

THE WESTERN WORLD

A NARRATIVE HISTORY

VOLUME II ~ 1600s TO THE PRESENT



ANTHONY ESLER

Second Edition

THE WESTERN WORLD

A Narrative History

Volume II: 1600s to the Present



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Preface

In this book, I have tried to outline the history of the Western World as a story, a narrative of people and events on the move, of a society evolving through time. I have also, however, allocated a substantial proportion of the book to social and cultural analysis, where so much cutting-edge historical research has been concentrated in recent years. I have tried to pay special attention to such still sometimes neglected areas as women's history and, in the second volume, to the history of the women's movement for social equality. As the author of an earlier history of the world as a whole, I have also felt a strong responsibility to deal here with the West's repeated encounters with the non-Western world; and I have tried to stress not only Western influences on the rest of the world but also a significant Western cultural debt to a number of non-Western peoples. I have made room here for both traditional emphasis on conflict between classes, creeds, and nations and for treatment of that more recently explored sense of community which defines a healthy society. And I have tried to be as up-to-date as the publishing process allows, a feature that seems particularly important in the pivotal 1990s, a watershed decade that could set the historical agenda of the Western world for decades to come.

Thanks to Prentice Hall's diligent development and production people, this book also boasts a number of special features that we hope will be helpful to its student readers. Each chapter has one or more Chronologies, listing important events in the time frame being explored. Most chapters have at least two maps, and a serious effort has been made to see to it that all places mentioned in the text are shown on the maps. At the end of each chapter is a selection of "key terms" to help students prepare for identification questions on tests. Each of the six parts of the book begins with a Time Line, which has been constructed to give a sense of sequence and of development.

In the course of assembling this book, I have accumulated a large number of intellectual debts. It is therefore my duty as well as a great pleasure to express my gratitude to some at least of those who have made the book you hold in your hands possible.

First and most of all, I must say thank you again to the scholarly and dedicated Europeanists at William and Mary, with whom I have had the privilege of working over the years—to Professors Dale Hoak, Lu Ann Homza, Gil McArthur, Jim McCord, and George Strong, as well as to some who have moved on, especially A. Z. Freeman, Harold Fowler, Bruce McCully, Maryann Brink, Dietrich Orlow, and Tom Sheppard. Thanks also to the Americanists and the specialists in non-Western history whose knowledge I have drawn upon most frequently—Cam Walker, Ismail Abdalla, Ed Crapol, Craig Canning, and Judy Ewell—and to the classicists downstairs, especially Jim Baron and Ward Jones. If I had not known that all these people were willing to let me pick their brains and paw through their books, I would probably never have had the nerve to undertake this project at all.

Next my gratitude goes to the historians at other universities who accepted Prentice Hall's invitation to read and comment on portions of this book as it has developed. My thanks then to: Douglas R. Bisson, Belmont University; Elizabeth Furdell, University of North Florida; George Huppert, University of Illinois at Chicago; James A. Jaffe, University of Wisconsin at Whitewater; James I. Martin, Sr., Campbell University; Michael Polley, Colombia College; Steven F. Sage, Middle Tennessee State University; Narashingha P. Sil,

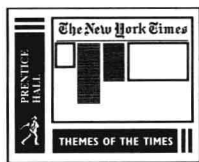
Western Oregon State College; and Martha S. Trainer, Pellissippi State Technical Community College. All surviving errors and misinterpretations are of course mine alone.

The students themselves, finally, deserve any academic writer's gratitude. By bringing their own increasingly international backgrounds to bear in classroom discussions or simply by asking the hard questions that send the teacher back to the sources, they have contributed immeasurably to the education of their instructor.

