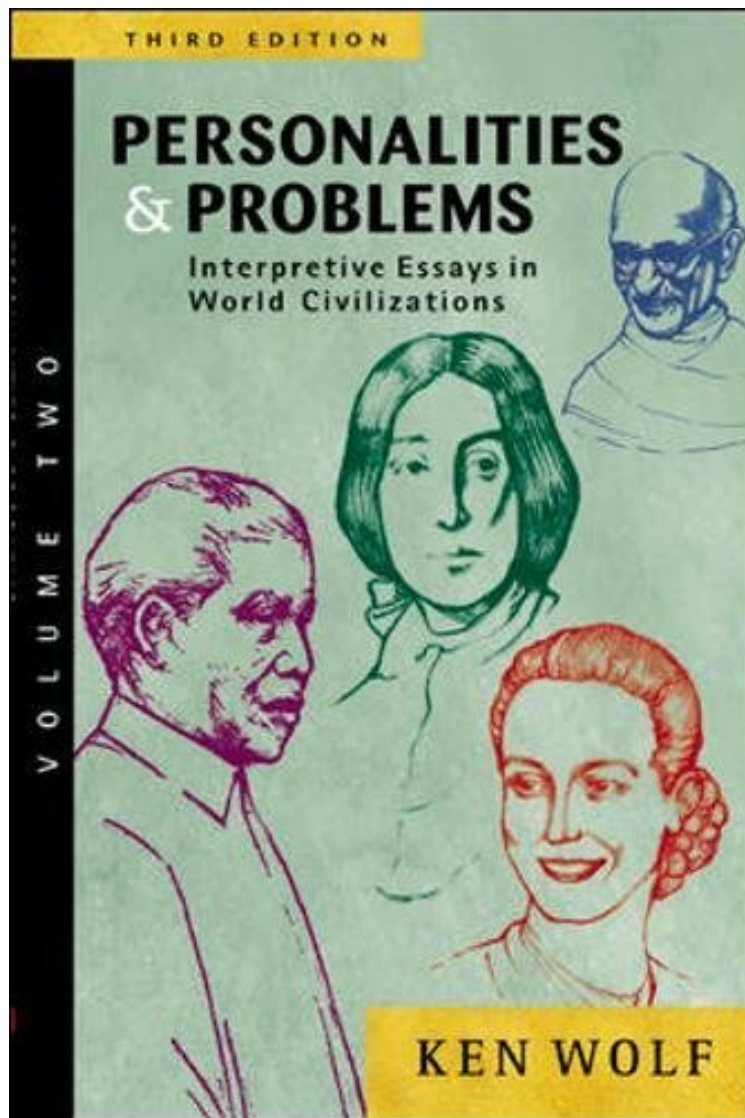


## Personalities Problems: Interpretive Essays in World Civilization, Volume II

Ken Wolf

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**Ken Wolf : Personalities Problems: Interpretive Essays in World Civilization, Volume II** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Personalities Problems: Interpretive Essays in World Civilization, Volume II:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. An interesting ideaBy Matthew SmithThis was an interesting little book. The idea is one I really like, which is to compare and contrast different historical periods and figures. The idea

of looking at two different historical people in similar situation, and then contrasting how each dealt with their own situation gives the reader an interesting perspective on these people and their times. Just seeing that Gandhi and Ho Chi Minh are juxtaposed was enough to really grab my interest. The essay on Teller and Sakharov was my favorite. How each man dealt with the implications of their research was fascinating. This one essay sparked an interest in the men who made the bomb, and how and what they thought of the moral problems that the development posed. What I have come to find out through more research is more than a little disturbing, but I have this book to thank for sparking that interest. This book is filled with interesting essays, and I really enjoyed reading each of them. I feel like I got a little more perspective on these times and the people who influenced them. I will say that readers always need to be careful how much stock they put into these comparative histories. While it may be fun to look at these figures and their times side by side, it is essential that we recognize the very real gulf that lays between them. It is fun and educational, but we must always be careful not carry the comparison too far. With that said this is a fun, little book that is a quick read. I think the amateurs will enjoy it along with the pros. (This book probably deserves four stars, but since one reviewer bashes the book not for content but instead for price and thickness? I am giving it 5 stars to make up for terrible review).

