization.

This changeability gives the European and Western history of recent centuries both a fascinating and a confusing character. The fact that we are heirs but also prisoners of the Western past, caught in the very midst of an unpredictable and incredibly fast-moving flux, does not make it easier to discern critical landmarks, as we can, with equanimity if not without error, for ages long past and civilizations alien to our own.

... Fortunately, a noble array of historians has traversed the ground already, so that it is not difficult to divide Western history into periods, nor to characterize such periods with some degree of plausibility. A greater embarrassment arises from the fact that suitable periods of Western history do not coincide with the benchmarks of modern world history. This is not surprising, for Europe had first to reorganize itself at a new level before the effects of its increased power could show themselves significantly abroad. One should therefore expect to find a lag between the successive self-transformations of European society and their manifestations in the larger theater of world history. ...

The Great European Explorations and Their World-Wide Consequences

Europeans of the Atlantic seaboard possessed three talismans of power by 1500 which conferred upon them the command of all the oceans of the world within half a century and permitted the subjugation of the most highly developed regions of the Americas within a single generation. These were: (1) a deep-rooted pugnacity and recklessness operating by means of (2) a complex military technology, most notably in naval matters; and (3) a population inured to a variety of diseases which had long been endemic throughout the Old World ecumene.

The Bronze Age barbarian roots of European pugnacity and the medieval survival of military habits among the merchant classes of western Europe, as

well as among aristocrats and territorial lords of less exalted degree, [are worth emphasizing.] Yet only when one remembers the all but incredible courage, daring, and brutality of Cortez and Pizarro in the Americas, reflects upon the ruthless aggression of Almeida and Albuquerque in the Indian Ocean, and discovers the disdain of even so cultivated a European as Father Matteo Ricci for the civility of the Chinese, does the full force of European warlikeness, when compared with the attitudes and aptitudes of other major civilizations of the earth, become apparent. The Moslems and the Japanese could alone compare in the honor they paid to the military virtues. But Moslem merchants usually cringed before the violence held in high repute by their rulers and seldom dared or perhaps cared to emulate it. Hence Moslem commercial enterprise lacked the cutting edge of naked, well-organized, large-scale force which constituted the chief stock-in-trade of European overseas merchants in the sixteenth century. The Japanese could, indeed, match broadswords with any European; but the chivalric stylization of their warfare, together with their narrowly restricted supply of iron, meant that neither *samurai* nor a sea pirate could reply in kind to a European broadside.

Supremacy at sea gave a vastly enlarged scope to European warlikeness after 1500. But Europe's maritime superiority was itself the product of a deliberate combination of science and practice, beginning in the commercial cities of Italy and coming to fruition in Portugal through the efforts of Prince Henry the Navigator and his successors. With the introduction of the compass (thirteenth century), navigation beyond sight of land had become a regular practice in the Mediterranean; and the navigators' charts, or *portolans*, needed for such voyaging showed coasts, harbors, landmarks, and compass bearings between major ports. Although they were drawn freehand, without any definite mathematical projection, *portolans* nevertheless maintained fairly accurate scales of distances. But similar mapping could be applied to the larger distances of Atlantic navigation only if means could be found to locate key points along the coast accurately. To solve this problem, Prince Henry brought to Portugal some of the best mathematicians and astronomers of Europe, who constructed simple astronomical instruments and trigonometrical tables by which ship captains could measure the latitude of newly discovered places along the African coast. The calculation of longitude was more difficult; and, until a satisfactory marine chronometer was invented in the eighteenth century, longitude could be approximated only by dead reckoning. Nevertheless, the new methods worked out at Prince Henry's court allowed the Portuguese to make usable charts of the Atlantic coasts. Such charts gave Portuguese sea captains courage to sail beyond sight of land for weeks and presently for months, confident of being able to steer their ships to within a few miles of the desired landfall.

The Portuguese court also accumulated systematic information about oceanic winds and currents; but this data was kept secret as a matter of high policy, so that modern scholars are uncertain how much the early Portuguese navigators knew. At the same time, Portuguese naval experts attacked the problem of improving ship construction. They proceeded by rule of thumb; but deliberate experiment, systematically pursued, rapidly increased the seaworthiness, maneuverability, and speed of Portuguese and presently (since improvements in

naval architecture could not be kept secret) of other European ships. The most important changes were: a reduction of hull width in proportion to length; the introduction of multiple masts (usually three or four); and the substitution of several smaller, more manageable sails for the single sail per mast from which the evolution started. These innovations allowed a crew to trim the sails to suit varying conditions of wind and sea, thus greatly facilitating steering and protecting the vessel from disaster in sudden gales.

With these improvements, larger ships could be built; and increasing size and sturdiness of construction made it possible to transform seagoing vessels into gun platforms for heavy cannon. Thus by 1509, when the Portuguese fought the decisive battle for control of the Arabian Sea off the Indian port of Diu, their ships could deliver a heavy broadside at a range their Moslem enemies could not begin to match. Under such circumstances, the superior numbers of the opposing fleet simply provided the Portuguese with additional targets for their gunnery. The old tactics of sea fighting—ramming, grappling, and boarding—were almost useless against cannon fire effective at as much as 200 yards distance.

The third weapon in the European armory—disease—was quite as important as stark pugnacity and weight of metal. Endemic European diseases like smallpox and measles became lethal epidemics among Amerindian populations, who had no inherited or acquired immunities to such infections. Literally millions died of these and other European diseases; and the smallpox epidemic raging in Tenochtitlan when Cortez and his men were expelled from the citadel in 1520 had far more to do with the collapse of Aztec power than merely military operations. The Inca empire, too, may have been ravaged and weakened by a similar epidemic before Pizarro ever reached Peru.

