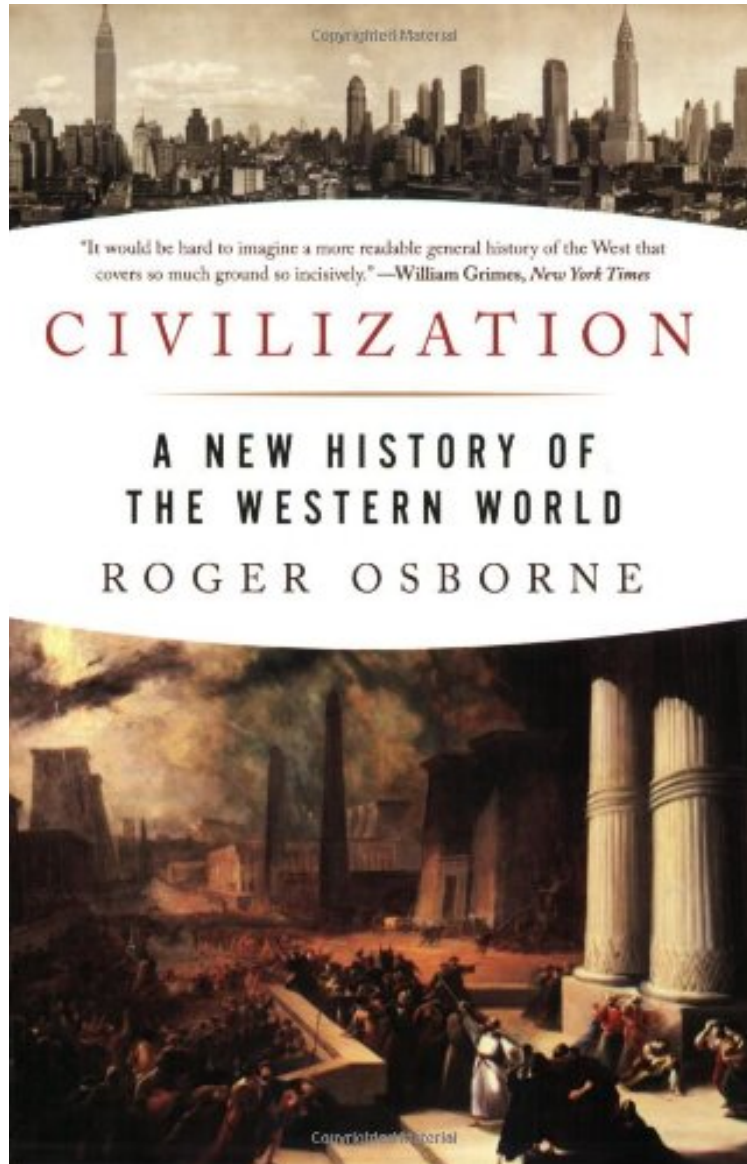


[Download pdf] Civilization: A New History of the Western World

Civilization: A New History of the Western World

Roger Osborne

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Roger Osborne : Civilization: A New History of the Western World before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Civilization: A New History of the Western World:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. It's all Plato's Fault! By R. Ben Madison To VASTLY oversimplify Osborne's argument: It's all Plato's fault! One of the many roots of Western culture that Osborne identifies is Plato's philosophical distinction between the earthly appearances of things, and the "forms" that those things represent. This

fundamental notion -- that there is an ideal form out there, somewhere, that earthly objects, institutions, and ideas only poorly approximate -- is bedrock to Western Civilization. We are a civilization that is never satisfied, always grasping, always reaching, always moving, to get closer to the ideal. Our justice is never Justice -- we can always be more just. Our freedom is never Freedom -- we can always be more free. Our holiness is never Holy -- we can always be more Holy. Our strength is never Strength -- we can always be stronger. Our purity is never Purity -- we can always be purer. We have built a world on the basis of disappointment with the way the world really is, and we feel our only escape is by tearing down the real world in pursuit of a "better" one. Osborne dares to tell us that the Western emperor has no clothes, and he forces us to confront the damage we have done to the world in relentless pursuit of "improvement." Best of all, he challenges our faith in the Enlightenment -- the same Enlightenment that gave us slavery, absolutism, capitalism, racism, imperialism, industrialism, pollution, world wars, drug-resistant diseases, the global obesity epidemic, and the twin threats of nuclear annihilation and world-wide climate collapse. All these great 'successes' of Western culture, with all the unplanned and horrific side-effects they generate, are rooted in our refusing to accept the world and ourselves as it, and we, really are. Instead we look for an improved world and improved people as they should be. Osborne names and shames us, and rightfully so.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

An engaging introduction to world history. By Sean Farrell

History can be a bit dry, and the idea of reading a book about the entire history of Western Civilization is more than a little bit daunting. Luckily, this book is written in fluid prose that keeps the reader engaged throughout. It also takes a unique way of looking at this history. Instead of focusing primarily on wars and politics, it takes a deeper look at the art, ideas, and movements that shaped the different eras our culture has gone through. It's one thing to simply state that something happened, it is another to give the reader a sense of why it happened, a feat that is handled with aplomb here. While you certainly can't expect everything of any importance to happen over the last several centuries to be covered in one book, one still comes away from this one feeling like they have a better understanding of human history. This is a must read, especially now, as it looks increasingly like we are on a path to repeat several of the mistakes we've made in the past.

