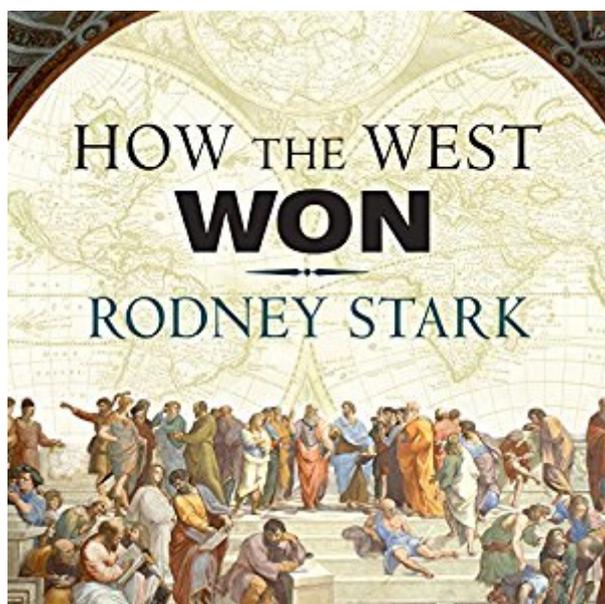


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How The West Won: The Neglected Story Of The Triumph Of Modernity



Synopsis

Modernity developed only in the West - in Europe and North America. Nowhere else did science and democracy arise; nowhere else was slavery outlawed. Only Westerners invented chimneys, musical scores, telescopes, eyeglasses, pianos, electric lights, aspirin, and soap. The question is, why? Unfortunately, that question has become so politically incorrect that most scholars avoid it. But acclaimed author Rodney Stark provides the answers in this sweeping new look at Western civilization. *How the West Won* demonstrates the primacy of uniquely Western ideas - among them the belief in free will, the commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, the notion that the universe functions according to rational rules that can be discovered, and the emphasis on human freedom and secure property rights. *How the West Won* displays Stark's gifts for lively narrative history and making the latest scholarship accessible to all. This bold, insightful book will force you to rethink your understanding of the West and the birth of modernity - and to recognize that Western civilization really has set itself apart from other cultures.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Anyone who has taken a history course at a university lately can attest to the rigid, doctrinaire multiculturalism taught. Textbook after textbook downplays the achievements of the west. "How the West Won" is a brisk slap in the face to the current animus against western civilization. Take the Dark Ages, which are always portrayed as an age of utter barbarism in our textbooks, a time when society declined and all that was worthy in the ancient world vanished. Stark points out that "serious historians have known for decades that these claims are a complete fraud. Even the respectable

encyclopedias...now define the Dark Ages as a myth" (p 71).He pulls out fact after fact to prove his position. Close to Stockholm, "an elaborate industrial community known as Helgo flourished from about 250 through 700." (p 82), and archaeologists have found a "bronze Buddha figure made in India" (p 81) in the ruins of Helgo, revealing how wide the trade was at the time. Not only did trade flourish, but "Within several centuries of the fall of Rome, Europeans have developed military technology that far surpassed not the the Romans' but that of every other society on earth" (p 84). Military might was important in the era. Islam was on the rise. In 1095 "The Byzantine emperor Alexius...appealed for Western forces to defend Constantinople from the threat of Turkish invaders" (p 102). Already, the entire of North Africa, which had once been solidly Christian, had fallen to Muslim armies. Stark asks us to "Compare Shakespeare's tragedies with those of the ancient Greeks" (p 119) For example, Oedipus is at the mercy of a blind, unfeeling fate. The ancient gods were without virtue; they were petty, vengeful, and vain.

Prof. Stark has brought together, over a lifetime of study, a very powerful argument which is, in many ways, refreshing to read. The restoration of the West to its proper place within world history is an important enterprise and one that is beginning to be given voice to as the grip the Counter Culture has held Western Universities in for the past forty plus years begins to fade. However, Prof. Stark often TM overcompensatesTM for the Counter CultureTM's self-loathing by engaging in what might be viewed as over-stated positions [the idea that the West invented Science is not entirely with merit, but it is true if we speak of Science in its modern form] and upon more than one occasion his vitriolic language when dealing with the Counter Culture [what Prof. Stark refers to as PC/Politically Correct] is difficult to abide. Where he is on firmer ground is demonstrating how Scholasticism was responsible for laying the foundation which made the Scientific Revolution possible. The author is even on firmer ground when he argues there was no revolution, but a natural evolution which took place over many centuries. They go on to argue an increasingly popular position: that there was no Dark Ages. Prof. Stark contends, rightly, this was the invention of the 18th Century Enlightenment and put forward by those hostile to religion. Along with this, he argues that Empires are bad for economic and political development, especially the Roman Empire which killed innovation. Perhaps this is, also, an overstatement, but an interesting one. One of the author'sTM import points was that disunity and competition among individuals and states was essential to the West'sTM triumph. However, Prof. Stark does not argue that everything was good.

Before I retired a few years ago I was an Advanced Placement World History teacher in a Georgia

high school. One of the most interesting topics was "Why the West?", or "How did a somewhat isolated region in the northwest corner of Eurasia manage to gain world dominance?" Basically the debate would boil down to whether Europe and the rest of the West's rise was due to internal or external factors, and whether the West really rose or the rest just declined. It made for some great discussions which I remember fondly. The same debate goes on in high school and college classrooms all over the world. In this debate Professor Rodney Stark of Baylor University comes down squarely on the side of European exceptionalism, or Eurocentrism. It is his view that Europeans, specifically Christian and predominantly Protestant Northern Europeans, out did the rest of the world because of their superior economics, governmental and other organizations, and most of all, their religion, which emphasizes individualism, enterprise, and expansion. The rest of the world fell behind because they were inferior to the West, especially in their predominant religions. Stark does not deny that there were abuses practiced by the Christian West on the areas and peoples they dominated, but he points out that other cultures and other religions did the same thing or worse to places they exploited. In other words, the West won because it was the best. Now there is nothing all that new or insightful about Stark's basic arguments. The idea of "Protestant exceptionalism" has been around for many years, for example, as have his points about capitalism, the Enlightenment, and the role of the Church in maintaining classical culture during the Middle Ages (Stark does not agree that there were "Dark Ages").

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