On the other hand, diseases like yellow fever and malaria took a heavy toll of Europeans in Africa and India. But climatic conditions generally prevented new tropical diseases from penetrating Europe itself in any very serious fashion. Those which could flourish in temperate climates, like typhus, cholera, and bubonic plague, had long been known throughout the ecumene; and European populations had presumably acquired some degree of resistance to them. Certainly the new frequency of sea contact with distant regions had important medical consequences for Europeans, as the plagues for which Lisbon and London became famous prove. But gradually the infections which in earlier centuries had appeared sporadically as epidemics became merely endemic, as the exposed populations developed a satisfactory level of resistance. Before 1700, European populations had therefore successfully absorbed the shocks that came with the intensified circulation of diseases initiated by their own sea voyaging. Epidemics consequently ceased to be demographically significant. The result was that from about 1650 (or before), population growth in Europe assumed a new velocity. Moreover, so far as imperfect data allow one to judge, between 1550 and 1650 population also began to spurt upward in China, India, and the Middle East. Such an acceleration of population growth within each of the great civilizations of the Old World can scarcely be a mere coincidence. Presumably the same ecological processes worked themselves out in all parts of the ecumene, as age-old epidemic checks upon population faded into merely endemic attrition.

The formidable combination of European warlikeness, naval technique, and comparatively high levels of resistance to disease transformed the cultural balance of the world within an amazingly brief period of time. Columbus linked the Americas with Europe in 1492; and the Spaniards proceeded to explore, conquer, and colonize the New World with extraordinary energy, utter ruthlessness, and an intense missionary idealism. Cortez destroyed the Aztec state in 1519–21; Pizarro became master of the Inca empire between 1531 and 1535. Within the following generation, less famous but no less hardy conquistadores founded Spanish settlements along the coasts of Chile and Argentina, penetrated the highlands of Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, and Central America, and explored the Amazon basin and the southern United States. As early as 1571, Spanish power leaped across the Pacific to the Philippines, where it collided with the sea empire which their Iberian neighbors, the Portuguese, had meanwhile flung around Africa and across the southern seas of the Eastern Hemisphere.

Portuguese expansion into the Indian Ocean proceeded with even greater rapidity. Exactly a decade elapsed between the completion of Vasco da Gama's first voyage to India (1497–99) and the decisive Portuguese naval victory off Diu (1509). The Portuguese quickly exploited this success by capturing Goa (1510) and Malacca (1511), which together with Ormuz on the Persian Gulf (occupied permanently from 1515) gave them the necessary bases from which to dominate the trade of the entire Indian Ocean. Nor did they rest content with these successes. Portuguese ships followed the precious spices to their farthest source in the Moluccas without delay (1511–12); and a Portuguese merchant explorer traveling on a Malay vessel visited Canton as early as 1513–14. By 1557, a permanent Portuguese settlement was founded at Macao on the south China coast; and trade and missionary activity in Japan started in the 1540's. On the other side of the world, the Portuguese discovered Brazil in 1500 and began to settle the country after 1530. Coastal stations in both west and east Africa, established between 1471 and 1507, completed the chain of ports of call which held the Portuguese empire together.

No other European nations approached the early success of Spain and Portugal overseas. Nevertheless, the two Iberian nations did not long enjoy undisturbed the new wealth their enterprise had won. From the beginning, the Spaniards found it difficult to protect their shipping against French and Portuguese sea raiders. English pirates offered an additional and formidable threat after 1568, when the first open clash between English interlopers and the Spanish authorities in the Caribbean took place. Between 1516 and 1568 the other great maritime people of the age, the Dutch, were subjects of the same Hapsburg monarchs who ruled in Spain and, consequently, enjoyed a favored status as middlemen between Spanish and north European ports. Initially, therefore, Dutch shipping had no incentive to harass Iberian sea power.

This naval balance shifted sharply in the second half of the sixteenth century, when the Dutch revolt against Spain (1568), followed by the English victory over the Spanish armada (1588), signalized the waning of Iberian sea power before that of the northern European nations. Harassment of Dutch ships in Spanish ports simply accelerated the shift; for the Dutch responded by

despatching their vessels directly to the Orient (1594), and the English soon followed suit. Thereafter, Dutch naval and commercial power rapidly supplanted that of Portugal in the southern seas. The establishment of a base in Java (1618), the capture of Malacca from the Portuguese (1641), and the seizure of the most important trading posts of Ceylon (by 1644) secured Dutch hegemony in the Indian Ocean; and during the same decades, English traders gained a foothold in western India. Simultaneously, English (1607), French (1608), and Dutch (1613) colonization of mainland North America, and the seizure of most of the smaller Caribbean islands by the same three nations, infringed upon Spanish claims to monopoly in the New World, but failed to dislodge Spanish power from any important area where it was already established.



The truly extraordinary *élan* of the first Iberian conquests and the no less remarkable missionary enterprise that followed closely in its wake surely mark a new era in the history of the human community. Yet older landmarks of that history did not crumble all at once. Movement from the Eurasian steppes continued to make political history—for example, the Uzbek conquest of Transoxiana (1507–12) with its sequel, the Mogul conquest of India (1526–1688); and the Manchu conquest of China (1621–83).

Chinese civilization was indeed only slightly affected by the new regime of the seas; and Moslem expansion, which had been a dominating feature of world history during the centuries before 1500, did not cease or even slacken very noticeably until the late seventeenth century. Through their conquest of the high seas, western Europeans did indeed outflank the Moslem world in India and southeast Asia, while Russian penetration of Siberian forests soon outflanked the Moslem lands on the north also. Yet these probing extensions of European (or para-European) power remained tenuous and comparatively weak in the seventeenth century. Far from being crushed in the jaws of a vast European pincer, the Moslems continued to win important victories and to penetrate new territories in southeast Europe, India, Africa, and southeast Asia. Only in the western and central steppe did Islam suffer significant territorial setbacks before 1700.

