

**The World: A History, Combined Volume**, by Felipe Fernández-Armesto. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006, 1152 pp., \$126.20 hardbound.

**Felipe Fernández-Armesto's *The World Is a History* against Western Civilization**

**Ricardo Duchesne**

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According to Wikipedia, Felipe Fernández-Armesto has achieved the honorable title of a UK “Superdon,” which in American English may stand for an academic who is both a Superman and an intellectual celebrity. This famed source of student learning can be trusted on this one: since 2005 Armesto has held the Prince of Asturias Chair in Spanish Culture and Civilization at Tufts University. He also directs the Pearson Prentice Hall Seminar Series in Global History; is a member of the faculty of history at the University of London; and is the author, co-author, and editor of twenty-five books, over

forty chapters, and numerous scholarly articles. His bestselling book, *Millennium: A History of the Last Thousand Years*, which inspired CNN’s *Millennium*, was the one that brought him global attention.<sup>1</sup> Other honors include the Caird Medal of the National Maritime Museum (1997), and the John Carter Brown Medal (1999). His journalistic works have been widely syndicated and appear frequently in the *London Times*, the *Guardian*, and regularly in the Sunday edition of the *Independent*. He also contributes to BBC Radio, most often as a panelist on *Room for Improvement*, *International Question Time*, and *Night Waves*.

Perhaps the most notorious incident that solidified his celebrity status occurred on January 4, 2007, when while in Atlanta, Georgia, for a conference of the American Historical Association he was thrown to the ground, handcuffed by five policemen, and jailed for eight hours as a result of jaywalking. In a video interview conducted by the History News Network following his arrest, which circulated several days later on YouTube, a poster in the background advertises his latest publication, a textbook entitled *The World:*

**Ricardo Duchesne** is professor of sociology at the University of New Brunswick Saint John, Saint John NB Canada E2L 4L5; rduchesn@unbsj.ca.

<sup>1</sup>Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Millennium: A History of the Last Thousand Years* (New York: Scribner, 1995).

*A History*.<sup>2</sup> This college text, released a few months earlier, was produced by Pearson Prentice Hall, the world's largest publisher of academic and reference textbooks. The praises cited in the press release were quite momentous: "It comes close to being the Holy Grail for world history teachers," proclaimed Patricia Seed, Professor of History, University of California, Irvine. "I expect that it will become the world history textbook for this generation, and the standard by which subsequent books are measured," said David Rowley, Associate Professor of History, University of Wisconsin-Platteville.<sup>3</sup>

*The World: A History* was indeed no ordinary undertaking. It was evaluated by more than one hundred reviewers from a wide variety of institutions across the country and around the world and class-tested by more than a thousand students at fifteen academic institutions across the U.S. Nonetheless, it offers an extremely distorted picture of Western civilization. The text is essentially a history of the world against the West. It deliberately plays down the history

of ancient Greece, Rome, and Christian Europe, while overplaying the history of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. As a history of the non-Western world, the book is not bad; it brings together all the latest corporate techniques of textbook production, standardization, uniformity, and clarity. Its conceptual rationale seems plain enough: humans are members of the same species and inhabitants of various habitats; what matters in world history are the interconnections between human communities and between humans and the environment.<sup>4</sup> But therein rests the problem. Behind this "objective" preoccupation with connections lies the ideology that world history should reflect, and be sensitive to, our current "embattled biosphere" and our current "need" for "diversity" and multicultural togetherness. But what if history does not relinquish its truth in this manner?

<sup>2</sup>Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The World: A History, Combined Volume* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically.

<sup>3</sup>Pearson Education ([www.pearsoned.com](http://www.pearsoned.com)), "'History' Is Made With [sic] Vital New College Textbook," press release, August 7, 2006, [http://www.pearsoned.com/pr\\_2006/080706a.htm](http://www.pearsoned.com/pr_2006/080706a.htm).