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

PROVOCATIVE AND READABLE

By John L. Layman

FOR 27 YEARS I HAVE TAUGHT A FRESHMAN COURSE ON CIVILIZATION, AVERAGING 170 OR SO STUDENTS EACH SEMESTER. FOR MANY YEARS I USED TRADITIONAL CIVILIZATION TEXTBOOKS, BUT FOUND THEM INCREASINGLY ANNOYING: OFTEN DULL, OVER-DETAILED, TERRIFICALLY EXPENSIVE AND, TO ADD INJURY, EDITIONS ARE [UNNECESSARILY AND TRIVIALY]CHANGED EVERY COUPLE YEARS, MAKING IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR STUDENTS TO BUY/SELL USED TEXTS. THE EXPENSIVE TEXTS MIGHT BE WORTH IT IF STUDENTS READ THEM, BUT MANY DON'T! SOME YEARS AGO I SWITCHED TO AN UNUSUAL SURVEY TEXT [SEE MY REVIEW ON NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC'S, CONCISE HISTORY OF THE WORLD: AN ILLUSTRATED TIME-LINE, AND ROGER OSBORNE'S CIVILIZATION: A NEW HISTORY OF THE WESTERN WORLD]. THE LATTER IS NEITHER A TRADITIONAL TEXTBOOK OR A COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY, FOR WHICH I AM GRATEFUL, BUT AN ANALYSIS OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION. THE TEXT IS READABLE, INTERESTING AND AT TIMES A PASSIONATE CONDEMNATION OF HISTORIC TRENDS THAT MASQUERADE AS "PROGRESS." WHETHER AN ANALYSIS OF PLATO, ARISTOTLE AND THE RATIONAL MIND, THE RISE OF THE MILITARY STATE, COLONIZATION AND SLAVERY OR, TECHNOLOGY, IDEOLOGY, APOCALYPSE, OSBORNE MAKES THE CASE THAT, "THE HEART OF MAN IS DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL THINGS AND DESPERATELY WICKED" [QUOTING JEREMIAH THE PROPHET, NOT OSBORNE]! MY STUDENTS ACTUALLY LIKE OSBORNE [A STRANGE BUT HAPPY TURN OF EVENTS] AND FIND THEMSELVES PONDERING HOW HIS CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE EVILS OF GLOBALIZATION INTERSECT WITH THEIR LOVE-AFFAIR WITH FAST FOOD AND THE LATEST INTERNATIONAL FASHIONS.

"It would be hard to imagine a more readable general history of the West that covers so much ground so incisively." William Grimes, *The New York Times*

Ever since the attacks of September 11, 2001, Western leaders have described a world engaged in "a fight for civilization." But what do we mean by civilization? We believe in a Western tradition of freedom that has produced a fulfilling existence for many millions of people and a culture of enormous depth and creative power. But the history of our civilization is also filled with unspeakable brutality for every Leonardo there is a Mussolini, for every Beethoven symphony a concentration camp, for every Chrysler Building a My Lai massacre. An ambitious historical assessment of the Western world tying together the histories of empires, art, philosophy, science, and politics

Civilization reexamines and confronts us with all of our glories and catastrophes. At such a dangerous time in the world's history, this brilliant book is required reading.

From *Publishers Weekly*

This stimulating survey steers a middle course between triumphal pageant of progress and postmodern bricolage of clashing perspectives to attempt a coherent narrative of Western history. Historian Osborne (*The Floating Egg: Episodes in the Making of Geology*) traces a lucid, thoughtful overview of European and American history from Stonehenge and the Greco-Roman era to the present. Tying together his account are a few broad themes,

most prominently the development of rationalism—the use of abstract reasoning to uncover universal laws governing nature and society—from its Platonic origins to its apotheosis in Western science and its malevolent influence on Soviet communism. This often sinister rationalism works in counterpoint, and sometimes opposition, to what he sees as the redeeming organicity of Western culture, its rootedness in human adaptation to changing environments and practical needs in a multitude of contexts, from the growth of medieval towns to the rise of Hollywood and rock 'n' roll. Some pronouncements, like Osborne's insistence on the unique ferocity of Western warfare, aren't persuasive, and the paragraph he accords the Rolling Stones' 1969 Altamont concert is one too many. But one judges such a book less by its historiographical synthesis than by the wealth of provocative insights it throws up, and by that measure Osborne succeeds admirably. Photos. (Dec.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist We frequently hear speculation that the West is engaged in a "clash of civilizations" with the Muslim world. So it is useful, perhaps even vital, that the West periodically examine the roots, history, and current condition of its civilization. Osborne is clearly an admirer of the richness and magnificent achievements of Western civilization. However, he is no cultural chauvinist, and he eloquently poses the dilemma implicit in a culture that could produce the glories of classical Greece and the Renaissance and the barbarism of Nazi Germany. Osborne follows a chronological approach that ranges from prehistory to the post-cold war period. Fortunately, he avoids the pitfalls of trying to tell too much, concentrating on vital and specific themes within particular epochs, including such topics as the development of democratic institutions in Athens, the growth of industrial capitalism, and the nature of totalitarianism under Hitler. This is a well-written, easily digestible survey illustrating that there remains much to be cherished within the common threads of our diverse civilization. Jay Freeman Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved. About the Author For many years Roger Osborne worked as an editor in the London publishing world, first at Macmillan and then Faber Faber, specializing in books on medicine, psychology, and the history of science. Since 1992 he has been a full-time writer, using particular subjects to demonstrate new ways of understanding the past. He is a Fellow of the Geological Society and lives in Yorkshire.