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# ASPECTS of WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Problems and Sources in History

Volume I

Fourth Edition

Edited by PERRY M. ROGERS

The Ohio State University

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Aspects of Western civilization: problems and sources in history / edited by Perry M. Rogers. —4th ed.
p. cm.
Vols. 1 and 2.
ISBN 0-13-083202-2 (vol. 1).—ISBN 0-13-083203-0 (vol. 2)

1. Civilization, Western—History. 2. Civilization, Western—

History—Sources. I. Rogers, Perry McAdow.

CB245.A86 2000 909' 09812—dc21

96-26935 CIP

Editor-in-chief: Charlyce Jones-Owen Executive editor: Todd Armstrong Assistant editor: Emsal Hasan Editorial assistant: Holly Jo Brown Managing editor: Jan Stephan

Production liaison: Fran Russello

Editorial/production supervision: Bruce Hobart (Pine Tree Composition)

Prepress and manufacturing buyer: Lynn Pearlman

Cover director: Jayne Conte Cover designer: Kiwi Design

Cover art: De Architectura di Vitruvio by Leonardo da Vinci/Art Resource, NY.

Director, Image Resource Center: Melinda Lee Reo

Manager, rights & permissions: Kay Dellosa

Image specialist: Beth Boyd Photo researcher: Teri Stratford Marketing manager: Sheryl Adams

This book was set in  $10/11\frac{1}{2}$  Baskerville by Pine Tree Composition, Inc., and was printed and bound by Courier Companies, Inc.

The cover was printed by Phoenix Color Corp.

© 2000, 1997, 1992, 1988 by Prentice-Hall, Inc. Simon & Schuster/A Viacom Company Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## ISBN 0-13-083505-5

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, London Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, Sydney Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., Toronto Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S.A., Mexico Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, New Delhi Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., Tokyo Pearson Education Asia Pte. Ltd., Singapore Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., Rio de Janeiro

## ASPECTS of WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Problems and Sources in History

For Ann Elisa, Kit, and Tyler

## **Preface**

The Roman orator Cicero once remarked that "History is the witness of the times, the torch of truth, the life of memory, the teacher of life, the messenger of antiquity." In spite of these noble words, historians have often labored under the burden of justifying the study of events that are over and done. Human beings are practical, more concerned with their present and future than with their past. And yet the study of history provides us with unique opportunities for self-knowledge. It teaches us what we have done and therefore helps define what we are. On a less abstract level, the study of history enables us to judge present circumstance by drawing on the laboratory of the past. Those who have lived and died, through their recorded attitudes, actions, and ideas, have left a legacy of experience.

One of the best ways to travel through time and perceive the very "humanness" of history is through the study of primary sources. These are the documents, coins, letters, inscriptions, and monuments of past ages. The task of historians is to evaluate this evidence with a critical eye and then construct a narrative that is consistent with the "facts" as they have been established. Such interpretations are inherently subjective and open to dispute. History is thus filled with controversy as historians argue their way toward the truth. The only effective way to understand the past is through personal examination of the primary sources.

Yet, for the beginning student, this poses some difficulties. Such inquiry casts the student adrift from the security of accepting the "truth" as revealed in a textbook. In fact, history is too often presented in a deceptively objective manner; one learns facts and dates in an effort to obtain the right answers for multiple-choice tests. But the student who has wrestled with primary sources and has experienced voices from the past on a more intimate level accepts the responsibility of evaluation and judgment. He or she understands that history does not easily lend itself to right answers, but demands reflection on the problems that have confronted past societies and are at play even in our contemporary world.

Aspects of Western Civilization offers the student an opportunity to evaluate the primary sources of the past in a structured and organized format. The documents provided include state papers, secret dispatches, letters, diary accounts, poems, newspaper articles, papal encyclicals, propaganda fliers, and even wall graffiti. Occasionally, the assessments of modern historians are included. Yet this two-volume book has been conceived as more than a simple compilation of sources. The subtitle of the work, Problems and Sources in History, gives true indication of the nature of its premise. Students learn from the past most effectively when faced with problems that have meaning for their own lives. In evaluating the material from Aspects of Western Civilization, the student will discover that issues are not nearly as simple as they may appear at first glance. Historical sources often contradict each other, and truth then depends upon logic and upon one's own experience and outlook on life. Throughout these volumes, the student is confronted with basic questions regarding historical development, human nature, moral action, and practical necessity. The text is therefore broad in its scope, incorporating a wide variety of political, social, economic, religious, intellectual, and scientific issues. It is internally organized around eight major themes that provide direction and cohesion while allowing for originality of thought in both written and oral analysis:

- 1. *Imperialism*. How has imperialism been justified throughout Western history, and what are the moral implications of gaining and maintaining empire? Is defensive imperialism a practical foreign policy option? This theme is often juxtaposed with subtopics of nationalism, war, altruism, and human nature.
- 2. Church/State Relationships. Is there a natural competition between these two controlling units in society? Which is more influential, which legacy more enduring? How has religion been used as a means of securing political power or of instituting social change?
- 3. Beliefs and Spirituality. The Judeo-Christian heritage of Western Civilization forms the basis of this theme. How have religious values and moral attitudes affected the course of Western history? To what extent have spiritual reform movements resulted in a change of political or social policy? Are ideas more potent than any army? Why have so many people died fighting for religions that abhor violence? Does every society need a spiritual foundation?
- 4. Systems of Government. This theme seeks to introduce the student to the various systems of rule that have shaped Western Civilization: classical democracy, representative democracy (republican government), oligarchy, constitutional monarchy, divine-right monarchy, theocracy, and dictatorship (especially fascism and totalitarian rule). What are the advantages and drawbacks to each? This rubric also includes the concepts of balance of power and containment, principles of succession, geopolitics, and social and economic theories such as capitalism, communism, and socialism.