Thus only two large areas of the world were fundamentally transformed during the first two centuries of European overseas expansion: the regions of Amerindian high culture and western Europe itself. European naval enterprise certainly widened the range and increased the intimacy of contacts among the various peoples of the ecumene and brought new peoples into touch with the disruptive social influences of high civilization. Yet the Chinese, Moslem, and Hindu worlds were not yet really deflected from their earlier paths of development; and substantial portions of the land surface of the globe—Australia and Oceania, the rain forests of South America, and most of North America and northeastern Asia—remained almost unaffected by Europe's achievement.

Nevertheless, a new dimension had been added to world history. An ocean frontier, where European seamen and soldiers, merchants, missionaries, and settlers came into contact with the various peoples of the world, civilized and uncivilized, began to challenge the ancient pre-eminence of the Eurasian

land frontier, where steppe nomads had for centuries probed, tested, and disturbed civilized agricultural populations. Very ancient social gradients began to shift when the coasts of Europe, Asia, and America became the scene of more and more important social interactions and innovation. Diseases, gold and silver, and certain valuable crops were the first items to flow freely through the new transoceanic channels of communication. Each of these had important and far-reaching consequences for Asians as well as for Europeans and Amerindians. But prior to 1700, only a few isolated borrowings of more recondite techniques or ideas passed through the sea lanes that now connected the four great civilizations of the Old World. In such exchanges, Europe was more often the receiver than the giver, for its people were inspired by a lively curiosity, insatiable greed, and a reckless spirit of adventure that contrasted sharply with the smug conservatism of Chinese, Moslem, and Hindu cultural leaders.

Partly by reason of the stimuli that flowed into Europe from overseas, but primarily because of internal tensions arising from its own heterogeneous cultural inheritance, Europe entered upon a veritable social explosion in the period 1500-1650—an experience painful in itself but which nonetheless raised European power to a new level of effectiveness and for the first time gave Europeans a clear margin of superiority over the other great civilizations of the world. . . .

Conclusion

Between 1500 and 1700, the Eurasian ecumene expanded to include parts of the Americas, much of sub-Saharan Africa, and all of northern Asia. Moreover, within the Old World itself, western Europe began to forge ahead of all rivals as the most active center of geographical expansion and of cultural innovation. Indeed, Europe's self-revolution transformed the medieval frame of Western civilization into a new and vastly more powerful organization of society. Yet the Moslem, Hindu, and Chinese lands were not yet seriously affected by the new energies emanating from Europe. Until after 1700, the history of these regions continued to turn around old traditions and familiar problems.

Most of the rest of the world, lacking the massive self-sufficiency of Moslem, Hindu, and Chinese civilization, was more acutely affected by contact with Europeans. In the New World, these contacts first decapitated and then decimated the Amerindian societies; but in other regions, where local powers of resistance were greater, a strikingly consistent pattern of reaction manifested itself. In such diverse areas as Japan, Burma, Siam, Russia, and parts of Africa, an initial interest in and occasional eagerness to accept European techniques, ideas, religion, or fashions of dress was supplanted in the course of the seventeenth century by a policy of withdrawal and deliberate insulation from European pressures. The Hindu revival in India and the reform of Lamaism in Tibet and Mongolia manifested a similar spirit; for both served to protect local cultural values against alien pressures, though in these cases the pressures were primarily Moslem and Chinese rather than European.

A few fringe areas of the earth still remained unaffected by the disturbing forces of civilization. But by 1700 the only large habitable regions remaining outside the ecumene were Australia, the Amazon rain forest, and northwestern North America; and even these latter two had largely felt tremors of social disturbance generated by the approaching onset of civilization.

At no previous time in world history had the pace of social transformation been so rapid. The new density and intimacy of contacts across the oceans of the earth assured a continuance of cross-stimulation among the major cultures of mankind. The efforts to restrict foreign contacts and to withdraw from disturbing relationships with outsiders—especially with the restless and ruthless Westerners—were doomed to ultimate failure by the fact that successive self-transformations of western European civilization, and especially of Western technology, rapidly increased the pressures Westerners were able to bring against the other peoples of the earth. Indeed, world history since 1500 may be thought of as a race between the West's growing power to molest the rest of the world and the increasingly desperate efforts of other peoples to stave Westerners off, either by clinging more strenuously than before to their peculiar cultural inheritance or, when that failed, by appropriating aspects of Western civilization—especially technology—in the hope of thereby finding means to preserve their local autonomy.



The World and the West: The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire

Conquest

The word *colonialism* is often a misnomer, used for any form of domination of one society over another. The original Greek meaning of a colony implied an outward migration from a mother city or metropolis to settle in a new place. True colonization in this original sense is represented today by examples such as the United States and Canada, where culture change took place but was mainly carried by a blanket immigration of Europeans who brought their culture with them. The Native Americans were pushed aside to become a small minority, sometimes culturally assimilated, sometimes not.

Another variety of so-called colonialism is demographically the reverse of true colonization. It is more accurately labeled territorial empire, where Europeans conquered a territory overseas but sent a negligible number of settlers beyond the administrative and military personnel required to control it. Examples of this type would be British rule in India and Nigeria.

A third, mixed case, midway between territorial empire and true colonization, also sometimes occurred. In these instances, European settlers were a substantial minority, living alongside other cultural communities of native inhabitants. The result is often called a plural society. A rough line between plural societies and true empires can be drawn when the settler community reaches more than about 5 percent of the total population. The important instances of plural societies in the past century or so are South Africa, Algeria, Israel, some Latin American countries, such as Peru or Guatemala, and many parts of the former Soviet Union.