<sup>4</sup>This emphasis on exchanges between humans, animals, seas, and germs is not original to Armesto but follows a widely influential anti-Western historiography that minimizes and explains away any cultural distinctions traditionally associated with European civilization. Some prominent names belonging to this "new consensus" are: Andre Gunder Frank, R. Bin Wong, James Blaut, Kenneth Pomeranz, Ross Dunn, Jack Goldstone, Jerry Bentley, Patrick Manning, Alfred Crosby, Philip Curtin, and many others who took over the cause of world history in the 1980s and founded the World History Association (1982), the *World History Bulletin* (1983), the *Journal of World History* (1990), *World History Connected* (2003), the *Journal of Global History* (2006), and promoted graduate programs across American campuses and beyond.

What if humans in the past were not as interested in the interconnectedness of cultures? What if ancient Greece was an exceptional culture that belonged to the same earth close to the Near East but that also contained its own very distinct identity?

Well, first you attack the claim that ancient Greece was a self-contained, autonomous culture. Actually, first you charge past historians with promoting a vision of Greece as a “self-made” culture, and then you castigate them for so doing, by arguing that the Greeks were not isolated but “were heavily indebted to what they called Asia” (132–33). Never mind what the word “heavily” means; this textbook’s way of dealing with global interactions is invariably about how non-Western cultures were heavily responsible for the achievements of the West. It is hardly about how the achievements of other cultures were dependent on external influences. The achievements of the non-Western world are to be appreciated, treated with dignity, and celebrated—and certainly there are no arguments about how in the past non-Western historians presumed that Confucianism or Buddhism (which one?) was “purely” Chinese. Only “Western” scholars make such claims; only Westerners have created the “myth” of cultural isolation, which our gifted multiculturalists are finally debunking.

But how exactly does one dissolve the originality of Aristotle, Plato, and Thucydides? Armesto does three things. First, he mashes up, gruel style, their philosophy, otherwise known for its truly original method of rational discourse, with Chinese, Indian, and even cultic, mysterious feelings-ideas, all within one amorphous and impersonal chapter entitled “The Great Schools” (158). Second, he devalues Greek ideas by reminding the average Joe that these ideas were part of the elite, ignored by the common folk, with the implication that if students really want to understand the legacy of Greece they need to come down to the world of social history and pop culture. Third, he creates the impression, simply by writing in the same egalitarian tone, that non-Western philosophers were on the same level of reflection.

The first words we hear about the West in the section “Early Greek Society” are: “We have idealized the Greeks as originators of our civilization and embodiments of all our values. However, scholars have been revising almost everything that has traditionally been said about them” (132). A few lines down, Armesto adds, “Until recently, people in the West hailed the Greeks as originators of democracy... [but] Greeks counted only privileged males as citizens... women were excluded. So were slaves,

who made up 40 percent of the population....When we look at [Greek states] now we see fragments of an oppressive system that made slaves of captives, victims of women, battle fodder of men, and scapegoats of failures” (132).

This, in essence, is the impression Armesto wishes to leave in the minds of students in what may be their first encounter with ancient Greece. What I object to is not just the asinine nature of an argument that walks over what was uniquely Greek—the existence of a government that allowed for the full participation of all male citizens—in the name of facts that were, in varying ways, standard features of the rest of the ancient world. What I question is the claim that these facts about the Greeks were unknown “until recently.” They have been known since ancient times, starting with the Greeks themselves. Anyone familiar with classical Greek sources, say, Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*, knows that the Greeks never idealized their societies, but were the first people to care about the veracity of historical facts, the first to point to the “follies and foibles” of their leaders, to speak straightforwardly about their own weaknesses and mistakes in a way that one rarely finds in other cultures. It is also the case that many books have been written on Greek democracy during

the last hundred years that invariably acknowledge the points Armesto makes. See, for example, W.G. Forrest’s *The Emergence of Greek Democracy* (McGraw-Hill, 1966), or see standard Western civilization textbooks; they recognized the obvious reality that ancient Greece was not the liberal democratic culture the modern West was to become. We don’t need current multicultural specialists in “world history” to tell us this.

