

The Idea of Europe in Selected American World History Textbooks¹

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The goal of this essay is to analyze the treatment of Europe within the mode of historical discourse known as world history. Although there is no one universally accepted definition of world history it is increasingly understood as a field that, instead of merely recounting the stories of political entities known as “nations” or “civilizations,” encompasses the stories of “past connections in the human community” (Manning, 2003: 15). The concept of “civilization” (traditionally the main unit within the study of world history) has come under scrutiny as well. In a recent book Felipe Fernández-Armesto defines civilization, not as a state or political-religious tradition, but as “a style of life” (Manning, 2003: 99). In addition to changes in how world history and civilization are defined the writing of world history has also changed, with the “triumphant symphony of European moral supremacy” being replaced by “a querulous cacophony of regional diversity and global interdependence” (von Glahn, 2003: 56).

To make some sense of this “querulous cacophony” several attempts at classification have been made. For example, Patrick Manning has argued that numerous publications in world history since 1990 fit into four categories: area-study approaches, thematic studies, conceptual studies at the global level, and studies that attempt to establish linkages between world history and European and American history (2003). Area-study approaches tend to embrace case study methodology, paying attention to the historical connections between regions. Thematic approaches focus on politics, economy, society, religion, ecology, and other aspects of world

¹ Do not cite without proper attribution. Forthcoming in Andrea C. Birch and Camelia Elias (eds.), *Transatlantic*, Cultural Text Studies 4, Aalborg University Press.

history. Conceptual studies explore the waves of globalization and the structure of global politics by paying attention to theory.

Approaches falling within the fourth category try to establish a relationship between the West (i.e., Europe and North America) and the rest. Until recently, there was a strong tendency to connect European and American history to world history by telling the story of the global past through a Western prism. Manning describes such a tendency as “Eurocentrism”—the idea that “history outside ‘the West’ was the story of Westerners staying away from home, or the history of Western impact on other areas of the world” (2003: 101). Although frowned upon in academic circles, this approach continues to be very popular in history textbooks. At the same time, according to Manning, few studies have managed to connect European and American history to world history successfully (2003).

If Manning is right, then the Eurocentric bias in the writing and teaching of world is unlikely to disappear any time soon. Richard von Glahn, a prominent scholar of Chinese history, also suggests that the Eurocentric bias in the writing of world history has persisted. Pre-modern China in world history discourse, for example, is sometimes still portrayed as a stagnant society and an “oriental despotism.”

Von Glahn identifies five basic orientations in world history: the stimulus-diffusion approach, European exceptionalism, the European hegemony model, counter-hegemony, and the regional networks approach. He emphasizes that most world history writing does not fit neatly into any one of these categories and in fact tends to combine several of them. The stimulus-diffusion approach uses an anthropological model of stimulus and diffusion to explain the interactions of various civilizations. It has drawn attention to a wide variety of agents of historical change: long-distance trade and travel; the diffusion of technology; transfers of plants,

animals, and diseases; imperial expansion; and missionary activity. Von Glahn believes that one of the most important contributions of the stimulus-diffusion approach has been “to push back the horizons of an integrated global history well before the expansion of Europe launched by the Iberian sailors in the fifteenth century” (von Glahn, 2003: 58).

European exceptionalism is the belief that Europe had some quality deeply rooted in its heritage—environment (temperate climate), society (feudal class structure), demography (nuclear families with low birth rates), knowledge (rationality and a belief in progress), or government (a competitive multi-state system)—that explains its dominance after 1500. One of the leading proponents of this approach is E.L. Jones, author of *The European Miracle*. In his search for the origins of European dominance Jones goes all the way back to the medieval period when Europe’s distinctive pattern of kinship, demography, and property, along with a competitive multi-state system, emerged. These qualities conferred certain advantages on Europeans which, according to Jones, they were later able to exploit in the modern period. The advantage of a competitive multi-state system, for example, is that it eroded political constraints on innovation and encouraged the diffusion of technology and methods of organization.

The European hegemony approach attributes the rise of Europe not to cultural or economic factors intrinsic to Europe, but to the formation of a world-system by which powerful European nations imposed an international division of labor on weaker societies, thereby enabling them to extract a greater portion of global wealth. The chief proponents of this approach are Immanuel Wallerstein and Fernand Braudel.