The Pattern of Empire

The conventional history of European empire building not only lumps dissimilar experiences under the rubric of colonialism, but it often, and too readily, accepts convenient fictions, concocted by long-dead publicists, historians, and government officials, in place of reality. Historians in recent decades have made great progress in correcting this European bias, but much remains to be done.

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One tendency of past historiography, not yet altogether corrected, is the tendency to read backward from the clear pattern of European dominance in the recent past, assuming that it was the case in earlier periods as well. Territorial empire and large-scale true colonization have origins that can be traced to these earlier times, but they flourished only in the period since about 1800, or even later.

In earlier centuries, the most important modes of culture contact were commercial, mediated by trade diasporas or the settlement of merchants along a trade route to facilitate commerce. These commercial settlers came only in small numbers but were often extremely important in the process of culture change. They were, in a sense, professional cross-cultural brokers, facilitating trade between the home region and its commercial outposts. Examples can be found in the earliest urban societies of Mesopotamia and in the pre-Columbian Americas.

Many early trade diasporas were comparatively peaceful, living on sufferance with the permission, often the good will as well, of the rulers of the territory where they settled. Dating back to the medieval Mediterranean, European trade diasporas often took a more violent form, where Genoese and Venetian not only settled in alien trading towns but seized the towns themselves and used them as bases for intercity competition in warfare as well as commerce. They rarely aspired to territorial control beyond those strong points, which is why militarized trade diasporas of this type are often called trading-post empires.

Between about 1425 and 1525, when the remnants of Magellan's fleet returned to Spain, European mariners revolutionized human ability to travel by sea and return. The achievement depended on a combination of improved vessels and navigational techniques with increased geographic knowledge, including the outlines of the world wind system. Before this time in world history, regular and routine navigation had been limited to coastal voyages and to some travel on inland seas such as the Mediterranean, though offshore voyages were common in the monsoon belt that stretched east and west from Indonesia to Africa and north through the South China Sea to Japan. After the 1520s, however, European mariners could sail to any coast in the world, though at considerable cost and danger at first.

This maritime revolution gave Europeans their first significant military advantage. They had, as yet, no technical advantage in the Mediterranean, where during the 1500s the Ottoman Turks were at least their equal. Overseas it was different. Maritime technology often made Europeans locally supreme in distant seas, where opposing ships mounting effective artillery were virtually unknown. Seapower also had the strategic advantage of mobility to concentrate the available force on a single objective.

It was the mobility of seapower that made it possible for Europeans to build trading-post empires at a time when they were still inferior militarily on land. In the early 1500s, when the Portuguese first began to send naval expeditions east of the Gape of Good Hope, they often chose as their bases islands such as Goa in western India, with secondary centers at Mozambique in East Africa, Melaka in Malaya, and Macau in south China. In the early 1600s, the

Dutch established a similar network based on Batavia (now Jakarta) on Java, with connections westward to Ceylon and the east coast of India and north to an island in Nagasaki harbor in Japan. The English shortly entered the picture at Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta in India. France and other European maritime states followed with their own sets of competing trading posts. These trade enclaves were no threat to major Asian powers, but they were the entering wedge from which territorial empires were to spread in later centuries.

Overland trading-post empires soon began to appear as well. In the 1600s, French fur traders fanned out to the west of the lower St. Lawrence River valley by way of the Great Lakes. English fur traders reached south from Hudson Bay. Neither had any interest in controlling territory or ruling over the Native American populations; they only wanted a secure base for trade and protection from rival European traders. In Asia at the same period, fur traders from Muscovy were extending their trading-post empire eastward across Siberia to the Pacific. In time, these overland trading-post empires were to form the background for territorial empire and true colonization in both North America and Siberia.

Empire in the Americas

In the Americas, and in the Americas alone, European territorial empires date from the 1500s. Here, the European maritime advantage intersected with a particular American vulnerability. The ancestors of the American Indians had crossed the land bridge from Asia during the last Ice Age, up to about 10,000 years ago. Their passage occurred before the agricultural revolution, hence before the development of diseases like smallpox, which grew out of the interaction of humans and their domestic animals. Other serious diseases, such as falciparum malaria, evolved in tropical Africa only after agriculture had made dense human communities possible. Those postagricultural human pathogens came too late to be carried to the Americas by the original immigrants, and the Americas, in isolation, developed no diseases of equivalent seriousness. Meanwhile, the intensity of intercommunication across the Afro-Eurasian land mass made it possible for diseases originating at any point to spread much more widely. Elements of a common disease pool, though with local variations, existed over most of these continents.

Any disease environment tends to build up a pattern of countervailing immunities in the children who grow up there. Victims of most diseases, if they survive, emerge with a degree of protection against further attack. Measles and other so-called childhood diseases mainly affect the young because most people are infected in childhood and are relatively immune later in life. Some diseases are also benign in childhood but more serious for adults. Yellow fever, for example, is often so mild in children that it has no clinical symptoms, yet victims still acquire a lifelong immunity, whereas among adults, yellow fever is often fatal to more than half of its victims.

In the early 1500s, diseases from Afro-Eurasia were devastating for non-immune American populations. Smallpox alone often swept away more than a quarter of the population, leaving the survivors incapable of an adequate military defense. As a result, major American empires such as those of the Aztecs and Incas were unable to withstand Spanish attack. The Portuguese also

easily established bases here and there along the Brazilian coast. Even after the initial crisis, the disease impact lasted for decades as one unfamiliar disease followed another. Some of the new diseases, such as smallpox, were common to Africa and Europe alike, but the most commonly fatal of tropical diseases, yellow fever and falciparum malaria, were virtually unknown in Europe, though Europeans accidentally introduced them to the Americas through the slave trade. Amerindian populations declined steeply for about a century and a half after contact, before they stabilized and began slowly to grow again. . . .