What troubles Armesto is not that “we” have idealized Greek culture by ignoring slavery but that scholars have long admired the Greeks regardless of their failings. If one pays careful attention to the “idealized” version famously associated with Johann Winckelmann that gained prominence among Europeans during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, one finds less a naive understanding than a strong enthusiasm for what Winckelmann called “the noble simplicity and calm grandeur” of the Greeks. Armesto wishes to demote the study of the Greeks from the core of the history curriculum. He derides “philhellenism” (love of Greece and Greek culture) as “idealistic.” Now, it is true that admirers of the self-sacrifice and intelligence of the Greeks focused primarily on the achievements of high culture. But already in the third quarter of the

nineteenth century we find the historian Jacob Burckhardt challenging this vision. Examine the English translation of his book, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*: it purposely brings out the dark side, the agonal, aggressive nature of Greek culture.<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, too, in his first book released in 1872, *The Birth of Tragedy*, insisted on the irrational and mythical forces of Greek Homeric culture.<sup>6</sup> But Nietzsche cherished these dark primeval elements, correctly realizing that all that is noble and “civilized” in Greece would have been impossible without the original will to accomplishment of this culture.<sup>7</sup> The “interconnectedness” multicultural historians are calling for is an ecological idea without connection to the historical context of ancient Greece.

Armesto insists that “the idea that the Greeks were a self-made civilization, owing almost nothing to other cultures” has been discredited. Greece had, “as scholars now say, an east face. Greece was not merely Greek (133). I need to insist that classical scholars have never written that Greece owed almost nothing to the Near East. Burckhardt, like many others since,

was plainly aware of the material tradition that the Greeks inherited from outside. The Greeks “themselves,” he wrote, “did not generally begrudge other nations their inventions and discoveries.”<sup>8</sup> Western civilization textbooks have always started with Mesopotamia and Egypt, just to teach students that Greece was not a self-made civilization. What’s the bone of contention? It is that Armesto, and multi-cultic historians at large, want to go beyond claims of borrowings to argue that Greece was not “original” at all.

My view is that Greek originality does not preclude debts to earlier civilizations. In support of his claim, in the “Read On” section, Armesto cites M. L. West’s *The East Face of*

<sup>5</sup>Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, ed. Oswyn Murray, trans. Shelia Stern (1898; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, ed. Michael Tanner, trans. Shaun Whiteside (1872; New York: Penguin Classics, 1994).

<sup>7</sup>“In certain epochs the Greeks were in a similar danger of being overwhelmed by what was past and foreign, and perishing on the rock of ‘history.’ They never lived proud and untouched. Their ‘culture’ was for a long time a chaos of foreign forms and ideas—Semitic, Babylonian, Lydian, and Egyptian—and their religion a battle of all the gods of the East....And yet Hellenic culture was no mere mechanical unity, thanks to that Delphic oracle [‘Know thyself’]. The Greeks gradually learned to organize the chaos by taking Apollo’s advice and thinking back to themselves, to their own true necessities, and letting all the sham necessities go. Thus they again came into possession of themselves, and did not remain long the epigoni of the whole East, burdened with their inheritance. After that hard fight, they increased and enriched the treasure they had inherited by their obedience to the oracle, and they became ancestors and models for all the cultured nations of the future.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins (1874; MacMillan/Library of Liberal Arts Edition, 1957), 72.

<sup>8</sup>Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, 136.

*Helicon* (Oxford University Press, 1998), adding that this book “settles the controversy about where the Greek ideas ‘originally’ came from” (189). This is not a helpful formulation for students who do not have a basis for weighing the evidence of mere cultural diffusion against the evidence that the Greeks synthesized what they appropriated from other cultures. There is always debate, and students should be made aware of this. I, for one, believe that Homer’s epics are quite original, for all the “orientalizing” motifs that have been found in them. The heroic spirit in Homer, the individuality and free will of the characters are far more accentuated than in Near Eastern epics. Once we get to the pre-Socratics, the Sophists, Sophocles, Socrates, and Plato we are way past the Near East into another world of high culture.

On the events leading to the Persian-Greek Wars, Armesto writes mostly of Greek disunity and of Persian unity and respect and generosity. On the actual wars themselves he offers only one sentence: “Persia, after testing the difficulties of conquering Greece in unsuccessful invasions in 490 and 480 BCE, was generally content to keep these enemies divided, while prioritizing Persian rule over rich, soft Egypt” (201–2). What did Armesto leave out? The context of the Persian-Greek wars: (1) that the Greek cities in Asia minor