The counter-hegemony approach reduces Europe to a marginal province within the world system. According to several scholars, such as Janet Abu-Lughod and Andre Gunder Frank,

during the thirteenth century the world system was Eurasian, and it was shattered by the break up of the Mongol empire and the ruinous effects of the Black Death.

Finally, the regional networks approach suggests that parallel phenomena took place in Eurasia in 1500-1800. These phenomena included the growth of regionally dominant cities and the development of urban commercial classes. These trends did not have any single point of origin. In fact, they are indicative of “horizontally integrative continuities” (von Glahn, 2003: 64).

The increase in the popularity of non-Eurocentric approaches to world history reflects a change in America’s identity in relation to Europe. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been rethinking its status and role in the world. This process is reflected in world history discourse, which, as expressed in world history textbooks, has the power of creating historical consciousness and contributing to the reconstruction of American national identity. Currently, world history is a required course at most American universities. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that world history discourse as expressed in the world history textbooks used in these courses is going to have at least some effect on the way that future Americans see themselves in relation to other parts of the world, including Europe.

Analyzing the ways in which Europe is treated in selected American world history textbooks may shed some light on whether (and why) American students are still being exposed to a Eurocentric view of the world. The remainder of this essay analyzes two textbooks that are currently used in world history classes taught at the university level in the United States: *World Civilizations: Their History and Culture* (Philip Lee Ralph et al., 1997) and *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past* (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003). Each case study is organized around the following questions: what is the unit of analysis within the textbook, how

prominent is the “European” theme, how do the authors describe the development of European societies before 1500, how do they explain the rise of Europe after 1500, and how do the authors describe European interactions with other parts of the world?

Europe Viewed from North America

World Civilizations: Their History and Their Culture is described by its publisher as “a top choice at colleges and universities with over 400 adoptions in its eighth edition” (W.W. Norton & Company, 2005). According to the copyright page it has gone through nine editions since 1955 and even includes material from Edward M. Burns’ *Western Civilizations*, first published in 1941. It is therefore not without justification that the authors of this textbook, whose living members currently hail from universities in North America, call it a “classic” (Philip Lee Ralph et al., 1997: 1: xiii).

The first volume starts with a description of the “earliest beginnings” of humankind and traces the steps, such as the emergence of villages and long-distance trade in western Asia during the period 6500 to 3500-3000 B.C.E., in the evolution toward “civilization.” The authors use a geographical area study approach. Consequently, the chapters span the globe, covering the Mesopotamian civilization, ancient Egypt, the Hebrew and early Greek civilizations, ancient Indian civilization, ancient Chinese civilization, ancient Greece, the Roman civilization, the rise of Christianity, Islam, Byzantium, and the early medieval Western world. The textbook ends with a description of the early modern world focusing on the Renaissance and Reformation in early modern Europe.

In the preface, the authors explain the reasoning behind the broad scope of the book: “Our effort throughout this ninth edition has been to enhance the book’s coverage of the non-Western world, to draw out comparisons and connections between civilizations where apt, in short, *to strengthen the global dimension of the book*” (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: xiii, our emphasis). For the ninth edition, sections on China, Africa, Japan, Latin America, South Asia, and the Middle East were “substantially revised” to include descriptions of “social and economic institutions, the status of women, literature and philosophy, science and technology,” and, in the case of Africa, the impact of European imperialism. Substantial changes were also made to the chapters on Europe and North America.

The authors conceptualize civilizations as entities with more or less distinct borders and even “real” characteristics. Civilization “may be defined as a stage in human organization when governmental, social, and economic institutions have developed substantially to manage (however imperfectly) the problems of order, security and efficiency in a complex society” (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 23). Therefore, the authors argue that “civilization” was created around 3200 B.C.E. in Mesopotamia because that area had cities with social classes and that is when the Mesopotamians began to keep records.

Throughout the first volume, the authors emphasize the achievements of every civilization. The Mesopotamians “had their unattractive qualities” but “were profound thinkers” (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 27). The ancient Egyptians “had found a way to cooperate with nature and each other in order to live in peace and self-sufficiency for centuries at a stretch” (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 68). The Greeks “were vastly more experimental and creative” than the Egyptians (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 68). Thus, the text creates the illusion that each civilization consisted of unified groups of people who worked together and achieved a lot together.

