# TAKING SIDES

## Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in

# World Civilizations Volume I

### From Ancient Times to the Rise of National States

Joseph R. Mitchell
Helen Buss Mitchell
William K. Klingaman
R. K. McCaslin

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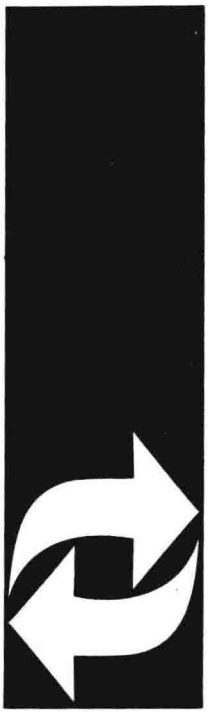

## Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in World Civilizations Volume I From Ancient Times to the Rise of National States


**Edited, Selected, and with Introductions by**

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# PREFACE

In *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in World Civilizations,* we identify the issues that need to be covered in the teaching of world civilizations and the scholarly and readable sources that argue these issues. We have taken care to choose issues that will make these volumes multicultural, gender-friendly, and current with historical scholarship, and we frame these issues in a manner that makes them user-friendly for both teachers and students. Students who use these volumes should come away with a greater understanding and appreciation of the value of studying history.

One of the valuable aspects of this book is its flexibility. Its primary intended use is for world civilization courses, world history courses, and other courses that pursue a global/historical perspective. However, since more than half the issues in this volume focus on Western civilizations, teachers of Western civilization will be able to use these issues within the framework of their teaching and then assign the non-Western civilization issues as comparative studies or supplements for placing the Western materials in a wider context.

**Plan of the book** This book is made up of 17 issues that argue pertinent topics in the study of world civilizations. Each issue has an issue *introduction,* which sets the stage for the debate as it is argued in the pro and con selections. Each issue concludes with a *postscript* that makes some final observations and points the way to other questions related to the issue. In reading the issue and forming your own opinions, you should not feel confined to adopt one or the other of the positions presented. There are positions in between the given views or totally outside them, and the *suggestions for further reading* that appear in each issue postscript should help you to find resources to continue your study of the subject. We have also provided Internet site addresses (URLs) in the *On the Internet* page that accompanies each part opener. At the back of the book is a listing of all the *contributors to this volume,* which will give you information on the historians and commentators whose views are debated here.

**A word to the instructor** An *Instructor's Manual With Test Questions* (multiple-choice and essay) is available through the publisher. A general guidebook, *Using Taking Sides in the Classroom,* which discusses methods and techniques for integrating the pro-con approach into any classroom setting, is also available. An online version of *Using Taking Sides in the Classroom* and a correspondence service for Taking Sides adopters can be found at `www.cybsol.com/usingtakingsides/`. For students, we offer a field guide to analyzing argumentative essays, *Analyzing Controversy: An Introduc-*

*tory Guide,* with exercises and techniques to help them to decipher genuine controversies.

*Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in World Civilizations, Volume 1,* is only one title in the Taking Sides series. If you are interested in seeing the table of contents for any of the other titles, please visit the Taking Sides Web site at `http://www.dushkin.com/takingsides/`.

**Acknowledgments** We would like to thank Larry Madaras of Howard Community College, fellow teacher, good friend, and coeditor of *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in American History,* for suggesting we pursue a Taking Sides volume in world civilizations and for introducing us to the editorial team at Dushkin/McGraw-Hill. We are also grateful for the assistance of Jean Soto, Susan Myers, James Johnson, Keith Cohick, and the entire staff of the Howard Community College Library for their assistance with this volume.

Special thanks go to David Dean, list manager for the Taking Sides series; David Brackley, developmental editor; and Tammy Ward, administrative assistant, for their assistance in this project. Without their professionalism, encouragement, and cooperation, this volume would not have been the manageable pleasure that it has been.