Migration and Demographic Transitions

The mass emigration of Europeans is characteristic of the industrial age, beginning in the 1800s, although in any decade before the 1840s more Africans than Europeans crossed the Atlantic. Even though earlier European governments tended to think their best prospects overseas were trading-post empires, small true colonies were an occasional by-product. The Azores, in the mid-Atlantic at the same latitude as Portugal itself, were an uninhabited chain of islands discovered by chance. In the next century, after 1470, they were gradually settled by mainland Portuguese. By the mid-1500s they had become part of Portugal, producing the same wine, wheat, and cattle as peninsular Portugal. The Canaries and Madeira, closer to the African coast, went through phases of trading-post and plantation developments, but they too ultimately became true colonies of Spain or Portugal.

Brazil began as an adjunct to the Portuguese trading-post empire in the Indian Ocean. Ships bound for India had to pass close by. Though they did not often stop off, Brazil in unfriendly hands would have been a potential threat to the safe passage to India. When, by the 1540s, the French and some others became active as dye-wood traders on the Brazilian coast, the Portuguese crown decided to plant a colony there, mainly as the self-supporting nucleus for a garrison to protect a crucial strategic position.

The original expedition of 1549 shows the Portuguese intentions. It included 320 people in the pay of the crown, 400 convicts to supply labor, and about 300 assorted priests and free men as colonists and missionaries. Up to about 1570, European colonists were a majority, but, as the influx of African and Amerindian slaves shifted the balance, northeast Brazil became a plantation colony with European managers and an African and Amerindian working class. It was only in the 1800s that a significant amount of true colonization was again attempted, this time mainly in central and southern Brazil.

In the 1600s, the French and the Dutch pursued a similar strategy of commercial settlements. Some of their Caribbean posts followed the Brazilian precedent and in time became plantation colonies with a majority population from Africa, but others took another direction and became true colonies, more by population growth than by continuous immigration from Europe. The Dutch settlement at the Gape of Good Hope and the French settlement around the mouth of the Saint Lawrence can serve as examples. Both of these settlements were founded in the mid-1600s to protect commerce, but with enough European farmers to produce a local supply of food and to provide local manpower for defense.

New France along the Saint Lawrence was established to serve the fur trade, which required only a few thousand settlers, and that was all that France sent out. During the whole period from its foundation to the conquest by England in 1763, no more than 10,000 immigrants came from France, and some authorities think the number may have been closer to 4,000. Yet the net natural increase of less than 10,000 French settlers led, with only small later additions from Europe, to a French Canadian population of more than five million in North America today.

The purpose of the Dutch settlements at the Cape was similar—to serve as a way station for the Dutch East India Company's trade to Indonesia and India and to provide a garrison to protect the harbor at Table Bay. For several decades after its founding in 1652, Cape Town was a military post and little more. But then, in 1679, the Company decided to increase the number of settlers in order to make the post more nearly self-supporting. The settlers were not on the Company payroll, but they might be called out for militia duty. Meanwhile, they were encouraged to produce food for the garrison and for sale to passing ships. For a time, the Company subsidized the immigration of German, Dutch, and French Protestants. In all, it sent out some 1,630 people, but in 1707, it ended assisted immigration, and immigration died to a trickle. This European immigration of two thousand or so before 1710 nevertheless grew by natural increase into a white Afrikaans-speaking South African population, which, numbered about three and a half million by the early 1900s.

At the Cape of Good Hope, however, the result was not a true colony on the order of Quebec. The local Khoisan population survived and mixed with European settlers and with slaves from many shores of the Indian Ocean. The result, is the present Cape Colored community, recently numbering more than three million people. The Cape Province thus became a plural Society, but a plural society that absorbed many different cultures. Not only did the small nucleus of European settlers expand through population growth, but their culture became an important ingredient in the culture of the Cape Colored majority. The vast majority of Cape Colored people, for example, speak Afrikaans as their home language.

The European settlements at the Cape and in Quebec illustrate two important differences from other trading-post empires. In both, the settlers were not an all-male military force but included women. They soon developed a normal sex ratio, which led to a natural increase among the European community. European populations in the humid tropics rarely attained a net natural increase, even after many decades, partly for lack of women and partly for lack of immunity to tropical disease. The disease environments of Canada and the Cape of Good Hope, however, were as favorable to European population growth as that of Europe itself, perhaps more so, and settler communities in North America and South Africa soon attained a higher rate of net natural increase than the European populations at home.

The demographic transitions in Spanish America were similar but more complex. By the 1570s, Mexico and Peru had overcome the anarchy of the conquest period to become the first territorial empires in the European world; yet two centuries later, they had become a complex network of plural societies,

with little net demographic input from Europe. The Spanish empire in the Americas had begun, not on the initiative of the Spanish government but on that of the conquerors themselves, and they numbered in the low thousands. Their successors were few as well—soldiers, administrators, missionaries, and later on, mine and ranch managers. Spanish America, at any date in the 1500s, was a territorial empire controlled by a tiny European minority.

After that time, the flow of net Spanish immigration to the Americas is difficult to estimate. Some authorities give the figure of 150,000 legal emigrants crossing from Spain to the Americas over the whole period from 1509 to 1740. Others suggest a half million up to 1650 only. These estimates are uncertain because they seldom take account of a large but unspecified number of officials, merchants, and soldiers who returned to Spain after a tour of duty in the Americas. In addition, the migratory flow in the 1500s was largely male—less than 15 percent female before 1550, less than 35 percent female by the end of the century. This suggests that the second generation of Spanish-derived population would be *mestizos*, Spanish only on the father's side.

