

World History in Brief

VOLUME ONE TO 1450

Major Patterns of Change and Continuity

THIRD EDITION



Peter N. Stearns

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Preface

World history courses are becoming increasingly fundamental at the college level for several reasons. Most obviously, as global issues fill our television screens and newspapers, Americans must gain perspective on the dynamics of events and patterns and must understand the diverse societies around the globe that help shape our future. History—often, even history rather remote in time—explains how the world became what it now is, including why global influences loom larger than before. The United States itself is peopled by groups with different heritages, again from around the world. Finally, world history raises some classic issues of historical interpretation, allowing its students to sharpen their understanding of how to interpret change and historical causation and providing a rich field for comparative analysis. Some educators, to be sure, still prefer to concentrate on Western civilization, arguing that it lies at our origins and, sometimes, that it is measurably superior, but while the Western heritage must be included in a world history approach, it is increasingly clear that a purely Western overlay cannot describe the world as we need to know it.

World history demands a commitment to a global rather than a West-centered approach. This book seeks to show how different civilizations have encountered the various forces of contemporary life—for example, population growth, industrialization, and international currents in diplomacy and art. Western civilization is included as one of the great world societies, but the text also studies East Asian, Indian, Middle Eastern, East European, African, and Latin American civilizations in order to achieve a genuine worldwide perspective.

This is a relatively short text, designed to allow additional readings and analytical exercises. World history teaching must follow the precedent of other survey history courses in reducing the emphasis on coverage and sheer memorization in favor of materials that provide facts that can be used to build larger understandings. Overwhelming detail, therefore, is not the chief goal of this book, but rather the presentation of enough data to facilitate comparison and assessment of change and to highlight the major developments in the world's history. Students can readily refer to larger reference works if they wish to follow up on themes of special interest with greater factual detail. For their convenience, a list of suggested readings follows each chapter.

World history also demands a balance between the examination of individual societies, within which the lives of most people are played out, and attention to the larger interactions across regional boundaries. These global interactions include trade, cultural

contact, migrations, and disease. This text presents the major civilizations through a narrative overview combined with emphasis on leading political, cultural, social, and economic characteristics. Grasp of these characteristics, in turn, facilitates comparisons and assessments of change. Chronological divisions—the basic periods of world history—reflect successive stages of international contact, from relative isolation to regional integration to the formation of global systems. This periodization is not conveniently tidy for the whole of world history, but it captures the leading dynamics of change at the global level.

Using the civilization focus plus the international periodization, students can follow the themes of change and continuity across time. For example, we can track and compare the juxtaposition of the traditions and novel forces that have shaped the modern world; the response of China or Latin America to the issues of the modern state; or the conditions of women in developing and in industrial economies. How different societies respond to common issues and contacts, and how these issues and contacts change over time: this is the framework for grappling with world history. By focusing on these problems of comparison and assessment of change, the text uses the leading patterns of world history to provide experience in analysis that will apply to other historical studies beyond the survey.

Several changes mark this third edition, in addition to corrections and improvements throughout the text. Attention to periodization and interregional contacts has increased, providing a clearer basis for discussions of global change; there is also more explicit comparison. New biographical highlights have been included, adding additional emphasis on the human components of world history. “Focal Points” at the beginning of each chapter frame the chapter contents by raising key questions and thereby setting learning goals. “History Debates” sections highlight some crucial but contested issues of interpretation. Of course, the text has been updated to include the developments and shifts since the mid-1990s.

I must add a personal note. World history has been a late love for me. I was trained in Western history, with an education that encouraged, though it did not require (the fault was mine), a largely Western focus. I increasingly chafed against my ignorance not of current world events but of the perspective, the historical understanding, that would give such events meaning. Belatedly schooled in world history, I have found continued reading and teaching in the field an endless source of fascination, a perpetual window for contemplating the varieties and unities of the human condition. I can only wish the same pleasure for many others, colleagues and students alike.

SUPPLEMENTS

The following supplements are available for use in conjunction with *World History in Brief*.

FOR THE STUDENT

World History Map Workbook in two volumes. Volume I (to 1600) and Volume II (from 1600) prepared by Glee Wilson of Kent State University. Each volume includes over 40 maps accompanied by over 120 pages of exercises. Each volume is designed to teach the

location of various countries and their relationship to one another. Also included are numerous exercises aimed at enhancing students' critical thinking abilities.