The construction of an image of a “European” civilization begins after a survey of the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Hebrew civilizations. This construction is built on a primordial understanding of identity. The authors state that the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations “were the earliest civilizations of Europe,” adding that “in some respects the Minoans and the Mycenaeans seem to have looked forward to certain later European values and accomplishments” (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 96-97). The “worldly and progressive outlook” of the Minoans and Mycenaeans, with their devotion to “comfort and opulence... their love of amusement, zest for life, and courage for experimentation” (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 97), therefore prefigured the values of later Europeans.

In their analysis of the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations, the authors compare these early Europeans with various “others” (that is, the ancient Assyrians, Babylonians and ancient Egyptians). The “non-Europeans” were more warlike than the early Europeans, especially the Minoans. The authors make the latter point in their consistently eloquent way: “whereas ancient Assyria, ancient Babylon, and even ancient Egypt all breathed their last as ‘corpses in armor,’ ancient Crete breathed its last amid joyous festivals celebrated in cities without walls” (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 97).

This vision of early Europe is reminiscent of the dualistic approach to transatlantic relations recently developed by Robert Kagan. Even before the second Gulf War, Kagan saw Europe as entering a “post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity.” To him, the “other” (that is, the United States) has remained “marred in history” and war. Kagan traces the “roots” of Europe, not to the Minoans, but to the European Enlightenment (Kagan 2002).

The authors fully develop the “European” theme in the second part of the first volume. This part is called “The World of the Classical Era.” The European focus also prevails in the last

two parts of the textbook. Eleven out of fifteen chapters are devoted to the “European theme.” The fourth part, entitled “The Early Modern World,” is devoted entirely to the rise of Europe in the early sixteenth century. The image of Europe changes from “peaceful” and “joyous” to more warlike, as “intrepid mariners and conquistadors ended Europe’s millennium of self-containment (during the Middle Ages) by venturing onto the high seas of the Atlantic and Indian ocean and by planting Europe’s flag throughout the world” (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 617). Territorial expansion coincides with the Commercial Revolution which “spurs the development of overseas colonies and trade” and encourages agricultural and industrial expansion (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 617). Why did Europeans start venturing out to far away lands? The most important reason for the commercial revolution (which brings about the “rise” of Europe) was economic. They argue that overseas expansion in the fifteenth century was fueled by the “quest for Asiatic spices and other luxury goods.” Religious reasons (specifically, a desire to find “lost Christians”) mattered, but they were only secondary to the economic desires of the Europeans (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 670). To help the readers understand what the authors have perceived as the major reason behind the expansion of Europe, they ask the readers to “imagine a civilization without refrigeration.” With this image in mind, “one can easily understand why wealthy Europeans hankered after tangy spices to keep their food from putrifying and to relieve the monotony of salt” (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 670). Like E.L. Jones, the authors suggest that climate and geography played a role in the rise of Europe, especially during the initial stage of overseas expansion.

The authors maintain that the start of the overseas expansion around 1500 C.E. immensely helped the spread of capitalism by “providing marvelous opportunities for people with ability and daring to make new fortunes” (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 676). These new

entrepreneurs helped to foster the economic growth of “Europe” during the sixteenth century. However, the encounters with “Europe” during the early modern period were deadly for the new world. For example, the authors point out that the population of Mexico declined by about 90% after one hundred years of Spanish rule. “For the original inhabitants the appearance of the white man was an unmitigated disaster” (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 677). The period from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries was, in the words of the authors, a “century of pronounced crisis for European civilization” (Ralph et al., 1997: 1: 711). Europe was plagued by economic problems and religious wars. (What a contrast to the “peaceful” beginning of Europe during the Minoan period!)

Paradoxically, the textbook suggests that “European civilization” could regain stability by losing its “civilizational” cohesiveness and breaking apart into separate nation-states. Europe becomes stable only in the second volume of the textbook which focuses on the modern era since the sixteenth century. It is argued that religion, “the factor that had torn Europe apart” during the sixteenth century, was “increasingly” superseded by “newer ‘interests’—commerce and international balance and stability” (Ralph et al., 1997: 2: 122). These newer interests led to the emergence of a nation-state system, in which national interests were pursued by diplomacy and sometimes war. France, Prussia, Britain, Russia, and Austria-Hungary (that is, separate nation-states, not one “Europe”) become the main actors in the world scene.