These patterns of disease, immigration, and reproduction formed the historical demography of Spanish America through the colonial period. No matter what the net migration from Europe, once the sex ratio of overseas Europeans reached parity among American-born Spaniards, the overseas European population rose by natural increase, just as it did at the Gape of Good Hope or in Quebec. So too did the mestizo populations. With time, the Native American decline slowed and stopped, and recovery began, but the timing was not uniform everywhere. Those Amerindian populations that first encountered the alien diseases had begun a strong recovery before the disease crisis reached more isolated regions. . . .

. . . British North America passed through another kind of demographic transition during the 1600s and 1700s. The overseas-European population increased dramatically, as it did elsewhere outside tropical lowlands. The Indians that survived the disease crisis, however, were too few to form a working class, as they had in Spanish America. For the most part, the working class in the northern colonies was made up of indentured European servants and their descendants, a few African slaves, some convicts, and some free settlers.

The English, unlike the other colonial powers, sometimes founded true colonies in North America by intent. In the 1600s, it was a common opinion that England was overpopulated, and this opinion lay behind the colonization of Ireland as well. Some settlements were designed to reproduce the society of the mother country, but not all. New York was partly designed to anchor the fur trade through Albany to the west, just as Quebec was to anchor the fur trade of the Saint Lawrence. The South Carolina low country of the early 1700s was more a plantation colony on the West Indian model than it was a colony of settlement.

Nevertheless, more European migrants went to North America in the colonial period than to all other destinations, and their population growth after arrival was even more important. Recent guesses based on spotty immigration figures put the number of arrivals in the mainland British colonies at 360,000 to 720,000, depending on the mode of estimation. Whatever the

actual number within that range, the rate of population growth was so high that this small input produced an overseas European population of more than three million by 1790.

Even so, the volume of the European immigration was insignificant compared to the flow that would follow in the late 1800s. Imprecise estimates of all European movement overseas by 1790 indicate around a million and a half—far fewer than the total of around eight million Africans landed in the Americas before 1800, and insignificant compared to the European emigration overseas in an equivalent time period from 1800 to 1990, sometimes set at sixty million.

Emergence of Territorial Empire

Territorial empire, like the massive European migrations overseas, belongs to the industrial age. Before about 1750, significant European control over territorial empires was still confined to the Americas, but even then the area governed was a shadow of what text-book maps show as Spanish and Portuguese America. The maps show European claims to sovereignty, whereas real government administration as of 1800 covered only the highlands from central Mexico to central Chile, most Caribbean islands, and much of coastal Brazil. Otherwise, the Europeans actually controlled only enclaves within territory they claimed but did not try to govern. Such enclaves to the north of central Mexico included scattered mining centers, trading towns such as Santa Fe, and bits of California surrounding mission stations. Elsewhere in North America, the pattern was similar. Real control extended over the coastal settlement areas from Quebec to Georgia, but beyond the Appalachians the dominant pattern was that of an overland trading-post empire. By 1800, not a quarter of the territory of the Americas was actually governed by Europeans.

North of the Black Sea and south of Muscovy, Europe had another frontier of expanding control to the east. At the beginning of the 1600s, this region had been mainly controlled by Tatar nomads left over from Mongol expansion of the 1200s and later, now contested by sedentary states on the borders—Muscovy to the north, Poland and Lithuania to the west, the Hapsburg domains to the southwest, and the Ottoman Empire to the south. The political and military contest between these sedentary states was more fluid than similar frontier struggles in western Europe. Ultimate political control of bureaucratic structures was less secure than in western Europe; populations were both sparser and more mobile. Over the period from 1600 to about 1800, however, the drift of power was away from the Tatars and Ottomans and in favor of the Russian Empire, and the military and political advance was accompanied by a massive settlement of what was to be Ukraine and southern Russia. It was the beginning of Russian colonization that would ultimately extend beyond the Urals as well.

Before 1800, however, the Russian presence in Siberia took the form of a trading-post empire that stretched eastward to Alaska. The bare beginning of true colonization centered in a narrow strip of land along the line of the later trans-Siberian railroad. In fact, the Russians had begun moving into that corridor a little before 1800, but the main Russian occupation came afterward,

along with the Russian acquisition of territorial empire in the Caucasus and Central Asia. In this part of Eurasia, the pattern was that of incipient territorial empires in the south and overland trading-post empires in the north, with enclaves of true colonization scattered in both regions. The whole strategy of European expansion here was under the strong influence of older traditions of conflict between nomadic and sedentary peoples.

Along the southern and eastern coasts of Asia, the pattern of European empire was still that of the trading enclaves, though some territorial control was beginning here and there. In the Philippines, Spain had extended the patterns of control originating in Spanish America. Its bureaucratic administrative structure theoretically covered all the islands, but underneath, strong elements of control remained in local hands, Spanish and Filipino alike. The government in Manila did not even try to administer much, perhaps most, of the Philippine territory it claimed.

The most important European territorial empires in Asia were those ruled by the British and the Dutch East India Companies. They were chartered trading companies, originally intended to supervise trading-post empires. By 1800, the Dutch Company had considerable power over parts of the Indonesian archipelago, but it was mainly exercised for commercial advantage rather than tax revenue, much less day-to-day government administration. The Company's rule over territory, weak as it was, was confined to the western three-quarters of the island of Java. Otherwise it had genuine control over a number of trading-post towns and some islands of particular importance for the spice trade, like the Malukus.

In India as of 1800, the British East India Company was the dominant authority over the provinces of Bengal and Bihar, but the nature of that authority indicates the transitional stage between trading-post empire and real territorial control. Since the 1740s, European powers, especially Britain and France, had begun to be more than simple traders, even armed traders, and they transferred their European rivalry into Indian politics. The Mughal Empire, which had ruled north India through most of the 1500s and 1600s, was no longer a strong central authority except in name. Provincial rulers held the real power, though they might rule in the Mughal name. This fluid situation opened the possibility for the European companies to recruit Indian soldiers to oppose one another and to use their military power to participate actively in an Indian state system.

