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Civilization: The West And The Rest

NIALL FERGUSON

Civilization



Synopsis

The rise to global predominance of Western civilization is the single most important historical phenomenon of the past five hundred years. All over the world, an astonishing proportion of people now work for Western-style companies, study at Western-style universities, vote for Western-style governments, take Western medicines, wear Western clothes, and even work Western hours. Yet six hundred years ago the petty kingdoms of Western Europe seemed unlikely to achieve much more than perpetual internecine warfare. It was Ming China or Ottoman Turkey that had the look of world civilizations. How did the West overtake its Eastern rivals? And has the zenith of Western power now passed? In *Civilization: The West and the Rest*, bestselling author Niall Ferguson argues that, beginning in the fifteenth century, the West developed six powerful new concepts that the Rest lacked: competition, science, the rule of law, consumerism, modern medicine, and the work ethic.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

While I suspect that David Starkey would violently object the two current giants of television history in the UK in terms of providing a worldview are the left leaning Simon Schama and the combative neo conservative Niall Ferguson. Their dust up at last years Hay Literary festival in Wales was a colourful sparring session between two big intellects firing verbal potshots at each other and a joy to behold. Schama concentrated on providing a robust defense of Barack Obama while Ferguson spent much of his allotted time dissing the President's now famous speech delivered in Cairo in 2009. Indeed he has described it as "touchy feely nonsense" and has in recent weeks sent out lurid warnings about Obama's failure to anticipate the demise of Mubarak and to come to terms with what

Ferguson sees as the potential rise of the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt and the possible "restoration of the caliphate and the strict application of Sharia". Strong stuff, but Ferguson does like a good row. (see his feud with the nobel prize winning economist Paul Krugman) These themes above are the heart of this new book "Civilization: The West and the Rest" since Ferguson comes from the controversial standpoint that Western dominance has on the whole been a progressive force and that on the basis of a cost benefit analysis the good outweighs the bad (it is a constant theme in all his books). He recently argued that "the rulers of western Africa prior to the European empires were not running some kind of scout camp. They were engaged in the slave trade. They showed zero sign of developing the country's economic resources....and the counterfactual idea that somehow the indigenous rulers would have been more successful in economic development doesn't have any credibility at all.

Wow, what an amazing, exciting and insightful historical analysis of how we all got here! By "here," I mean to say, at , browsing books on line, reading the reviews of anonymous readers with wildly divergent opinions! Before I write anything, remember this: Comparative Culture is, by definition, based on human opinion, and its study can be polarizing and emotionally sensitive. This book will get your back up, one way or the other. There are many detailed reviews already written on this controversial volume, so I'll just cut RIGHT to the chase: If you're a conservative American (or European, for that matter), and you think we are "by God, the strongest country on earth, never been stronger, and all you foreign hordes coming from Asia can love it or leave it!" then this book is NOT for you. If you're a Tea Partier or a Rick Perry supporter, this book is going to rankle you, maybe even offend you, because Dr. Ferguson recognizes that the United States is an empire in serious trouble. But he doesn't leave the story there. On the other side of the coin, if you're a staunch "declinist," a radical environmentalist, an Occupier, or a gloom-and-doom jeremiah, this book will ALSO put you off. Niall Ferguson is far too sophisticated a social critic to be easily labeled. He's not a flag waving patriot, and he's not a red-hot revolutionary. He's an enormously accomplished historian who believes that our times are BAD, that civilization is dangerously close to rapid disintegration, that the loss of standards and civility in life are creating a world of unimaginable selfishness, that fear and greed rule the WORLD, not just the markets, and that mass consumerism leads to boredom, loneliness and depression. There's just one catch: He believes we can fix it.

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