

F. ROY WILLIS

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# WESTERN CIVILIZATION

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*A Brief Introduction*



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University of California, Davis

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# Preface

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This book is approximately half the length of the volumes that form the staple intellectual diet for the students in Western Civilization courses. It was written in the firm belief that a book that achieves full, balanced coverage of the course of Western Civilization without indulgence in intricate detail and plethora of issues would be a valid alternative for professors and students alike. For the past fourteen years, I have taught a one-quarter course at the University of California, Davis, that surveys in ten weeks the development of Western Civilization from the Persian Wars in the fifth century B.C. to the First World War twenty-four centuries later. I was therefore acquainted with both the challenges and the opportunities of presenting a brief introduction to the variety of the history and culture of the West, and I could approach the writing of this book with a pragmatic awareness of the potential pitfalls and satisfactions in what I was undertaking. The French philosopher Blaise Pascal put his finger on an important truth when he apologized to a friend, "I have made this letter longer than usual because I lack the time to make it shorter."

For the professor, a brief history of Western Civilization like this one can be used in several different ways. If assigned as the principal reading matter, it makes it possible to teach a survey of the whole evolution of Western Civilization in a one-semester or even a one-quarter course without imposing excessive reading assignments on the student. Second, it can be used to provide the essential background material needed by the student in courses where the professor chooses to assign substantial readings in primary sources, either by use of an anthology or by selection of individual texts. Chapter 2, on the Greeks, for example, provides the information on Greek religion and drama necessary for informed reading of such a play as Sophocles's *Antigone*. Reading the *Communist Manifesto* becomes more meaningful after the study in Chapter 14 of the

emergence of class antagonism in the factory cities of northern England. Third, a short but comprehensive text permits the professor to expand in lectures upon selected themes or to make use of audiovisual materials without fear that the student will be missing necessary coverage.

For the student, a short book has a number of advantages. Since excessive detail has been pruned away, the most important topics stand out more clearly. The sequence of events appears more logical. The interrelationship of different aspects of society and culture becomes more evident. For example, in seeking to explain the changing status of women in Western society, to which great attention is given in this book, I have shown how status was affected by the nature of the legal codes, whether Hammurabi's in the eighteenth century B.C. or the Emperor Augustus's in the first century A.D.

To achieve brevity without sacrificing comprehensiveness, I have used a number of methods. A framework of analysis, described in the Introduction, is followed in approaching each society studied, enabling the student to make increasingly valid comparisons between societies. The economic base of the society of Greece in the fifth century B.C., for example, can be compared with those of the Roman empire in the first century A.D. and of the Byzantine empire of the sixth century A.D. Quotations have been chosen not merely to introduce a specific author but to provide source material on a particular society. For example, the chaotic conditions of life in imperial Rome are described in quotations from the poems of Ovid and Juvenal, the sufferings of soldiers in the First World War in the verse of Wilfred Owen. Photographs have been closely integrated with the text and are themselves an important teaching device. Time-lines provide a guide to the interrelationship of events. The maps have been designed for clarity of reference and to provide graphic illustration of themes discussed in the text, such as the threat of fragmentation posed to the Austrian empire in the nineteenth century by its incorporation of many non-German nationalities. Suggested readings at the end of each chapter direct the student to the most significant recent scholarship.

The book combines three basic forms of coverage. First, there is a clear chronological coverage, emphasizing political and economic events. Second, there is a full exploration of the cultural achievements of the West, in philosophy, literature, arts, and music. Third, I have paid great attention to the advances in social history during the past two decades. The book therefore includes study of (a) the role of women and minorities; (b) the nature of the popular culture of the illiterate as compared with the so-called "high" culture of the educated classes; and (c) details of social life, such as health, diet, working conditions, and social disturbances. Fourth, although the book is not a history of world civilization, the relationship of the West to the rest of the world's peoples and cultures is described. The rise of Islam, for example, is shown to have important repercussions on the society of medieval Europe.

I am grateful to a number of colleagues, whose invaluable suggestions greatly helped in preparation of the manuscript: Ted Bogacz, U.S. Naval Acad-

emy; Louise E. Hoffman, The Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg; Hans Kellner, Michigan State University; John A. Mears, Southern Methodist University; Robert J. Moore, Columbia College; Perry M. Rogers, The Ohio State University; Don Thomas Sine, U.S. Naval Academy; John L. Tevebaugh, Grand Valley State College; William A. Vincent, Michigan State University; Charles W. Weber, Wheaton College; and Richard Wires, Ball State University. I am also indebted to Sidney Zimmerman, a developmental editor of extraordinary abilities, who has also prepared the *Instructor's Manual* to accompany this text.

Finally, I hope that both professor and student will find the book enjoyable. As an inveterate traveler, I have always found great pleasure both in teaching and writing about the history of civilization. I can only wish that this enthusiasm proves infectious.

F. R. W.

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