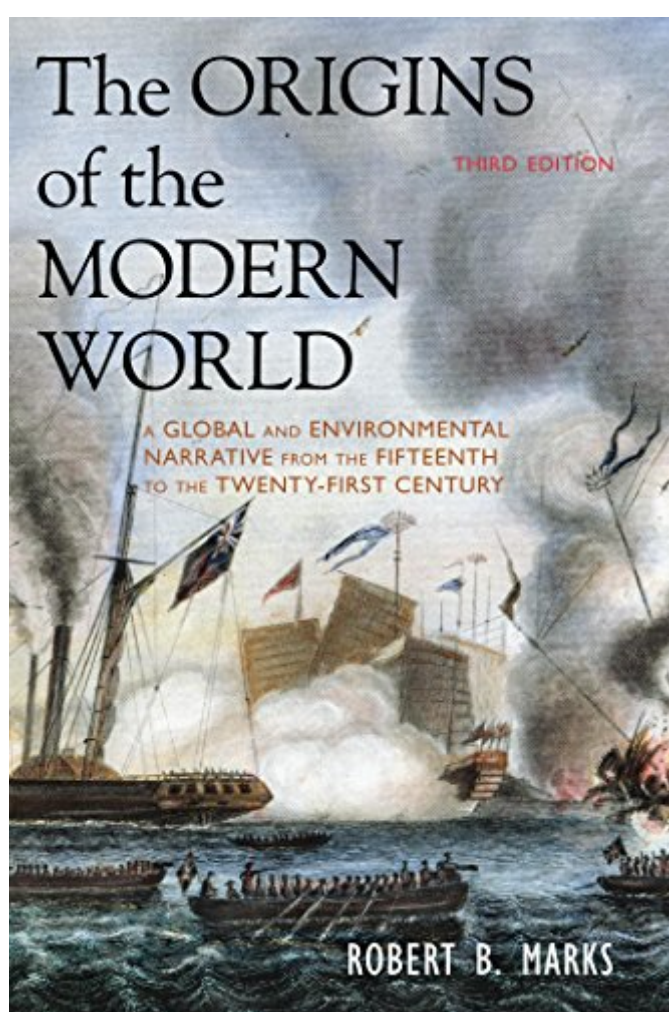


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The Origins Of The Modern World: A Global And Environmental Narrative From The Fifteenth To The Twenty-First Century (World Social Change)



Synopsis

This clearly written and engrossing book presents a global narrative of the origins of the modern world from 1400 to the present. Unlike most studies, which assume that the rise of the West is the story of the coming of the modern world, this history, drawing upon new scholarship on Asia, Africa, and the New World and upon the maturing field of environmental history, constructs a story in which those parts of the world play major roles, including their impacts on the environment.

Robert B. Marks defines the modern world as one marked by industry, the nation state, interstate warfare, a large and growing gap between the wealthiest and poorest parts of the world, increasing inequality within the wealthiest industrialized countries, and an escape from the environmental constraints of the biological old regime. He explains its origins by emphasizing contingencies (such as the conquest of the New World); the broad comparability of the most advanced regions in China, India, and Europe; the reasons why England was able to escape from common ecological constraints facing all of those regions by the eighteenth century; a conjuncture of human and natural forces that solidified a gap between the industrialized and non-industrialized parts of the world; and the mounting environmental crisis that defines the modern world. Now in a new edition that brings the saga of the modern world to the present in an environmental context, the book considers how and why the United States emerged as a world power in the twentieth century and became the sole superpower by the twenty-first century, and why the changed relationship of humans to the environment likely will be the hallmark of the modern era—the Anthropocene. Once again arguing that the U.S. rise to global hegemon was contingent, not inevitable, Marks also points to the resurgence of Asia and the vastly changed relationship of humans to the environment that may in the long run overshadow any political and economic milestones of the past hundred years.

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Customer Reviews

This is a superb book about world history, but it doesn't read like a history book. It has 2 primary arguments: 1. Contrary to popular opinion, "the West" (Europe and the United States) didn't dominate world history until about the 1850's. In contrast, "common knowledge" casts Europe, especially Spain, England, and Portugal, (and later the United States) as hegemonic since at least the time of Columbus' voyages around 1500. Mr. Marks' argument is both convincing and approachable because he provides a wide variety of metrics to demonstrate the East's (China, India and other Asian empires) superiority in areas such as technology, sophistication of trading networks, population, standards of living, and even sophistication of unwritten international contracts. 2. Second, Mr. Marks argues for magnifying the role of environment in world history. As with the East/West thesis above, his argument is coherent and fact-based. From the initial point of departure (First Americans in the New World including Mesoamericans such as the Incas and Aztecs suffered up to 90% population loss due to diseases brought by the Europeans), and continuing forward (arguing that the production of synthetic nitrogen was among the most important events in human history, fueling the growth of Europe and the United States and making possible their rise over India and China, and that industrialization came first to England's in large part thanks to luckily being close to easily accessible sources of coal), luck and the environment helped accelerate the "rise of the West" more than many people think.

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