Longman World History Atlas. This four-color atlas contains a wide variety of historical maps. It is available shrink-wrapped with *World History in Brief* at low cost

Mapping World Civilizations: Student Activities. A free student workbook by Gerald Danzer, University of Illinois, Chicago. Features numerous map skill exercises written to enhance students' basic geographical literacy. The exercises provide ample opportunities for interpreting maps and analyzing cartographic materials as historical documents

FOR QUALIFIED ADOPTERS

Instructor's Manual/Test Bank. Written by Peter Stearns, this useful tool provides a guide to using the text book, suggestions for structuring a syllabus for the world history course complete with assignment ideas, chapter summaries, multiple choice, short answer and essay questions, and map exercises.

TestGen EQ program. Written by Peter Stearns, this computerized test bank available for Windows includes multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. The package includes the Quizmaster EQ program for networked testing.

Guide to Advanced Media and Internet Resources for World History by Richard M. Rothaus of St. Cloud University. This pamphlet provides a comprehensive review of CD-ROM, software and Internet resources for world civilization including a list of the primary sources, syllabi and article, and discussion groups available on-line.

Discovering World History Through Maps and Views, Second Edition, by Gerald Danzer, University of Illinois, Chicago, winner of the AHA's James Harvey Robinson Award for his work in the development of map transparencies. The second edition of this set of 100 four-color transparencies is completely updated and revised to include the newest reference maps and the most useful source materials. These transparencies are bound with introductory materials in a three-ring binder with an introduction on teaching history with maps and detailed commentary on each transparency. The collection includes source and reference maps, views and photos, urban plans, building diagrams, and works of art.

Longman-Penguin USA Value Packages in World History. Twenty classic titles from Penguin USA are available at a significant discount when bundled with any Longman world history textbooks.

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Peter N. Stearns

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The Rise of Agriculture and Agricultural Civilizations



INTRODUCTION: A SMALL WORLD?

The idea that the world is getting smaller is, like much folk wisdom, only partly true. For several hundred years, but particularly during the past century, worldwide transportation and communication facilities have become steadily more elaborate and rapid. It was less than 500 years ago that a ship first sailed around the entire world, a dangerous and uncertain journey that took many months. Now political leaders, business people, and even wealthy tourists can routinely travel across half the world in less than a day. Telephone and radio communications have for several decades provided worldwide linkages, and, thanks to satellites, even global television hookups have become routine. As a result, for the first time in world history, events of widespread interest can be simultaneously experienced by hundreds of millions of people in all parts of the globe. World Cup soccer finals and recent Olympic Games have drawn audiences of over a billion people.

The smallness of our world involves more than speedy international contact; it also involves the nature and extent of that contact. Our century is the first to experience world wars, as well as the fear of surprise attacks by enemies 6000 miles away. International negotiations and diplomatic contacts are not so novel, but the extent of the impact of events in distant parts of the globe has obviously increased; to take one example, President Bush hoped to win the 1992 American presidential election on the strength of his military action in the relatively unfamiliar (to Americans) nation of Kuwait. Worldwide economic contacts have increased at least as fast as those in the military and diplomatic fields. Production surges in China or Mexico vitally affect Americans as consumers and workers; shifts in the oil prices levied by Middle Eastern nations condition the driving habits of Americans and Europeans. Cultural linkages have also proliferated, as witness the existence of international sporting events and the widespread audience open to

French films or American television. Only in the 20th century has a traveler been able to go to cities on every inhabited continent and find buildings that look just like those at home; indeed, U.S. hotel and restaurant chains have literally spanned the earth.

To some observers, our smaller world is also an increasingly homogeneous world. Certain people lament the widespread adoption of various customs that seem to reduce valuable and interesting human diversity. Thus purists in France deplore the practice of modern French supermarkets to imitate American packaging of cheese, as those in Japan or Egypt deplore the decline of traditional costumes in favor of more Western-style dress. Probably more people, or at least more Americans, rejoice that our life style has been adopted by other societies. Many Americans, comfortable in their own ways, are pleased to see familiar products and styles in other countries. Others, deeply persuaded of the importance of international harmony, are eager to minimize the strangeness of foreign lands.

Yet despite new and important international linkages, our world is also marked by fundamental, often agonizing, divisions and diversities. Japan, in 1984, ordered a government inquiry into the use of chopsticks among schoolchildren, which was declining because of a growing eagerness to eat quickly—surely, to many American eyes, a quaint if harmless concern for distinctive tradition. Many Muslim leaders from the late 1970s to the present thunder against Western influences ranging from styles of women's dress to the idea that economic development rather than religion is the top priority. Ethnic disputes in small sections of the Balkans flame up in brutal wars.