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A Useful Tool for Intro College Students and History Minors

By Nicholas Stark

Within Ken Wolf's Personalities and Problems, Vol. II there is a series of essays detailing the lives of famous peoples from various parts of the world being compared and contrasted with other individuals from the same era who accomplished similar goals or who held similar beliefs. The purpose of the work is to emphasize the modern ideology of globalization through exposure of the conditions of peoples across the world, revealing that the world is not split simply between a "barbaric East" and "civilized West" but rather that people everywhere are capable of free and unique thought, coincidentally yet surprisingly similar in many instances. Despite this similarity in the global human race, there are certain ideological and political differences between regions, and in order to fairly evaluate the development of a particular state or region it is important to understand its traditions. In effect, the book's goal is simply to expand the cultural horizons of the reader through the juxtaposition of developments in the East (Africa, and Asia) and the West (Europe and the United States). Now familiar with the aim of the book, it is important to investigate how fairly it was executed. As a whole, there is a noticeable, albeit not overwhelming, bias towards the easterners or against the westerners. In the first chapter, comparing the Chinese Zheng He and the Portuguese Prince Henry "The Navigator," the opening words betray this sentiment, "It somehow doesn't seem fair." [pg. 3] Although the author establishes backing to demonstrate that Zheng He's achievements in the short run were more impressive, yet less effectual, than Prince Henry's, there is an immediate handicap placed on the Iberian. This sort of bias is not restricted to easterners, and perhaps would be better described as to be favorable to the "underdog." In Chapter Six, the Haitian military commander Toussaint Louverture is presented in a glowing light and the author specifically prevents criticizing him. The author writes that he "made himself governor-general for life," [pg. 72] yet avoids addressing the highly anticipated counter-argument that Toussaint betrayed the ideal of independence by instating himself as omnipotent tyrant, a title the author avoids completely. Furthermore, the author tells of how Napoleon Bonaparte aimed to restore slavery to Saint-Domingue (modern Haiti), yet despite the fact that Toussaint is described as having "used military force to keep field hands on the plantations," [pg. 73] he in actuality, behind the glittery faade of the author, had reinstated slavery himself. Outside of these blatant instances, the book was largely fair in its scope. The conditions, aims, and successes, or lack-there-of, for the people are balanced, particularly in the description of Tecumseh that avoids adopting the ignorant martyr stance, George Sand and Harriet Beecher Stowe without detailing their views as more liberally feminist than they were, and of Ho Chi Minh that was not overly hostile or dismissive, just to name a few. There is a good degree of significance to this book outside of the message of globalization, which is not uncommon for books in this post-Cold War era. The relatively simple language and ordinary length make the book ideal for a fast-paced college courses, or for youths in general for that matter, as well as for leisure readers. This accessibility is only truly important when one considers the host of characters featured in the book, including Zheng He, Kangxi, Toussaint, Tecumseh, Ito Hirobumi, Pern, and Meir, all of whom are people of great historical significance, regardless of whether their effects were local or international, yet largely unknown and unpublicized in mainstream education. Ken Wolf, through his book, helps to fill a gap in education through the sheer amount of useful facts and the quality of the background stories he manages to include in the work, overshadowing the occasional flaws in his techniques and writings, which are outstanding enough to warrant it as a valuable tool for anyone but the dedicated historian.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Interesting Book

By D. Maddock

Wolf writes interesting comparative evaluations of historical personages in both volumes of this little pair of books. His comparisons are useful, not profound in any way, but short biographies which point out characteristics of the historical figures as well as similarities and differences between them. The chapters are clearly written, almost too simply, and should certainly give students no problem whatsoever. You will note that I am commenting on the actual book itself -- and not the price my college bookstore charged me for it. Presumably, the troubled soul who could not see beyond the price his college bookstore charged, was later able to sell it back to the bookstore. Shouldn't he have mentioned that? Probably forgot. Did he even read it? We'll never know. Probably forgot.

Assuming no previous knowledge of history, *Personalities and Problems* is a unique collection of original essays about real people whose lives or careers demonstrate solutions to problems of their times. Each chapter focuses on a problem or issue and illustrates it by discussing the lives of two historical figures (actual or near contemporaries of each other) whose careers illustrate the richness and variety of history.

About the Author Ken Wolf is Professor of History at Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky, where he has taught since 1969. He received his B.A. degree from St. Ambrose College and his M.A. and Ph.D. in history from the University of Notre Dame. Professor Wolf helped design Murray State's World Civilizations course and has taught it since its inception. He also teaches courses in the Development of Historical Thinking. Professor Wolf has published articles on European nationalism, historiography, intellectual history, and the teaching of history in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, *The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences-Biographical Supplement*, *Teaching History*, the *Illinois Quarterly*, *The Journal of Kentucky Studies*, and the *AHA Perspectives*. For five years Professor Wolf served as a dean of the Kentucky Governor's Scholars Program, and has recently helped start The Commonwealth Honors Academy at Murray State. He was selected as a Pew Faculty Fellow in International Affairs for 1993-94. He and his wife, Deanna, a social worker, have three children and four grandchildren.