



Civilization: A New History of the Western World

By Roger Osborne

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"It would be hard to imagine a more readable general history of the West that covers so much ground so incisively."?William Grimes, *The New York Times*

Ever since the attacks of September 11, 2001, Western leaders have described a world engaged in "a fight for civilization." But what do we mean by civilization? We believe in a Western tradition of freedom that has produced a fulfilling existence for many millions of people and a culture of enormous depth and creative power. But the history of our civilization is also filled with unspeakable brutality?for every Leonardo there is a Mussolini, for every Beethoven symphony a concentration camp, for every Chrysler Building a My Lai massacre.

An ambitious historical assessment of the Western world?tying together the histories of empires, art, philosophy, science, and politics?*Civilization* reexamines and confronts us with all of our glories and catastrophes. At such a dangerous time in the world's history, this brilliant book is required reading.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This stimulating survey steers a middle course between triumphal pageant of progress and postmodern bricolage of clashing perspectives to attempt a coherent narrative of Western history. Historian Osborne (*The Floating Egg: Episodes in the Making of Geology*) traces a lucid, thoughtful overview of European and American history from Stonehenge and the Greco-Roman era to the present. Tying together his account are a few broad themes, most prominently the development of rationalism—the use of abstract reasoning to uncover universal laws governing nature and society—from its Platonic origins to its apotheosis in Western science and its malevolent influence on Soviet communism. This often sinister rationalism works in counterpoint, and sometimes opposition, to what he sees as the redeeming organicity of Western culture, its rootedness in human adaptation to changing environments and practical needs in a multitude of contexts, from the growth of medieval towns to the rise of Hollywood and rock 'n' roll. Some pronouncements, like Osborne's insistence on the unique ferocity of Western warfare, aren't persuasive, and the paragraph he accords the Rolling Stones' 1969 Altamont concert is one too many. But one judges such a book less by its historiographical synthesis than by the wealth of provocative insights it throws up, and by that measure Osborne succeeds admirably. Photos. (Dec.)

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From [Booklist](#)

We frequently hear speculation that the West is engaged in a "clash of civilizations" with the Muslim world. So it is useful, perhaps even vital, that the West periodically examine the roots, history, and current condition of its civilization. Osborne is clearly an admirer of the richness and magnificent achievements of Western civilization. However, he is no cultural chauvinist, and he eloquently poses the dilemma implicit in a culture that could produce the glories of classical Greece and the Renaissance and the barbarism of Nazi Germany. Osborne follows a chronological approach that ranges from prehistory to the post-cold war period. Fortunately, he avoids the pitfalls of trying to tell too much, concentrating on vital and specific themes within particular epochs, including such topics as the development of democratic institutions in Athens, the growth of industrial capitalism, and the nature of totalitarianism under Hitler. This is a well-written, easily digestible survey illustrating that there remains much to be cherished within the common threads of our diverse civilization. *Jay Freeman*

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Review

"THE FLOATING EGG (over 12,000 copies sold) 'Wonderful...utterly fascinating' The Times 'If you have never read a book about geology, and didn't even think you were interested, Roger Osborne could change your life' Independent on Sunday THE DEPRAT AFFAIR 'Immensely readable and beautifully written' Ruth Rendell, Daily Telegraph THE DREAMER OF CALLE SAN SALVADOR 'A refreshing change from "straight" history...fascinating' Daily Telegraph"

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Lori Gravitt:

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