Correspondingly, certain systematic *separations* shape our world as much as do linkages. As Russia experiments with democracy, China resolutely combines political authoritarianism with economic innovations. Stark divisions separate societies that have industrialized, and in which a minority of people are directly engaged in food production, from the larger number of nations in which full industrialization remains a distant dream. Cultural divisions also remain strong. India is the leading producer of films in the contemporary world, but these films, steeped in traditional Indian themes and values, rarely find non-Indian audiences. The United States, though able to export some films and television shows widely, also enjoys certain sports, notably football, that have only modest appeal to other cultures. Japan, copying American television shows, imposes shame on losing contestants in a fashion that would seem bizarre to the West. Changes in the work roles of women and their growing assertiveness and independence, commonplace factors in Western societies, find limited echoes in the Muslim world or even in Japan.

The point is clear: the smallness of the world, the new and sometimes fruitful exchanges among diverse peoples, jostle against deep divisions. International contacts do not necessarily bring harmony or friendship. Any interpretation of the contemporary world must do justice, then, to a complex tension, involving the undeniable existence of certain patterns that have worldwide influence but the equally undeniable existence of divergencies and conflicts that stubbornly persist. Policy makers face this tension in their orientation to the wider world: should U.S. policy be based on assumptions that most of the world will become increasingly like us, or should it build on assumptions of permanent political and cultural differences? U.S. policy in recent decades has in fact oscillated between approaches, in part because each approach—the vision of expanding contact and imitation, and the vision of deep-seated, possibly growing differentiation—has much to commend it.

The same tension must inform any study of how the world got to be what it is today—that is, any effort to convey the basic dynamics of world history. Both international influences and major diversities are rooted in the past. Humankind has always been united in some respects. The human species displays certain common responses, and as a result all human societies share certain basic features. Moreover, there have always been some links among different human societies in the various parts of the world, though admittedly the linkages have only recently become so dense and rapid. Cultural diffusion—the process by which an idea or technique devised in one society spreads to another—describes the way plowing equipment first invented in China ultimately was adopted in Europe, or the way a numbering system conceived in India reached the Middle East and then Europe many centuries ago. The same basic process of cultural diffusion, now speeded up, indicates how the Japanese copied and then improved upon American assembly-line production during the past 20 years. There have always been, in other words, some common themes in world history, affecting many peoples and setting a common dynamic for developments in many parts of the world in a given set of centuries. But there also have always been important differences among the world's peoples, as even prehistoric societies differed markedly in how they viewed death, how they treated the elderly and children, or the kind of government they established for themselves.

There are two ways to make the juggling act relatively manageable. The evolution of worldwide processes—that is, developments that ultimately shaped much of the world's population—can be understood by dividing the past into coherent periods of world history, from the prehistoric age to the development of civilization to the spread of the great religions and on to more recent stages. The leading diversities of human society for at least the past 3000 years can be conveyed by concentrating on the development of particularly extensive and durable civilizations, whose impact runs from their own origins to the present time. These civilizations, while not embracing the entire human species even today, have come to include most people, and they are, fortunately, not infinite in number. Five early traditions—in the Middle East (Mesopotamia and Persia), Mediterranean (the Middle Eastern coast, North Africa, and Southern Europe), India, China, and Central America—ultimately were replaced by seven major patterns of government, society, and culture. Grasping the nature of these patterns in the seven regions—East Asia; India and Southeast Asia; the Middle East; Eastern Europe; sub-Saharan Africa; Western Europe plus North America; and Latin America—and then assessing their interaction with the larger processes of world history provides the key to the essential features of human society past and present.

Think of a pattern as follows: each civilization deals with some common issues, such as how to organize a state, how to define a family, how to integrate technology and whether or not to encourage technological change, how to explain and present the natural universe, and how to define social inequality. The distinctive ways that each civilization handles these issues follows from geographical differences plus early cultural and historical experience. The goal in comparing the major civilizations involves understanding these different approaches to common social issues. But civilizations were never entirely isolated, and as contacts proliferated cultures had another set of common issues to address: what to do about growing international trade, migrations, spreading diseases, and missionary religions. Responses to these common forces might have drawn civilizations

together, but they would also reflect diverse adjustments that actually increased differentiation. The world history puzzle—its pieces composed of distinct civilizations, contacts, and ongoing change—is not hard to outline but it is undeniably challenging.

Not long ago many Americans believed that world history consisted of the rise of their own Western civilization and its interaction with the rest of the globe. Not long ago many Chinese believed that world history involved little more than the fascinating story of the evolution of the only civilization that mattered—their own. These were attractive visions, adequate for many purposes; and they certainly offered a simpler focus than does a world history that deals with the interaction and differentiation of several vibrant civilizations. But just as many people today see that the world is growing “smaller,” in the same way many also see that it is growing more complex; a sketch of world history can and should respond to this complexity.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Important explorations of world history that provide greater detail or a somewhat different vantage point from this study include: W. McNeill, *Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (1970) and *A History of the Human Community* (1996); J. M. Roberts, *The Pelican History of the World* (1984); Peter N. Stearns, Michael Adas, and Stuart B. Schwartz, *World Civilizations: The Global Experience* (1993); Albert M. Craig et al., *The Heritage of World Civilizations* (1993); and John P. McKay, Bennett Hill, and John Buckler, *A History of World Societies* (1987). Also useful for background on the distribution of the world's people is G. Murdock, *Ethnographic Atlas* (1967).