We hope you enjoy using this book. Please send us any comments you have on its contents, especially suggestions for additions and deletions, to Taking Sides, Dushkin/McGraw-Hill, Sluice Dock, Guilford, CT 06437 or to `tsides@mcgraw-hill.com`.

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# INTRODUCTION

## World Civilizations and the Study of History

Helen Buss Mitchell

### WHAT IS A CIVILIZATION?

What do we mean by the term *civilization?* Usually it designates a large group of people, spread out over a vast geographical area. In the modern world, we typically think in terms of nations or states, but these are a relatively recent development, traceable to sixteenth-century Europe. Before the rise of national states, the land that we call Europe belonged to a civilization known as Christendom—the unity of people ruled by the spiritual and temporal power of the Christian Church. At that time, other great civilizations of the world included China, Africa, India, Mesoamerica, and the Islamic Empire.

Civilization began about 5,000 years ago, when humans reached high levels of organization and achievement. When we look at world civilizations, we are considering the ancient and the contemporary versions of human alliances. Even in this age of national states, perhaps it makes sense to think of the West (Europe and North America) as a civilization. And the movement for European unity, which includes attempts to create a common currency, suggests that Europe may be thought of as a civilization despite its division into many separate nations. Postcolonial Africa is a continent of separate countries, and yet, in some ways, it remains a unified civilization. China, once a vast and far-flung group of kingdoms, has united as a civilization under communism. And Islam, which united the warring tribes of the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century, is again defining itself as a civilization. What would be gained and what would be lost by shifting our focus from the national state to the much larger entity civilization?

Civilizations are systems for structuring human lives, and they generally include the following components: (1) an economic system by which people produce, distribute, and exchange goods; (2) a social system that defines relationships between and among individuals and groups; (3) a political system that determines who governs, who makes the laws, and who provides services for the common good; (4) a religious and/or intellectual orientation by which people make sense of the ordinary and extraordinary events of life and history—this may appear as a formal religious system, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism, or as an intellectual/values system, such as communism, Confucianism, or democracy; and (5) a cultural system, which includes the arts, and symbol systems, which give expression and meaning to human experience. Some of these components stand out

more clearly than others in the selections in this volume, but all of them are present to one degree or another in every civilization.

## WHAT IS HISTORY?

History is a dialogue between the past and the present. As we respond to events in our own world, we bring the concerns of the present to our study of the past. What seems important to us, where we turn our attention, how we approach a study of the past—all these are rooted in the present. It has been said that where you stand determines what you see. This is especially true with history. If we stand within the Western tradition exclusively, we may be tempted to see its story as the only story, or at least the only one worth telling. And whose perspective we take is also critical. From the point of view of the rich and powerful, the events of history take one shape; through the lens of the poor and powerless, the same events can appear quite different. If we take women as our starting point, the story of the past may present us with a series of new surprises.

### Presentism

Standing in the present, we must be wary of what historians call *presentism*, that is, reading the values of the present back into the past. For example, if we live in a culture that values individualism and prizes competition, we may be tempted to see these values as good even in a culture that preferred communalism and cooperation. And we may miss a key component of an ancient civilization because it does not match what we currently consider to be worthwhile. We cannot and should not avoid our own questions and struggles; they will inform our study of the past. Yet they must not warp our vision. Ideally, historians engage in a continual dialogue in which the concerns but not the values of the present are explored through a study of the past.

### Revisionism

History is not a once-and-for-all enterprise. Each generation will have its own questions and will bring new tools to the study of the past, resulting in a process called *revisionism*. Much of what you will read in this book is a product of revisionism in that the featured historians have reinterpreted the past in the light of the present. You will find that whereas one generation might value revolutions, the next might focus on their terrible costs. Likewise, one generation might assume that great men shape the events of history, while the next might look to the lives of ordinary people to illuminate the past. There is no final answer, but where we stand will determine which interpretation seems more compelling to us.

As new tools of analysis become available, our ability to understand the past improves. Bringing events into clearer focus can change the meanings that we assign to them. Many of the selections in this book reflect new at-

titudes and new insights made possible by the tools that historians have recently borrowed from the social sciences.