At Prentice Hall, the most professional and hard-working selection of editors I have ever known labored over this book. It would never have been written at all if Executive Editor Steve Dalphin hadn't pried me away from another project and Senior Acquisitions Editor Sally Constable hadn't proposed this revised version. Three enormously skilled and understanding development editors, Cecil Yarborough, Virginia Locke, and Susan Alkana have given the project the benefit of their knowledge of books, book-making, and much else, and despite my sometimes negative reactions to all the rethinking and rewriting they suggested, the book is deeply in their debt. Barbara DeVries handled production deftly and bore with my seemingly congenital inability to respond to deadlines on time with remarkable calm. For copyediting that was amazingly able to pluck out inconsistencies a hundred pages apart, my appreciation to Marcia Rulfs.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge a few personal debts which can never be adequately repaid. I would like to thank my parents, Jamie Arthur and Helen Kreamer Esler for raising me with an awareness that thinking is part of life and that there is a larger world out there waiting. Thanks to my first wife Carol Clemeau Esler and to my sons Kenneth Campbell Esler and David Douglas Esler for being wonderful travelers and for finding plenty to like in European cities and villages. And thanks again to my wife Cam—Professor Helen Campbell Walker—for many years of insights and for everywhere from Skara Brae, Great Zimbabwe, Samarkand, and Lhasa to wherever we end up next year.

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Introduction: What is the Western World?

You may think this a strange question to ask, for we are all likely to believe we know the answer. If we look into a dictionary or two, to be sure, we are not surprised to note that as far back as Shakespeare's day, *Western* referred to "Western or European countries" and that more recent usage defines *the West* as "Europe and the Americas." Asked to list some characteristics of the West today, we might say that Western peoples have civil rights, democratic elections, and a fair degree of material prosperity. We might add that they also live in Europe and America or in places that have some roots in these twin centers of the modern West—Australia, say, or Iceland.

The historical core of the Western world, however, is Europe, where Western civilization was born. This brief introduction, then, will attempt to do two things: to introduce Europe itself, the historic center of the West; and to give some idea of how the larger Western world grew to its current awesome dimensions.

Both here and throughout this book, we will attempt to give the rest of the world its due. We will recognize the key role of Europe's neighbors as shapers of Western history. We will turn, at length, to the impact of the expanding West on the histories of other peoples. In dealing with recent centuries, we will see the history of the Western world blending with that of the world at large. Emphasis on *global context* is, in fact, a central feature of this particular history of Western civilization.

But this is a history of the Western peoples, of the peoples who built one of the world's half-dozen major civilizations on European land. So we will begin in Europe and move out from there.

Where the West Began

Perhaps the best way to get a sense of the European landscape today is to get away from the airplanes, and even the trains, and hike, bike, or drive through it. Go the youth hostel route; have wine, bread, and cheese in a field for lunch; and find the cheapest menus outside the brasseries and trattorias for supper on the village square. All of a sudden, Europe isn't just the Tower of London, the Louvre, and the Trevi Fountain. It's dusty roads and olive trees, a curve of the Rhine and a castle on a crag, or snowballs in the Alps. It's wine country and grain country, lakes and fjords and forests. From Ireland to the Urals, from the Mediterranean to the Arctic Circle, there's a lot of country there.

The very variety of the continent makes describing its basic geography in words no easy task. Still, we should make some effort to develop a sense of the geographical outlines of Europe today before we focus on what has happened there over the past thirty centuries and more.

There are a few basic facts, easily enough assimilated. Europe consists of the western fifth of the double continent of Eurasia. It is generally defined as the territory running from the Atlantic Ocean east to the Ural Mountains and the Turkish Straits. The Black Sea and the Mediterranean mark its southern frontier, the arctic reaches of Scandinavia and Russia its northern one. In area, it is somewhat larger than the United States.

If you were to cut out a map of Europe, it would take you quite a long time because of the many ins and outs of its coastline. Scandinavia, the Iberian countries, Italy, and Greece are all huge peninsulas, and there are many large islands in both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, including country-sized ones like Great Britain and Ireland. Inland too, Europe is broken up by massive mountain chains—the Pyrenees, the Alps, and the ranges of the Balkans and the Caucasus. The continent is marked also by long river valleys, like the Seine in France, the Po in Italy, the Rhine–Danube line that formed the Roman frontier, and the Elbe, Volga, and other rivers of eastern Europe.

Western Europe, in particular, is a tumbled land, folded and wrinkled, with only a few plains and plateaus, like those in Spain and France. The real “great plains” of Europe lie in the central and eastern parts of the continent: a drive from Berlin to Moscow can remind you of nothing so much as a trip from Chicago to Kansas, leaving out most of the towns. But much of the rest of Europe has mountains on the horizon, gleaming rivers winding down a glen, or church spires rising over rolling hills.