From Human Prehistory to the Early Civilizations

Focal Points

Examining the long early stages of human history involves several chief issues, centering mainly around agriculture and the definition of a civilization: Why did agriculture develop and how did it change the potential of human societies? What are the debates about defining “civilization” as a form of human society, and why are they significant? Why did most early civilizations center in river valleys? What did these early civilizations have in common, and how did they differ? Is the early story of the human species, particularly once agriculture and then civilization became increasingly common, a story of increasing progress, or is some other interpretive model more accurate?

GETTING STARTED IS ALWAYS HARD

The human species has accomplished a great deal in a relatively short period of time. There are important arguments over how long an essentially human species, as distinct from other primates, has existed. But a figure of 2 or 2.5 million years seems acceptable. This is approximately 1/4000 of the time the earth has existed—that is, if one thinks of the whole history of earth to date as a 24-hour day, the human species began at about 5 minutes until midnight. Human beings have existed for less than 5 percent of the time mammals of any sort have lived. Yet in this brief span of time—by earth-history standards—humankind has spread to every landmass (though only for visits to the polar regions) and, for better or worse, has taken control of the destinies of countless other species.

To be sure, human beings have some drawbacks as a species, compared to other existing models. They are unusually aggressive against their own kind: while some of the great apes, notably chimpanzees, have periodic wars, they can hardly rival human violence. Human babies are dependent and weak for a long period, which requires some special family or child care arrangements and often has limited the activities of many adult women. Certain ailments, such as back problems resulting from upright stature, also bur-

den the species. And, insofar as we know, the human species is alone in its awareness of the inevitability of death—a knowledge that imposes some unique tensions.

Distinctive features of the human species account for considerable achievement as well. Like other primates, but unlike most other mammals, people can manipulate objects fairly readily because of the grip provided by an opposable thumb on each hand. Compared even to other primates, human beings have relatively high and regular sexual drives, which aid reproduction; being omnivores, they are not dependent exclusively on plants or on animals for food, which helps explain why they can live in so many different climates and settings; their unusual array of facial expressions aids communication and enhances social life. The distinctive human brain and a facility for elaborate speech are even more important: much of human history depends on the knowledge, inventions, and social contracts that resulted from these assets. Features of this sort explain why many human cultures, including the Western culture that most Americans share, posit a firm separation between human and animal, seeing in our own species a power and rationality, and possibly a spark of the divine, which “lower” creatures lack.

While the rise of humankind has been impressively rapid, however, its early stages can also be viewed as painfully long and slow. Most of the 2 million-plus years during which our species has existed are described by the term *Paleolithic*, or *Old Stone Age*. Throughout this long time span, which runs until about 14,000 years ago, human beings learned only simple tool use, mainly through employing suitably shaped rocks and sticks for hunting and warfare. Fire was tamed about 750,000 years ago. The nature of the species also gradually changed during the Paleolithic, with emphasis on more erect stature and growing brain capacity. There were also some gains in average size. A less apelike species, whose larger brain and erect stance allowed better tool use, emerged between 500,000 and 750,000 years ago; it is called, appropriately enough, *Homo erectus*. Several species of *Homo erectus* developed and spread in Africa, to Asia and Europe, reaching a population size of perhaps 1.5 million 100,000 years ago. Considerable evidence suggests that more advanced types of humans killed off or displaced many competitors over time, which explains why there is only one basic human type throughout the world today, rather than a number of rather similar human species, as among monkeys and apes. The newest human breed, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, of which all humans in the world today are descendants, originated about 40,000 years ago, also in Africa. The success of this subspecies means that there have been no major changes in basic human physique or brain size since its advent.

Human life during the Paleolithic, for some time after as well as before the appearance of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, was difficult as well as primitive. People who hunted food and gathered nuts and berries could not support large numbers or elaborate societies. Most hunting groups were small, and they had to roam widely for food. Two people required at least a square mile for survival. Population growth was slow, partly because women breast-fed infants for several years to limit their fertility. On the other hand, people did not have to work very hard—hunting took about seven hours every three days on average. Women, who gathered fruits and vegetables, worked harder but there was substantial gender equality based on common economic contributions.

Paleolithic people gradually improved their tool use, beginning some crude shaping of stone and wooden implements. Speech developed with *Homo erectus* 100,000 years