



The West: Encounters & Transformations, Concise Edition, Volume 1: To 1715

By Brian Levack, Edward Muir, Michael Maas, Meredith Veldman

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The West: Encounters & Transformations Concise Edition examines the changing definition and identity of the West throughout history, emphasizing the encounters between different cultures, beliefs, ideas and peoples that shaped Western civilization, both outside the West and within it.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Brian Levack grew up in a family of teachers in the New York metropolitan area. From his father, a professor of French history, he acquired a love for studying the past, and he knew from an early age that he too would become a historian. He received his B.A. from Fordham University in 1965 and his Ph.D. from Yale in 1970. In graduate school he became fascinated by the history of the law and the interaction between law and politics, interests that he has maintained throughout his career. In 1969 he joined the History Department of the University of Texas at Austin, where he is now the John Green Regents Professor in History. The winner of several teaching awards, Levack teaches a wide variety of courses on British and European history, legal history, and the history of witchcraft. For eight years he served as the chair of his department, a rewarding but challenging assignment that made it difficult for him to devote as much time as he wished to his teaching and scholarship. His books include *The Civil Lawyers in England, 1603-1641: A Political Study* (1973), *The Formation of the British State: England, Scotland and the Union, 1603-1707* (1987), and *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (1987 and 1995), which has been translated into eight languages.

His study of the development of beliefs about witchcraft in Europe over the course of many centuries gave him the idea of writing a textbook on Western civilization that would illustrate a broader set of encounters between different cultures, societies, and ideologies. While writing the book, Levack and his two sons built a house on property that he and his wife, Nancy, own in the Texas hill country. He found that the two projects presented similar challenges: it was easy to draw up the design, but far more difficult to execute it. When not teaching, writing, or doing carpentry work, Levack runs along the jogging trails of Austin, and he has recently discovered the pleasures of scuba diving.

Edward Muir grew up in the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains in Utah, close-by the Emigration Trail along which wagon trains of Mormon pioneers and California-bound settlers made their way westward. As a child he loved to explore the broken-down wagons and abandoned household goods left at the side of the trail and from that acquired a fascination with the past. Besides the material remains of the past, he grew up with stories of his Mormon pioneer ancestors and an appreciation for how the past continued to influence the present. During the turbulent 1960s, he became interested in Renaissance Italy as a period and a place that had been formative for Western civilization. His biggest challenge is finding the time to explore yet another new corner of Italy and its restaurants.

He received his Ph.D. from Rutgers University where he specialized in the Italian Renaissance and did archival research in Venice and Florence, Italy. He is now the Clarence L. Ver Steeg Professor in the Arts and Sciences at Northwestern University and former chair of the History Department. At Northwestern he has won several teaching awards. His books include, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, 1981); *Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta in Renaissance Italy* (Johns Hopkins, 1993 and 1998); and *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997).

Some years ago Ed began to experiment with the use of historical trials in teaching and discovered that students loved them. From that experience he decided to write this textbook, which employs trials as a central feature. Ed lives beside Lake Michigan in Evanston, Illinois. His twin passions are skiing in the

Rocky Mountains and rooting for the Chicago Cubs, who manage every summer to demonstrate that winning isn't everything.

Michael Maas was born in the Ohio River Valley, a community that had been a frontier outpost during the late eighteenth century. He grew up reading the stories of the early settlers and their struggles with the native peoples, and seeing in the urban fabric how the city had subsequently developed into a prosperous coal and steel town, with immigrants from all over the world. As a boy he developed a lifetime interest in the archaeology and history of the ancient Mediterranean world and began to study Latin. At Cornell University he combined his interests in cultural history and the Classical world by majoring in Classics and Anthropology. A semester in Rome clinched his commitment to these fields — and to Italian cooking. Michael went on to get his PhD in the Graduate Program in Ancient History and Mediterranean Archaeology at UC Berkeley.

He has traveled widely in the Mediterranean and the Middle East and participated in several archaeological excavations, including an underwater dig in Greece. Since 1985 he has taught ancient history at Rice University in Houston, Texas, where he founded and directs the interdisciplinary B.A. Program in Ancient Mediterranean Civilizations. He has won several teaching awards.

Maas' special area of research is Late Antiquity, the period of transition from the Classical to the Medieval worlds, which saw the collapse of the Roman Empire in western Europe and the development of the Byzantine state in the east. During his last sabbatical, he was a member of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N. J., where he worked on his current book *The Conqueror's Gift. Ethnography, Identity, and Imperial Power at the End of Antiquity* (forthcoming). His other books include *John Lydus and the Roman Past. Antiquarianism and Politics in the Age of Justinian* (1992); *Readings in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (2000); and *Exegesis and Empire in the Early Byzantium* (2003).

Maas has always been interested in interdisciplinary teaching and the encounters among different cultures. He sees *The West: Encounters and Transformations* as an opportunity to explain how the modern civilization that we call "the West" had its origins in the diverse interactions among many different peoples of antiquity.

Meredith Veldman grew up in the western suburbs of Chicago, in a close-knit, closed-in Dutch Calvinist community. In this immigrant society, history mattered: the "Reformed tradition" structured not only religious beliefs but also social identity and political practice. This influence certainly played some role in shaping Veldman's early fascination with history. But probably just as important were the countless World War II re-enactment games she played with her five older brothers. Whatever the cause, Veldman majored in history at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and then earned a Ph.D. in modern European history, with a concentration in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain, from Northwestern University in 1988.

As Associate Professor of History at Louisiana State University, Veldman teaches courses in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British history and twentieth-century Europe, as well as the second half of "Western Civ." In her many semesters in the Western Civ classroom, Veldman tried a number of different textbooks but found herself increasingly dissatisfied. She wanted a text that would convey to beginning students at least some of the complexities and ambiguities of historical interpretation, introduce them to the exciting work being done now in cultural history, and, most importantly, tell a good story. The search for this textbook led her to accept the offer made by Levack, Maas, and Muir to join them in writing *The West: Encounters and Transformations*.

The author of *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-1980* (1984),

Veldman is also the wife of a Methodist minister and the mother of two young sons. They reside in Baton Rouge, where Veldman finds coping with the steamy climate a constant challenge. She and her family recently returned from Manchester, England, where they lived for three years and astonished the natives by their enthusiastic appreciation of English weather.

Users Review

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