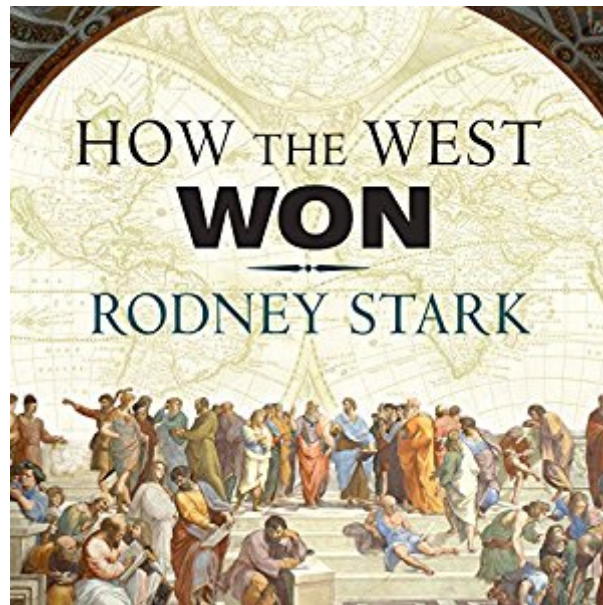


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# How The West Won: The Neglected Story Of The Triumph Of Modernity



## Synopsis

Modernity developed only in the West - in Europe and North America. Nowhere else did science and democracy arise; nowhere else was slavery outlawed. Only Westerners invented chimneys, musical scores, telescopes, eyeglasses, pianos, electric lights, aspirin, and soap. The question is, why? Unfortunately, that question has become so politically incorrect that most scholars avoid it. But acclaimed author Rodney Stark provides the answers in this sweeping new look at Western civilization. *How the West Won* demonstrates the primacy of uniquely Western ideas - among them the belief in free will, the commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, the notion that the universe functions according to rational rules that can be discovered, and the emphasis on human freedom and secure property rights. *How the West Won* displays Stark's gifts for lively narrative history and making the latest scholarship accessible to all. This bold, insightful book will force you to rethink your understanding of the West and the birth of modernity - and to recognize that Western civilization really has set itself apart from other cultures.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Anyone who has taken a history course at a university lately can attest to the rigid, doctrinaire multiculturalism taught. Textbook after textbook downplays the achievements of the west. "How the West Won" is a brisk slap in the face to the current animus against western civilization. Take the Dark Ages, which are always portrayed as an age of utter barbarism in our textbooks, a time when society declined and all that was worthy in the ancient world vanished. Stark points out that "serious historians have known for decades that these claims are a complete fraud. Even the respectable

encyclopedias...now define the Dark Ages as a myth" (p 71). He pulls out fact after fact to prove his position. Close to Stockholm, "an elaborate industrial community known as Helgo flourished from about 250 through 700." (p 82), and archaeologists have found a "bronze Buddha figure made in India" (p 81) in the ruins of Helgo, revealing how wide the trade was at the time. Not only did trade flourish, but "Within several centuries of the fall of Rome, Europeans have developed military technology that far surpassed not the the Romans' but that of every other society on earth" (p 84). Military might was important in the era. Islam was on the rise. In 1095 "The Byzantine emperor Alexius...appealed for Western forces to defend Constantinople from the threat of Turkish invaders" (p 102). Already, the entire of North Africa, which had once been solidly Christian, had fallen to Muslim armies. Stark asks us to "Compare Shakespeare's tragedies with those of the ancient Greeks" (p 119) For example, Oedipus is at the mercy of a blind, unfeeling fate. The ancient gods were without virtue; they were petty, vengeful, and vain. But Christianity imbued western culture with a belief in conscience. "It created a tendency for people not to be resigned to things as they are but rather to attempt to make the situation better" (119). It also meant an absolute truth existed, and could be rationally sought. Christianity pushed society to abolish slavery, that economic pillar of the ancient world. Even though the west had inherited a civilization from ancient Rome that was based on slavery, by the end of the eighth century Charlemagne opposed slavery, as did the pope. Within a century it was generally agreed upon Christian principle that slavery was against divine law. Although Max Weber claimed Protestantism invented capitalism, Stark points out that, rather, "The rise of capitalism in Europe proceeded the Reformation by centuries" (p 129). The key to western civilization was the belief in the rationality of God. During the Middle Ages, the church created universities, and paid for priests to take classes. "The first university was founded in... 1088" (p 163). "By 1200...the University of Paris...had 2,550 to 5,000 students" (p 166). One result was science - long before the Enlightenment. "Just as...eighteenth-century philosophers invented...the 'Dark Ages' to discredit Christianity, they labeled their own era the 'Enlightenment' on grounds that religious darkness had finally been dispelled by secular humanism" (p 309). I loved how Stark acidly noted how not even one of these 'Enlightened' men, such as Voltaire, had anything to do with science. No, the people who were "scientific stars were members of the clergy, nine of them Roman Catholics" (p 309). You really need this book! Stark is a marvelous writer, brisk and fun to read. But it is his ideas which are important. He argues brilliantly, and persuasively, that western civilization, so maligned in our current culture, is worthy of regard.

As a relative beginner to history books, this was a great overview of Western society's path from

ancient Greece to the modern day. The author (Stark) says his main intent is to give a thorough re-examination of the standard "Western Civ" college course. This is a lesson worth taking again - published in 2014, Stark refers to multiple new studies based on archaeological evidence and new sources of data discovered within the past 50 years. These new insights are fascinating when contrasted to the common myths that have been re-told through the generations. What I appreciate most about this book is Stark's willingness to stick to the data. For example, his review of why the Reformation influenced some European societies and not others did not begin with an objective followed by supporting data - he looked at all of the data and then chose the accurate conclusion from competing historians. Stark also isn't afraid to tell you when he liked one conclusion, but the data supported another. In the Kindle version, 43% of the book is notes and references, which doesn't automatically make sources accurate, but shows you the level of research that went into creating the book. Speaking of Kindle...give us Real Page Numbers please! Stark also does a great job at telling you WHY certain myths have remained popular. OK, the fall of Rome was a good thing, but why has it been considered a catastrophe for so long? Who has written the history to make it seem so? Intriguing answers that will make you think. Each of the chapters could be its own book. Keep Wikipedia on your phone handy! It's stimulated me to read about smaller stories within the chapters. I am sure some historians will take issue with points here and there, and some sections were more entertaining than others - the introduction on Greek philosophy felt long while the ending abrupt - but that is a matter of personal preference and does not take away from the overall quality of this work. An excellent read on my Kindle.

Audible edition. Got the hardback after listening. This book will change how you think of western civilization and its development. It is a little like a lesson plan in organization and so it is a little sparse in places but over all it is a huge change in the traditional teaching of the development of the western world. Who would teach the "Dark Ages" were not or that the fall of Rome was the best thing that could have happened. I consider myself pretty well informed historically and this author brought up details I have never heard or considered as important. I really enjoyed it. My daughter in law teaches the subject and she has adopted it as an additional required reading to her text.. I recommend it to anyone who has any interest in world history.

I don't think I've ever written a review on before, but this book is worth it. I bought it originally as an audio book and loved it so much, I wanted to see the references he used. I've listened to it over and over because there's so much information that I get something more every time I read it. He tells the

story well. I had never heard of Rodney Stark, but based on this book, I'll be buying his others.

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