had fallen under the control of Persia in 546 BC; that there was an organized Greek rebellion that spread throughout the Greek cities of Asia Minor, which was eventually defeated by the Persians, who went on to wipe out Miletus, killing and enslaving everyone. (2) That the Persians then sent an expedition to punish Athens for offering some help to the rebellion, and to control the Aegean Sea. (3) That this expedition led to the battle of Marathon, which resulted in a defeat for the Persians and demonstrated the superiority of hoplite warfare over chariot warfare. (4) That in 481 BC the Persian king Xerxes put together an army of one hundred fifty thousand men and a navy of six hundred ships set to conquer weak, divided, and tiny Greece. That the Battle of Salamis in 481 BC alone was the most significant naval battle of the history of the ancient world. (5) That while Greece was not fully united, and was heavily outnumbered by mighty Persia, the Greeks successfully defeated the Persians, setting the stage for one of the greatest intellectual periods in human history, which would not have occurred had the Persians been successful.<sup>9</sup>

Armesto’s denial of the importance of the Persian-Greek Wars cannot be excused with claims that one cannot

<sup>9</sup>Barry Strauss, *The Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter That Saved Greece—and Western Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

cover every subject of world history in one textbook. The chapter on ancient Greece is a charade.<sup>10</sup> I enjoyed *Civilizations*,<sup>11</sup> and to a lesser degree *Millennium*, but I understood that these books were interpretative works aimed for a literate and discriminating audience. *The World: A History* is a text for introductory classes, which should require a high degree of fairness and balanced presentation. Roughly counting, the number of pages dedicated to the West as of page 528, before the “rise” of the modern West, are a meager forty plus—to Greece, the Hellenistic world, Rome, and Medieval and Renaissance Europe combined—in comparison to the approximate twenty-three pages dedicated to the Mongols alone. Those forty plus pages are mostly negative.

Armesto devotes about five words to Roman high culture. Naturally, the Roman Empire, which would have been difficult to hide, gets a few pages, but the conclusion is that this

empire was inferior to the Chinese. See the section “China and Rome Compared” (245). It states in point form that (1) Chinese armies “can get quickly to any point on the frontier,” whereas Roman movement of troops and information is “impeded” by “narrow sea lanes”; (2) “subject peoples embrace Chinese identity; barbarian immigrants adopt Chinese customs and language,” whereas in Rome “north-south gap leads to envy and hostility, limited identification by barbarians”; (3) in China “productivity and technical inventiveness lead to self-sufficiency,” whereas in Rome “adverse balance of trade drains wealth out of the empire.” These comparisons do not take into consideration radical differences in the making of these two empires. Rome, for one, was a true empire built in the most competitive region of the world. The non-Han Chinese living today in south Asia were once living in China, but were all expelled by the Han, who today hold almost a complete monopoly over the ethnicity of China; the natural properties of “rice” accounts largely for China’s higher productivity.

Medieval Europe, the period Marcia Colish saw as the true “foundation” of the West because this “was the only traditional society known to history to modernize itself from within, intellectually no less than economically and

<sup>10</sup>After disparaging Plato as a member of a “gang” of rich men, Armesto observes that Plato wrote brilliantly and persuasively, only to tell his readers why he managed to exercise such an influence over the West: “His Guardians, however, became the inspiration and the intellectual ancestors of elites, aristocracies, party hacks, and self-appointed supermen whose justification for tyrannizing others has always been that they know best” (172).

<sup>11</sup>Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Civilizations: Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

technologically,”<sup>12</sup> gets some positive words for “originating” windmills, ground lenses, and clocks, but the emphasis, nevertheless, is on Europe’s borrowing of paper mills, the compass, firearms, and the blast furnace from Asia. Some attention is directed to the art, literature, and scholarship of this period, but the concluding words of this section are directed to Muslim centers of learning in Spain and Muslim transmission of science and mathematics to Europe (363–70). One sentence speaks “of evidence of dynamism in the Western Europe of the eleventh and twelfth centuries,” but the same sentence tells us that this dynamism “was expended” on internal wars of aggression and colonization. This sentence, moreover, is located in a sequence of paragraphs dealing with the destructive effects of the Crusades on a Muslim world that had been in a state of peaceful coexistence with Christian and Jewish communities; a Muslim world that defeated the crusaders and thus “helped alert people in Europe to the backwardness and vulnerability of their part of the world compared to the cultures of the Near East” (380–81).