### The New Social History

Proponents of the new social history reject what they call "history from the top down." This refers to the previous generation of historians who had sometimes acted as if only the influential—often referred to as the "great man"—had a role in shaping history. Social historians assume that all people are capable of acting as historical agents rather than being passive victims to whom history happens. With this shift in attitude, the lives of slaves, workers, all women, and children become worthy of historical investigation. Social historians call this technique of examining ordinary people's lives "history from the bottom up."

### Tools of the New Social History

Because the poor and powerless seldom leave written records, other sources of information must be analyzed to understand their lives. Applying the methods of social scientists to their own discipline, historians have broadened and deepened their field of study. Archaeological evidence, DNA analysis, the tools of paleoanthropology, and computer analysis of demographic data have allowed the voiceless to speak across centuries. Analyzing "material culture" (the objects that the people discarded as well as the monuments and other material objects they intended to leave as markers of their civilizations), for example, reveals to historians the everyday lives of people. At certain points in human history, to own a plow made the difference between merely surviving and having some surplus food to barter or sell. What people left to their heirs can tell us how much or how little they had while they lived. Fossil evidence and the analysis of mitochondrial DNA—the structures within cells that we inherit only from our mothers—may each be employed, sometimes with strikingly different results, to trace the migrations of preliterate peoples. As we continue to dig, for instance, we find our assumptions confirmed or denied by the fossils of once-living organisms. Evidence of sea life on the top of a mountain lets us know that vast geologic changes have taken place. And, in another example, our genetic material—our DNA—has information scientists are just now learning to decode and interpret that may settle important questions of origin and migration.

The high-speed comparative functions of computers have allowed historians to analyze vast quantities of data and to look at demographic trends. Consider this question: At what age do people marry for the first time or have a child? Looking at the time between marriage and the birth of a first child can help us to calculate the percentage of pregnant brides and to gain some insight into how acceptable or unacceptable premarital sex may have been to a certain population at a certain time in the context of an expected future marriage. If we study weather patterns and learn that certain years were marked by periods of drought or that a glacier receded during a partic-

ular time period, we will know a little more about whether the lives of the people who lived during these times were relatively easier or more difficult than those of their historical neighbors in earlier or later periods.

**Broadening the Perspective**

Stepping outside the Western tradition has allowed historians to take a more global view of world events. Accusing their predecessors of Eurocentrism, some historians have adopted a view of world history that emphasizes Africa's seminal role in cultural evolution. Also, within the Western tradition, women have challenged the male-dominated perspective that studied war but ignored the family. Including additional perspectives complicates our interpretations of past events but permits a fuller picture to emerge. We must be wary of universalism—for example, the assumption that patriarchy has always existed or that being a woman was the same for every woman no matter what her historical circumstances. If patriarchy or the nuclear family has a historical beginning, then there must have been a time when some other pattern existed. If cultures other than the West have been dominant or influential in the past, what was the world like under those circumstances?

**Race, Class, and Gender**

The experience of being a historical subject is never monolithic. That is, each of us has a gender, a race, a social class, an ethnic identity, a religion (even if it is atheism or agnosticism), an age, and a variety of other markers that color our experiences. At times, the most important factor may be one's gender, and what happens may be more or less the same for all members of a particular gender. Under other circumstances, however, race may be predominant. Being a member of a racial minority or of a powerful racial majority may lead to very different experiences of the same event. At other times social class may determine how an event is experienced; the rich may have one story to tell, the poor another. And other factors, such as religion, ethnic identity, or even age, can become the most significant pieces of a person's identity, especially if prejudice or favoritism is involved. Historians generally try to take into account how race, class, and gender (as well as a host of other factors) intersect in the life of a historical subject.