- 5. Revolution. This theme seeks to define and examine the varieties of revolution: political, intellectual, economic, and social. What are the underlying and precipitating causes of political revolution? How essential is the intellectual foundation? Are social demands and spontaneity more important elements in radical action?
- 6. *Propaganda*. What is the role of propaganda in history? Many sections examine the use and abuse of information, often in connection with absolute government, revolution, imperialism, or genocide. How are art and architecture, as well as the written word, used in the "creation of belief"? This theme emphasizes the relativity of truth and stresses the responsibility of the individual in assessing the validity of evidence.
- 7. Women in History. The text intends to help remedy the widespread omission of women from the history of Western society and to develop an appreciation of their contributions to the intellectual and political framework of Western Civilization. At issue is how women have been viewed—or rendered invisible—throughout history and how individually and collectively their presence is inextricably linked with the development and progress of civilization. This inclusive approach stresses the importance of achieving a perspective that lends value and practical application to history.
- 8. Historical Change and Transition. What are the main determinants of change in history? How important is the individual in effecting change, or is society regulated by unseen social and economic forces? What role does chance play? What are the components of civilization, and how do we assess progress or decline? Are civilizations biological in nature? Is a crisis/response theory of change valid? This theme works toward providing the student with a philosophy of history and against the tendency to divide history into strict periods. It stresses the close connection between the past and the present.

## Structure of the Book

Each chapter begins with a timeline chronology so that students may visualize the historical parameters of the chapter. This is followed by a series of quotations from various historians, diplomats, philosophers, literary figures, or religious spokespersons who offer insight on the subject matter of the chapter. These quotations may well be used in conjunction with the study questions at the end of the unit. After the quotations, chapter themes are listed and framed by several questions that direct the reader to broader issues and comparative perspectives with ideas and events in other chapters. This feature acknowledges the changing perspectives of different eras while linking historical problems that emphasize the continuity of history. A general introduction then provides a brief historical background and focuses the themes or questions to be discussed in the chapter.

Following this general introduction, the primary sources are presented with extensive direction for the student. A headnote explains in more detail

the historical or biographical background for each primary source and focuses attention on themes or interrelationships with other sources. Each chapter concludes with a chronology designed to orient the student to the broader context of history, and a series of study questions that can form the basis of oral discussion or written analysis. The questions do not seek mere regurgitation of information, but demand a more thoughtful response based on reflective analysis of the primary sources.

### Use of the Book

Aspects of Western Civilization offers the instructor a wide variety of didactic applications. The chapters fit into a more or less standard lecture format and are ordered chronologically. An entire chapter may be assigned for oral discussion, or sections from each chapter may satisfy particular interests or requirements. Some of the chapters provide extensive treatment of a broad historical topic ("The Sword of Faith: Western Civilization During the Middle Ages"; "'I Am the State!': The Development of Absolutism in England and France"; "'Dare to Know!': The Revolution of the Mind in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries"; "'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!': Romanticism and Revolution"). In order to make them manageable and effective, I have grouped them into topical sections (with correspondingly labeled study questions) that can be utilized separately, if so desired.

The chapters may also be assigned for written analysis. One of the most important concerns of both instructor and student in an introductory class is the written assignment. Aspects of Western Civilization has been designed to provide self-contained topics that are problem-oriented, promote reflection and analysis, and encourage responsible citation of particular primary sources. The study questions for each chapter should generally produce an eight- to ten-page paper.

## Acknowledgments

I would particularly like to thank friends and colleagues at Columbus School for Girls who contributed their expertise and enthusiasm to this book. Susan Altan lent her perspective and sensitive awareness of women's issues at critical moments when new avenues of thought were most needed. Daniel Hall and Thomas Tappan advised me on several scientific and technological matters that broadened the scope of the text immeasurably. Anne Lodge and Mary Ann Leonard offered their unique perspectives regarding ethical issues that often caused me to pause and certainly forced the introduction of new questions into the discussion. Mary Alice Fite provided me with material and literary insight that added greatly to the accuracy of the text, and Jack Guy and Patricia Niehoff-Smith read drafts of some chapters, offering sterling commentary throughout. Thanks also to the students of Columbus School for Girls, who continue to "test" the chapters in this book with their typical diligence and hard work; the final product has benefited greatly from their

suggestions and ideas. This revision has also benefitted from the insight and suggestions of Eleanor McCluskey, Broward Community College, Florida and Charles Parker, University of St. Louis, who reviewed the text in its preliminary stages. Finally, I owe an immeasurable debt to my wife, Ann, who suffered all the outrageous fortune and disruption that goes into writing a book of this kind over a period of years—she did it with me.

P. M. R.

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