Defenders of Armesto will surely argue that he does give the West its due

when it enters onto the world stage in the sixteenth century—in such section headings as “The Renaissance ‘Discovery of the World’” (621), “The Rise of Western Science” (625), “The West’s Productivity Leap” (690), “The Enlightenment in Europe” (747), “Western Dominance in the Nineteenth Century” (842), and “Western Science Ascendant” (918). But even in these sections Armesto’s singular goal is to instill the idea that the West was a perennially backward civilization that only emerged in the nineteenth century thanks to the benevolent influences of Asia. Right away, as he starts dealing with the growth of a “more empirical” scientific tradition in Europe in the century preceding the Portuguese expeditions, Armesto cannot but insist that the Chinese tradition in observation and experiment remained ahead of Western science well into the modern era (434).

How does Armesto account for the eventual European upsurge in navigation, exploration, cartography, ballistics, mathematics, and astronomical thinking? By ignoring all these matters and writing instead that “Europeans were backward in navigation compared with the Indian Ocean peoples” and compared with China (508). And how did Europeans link the Old World to the New World, and the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic? They were lucky; China, the most advanced

<sup>12</sup>Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400–1400* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), ix.



maritime nation, was not interested in establishing global links with her poor neighbors, otherwise Europeans would have been unable to meet her majestic fleet. Besides, he adds, it was not really “Europe” that engaged in explorations but “people from a few communities on the Atlantic seaboard” (512). One of the few mariners was Columbus, and he was not an explorer in any case, but a “weaver” who imagined himself a captain and who “took to exploration to escape the restricted social opportunities at home.” All in all, Europe’s exploration “was probably not the result of science or strength, so much as of delusion and desperation” (518). Prince Henry, too, “misrepresented as a navigator motivated by scientific curiosity,” was just another character who “imagined himself a romantic hero” but “in truth never went exploring” (517).

To the contrary, the remarkable Portuguese rounding of the Cape and the creation of a seaborne empire in the Indian Ocean was deliberately planned from the very beginning when around 1419 Prince Henry established a sort of institute for advanced study at the southern tip of Portugal, Cape St. Vincent, to which he brought astronomers, shipbuilders, instrument makers, cartographers, and navigators of all nationalities. Many technical solutions and improvements—in the measure-

ment of latitude, the charting of the African coast, the collection of charts on new map projections, the differentiation of types of ships for different tasks—were introduced by the Portuguese as they patiently sent out expeditions almost annually through the fifteenth century down the tortuous west coast of Africa, until the way was paved for Vasco da Gama to cross into the Indian Ocean. Armesto’s statement, in *Millennium* that the fifteenth-century European expansion was “no outpouring of pent-up dynamism [but] was launched from...a contracting civilization...[that] will appear [to future non-Eurocentric historians] as stagnant and introspective”<sup>13</sup> is completely out of sync with what happened right after Columbus sighted in October 1492 the islands now known as the West Indies.

Leave out the exploration of the Indian Ocean. In 1497 John Cabot secured the support of Bristol merchants for a voyage on which he discovered Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. A decade later the Frenchman Jacques Cartier made three trips that resulted in the exploration of the St. Lawrence River. By the 1520s Spanish and other navigators had explored the entire eastern coast of the two Americas from Labrador to Rio de la Plata. From 1519 to 1522 Ferdinand Magellan, a

<sup>13</sup>Fernández-Armesto, *Millennium*, 172.

Portuguese, circumnavigated the globe. Between 1519 and 1521 Fernando Cortez conquered the Aztec Empire. And in 1530 Francisco Pizarro conquered the Inca Empire—to mention some of the voyages.

The overall impression Armesto wants to give about the West is that this was a marginal civilization with few positive accomplishments until it “leaped” suddenly onto the world scene in the nineteenth century. The Renaissance is a “much-abused word,” “no radically new departure occurred in the fifteenth century” (513). From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Europeans were able to develop their navigational capacities “partly thanks to borrowings from Asian technology” (533–35), and partly thanks to the “huge bonanza of land, of food and mineral resources” they acquired from the New World, which eventually allowed the “formerly impoverished West” to challenge the centuries-long dominant economies of Asia (562). Even with respect to the Scientific Revolution, Armesto can barely get himself to say that “Western science registered leaps in the seventeenth century,” stating in the same sentence that this revolution was “partly because of privileged access to the recycled learning of classical antiquity and partly to the new data accumulated during the exploration of the world” (625).