**Ethnocentrism**

All cultures are vulnerable to the narrow-mindedness created by *ethnocentrism*—the belief that one culture is superior to all others. From inside a particular culture, certain practices may seem normative—that is, we may assume that all humans or all rational humans must behave the way that we do or hold the attitudes that we hold. When we meet a culture that sees the world differently than we do, we may be tempted to write it off as inferior or primitive. An alternative to ethnocentrism is to enter the worldview of another and see what we can learn from expanding our perspective. The issues in this book will offer you many opportunities to try this thought experiment.

**Issues of Interpretation**
Often historians will agree on what happened but disagree about why or how something occurred. Sometimes the question is whether internal or external factors were more responsible for a happening. Both may have contributed to an event but one or the other may have played the more significant role. Looking at differing evidence may lead historians to varying interpretations. A related question considers whether it was the circumstances that changed or the attitudes of those who experienced them. For example, if we find that protest against a situation has been reduced, can we conclude that things have gotten better or that people have found a way to accommodate themselves to a situation that is beyond their control?

**Public or Private?**
Another consideration for historians is whether we can draw firm lines between public and private worlds. For instance, if a person is highly respected in private but discriminated against in public, which is the more significant experience? Is it even possible to separate the two? In the postindustrial world, women were able to exercise some degree of autonomy within the sphere of home and family. This might have compensated for their exclusion from events in the wider world. On the other hand, can success in the public sphere make up for an emotionally impoverished or even painful personal life? Every person has both a public and a private life; historians are interested in the balance between the two.

**Nature or Nurture?**
It seems plausible that our experiences within the private sphere, especially those we have as children, may affect how we behave when we move outside the home into a more public world. However, some of what we are in both worlds may be present at birth—that is, programmed into our genes. When historians look at the past, they sometimes encounter one of the puzzles of psychology and sociology: Are we seeing evidence of nature or nurture? That is, does biology or culture offer the more credible explanation for people's behavior through history? Do women and men behave in particular ways because their genetic makeup predisposes them to certain ways of acting? Or is behavior the result of an elaborate system of socialization that permits or rewards some actions while forbidding or punishing others? If people in the past behaved differently than those in the present do, what conclusions may we draw about the relative influence of nature and nurture?

**Periodization**
The student of the past must wonder whether or not the turning points that shape the chapters in history books are the same for all historical subjects. The process of marking turning points is known as *periodization*. This is the more or less artificial creation of periods that chunk history into manageable segments by identifying forks in the road that took people and events in new

directions. Using an expanded perspective, we may find that the traditional turning points hold for men but not for women or reflect the experiences of one ethnic group but not another. And when periodization schemes conflict, which one should we use?

It is also important to keep in mind that people living at a particular moment in history are not aware of the labels that later historians will attach to their experiences. People who lived during the Middle Ages, for example, were surely not aware of living in the middle of something. Only long after the fact were we able to call a later age the Renaissance. To those who lived during what we call the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, marriage, childbirth, work, weather, sickness, and death were the primary concerns, just as they are for us today. Our own age will be characterized by future historians in ways that might surprise and even shock us. As we study the past, it is helpful to keep in mind that some of our assumptions are rooted in a traditional periodization that is now being challenged.

**Continuity or Discontinuity?**

A related question concerns the connection or lack of connection between one event or set of events and another. When we look at the historical past, we must ask ourselves whether we are seeing continuity or discontinuity. In other words, is the event we are studying part of a normal process of evolution, or does it represent a break from a traditional pattern? Did the Industrial Revolution take the lives of workers in wholly new directions, or did traditional behaviors continue, albeit in a radically different context? Questions of continuity versus discontinuity are the fundamental ones on which the larger issue of periodization rests.

Sometimes events appear continuous from the point of view of one group and discontinuous from the point of view of another. Suppose that factory owners found their world and worldview shifting dramatically, whereas the lives and perspectives of workers went on more or less as they had before. When this is the case, whose experience should we privilege? Is one group's experience more historically significant than another's? How should we decide?

