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# Civilization: The West And The Rest

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NIALL FERGUSON

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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**

This book with Brexit and the US election as a backdrop becomes all the more interesting to read. I could perhaps say that Mr. Ferguson simplifies the complexity to suit the narrative (or as he says historians trying to retroactively fit civilizational cycles to their theories) but the larger point he makes is very valid and makes you question whether the foundational pieces of western civilization are being torn down (not just by the brexiters but also the anti-brexiters... I use both as a shortcut for grouping the two sides coming up around the Democratic world). One side questioning trade and immigration and the other glorifying precolonial colonies (I don't want to use the term nation and

hence use colony for the lack of a better term) and disparaging religion's role in society. The list can go on. Long story short... Would recommend it to read.

I like the subtitle "The West and the Rest". It shows how the collaborations that resulted from open approaches to developing resources, not simple plundering, resulted in the greatest accomplishments that have been adopted by extant civilizations everywhere. There were some surprises for me, including the idea that the human tendency to warring actually had a human benefit. The origins of the word denim, jeans, and the Japanese word for suit, as in suit of clothes, were delights. He points out that it really makes little difference which particular civilization is the dominant one from time to time. The successful ones will always have incorporated the most civilly advanced concepts.

You don't have to agree with Mr Ferguson's every word to nonetheless find this an illuminating and perspective-tilting wide angled telescope on five hundred years of history. Written in a highly engaging style and narrated brilliantly by the author. Highly recommended.

You will not be able to put this book down. You might consider the Kindle version in case you need to google Websters or refresh (learn) your South American history

If you want to get a good sense of why the West has been leading the Rest and really become a part of the daily lives of almost all civilizations, this is a must read. There is a lot of things to learn from this book in addition to, at least in my case, becoming surprised about how Western the world really is. Everything from how we work to how we live, how we dress, and increasingly how we eat, is Western.

Ferguson's book is a great description of what made the West great, as well as the pitfall civilization sometimes succumbs to. It is interesting to look at his findings through the glasses of today's economic, political, and social institutions.

Niall Ferguson does a masterful job of capturing the rise of Western civilization and its impact on the rest of the world. His identification of five "killer apps" that enabled small European powers to become world-wide empires provides a nice structure for what can sometimes be an overwhelming amount of detail. I'm not sure that everything Ferguson postulates is true, but it provides a cohesive

and convincing way of understanding the rise of Western civilization from 1500 onward. I found that I kept thinking back to the thought-provoking book *Guns, Germs and Steel* that assays much of the same territory from a different - and I think complementary - perspective. If you want a big picture view of modern history, I think you will find this book valuable.

This is the second book I have read by Niall Ferguson. It is a well-written, fully engaging examination of western civilization and how our societies evolved to dominate the world in so many ways, and to contribute to its evolution, both negatively and positively. Mr. Ferguson is a talented writer and historian and great presenter of information, both on the written page and on the television screen. The biggest take-away message from the book -- which all policy-makers, elected officials, and citizens should be mindful of today -- is the vital role science and learning have played in our success, and how much they have contributed to the betterment of humankind the world over. We -- the "west" and the "evolving rest" -- should continue to place a high value on scientific research and discovery.

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