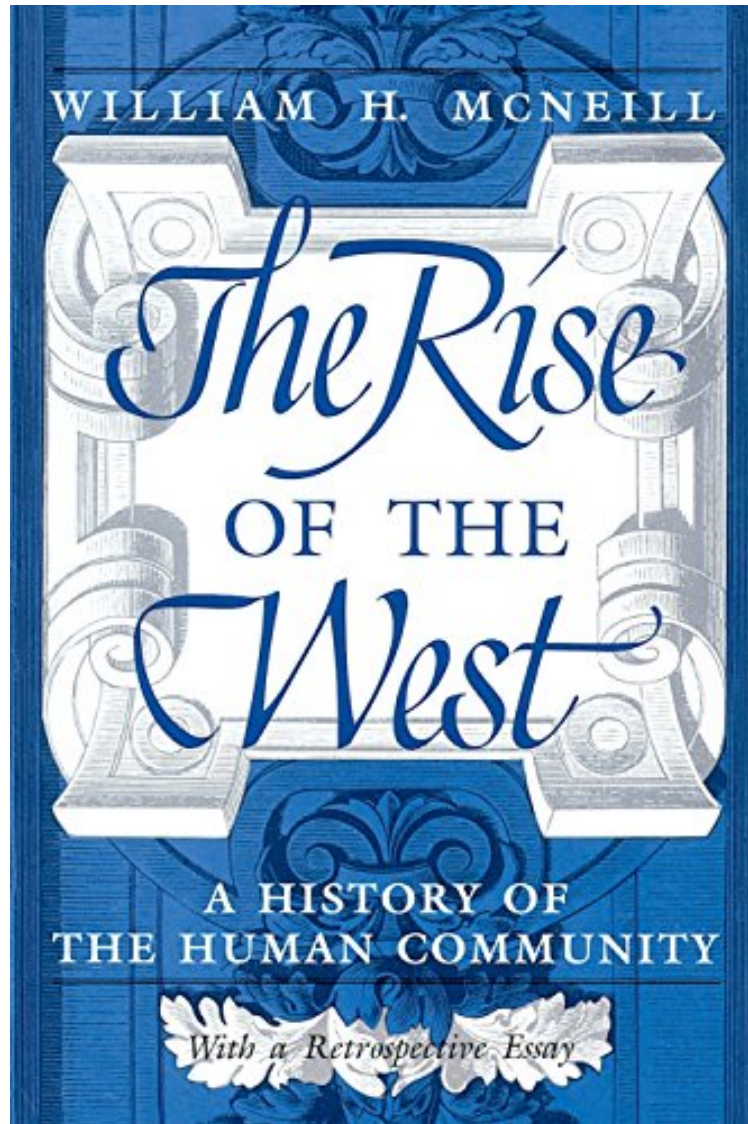


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The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community; with a Retrospective Essay

William H. McNeill

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William H. McNeill : The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community; with a Retrospective Essay before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community; with a Retrospective Essay:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. I wish I had learned history this way! A crosswalk through time