**The Power of Ideas**

Can ideas change the course of history? People have sometimes been willing to die for what they believe in, and revolutions have certainly been fought, at least in part, over ideas. Some historians believe that studying the clash of ideas or the predominance of one idea or set of ideas offers the key to understanding the past. What do you think? Would devotion to a political or religious cause lead you to challenge the status quo? Or would poor economic conditions be more likely to send you into the streets? Historians differ in ranking the importance of various factors in influencing the past. Do people challenge the power structure because they feel politically powerless, or because they are hungry, or because of the power of ideas?

A related question might be, What makes a person feel free? Is it more significant to have legal and political rights, or is the everyday experience of personal autonomy more important? If laws restrict your options but you are able to live basically as you choose, are you freer than someone who has guaranteed rights but feels personally restricted? And, again, does the public sphere or the private sphere exert the greater influence? Suppose that you belong to a favored class but experience gender discrimination. Which aspect of your experience has a greater impact? On the other hand, suppose you are told that you have full political and economic rights and you are treated with great respect but are prevented from doing what you like. Will you feel freer or less free than the person who is denied formal status but acts freely? In the quest to understand the past, these questions are interconnected, and they are becoming increasingly difficult to answer.

## THE TIMELINESS OF HISTORICAL ISSUES

If you read the newspaper or listen to the news, you will find that there are a confusing number of present-day political, economic, religious, and military clashes that can be understood only by looking at their historical contexts. The role of the United States in world events, the perennial conflicts in the Middle East, China's emerging role as an economic superpower, the threat posed by religious fundamentalism, Africa's political future, the question of whether revolutions are ever worth their costs—these concerns of the global village all have roots in the past. Understanding the origins of conflicts increases the possibility of envisioning their solutions. The issues in this book will help you to think through the problems that are facing our world and give you the tools to make an informed decision about what you think might be the best courses of action.

In a democracy, an informed citizenry is the bedrock on which a government stands. If we do not understand the past, the present will be a puzzle to us and the future may seem to be out of our control. Seeing how and why historians disagree can help us to determine what the critical issues are and where informed interpreters part company. This, at least, is the basis for forming our own judgments and acting upon them. Looking critically at clashing views also hones our analytic skills and makes us thoughtful readers of textbooks as well as magazines and newspapers.

## WHY STUDY WORLD CIVILIZATIONS?

At times it seems that the West's power and dominance in the world make its story the only one worth studying. History, we are sometimes told, is written by the winners. For the Chinese, the Greeks, the Ottoman Turks, and many other victors of the past, the stories of other civilizations seemed irrelevant, unimportant, and not nearly as valuable as their own triumphal sagas. The Chinese considered their Middle Kingdom the center of the world; the Greeks

labeled all others barbarians; and the Ottoman Turks never expected to lose their position of dominance. From our perspective in the present, these stories form a tapestry. No one thread or pattern tells the tale, and all stories seem equally necessary for a complete picture of the past to emerge.

Any single story—even that of a military and economic superpower—is insufficient to explain the scope of human history at a given moment in time. Your story is especially interesting to you. However, as we are learning, any one story achieves its fullest meaning only when it is told in concert with those of other civilizations, all of which share an increasingly interconnected planet. As communications systems shrink the Earth into a global village, we may be ignoring the rest of the world at our own peril. At the very least, the study of civilizations other than our own can alert us to events that may have worldwide implications. And, as we are beginning to learn, no story happens in isolation. The history of the West, for example, can be accurately told only within a global context that takes into account the actions and reactions of other civilizations as they share the world stage with the West. As you read the issues that concern civilizations other than those of your heritage, stay alert for what you can learn about your own civilization.