European nation-states play a major role in the second volume. They develop absolutist monarchies (except Britain) and get engaged in the scientific revolution, the Industrial Revolution, nationalism, and liberalism. Industrialization brings the “West” (Western Europe) into the “world’s center” (the title of the sixth part is “The West at the World’s Center”). The non-Western, non-European civilizations are marginalized: major historical developments in

India, East Asia, and Africa during the early-modern era are summarized in one chapter. (There are forty three chapters in the second volume of the textbook.) The experiences of China, Japan, and Africa “under the impact of the West” during the nineteenth century are also synthesized into one chapter. The non-Western parts of the world receive more attention in the third part, after the “emergence of world civilization” (that is, after World War II). Four out of seven chapters describe developments in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America.

In this “new” post-World War II “world civilization” Europe is one of several regions. The authors emphasize the creation of a European community and the “economic renaissance” that took place during the nineteen-fifties, which was brought about by the Marshall Plan and the creation of the European Economic Community (Ralph et al., 1997: 2: 658). These developments are described in the first two chapters of the concluding part of the textbook, and they are depicted in more detail than post-World War II developments in other geographical areas.

As this new “world civilization” is being created, Europe is “assembled” from separate nation-states into one civilization through an “economic renaissance.” “Prosperity” becomes a distinctive feature of Europe, at least until the mid-nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies, when (due to economic problems and protest movements) European societies are described as becoming “fragmented in new and confusing ways” (Ralph et al., 1997: 2: 681). This fragmentation, brought about by social forces such as women’s and peace movements, was “overshadowed” by the birth of a new, post-Communist Europe after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The lack of prosperity and “brutish” life, exemplified by ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia, made Eastern Europe different from the prosperous West, at least during the post-Cold War era (Ralph et al., 1997: 2: 701).

In the last chapter, the authors do not dwell on the future of “one” Europe after the fall of Communism nor do they try to predict the future of the “world civilization” characterized by US dominance after World War II. They describe current global issues such as the environmental crisis brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Given the geographical approach to world history used in both volumes, the concluding ideas about the “common” global issues in a “common” world civilization are not entirely convincing. It is also not entirely clear which historical forces have created a common “world civilization” if the nation-state system created during the seventeenth century has remained more or less intact.

World Civilizations exemplifies the pros and cons of the area study approach to world history. On the one hand, moving from one geographical area to another (especially in the first volume) helps to create a sense of order and clarity in world history. Area studies are interesting and rich in detail. This is why the textbook has remained quite popular in world civilization classrooms in the United States. On the other hand, this approach does not lend itself well to the portrayal of on-going encounters and exchanges between different cultures and civilizations. As a matter of fact, the second volume creates an impression that (in the words of Patrick Manning) history outside the West was “the history of Western impact on other areas of the world.” The second volume (more than the first one) focuses on Western Europe and its wars and revolutions, thus failing to establish a seamless connection between European history and non-European, non-Western entities.

Europe Viewed from Hawaii

Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past is described by its publisher as “a market leader” (McGraw-Hill, 2003), a claim that, judging by its popularity at one large American university, is certainly hard to refute.² Its authors, Jerry H. Bentley and Herbert F. Zeigler, are both professors of history at the University of Hawaii. In the preface they assert that “it... is impossible to understand the world’s history by viewing it through the lenses of any particular society” and point out that the second edition of this textbook includes expanded treatments of several non-European societies (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: xxxi, xxxiii). This suggests that the perspective on the past that Bentley and Zeigler offer will be one that is relatively free of Eurocentrism.

The chapters in *Traditions & Encounters* focus either on a world region or a specific theme in world history. In the pre-modern era chapters on world regions, such as “Early Societies in Southwest Asia and the Indo-European Migrations,” predominate and the authors use “complex societies” as their unit of analysis. In the modern era chapters on specific themes, such as “The Building of Global Empires,” predominate and there is no clear unit of analysis. Bentley and Zeigler define complex society as “a form of large-scale social organization” in which “many individuals... congregate in urban settlements, where they devote their time and energy to specialized tasks other than food production” (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: 2). The authors’ use of the term *complex society* instead of *civilization* is an attempt to overcome some of the problems inherent in using that value-laden term. By identifying some societies as civilized, does that suggest that other societies are uncivilized? Are “uncivilized” societies truly uncivilized? Bentley and Zeigler have certainly given these questions some thought and their solution to the problem is a radical one: no other world history textbook in the United States that is as widely used has shown a similar willingness to completely abandon the term *civilization*.

