

**THE
WORLD
TO
1500
A Global History**

全球通史 下

—1500年从来的世界

L. S. STAVRIANOS

SINCE 1500

A Global History

Englewood Cliffs, N. J.

THE WORLD SINCE 1500: *A Global History*, Second edition

BY L. S. STAVRIANOS

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Preface

All prefaces should be in capsule form; but this one should be a space capsule, a vehicle that will take the reader to the moon, where he can watch the whole planet as its significant events are illuminated in the pages that follow.

A global approach to history is not new. Indeed, it represents a return to the historiographic tradition of the Enlightenment, when the idea of universal history, as it was then called, fitted in with the prevailing views regarding progress. Prior to that period, Western historians had been constrained by the need to fit all known historical events into a rigid biblical context. Their custom was to divide the past into periods corresponding to the four world empires presaged in the book of Daniel: the Assyrian, the Persian, the Greek, and the Roman. But by the late seventeenth century this traditional approach was becoming increasingly inadequate in the face of new historical data concerning China and India. The first clear break with the old pattern came with Voltaire's *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* (1752) and the multivolume *Histoire universelle* (1736–1765), both of which dealt with China, India, and America, as well as with the traditional regions of biblical antiquity.

But interest in global history began to peter out by the end of the eighteenth century. The development of a more scientific attitude toward history set standards of reliable factual information that

could not then be met in dealing with civilizations other than those of Greece and Rome. And perhaps a more important reason for a narrowed view was the rise of the militant nation-state, which stimulated national history instead of the earlier universal history. This restricted frame of reference prevailed at least until the First World War and to a large degree until the Second.

The past few decades, however, have witnessed the beginnings of a renewed interest in world history. The accelerating tempo of historical research has vastly enlarged the fund of dependable data, while the impact of the two world wars and of the scientific-technological revolution, with its remarkable advances in communication, has compelled general recognition of the fact of "One World." Symptomatic of the new trend are the *Outline of History* by H. G. Wells (1919), *The Great Cultural Traditions* by Ralph Turner (1941), and *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* by William H. McNeill (1963), as well as the current UNESCO publications *Journal of World History* and *History of Mankind*.

This new interest has had little impact thus far on classroom teaching, apparently because of misgivings regarding the pedagogical viability of world history—doubts that are quite justified if it is assumed, as it too often is, that world history is the sum of the histories of all the countries or civilizations of the world. This assumption, of course, is preposterous. The Modern European History course, after all, does not deal in sequence with the histories of England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the Scandinavian countries, and the Balkan and Baltic countries. Rather, it considers the essential internal developments of the principal states, but equally important, it also traces those forces or movements that had a continentwide impact. The objectives of the Modern World History course are of a corresponding nature. Its aims are to analyze the essential characteristics and experiences of the major world regions, but equally important, to consider also those forces or movements that had a worldwide impact. Thus, it is not a matter of a greater number of facts in the World History course, but rather of a different angle of vision—a global rather than a regional or national perspective.

What this different angle of vision means may be illustrated concretely by considering the early modern period between the voyages of Columbus and the outbreak of the French Revolution. In the European History course, the principal topics usually considered for this period include: for the sixteenth century, dynastic conflicts, Protestant revolt, overseas expansion; for the seventeenth century, Thirty Years' War, rise of absolute monarchies, English Revolution; for the eighteenth century, dynastic and colonial wars, Enlightenment, enlightened despots.

Too often, the Modern World History course retains these traditional topics and adds others concerning developments in non-European regions. The net result is an overburdened course that is neither European nor world history. It is essential, therefore, to start afresh and to organize the course on a new and genuinely global basis. When this is done, it becomes apparent at once that the outstanding development of worldwide significance during this early modern period was the emergence of Western Europe. At the end of the fifteenth century, Europe was only one of four Eurasian centers of civilization, and by no means the most prominent. By the end of the eighteenth century,

Western Europe had gained control of the ocean routes, had organized an immensely profitable worldwide commerce, and had conquered vast territories in the Americas and in Siberia. Thus this period stands out in the perspective of world history as a period of transition from the regional isolation of the pre-1492 era to the West-European global hegemony of the nineteenth century.

If the early modern period is appraised from this viewpoint, then it becomes apparent immediately that the traditional topics of European history are irrelevant for world history and must be discarded. In their place, accordingly, the following three general topics are emphasized in this study:

1. The roots of European expansion (why Europe, rather than one of the other Eurasian centers of civilization, expanded).

2. The Confucian, Moslem, and non-Eurasian worlds on the eve of Europe's expansion (their basic conditions and institutions, and the manner in which they affected the nature and course of European expansion).

3. The stages of European expansion (Iberian stage 1500-1600; Dutch, French, British stage 1600-1763; Russian stage in Siberia).

This organization makes clear the main trends in world history during these centuries, and in a manner no more difficult to comprehend than the very different organization usually followed in the European History course. Also it should be noted that the role of Western Europe in this early modern period is emphasized, not because of any Western orientation, but because from a global viewpoint Europe at this time was in fact the dynamic source of global change. This is true also of the nineteenth century when the unifying feature of world history was Europe's domination of the globe, and of the twentieth when the non-Western world reacted against Europe's hegemony. The fact is that since 1500 the West has been the region of innovation and decision in global affairs. Consequently, the history of the world in modern times centers on Europe, just as during the millennia before Christ it focuses for the same reason on the Middle East, and during certain centuries of the medieval period on the Mongol and Islamic Empires. This explains why the organization of this book is based essentially on Europe's emergence, dominance, and decline and triumph. But as indicated above and reflected in the chapter titles, focus does not preclude global perspective and coverage. Both are essential for a meaningful and viable World History course.

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The World to 1500, A Global History

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*By universal history I understand that
which is distinct from the combined history of
all countries, which is not a rope
of sand, but a continuous development, and
is not a burden on the memory but an illumination
of the soul. It moves in a succession
to which the nations are subsidiary.
Their story will be told, not for their own
sake, but in reference and subordination to a
higher series, according to the time
and the degree in which they contribute
to the common fortunes of mankind.*

LORD ACTON

*. . . universal history is more than
the sum of its parts; it cannot be divided
and subdivided without being denaturalized, much
as water, separated into its chemical
components, ceases to be water and
becomes hydrogen and oxygen.*

GEOFFREY BARRACLOUGH

*In its true meaning, universal history
is not a collection of separate histories
of all the nations and states without general
connection or common purpose;
nor is it a mass of occurrences in a lifeless
or dry form, in which it is too often
presented. . . . It must assemble in one
all the nations of the world,
separated by time, by accident, or by
mountains and seas, unite them in one
proportionate, harmonious whole and from them
compose one magnificent poem.*

NIKOLAI GOGOL

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