At first, the Europeans sought only to influence Indian rulers, but that influence gradually increased to the point that they were *de facto* rulers. In 1772, the British East India Company became, in theory, a corporate official of the Mughal empire for the provinces of Bengal and Bihar, in the hinterland of Calcutta. It assumed the post of revenue collector, or *diwan*, for those provinces but kept the revenue for itself instead of passing it on to the Mughal capital in Delhi. The actual tax collectors were Indian, as they had always been, but they now worked under supervision of British Company officials. Tax collection led the Company on to take over other administrative and judicial powers, at least over the top level of government. Still later, it began the indirect supervision of Indian "native states," which would agree to accept the authority of a

British "resident," in effect a kind of ambassador whose advice the ruler was bound to accept in crucial matters.

Beginning with these convenient fictions, the authority of the British company increased until by 1805, it was the most powerful single territorial power in India. By the 1840s, the British East India Company was so powerful that its word could often be law even within most Indian states still not formally annexed to British India. Even so, the authority of the Company and of Crown officials above it was imbedded in a congeries of Mughal institutions, which were only gradually Westernized in the course of the 1800s.

The Changing Reality of Imperial Power

The powers of governments have varied over time, although the early industrial age made available a new technology of government, which, with local modification, has become worldwide. In the agricultural age government administration differed greatly from one culture to another. Feudal Europe was very different from Song China. Many historical atlases show a map of "Charlemagne's Empire," in a solid color and stretching over much of north-west Europe from a capital at Aachen. Charlemagne's overrule may have been recognized in some sense over this vast territory, but the levels of literacy and governmental efficiency in Europe at that time were so low that orders could not have been reliably transmitted everywhere, much less obeyed. It is doubtful whether a substantial minority of the population were conscious that they were part of an empire by any name.

Maps of later periods show such events as the transfer of Alsace and Lorraine from France to Germany in 1871. The meaning in that case was far more real. Taxes went to a new destination. Orders given were normally carried out; police and judicial authorities exercised control within a central framework of authority. Public education by that time was nearly universal, and changing the language of education from French to German meant something important, even though the people of Alsace continued to speak their own home language, which was neither. Hardly anyone, however ill-educated, could fail to be aware of the change. European governments in the early industrial age controlled a largely literate population through an increasingly efficient public administration, which controlled wide areas of public service. No preindustrial government had such extensive power to influence its subjects in so many aspects of their lives.

European empires overseas had increasing administrative power as well, but an enormous gap could sometimes exist between their claims to authority and the reality of power they were capable of exercising. The European use of grandiose titles to empire goes back at least to the early 1500s, when Manoel I of Portugal claimed the title "Lord of the Conquest, Navigation, and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia, and India." At the time, very few people in these territories had even heard of Portugal, but the claim is not as foolish as it sounds. In the European context of that time, it was merely the assertion of a Portuguese monopoly over Asian trade, to the exclusion of other Europeans, and a warning that other Europeans who attempted to conquer Asian or African territory could count on Portuguese opposition.

At other times, Europeans underplayed rather than overplayed the reality of their power. In 1882, a British army occupied Egypt, but the European diplomatic setting of the time made it inconvenient for Britain either to annex Egypt or to withdraw. As a way out, the British Foreign Office established its control over major operations of the Egyptian government and ruled Egypt in fact for decades. British overrule began in 1882, and a measure of control over Egyptian foreign policy lasted until 1952, but Egypt was a legal part of the British Empire only from 1914 to 1922. Everybody important knew what was going on, but it was a convenient fiction to call the British governor "consul general" rather than governor, and to rule the protectorate through the Foreign Office rather than the Colonial Office.

Openly disguised control of this kind was common in the age of empire. The map was dotted with *Schutzgebieten*, protectorates, overseas provinces, Socialist Soviet Republics, African Homelands, and other disguised forms of territorial empire. In most cases, the disguise was merely a legal fiction for the sake of public relations, not a serious effort to fool either the conquered people or the world at large.

The true degree of outside control, nevertheless, is sometimes hard to ascertain. It was theoretically possible at the height of European empire to set up a fully bureaucratic imperial administration, with the apparatus of the modern state at its command and with little or no participation on the part of the local population. But this kind of imperial government was rare outside of plural societies such as Algeria or South Africa, where a local population of overseas Europeans was available as administrators. Elsewhere, the vast majority of police, clerical workers, and low-level administrators were recruited locally. Sometimes high-level administrators were local as well, such as the rajas at the head of Native States in India.

The proportion of European administrators to population could vary greatly, but even in the most heavily administered colonies they were comparatively few. The Belgian Congo was tightly ruled, but it had only about one European administrator for 1,500 subjects. In other African territories, where the Europeans made a conscious decision to administer through existing authorities, the ratio might run as high as one to 50,000 or even more.

It was one question to decide how much authority to delegate to local subordinates, a second to decide how much authority to exercise at all. At one end of the spectrum, a European power might claim sovereignty over a territory in order to warn off European rivals but not attempt to rule over it. Actual influence might be limited to threats or an occasional punitive expedition. The Spanish and Portuguese claim to share sovereignty over the Americas in the colonial period was largely of this sort, and well into the twentieth century, Latin American republics left much of the Amazon basin and some of the Pacific coastal plain unadministered. Neither the Australians nor the Dutch attempted to administer all the interior of New Guinea until well after the Second World War. Unless the potential subjects had valuable resources such as minerals or oil, it was sometimes cheaper and easier to let them go their own way.