² The university at which *Traditions & Encounters* is quite popular is Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia.

The term *European civilization* is therefore absent from the pages of this textbook. Instead, the authors speak of a distant, more unfamiliar “European society.” And when, according to Bentley and Zeigler, did European society begin? In the chapters on Greece and Rome they point out the long-term influence that Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Christianity have had on the development of European society, but they do not actually identify Greece or Rome as European societies. The first complex society which Bentley and Zeigler identify as being unequivocally “European,” is western Europe during the early middle ages, which they describe as “a violent and disorderly land... [that] played little role in the development of a hemispheric economy during the era dominated by the Tang, Song, Abbasid, and Byzantine empires” (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: 518). It should come as no surprise then that only two of the twenty-two chapters on the pre-modern era in *Traditions & Encounters* deal exclusively with western Europe. China, in contrast, is the subject of three chapters.

The first chapter on western Europe, “The Foundations of Christian Society in Western Europe,” does not use any of the approaches identified by von Glahn. The second, “Western Europe During the High Middle Ages,” does, but in a very limited way. In that chapter, medieval Europe is described as “a political mosaic of independent and competing regional states” that, although frequently at war with one another, “organized their territories efficiently, and... laid the political foundations for the emergence of powerful national states in a later era” (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: 519). Although the authors stop short of making an argument in favor of European exceptionalism it is clear from a later chapter that this is in fact what they have in mind. Also, at the end of the chapter, the Crusades are described as having “profoundly influenced European development” by enabling “a large-scale exchange of ideas, technologies,

and trade goods” (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: 542)—a brief, but clear example of the stimulus-diffusion approach in world history.

In the last chapter on the pre-modern era, “Reaching Out: Cross-cultural Interactions,” Bentley and Zeigler completely embrace the stimulus-diffusion approach, describing how, between 1000 and 1500 C.E. “the peoples of the eastern hemisphere traveled, traded, communicated, and interacted more regularly and intensively than ever before” (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: 574). Europeans figure prominently in this chapter, but they share the stage with the people of other societies. This is reflected in the maps, which, although simple, are quite thought-provoking. For example, one map shows the travels of *both* the Venetian Marco Polo and the Moroccan Ibn Battuta; another shows the voyages of *both* Chinese and European explorers in the fifteenth century. By juxtaposing the travels and voyages of Europeans with non-Europeans these maps put the accomplishments of pre-modern Europeans into proper global perspective.

In sharp contrast to the chapters on the pre-modern era, Europe figures quite prominently in the chapters on the modern era. Roughly half of the eighteen chapters on the modern era deal, in part or in whole, with Europe. In “Transoceanic Encounters and Global Connections,” Bentley and Zeigler adopt the European hegemony approach, describing how the expansion of European influence “resulted in the establishment of global networks of transportation, communication, and exchange” and “brought about a decisive shift in the global balance of power” (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: 608). They also continue with the stimulus-diffusion approach, describing the global diffusion of plants, food crops, animals, people, and diseases that took place after the European voyages of exploration in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Although Bentley and Zeigler clearly have reservations about introducing the idea of European exceptionalism in the chapters on pre-modern Europe, they have no such reservations in the chapters on the modern era. In “The Transformation of Europe,” they describe how the existence of a competitive multi-state system in Europe provided the stimulus for technological innovation in the arms industry, observing that “in China, India, and Islamic lands, imperial states had little or no incentive to encourage similar technological innovation...” (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: 652). They also describe how the Enlightenment, with its belief in reason and progress, “helped to bring about a thorough transformation of European society,” (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: 663) but do not explicitly link this with Europe’s rise to global hegemony.

In “Revolutions and National States in the Atlantic World” the French revolution is grouped together with the American and Haitian revolutions, thus making it an Atlantic, not a European, revolution. Bentley and Zeigler return once again to the stimulus-diffusion approach in “The Building of Global Empires,” describing how “western European peoples... imposed their hegemony throughout the world” in the nineteenth century (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: 934). It is in this chapter that the term *civilization* makes a rare appearance. The authors explain how Europeans worked to bring subject peoples “‘civilization’ in the form of political order and social stability” and how French imperialists “routinely invoked the *mission civilisatrice* (‘civilizing mission’) as justification for their expansion into Africa and Asia” (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: 937-938).

