



The Way of the World: From the Dawn of Civilizations to the Eve of the Twenty-first Century

By David Fromkin

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"Ambitious.... The truth is that Fromkin's outline is persuasively thought out and presented."--*The Washington Post Book World*

As the human race approaches the 21st century, questions of our past trouble us as much as those that concern our future. How did we get here? Where--and how--did Homo sapiens originate? How did we, precariously bipedal, come to dominate the animal kingdom, direct the flow of the Euphrates, fly a rocket to the moon?

David Fromkin, author of **A Peace to End All Peace** and finalist for both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critic Circle Award, provides an arrestingly cogent answer in **The Way of the World**. With insight and sound scholarship, he reveals how human culture has evolved according to the principles of self-determination--from the footsteps of the first hominids 3.5 million years ago to the efforts of contemporary democracies' to establish a global, lasting peace. Here is a world history wherein early forms of Christianity give way to rationalism, the tyranny of kings crumbles to the merits of representative government, and modern science presents us with the master key to the future. Refreshingly positive, David Fromkin reminds us of the astounding record of human achievement, and the potential in each of us to improve the way of our world.

"Mr. Fromkin recounts 'the greatest story ever told' exceedingly well, aided by a deep knowledge and an elegant prose style."--*The Wall Street Journal*

"The Way of the World is worldly, civilized, genial."--*The Boston Globe*



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Historians and philosophers of history have long debated whether the human story is one of constant improvement and progress, or whether history is instead a wheel that leads us again and again to the same place--the same choices, the same errors. To judge by this slender volume, David Fromkin is an unabashed partisan of the first school. In his view, the logic of history leads to "the only civilization still surviving, the scientific one of the modern world," the civilization of capitalism and technology. That view is, of course, arguable, but Fromkin defends it ably and intelligently. General readers will be more interested in Fromkin's overview of world history, a fast-forward tour of the evolution of civilization from a simple congeries of agriculturalists, as in Sumer, to a collectivity of peoples interested in such ideals as morality and peacemaking. Fromkin's whirlwind approach is sometimes vexing--he treats, for instance, the fall of Rome in just a few sentences, ignoring generations of scholarly inquiry on the multiple causes of that decline--but it nonetheless yields a spirited synthesis of past events and patterns. Fromkin closes by remarking that although the future may promise "a nightmare of nationalist, religious, and language-group wars," the worldwide adoption of an American-style federalism that transcends such distinctions is a more attractive possibility. "For all its faults," he writes, "the American way may prove to be the only viable one to deal with the consequences of the modernizing revolution. If so, the world is in luck, for continuing American leadership, like it or not, seems to be what the world has got." --*Gregory McNamee*

From Publishers Weekly

As its subtitle indicates, this is a broad, ambitious work. Boston University historian Fromkin (*A Peace to End All Peace*) guides readers on a whirlwind journey from the dawn of time to the present, touching on subjects as wide-ranging as Jane Goodall's observations of chimpanzees, Pizarro's conquest of Peru and Thomas Edison's ingenious inventions. The main subject is human civilization: what it is; how it came about; why civilizations rose and fell; what the future of civilization itself may be. Beginning with the city-states of ancient Mesopotamia, humanity gradually transformed from a herd of nomadic hunter-gatherers to an ordered society. The ancients invented agriculture, politics and religion?all while struggling with the ever-present barbarians who threatened to destroy them. Central to Fromkin's story is his account of how Western civilization?although by no means the most "advanced" civilization of its day?managed to conquer and eclipse its rivals and dominate the world to such an extent that "modernization" and "Westernization" have come to be synonymous. The final section, on the future of civilization, sometimes sinks into banalities ("For countries, as for people, becoming too wealthy or too powerful tends to be dangerous"). Of course, any work that combines such brevity with such broad scope is bound to be somewhat superficial. Nevertheless, Fromkin is a skillful raconteur with a keen eye for the telling anecdote and a conquistador's power to cover vast swaths of territory in a short amount of time.

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From Library Journal

This is a conscious attempt to relate world history in about 250 pages. Actually, its eight stages of history are set in the West, from the emergence of humans in Africa to the rise of Western governments. Fromkin sees history as natural, not divine, "the story of the human race in the world," and believes that humans are therefore responsible for their own future. For high school, public, and college libraries. (LJ 10/15/98)

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Adriana Phillips:

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Rene Hudson:

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