Another possibility was to divide authority into a European sphere and a local sphere. Europeans often preferred to take over foreign affairs, the military,

revenue collection, or posts and telegraphs, which seemed to affect their interests, leaving other matters to the local authorities, as the British did in Egypt. In other places, like parts of China in the late 1800s or the Persian Gulf sheikdoms in the early twentieth century, it is unclear whether Europeans were ruling at all or simply giving advice with a certain weight of power behind it.

A similar problem existed even with territories that were formally under European rule. Precolonial authorities could be left to rule their territory with the advice of European officials. Sometimes the advice was perfunctory, but at other times it was so detailed and precise that the advisers became the real rulers. The reality of imperial rule was therefore highly variable from time to time and place to place even within a single colonial empire. Published maps colored appropriately to show French, British, or Portuguese territory merely showed claims to legal sovereignty, not the reality of power exercised on the ground.

Afterword

The rise of the West to a position of dominance is one of the most important developments in world history in recent centuries. Many have dealt with it in some central framework, whether that of European history, alone, that of economic history, or that of a world system. Everyone writing about the world beyond Europe has had to take the rise of the West into account, consciously or unconsciously.

For the world outside the West, the central fact in this period is the challenge of the West and the responses to it, and many historians have dealt with this subject in different ways. These essays represent a particular approach, with an emphasis on the non-Western responses seen through case studies of particular problems, rather than through broad themes and overall generalizations. The choice of cases may appear idiosyncratic, but it was not random. They were chosen in an effort to look at a wide variety of responses within a brief scope. The sharp shift in subject matter from a discussion of administrative decisions and their outcomes in Southeast Asia to the affairs of Maya peasants in Yucatan was intentional. Both views represent only a part of the whole reality, but together they represent part of the variety of what actually took place. The essays seek to incorporate the perspective of world history, not by telling all the important things that happened anywhere—a clear impossibility—but by telling about a selection of different things that happened in different places within the framework of different human societies.

The essays also incorporate a strand of comparative history, with a particular attitude about which comparisons are valuable. Some compare situations that are similar; others look for common threads, in dissimilar circumstance. Both approaches have their uses. The comparison of modernization in Japan and Turkey is familiar and has been dealt with by others from different points of view. The comparison of the Yaqui and the Maya has a common factor in Spanish and Mexican overrule. Other comparisons are intentionally distant—like the responses of the modernizing oligarchies in Japan and Buganda. Such comparisons of events in distant parts of the world

can help to rise above the immediate cultural setting. The chapter about culture change in plural societies as distant as South Africa and Soviet Central Asia had that objective, and so did the pair of chapters about nation building in Ghana and Indonesia.

Some common themes emerge in retrospect. One is a reflection on historical change in general; it is the gap between the intentions of the major actors and the actual outcomes. A second is the degree to which the European empires; were actually, run by non-Europeans. This is not merely a reflection of the fact, that Europe conquered the world mainly with non-European soldiers, though this, too, was the case, but also of the fact that the actual rule over the conquered societies was far more in local hands than in those of European administrators. This theme merges with a third. Cultural borrowing from the West was rarely a matter of wholesale imitation. The borrowed cultural items were fitted into an existing cultural matrix. Nor was the globalization of world cultures a one-way street; Western borrowing from the non-West is less obvious to Westerners because it, too, was fitted into a familiar Western cultural matrix.

One final theme has been more explicit, though not emphasized because it is so obvious. Human cultures have been converging since the invention of agriculture, and the convergence has been more rapid than ever since the beginning of the industrial era. The controversial question is: What, if anything, should or could be done about it? The homogenization of human cultures is only one part of a broader pattern of change making the world a less varied place than it used to be. Biological species are disappearing at a faster rate than ever before, and the technology that has come with the industrial age is largely to blame. Biologists are alarmed and would like to preserve as many species as possible. It is hard to advocate a similar course of action for human cultures, especially regarding cultures other than one's own. Globalization has some benefits, but it also has costs. Perhaps the place to begin is to be conscious that they exist.





Did the West Define the Modern World?

Changes in the historical profession in the last quarter-century can be seen clearly in the 25th anniversary edition of McNeill's *Rise of the West*. In an essay entitled "The Rise of the West After Twenty-five Years," McNeill states that the first edition of his book was influenced by the post-World War II imperial mood of the United States, which was then at its apex of power and ability to influence world affairs. He now urges historians to "construct a clear and elegant discourse with which to present the different facets and interacting flows of human history as we now understand them." The rise in the number of world history courses in college curricula (replacing the traditional Western history ones) and the number of advanced degrees awarded each year in non-western humanities-related subjects, are the fruits of the new historical labors of which McNeill speaks.

This issue provides interesting tie-in opportunities with Issue 13 and 14 in this volume. It examines the reasons why the Chinese gave up on their maritime campaigns, and the effects of such action are scrutinized and assessed. This Chinese decision is directly related to this issue, especially the McNeill reading, which describes why the West was able to gain the upper hand over the rest of the world during the "Age of Exploration" and after.

But the term dominance should not be taken to imply that the modern world's development has been fueled solely by the centuries of western influence. The work of a new generation of historians, described briefly in this issue's introduction, attests that the countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America today, owe a great deal to their own home-grown cultures, institutions, and mores.

Some sources helpful to understanding this issue would be: Eric Wolf, *Europe and People Without History* (University of California Press, 1982), a ground-breaking work on the need to provide an all-inclusive view of the world's history; and, Fernand Braudel, *The Perspective of the World* (University of California Press, 1992), the third volume of a multi-volume study of the 15th- through-18th century capitalist world, gives "the people without history" a voice. Finally, for a multi-disciplinary application of these principles, which concentrates on Africa, see Robert H. Bates, V.Y. Mudimbe, and Jean O'Barr, eds., *Africa and the Disciplines: The Contributions of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences* (University of Chicago Press, 1993). Steven Feierman's essay, "African Histories and the Dissolution of World History" is especially useful.