In the chapters on the twentieth century Europe goes from global primacy to being a trading bloc with a shrinking population. “The Great War,” which is the term that Bentley and Zeigler use to describe World War I, “undermined the preeminence and prestige of European society, signaling an end to Europe’s global primacy” (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: 973). Although

the authors describe the Holocaust as a case of “genocide,” other cases of genocide in the twentieth century (e.g., Armenia, Cambodia, and Rwanda) go unmentioned, thus giving the impression that genocide matters only if it occurs in Europe.³ De Gaulle is described as a man “who dreamed of a Europe that could act as a third force in politics,” and although he “failed to convince Europeans to leave the protective fold of the United States,” his dream “persisted in a different guise” (Bentley & Zeigler, 2003: 1083). The European Union is important enough to receive a whole paragraph in a textbook that is 1,169 pages long and a helpful table shows how Europe is the only area of the world whose population is projected to decline over the next fifty years. This suggests that the authors do not see Europe as a “superpower” capable of challenging the power of the United States any time soon.

Throughout *Traditions & Encounters*, Europe is just an actor, one of many, which had its day in the sun during the modern era. In the post-modern world of world history constructed by Bentley and Zeigler, Europe is “only” a complex society, one of a great many in the world.

Conclusion

Our textbook case studies suggest several insights and hypotheses. Both textbooks exemplify the influence of intellectual trends, such as “de-Europeanization” and constructivism. The authors of both textbooks make it clear to the readers that they are going to include regions other than Europe in their analysis. They also make it clear that their goal is to show cultural

³ As this article neared completion the authors received an advance copy of the third edition of *Traditions & Encounters* from the publisher. New to this edition is a series of brief essays called “Contexts & Connections,” each of which takes a specific issue from an individual chapter and seeks to understand it within the larger historical context. The chapter on World War II includes an essay on genocide. This essay describes, not only the mass murder of Jews during World War II, but the genocides that took place in Armenia, Cambodia, and Rwanda as well, thus correcting the impression given in the second edition that genocide matters only if it occurs in Europe (Bentley & Zeigler, 2006: 1052).

entities, whether “civilizations” or “complex societies,” interacting with each other through trade and war. Bentley and Zeigler are more successful than Ralph et al. at portraying their units of analysis as constructs instead of relatively self-contained geographical areas inhabited by people who create extraordinary artifacts. They are also more successful at contextualizing “Europe” and showing its rise to power in comparison with other complex societies.

In *Traditions & Encounters* Bentley and Zeigler follow the trend toward de-Europeanization and post-modernism (e.g., analyzing “complex societies,” not “civilizations”) more closely than Ralph et al. in *World Civilizations*. It should come as no surprise, then, that *Traditions & Encounters* has become increasingly popular among professors at American universities. From a practitioner’s point of view, those students with only a weak background in world history may find the numerous complex societies and cross-cultural contacts in this textbook to be a bit overwhelming. On the other hand, volume one of *World Civilizations*, which portrays each civilization as “naturally belonging” to one geographical area and traces the origins of Europe to ancient times, offers a somewhat simplified approach to the ancient world.

It may be possible to hypothesize that one of the negative unintended consequences of the primordial approach to civilizational identities, such as that used in volume one of *World Civilizations*, is the creation of a mythology about “ancient hatreds” that are abundant “out there” in the world. (Similar beliefs about “ancient hatreds” in the former Yugoslavia were very popular during the early and mid nineties in the United States.) If so, then history textbooks embracing such approaches may contribute to the strengthening of America’s isolationism and its simplified view of world affairs.

At the same time, the influence of history teaching on national consciousness should not be over-stated. We realize and admit the limits of formal education. The worldviews and

opinions of American students are shaped by myriads of other variables, such as the mass media, friends, family, church, sororities, study abroad, and so on. However, world history textbooks do play a role, even if it is a small and insignificant one, in the construction of identities. At the same time, they are a reflection of America's relations with the outside world. It is not a coincidence that world civilization courses in the United States have their origin in a course that was first taught to servicemen during World War I to help them understand why they were fighting. If history textbooks can indeed be viewed as the "mirrors" of a country's consciousness, then our analysis of two very popular textbooks suggests that, in the United States at least, world history is seen as a complex mosaic of societies and cultures instead of the rise and fall of great powers. Europe is one part of this mosaic, and not the centerpiece.

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