In ancient and medieval times, this European land was a good deal less tidy than it looks now. Forests were heavy over much of the continent, and there was much more undeveloped wasteland—undrained marshes, rocky hills, or open grasslands untenanted save by nomadic herdsmen. The great mountain ranges, not yet sown with picture-postcard ski resorts, loomed as cold and forbidding barriers to trade and travel.

There was immense potential in that European earth, heavy and black in the north, lighter in the Mediterranean south, but capable of producing bumper crops everywhere once the forests were pushed back, the swamplands drained. Properly exploited, those endless coasts and rivers were made for trade, the streams that fed them for turning water wheels. There was plenty of timber and building stone. Minerals slept under the European earth, waiting for a later age to turn them into tools and weapons, machinery and structural steel. And the climate—albeit colder and wetter the farther north you went—might serve to brace people to their duties rather than to slow their efforts.

The familiar political divisions of today were not yet there, of course. Such twentieth-century powers as Germany, France, Britain, and Russia did not exist. There were no tidy groupings of other nations, from the Scandinavian countries to the Balkans. Still, the mountain ranges, river valleys, and winding coastlines that defined later political frontiers were there. Geography was as important to Europe’s future political organization as to its economic future.

To turn Europe into one of the most successful areas of human habitation on the globe was the labor of many centuries. Much of the rest of this book is devoted to exploring the achievements of these European generations.

But Europeans, like other peoples, did not limit themselves to the continent where their culture had its deepest roots. Like other peoples, they learned from their neighbors, conquered other peoples, traded with and exploited others economically, and spread their values and beliefs far and wide. We should therefore include here a brief overview of the expansion of the Western world, of its interaction with other parts of the world, and of its contribution to the history of the world as a whole.

The West and the World

In the simplest territorial sense, the Western world will be seen here as a growing thing. It has expanded and spread throughout its history, swelling from the little Greek world at the eastern end of the Mediterranean to a mighty array of modern nations scattered around the world.

Some twenty-five hundred years ago—around 500 BCE—the West was a collection of tiny Greek city-states centering on the shores and islands of the Aegean Sea, a northward projection of the Mediterranean. By the time of Christ, two thousand years ago, this Greek birthplace of the Western world had given way to the Roman Empire of Caesar Augustus, ringing the entire Mediterranean, and stretching north of the Alps to encompass western Europe and the British Isles. By the year 1000 CE, the medieval West included western, central, and eastern Europe, and stretched from Spain to Russia. And by 1500 CE, five hundred years ago, the first European sailing ships to control the sea lanes of the world were already carrying European settlers to North and South America and traders to Africa and Asia. As recently as 1900, less than a century ago, Western empires were at the height of their most vigorous period of global expansion.

This process of territorial growth has been accompanied by another important characteristic of the Western world: fertile interaction with many other cultures. For Western peoples have interacted with other peoples from the very beginning, often with very significant consequences. We will thus see influences from ancient Egypt and the Near East helping to shape Greece during the earliest stages of Western history. We will visit a Roman Empire that actually included sizable slices of North Africa and Western Asia. In the Middle Ages, we will find Byzantines, Muslims, and Mongols influencing as well as threatening various parts of Europe. In modern times, we will see an imperial West coming into contact with and, increasingly, imposing its will upon other peoples around the world. And we will see how peoples from all parts of the globe have helped to build the West as we know it today, both by providing labor, goods, and ideas and by contributing energetic new citizens to many Western nations.

Overall, we will try to show that the Western world may legitimately be defined in terms of real contributions to human history as a whole. Western ideas have played a central part in modern history. The physical sciences, though derived in significant part from the thought of other peoples, emerged in their modern form in the European scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many of the key political, economic, and social ideas underlying the structure of modern states around the world have their roots in the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and in the ideologies developed in the West during the nineteenth century. The ongoing industrialization of the globe, too, has its roots in the European industrial revolution which began in the eighteenth century. It was the West which, through its structure of international trade and empire, forged the first genuinely global market and brought all the world's peoples into closer contact than ever before. These varied accomplishments are no small thing to have contributed to the world's store.

We will begin, then, with a small people at the far end of an inland sea and expand our subject until half the globe seems to be in some sense "Western." We will envision the Western world as a dynamically developing society, and one which has always been part of a larger human world. And we will follow throughout the line of historical evolution and achievement which provides the core of Western identity today.

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