Exactly how traveling to the New World produced the law of inertia is not clear to me. Well, that’s not the point; for Armesto, the science and philosophy of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Laplace, Descartes, and Bacon was no more original than the neo-Confucian “scientific” revival of the seventeenth century—both were “comparable in kind” (630). He cannot, however, ignore the fact that Western science does start to have an effect on technical skills, resulting in an eventual “reversal” in the balance of military and industrial power away from Asia. But this is only a momentary acknowledgment, as some pages later he states that modern science had little effect on the Industrial Revolution, and repeats that “the [modern] science of the West had largely been anticipated in China” (691).

Why did China not experience industrialization? The “global context” did not favor it—forget that China had enjoyed a balance of trade surplus for centuries. The British, on the other hand, were “privileged” gainers of the growing trans-Atlantic trade. Without any qualms about the validity of the long-discredited argument that the Industrial Revolution was made possible by the exploitation of the New World, Armesto happily writes: “The New Europes made the West big. A culture crammed, for most of its history, into a small, remote, and beleaguered corner

of Eurasia, now had much of the Western Hemisphere and important parts of the Pacific and Africa at its disposal (700).<sup>14</sup>

Inquiring students may want to ask teachers who adopted this textbook how a West that was just “beginning” to gain some advantages managed to have most of the world at its disposal? And, if Europe was uniquely different in the accidental creation of a global empire, how do we make sense of Armesto’s own words that during the eighteenth century China, “by almost every standard, [was] still the fastest-growing empire in the world” (740)? Heads I win, tails you lose. China is great in the acquisition of an empire (which does not allow her to industrialize) and Europe is lucky and colonial.

<sup>14</sup>Armesto follows Andre Gunder Frank, R. Bin Wong, and Kenneth Pomeranz in believing, with no alternative views offered to students, that Britain was the lucky beneficiary of an ecological windfall in the form of New World resources. To which I respond: (1) the American ecological benefits to England were not significant compared to the actual and potential expansion of intra-European trade; (2) the economic costs of the mercantile system were on balance as significant as the gain and, in any case, it was Britain that achieved a position of comparative international advantage as an exporter of manufactures and importer of raw materials through its own nationalist policies and administrative innovations; (3) China was unable to attain any industrial breakthrough despite enjoying a far greater ecological windfall (timber, sugar, food, fertilizers, labor, lead, copper, iron, silver, gold) from the colonization of huge territories in central and southwestern Asia after 1500, including the large island of Taiwan, Hainan, and the land of Manchuria, and from the many resources (silver, potatoes, peanuts, tobacco) China acquired without much cost from the Americas.

The chapter on the Enlightenment is similarly designed to reduce European responsibility and augment the role of “overseas ideas.” “The Enlightenment was global in its inspiration” and the arrival of ideas from Asia was “the more fundamental contribution” (738). China was (in “key respects”) a “more modern society” than the West, “a better educated society,” “a more entrepreneurial society,” “a more industrialized society,” a “more egalitarian society” (740). The Renaissance, the Cartographic Revolution, the Military Revolution, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the rise of representative institutions, the Enlightenment were not really European; China was still “more industrialized” and “more enlightened” as a matter of course. The “inferiority” of the West (a word Armesto would never use in reference to non-Western cultures) was “only beginning to be reversed” in the eighteenth century (743).

The immense intellectual flaws of *The World: A History* should be obvious to anyone who cares for the intellectual achievements of humanity. This is an extremely distorted evaluation of the contribution of the West to world history. By trivializing the higher culture of the West, this text runs against the aims of higher learning that universities are supposed to uphold. World history texts should be

balanced and fair-minded in the representation of the histories of all peoples relative to their degrees of influence on the world and relative to their cultural achievements (and all the cultures of the earth do have achievements if only in their ability

to survive in harsh environments, as Armesto writes persuasively in *Civilizations*). I just don't think it is appropriate for current teachers to remake world history to fit their ethnocentric visions of multicultural egalitarianism.