rather than units of "world civ."By charlene at Dosido BookshelfThis is a wonderful telling of the human story from cave man days to the modern era, condensed to 800 pages. The theme of the writer, William H. McNeill, is how societies advance through cross-cultural challenge and exchange. This theme unifies the discussion of various empires and epochs, because each history is explored in relationship to the larger world. Despite the broad brush strokes, McNeill still provides fascinating detail as he touches down on particular times and places. This detail engages the reader and invites further reading in areas of special interest, as well as reflection and discussion respecting contemporary issues. Here is an example: "Within surprisingly few decades, the most active center of innovative activity shifted from China to the Atlantic face of Europe. Before 1500, capitalists achieved remarkable autonomy within the walls of a few Italian and north European city-states; and even after that political framework decayed, urban sovereignties in Europe continued to give merchants and bankers almost unhampered scope or expansion of market activity, whereas in China, and also in most of the Moslim world, regimes unsympathetic to private capitalist accumulation prevailed. In the name of good government, Asian rulers effectively checked the rise of large-scale entrepreneurship by confiscatory taxation on the one hand, and by regulation of prices in the interest of consumers on the other. This left large-scale commercial enterprise, and presently also mining and plantation agriculture, more and more to the Europeans. Consequently, the rise of the West to its world hegemony of recent centuries got underway." (p.xxviii)McNeill emphasizes the ingenuity and social progress that follows the release of peasant classes from serfdom: "Thus, for example, pikemen recruited from the towns of northern Italy and later from the villages of Switzerland challenged the military supremacy of aristocratic knights from the twelfth century onward, while in the fourteenth century, the cream of French chivalry could not prevail against English bowmen, recruited originally from the poverty-stricken Welsh marchlands. As for politics, such representative institutions as the English Parliament, the French Estates-General, and the Ecumenical Councils of the Church, all brought varied social groups into the highest arenas of the political process."The result was to mobilize greater human resources within European society than was possible within the more rigidly hierarchical societies of the other civilized lands. The Greek democratic polis of the classical age had shown for a brief period the potentialities of a small community of free men and citizens. Western Europe was neither so free nor so intensely creative; yet there, too, we can perhaps detect the stimulating effect of circumstances that called forth conflicting energies of a larger proportion of the total population than could ever find expression in a society dominated by just a few individuals of comparatively homogeneous, though much more refined, outlook." (p.558-559)McNeill's walk through human history provides a solid framework for the study of history, and a clearer view of our own times. I definitely recommend it, especially for young adults. They are the heirs of this world; and they will write the history of the next century.6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. One of the good old ones.By JB1976An absolutely readable and thorough (relatively, considering it's scope) history of how the West - once an inconsequential backwater - came to dominate the globe. Covers all cultures up until the ascendancy of the West (but still keeps some attention on other cultures. Further, this book is old enough that it is not PC, or 'sensitive' to the feelings of those cultures that didn't do as well. Too many modern histories seem intent to find the New Guinea Shakespeare or some such - utter silliness. Don't get me wrong, he gives each culture/civ it's due, but when the West rises to ascendancy he does not worry about offending the people of those cultures who didn't match the West at the period 1500-present.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Classic History of Civilizations, East and WestBy John CaronnaAn amazing work of scholarship that is very readable, This sweeping history covers world civilisation from its beginning in Mesopotamia to the mid-twentieth century. The book is divided into epochs of hundreds of years and describes the civilisation of each period in the different parts of the world: The West (Europe and later the Americas), the Middle East, India and Asia. The origins of the major world religions and their interactions over centuries are especially interesting.Although published in the 1960's this work remains a classic.

The Rise of the West, winner of the National Book Award for history in 1964, is famous for its ambitious scope and intellectual rigor. In it, McNeill challenges the Spengler-Toynbee view that a number of separate civilizations pursued essentially independent careers, and argues instead that human cultures interacted at every stage of their history. The author suggests that from the Neolithic beginnings of grain agriculture to the present major social changes in all parts of the world were triggered by new or newly important foreign stimuli, and he presents a persuasive narrative of world history to support this claim. In a retrospective essay titled "The Rise of the West after Twenty-five Years," McNeill shows how his book was shaped by the time and place in which it was written (1954-63). He discusses how historiography subsequently developed and suggests how his portrait of the world's past in The Rise of the West should be revised to reflect these changes. "This is not only the most learned and the most intelligent, it is also the most stimulating and fascinating book that has ever set out to recount and explain the whole history of mankind. . . . To read it is a great experience. It leaves echoes to reverberate, and seeds to germinate in the mind."H. R. Trevor-Roper, New York Times Book Review

From Library JournalThis is one of the works that Gress criticizes as an example of the Grand Narrative. And, in the retrospective essay contained in this most recent edition, McNeill does acknowledge the "cultural imperialism" of the

scope and conception of the work as well as some of the other weaknesses. However, it still remains an informative overview suitable for high school as well as college and public libraries. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. About the Author William H. McNeill is the Robert A. Millikan Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus in the Department of History and the College at the University of Chicago. His many books include *The Pursuit of Power*, *The Rise of the West*, and *Mythistory and Other Essays*, all published by the University of Chicago Press.