# *On the Internet . . .*


### Duke Papyrus Archive

The Duke Papyrus Archive provides electronic access to texts about and images of 1,373 papyri from ancient Egypt.
*http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/*

### Fossil Evidence for Human Evolution in China

This site introduces the fossil evidence for human evolution in China. It includes a catalog of Chinese human fossil remains; links to other sites dealing with paleontology, human evolution, and Chinese prehistory; and other resources that may be useful for gaining a better understanding of China's role in the emergence of humankind.
*http://www.cruzio.com/~cscp/index.htm*

### HyperHistory Online

HyperHistory presents 3,000 years of world history via a combination of colorful graphics, life lines, time lines, and maps. Its main purpose is to convey a perspective of world historical events and to enable the reader to hold simultaneously in mind what was happening in widely separated parts of the world.
*http://www.hyperhistory.com/online_n2/History_n2/a.html*

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**NO: Alan G. Thorne and Milford H. Wolpoff,** from "The Multiregional Evolution of Humans," *Scientific American* 12

The late Allan C. Wilson and Rebecca L. Cann, both molecular biologists, state that modern humans are descended from a single woman who lived in Africa around 200,000 years ago. Anthropologists Alan G. Thorne and Milford H. Wolpoff maintain that modern humans developed simultaneously in different parts of the world.

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**ISSUE 2. Did Egyptian Civilization Originate in Africa?** 22

**YES: Clinton Crawford,** from *Recasting Ancient Egypt in the African Context: Toward a Model Curriculum Using Art and Language* 24

**NO: Kathryn A. Bard,** from "Ancient Egyptians and the Issue of Race," in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers, eds., *Black Athena Revisited* 33

Clinton Crawford, an assistant professor who specializes in African arts and languages as communications systems, asserts that evidence from the fields of anthropology, history, linguistics, and archaeology prove that the ancient Egyptians and the culture they produced were of black African origin. Assistant professor of archaeology Kathryn A. Bard argues that although black African sources contributed to the history and culture of ancient Egypt, the country's people and culture were basically multicultural in origin.

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**ISSUE 3. Did Greek Civilization Have Semitic and African Origins?** 42

**YES: Martin Bernal,** from "Black Athena: The African and Levantine Roots of Greece," in Ivan Van Sertima, ed., *African Presence in Early Europe* 44

**NO: John E. Coleman,** from "Did Egypt Shape the Glory That Was Greece? The Case Against Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*," *Archaeology* 52

Professor of government Martin Bernal argues that racism and anti-Semitism among past classical scholars caused them to ignore the African and Near Eastern roots of Greek culture and civilization. Professor of classics John E. Coleman argues that although racism and anti-Semitism did exist among classical scholars, it did not influence their work. He maintains that the idea that Greek culture and civilization have African and Near Eastern roots cannot be proved.

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**ISSUE 4. Did the Benefits of the First Emperor of China's Rule Outweigh the Human Costs?** 62

**YES: Arthur Cotterell,** from *The First Emperor of China: The Greatest Archeological Find of Our Time* 64

**NO: T'ang Hsiao-wen,** from "A Refutation of Some Confucian Fallacies Concerning the Causes of the Downfall of the Ch'in Dynasty," in Li Yu-ning, ed., *The First Emperor of China* 72

English historian Arthur Cotterell argues that the ruthless policies of emperor Qin Shihuangdi caused thousands of deaths among the Chinese peasantry and impoverished much of the surviving population. Chinese scholar T'ang Hsiao-wen, adopting a Marxist approach, praises Qin Shihuangdi for centralizing the Chinese state and for his willingness to attack the aristocratic slave owners.

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**ISSUE 5. Did Christianity Liberate Women?** 80

**YES: Monique Alexandre,** from "Early Christian Women," in Pauline Schmitt Pantel, ed., *A History of Women in the West, vol. 1: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints* 82

**NO: Karen Armstrong,** from *The Gospel According to Woman: Christianity's Creation of the Sex War in the West* 90

Professor of religious history Monique Alexandre argues that there were a variety of roles for women—including prophetess, widow, deaconess, donor, and founder—that indicated a more liberated status for women in the early centuries of Christianity. Professor of religious studies Karen Armstrong finds examples of hostility toward women and fear of their sexual power in the early Christian Church, which she contends led to the exclusion of women from full participation in a male-dominated church.