

Reviews of Books

The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Ecological Narrative. By Robert B. Marks. (Lanham, Md., Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. xi + 173 pp. \$60 cloth, \$17.95 paper)

Robert Marks writes about the origins of the modern world, its historical inequities, conjunctures, and contingencies, with clarity and an engagingly persuasive style. Readers hoping for a balanced, inclusive view of world regions will be disappointed, however. This abridged version of world history neglects much of Islam, Africa, and Latin America, in favor of the stories of China, India, and Europe. And, while the author clearly does not seek such balance, the failure to be fully inclusive of the world beyond Europe does little to address his stated goal of supplanting Eurocentrism. The modern world Marks describes comes together under the heavy boot of European dominance, global industrial capitalism, and competitive nation states. It is the foundation story of the new world history, brilliantly synthesizing the scholarship of Kenneth Pomeranz, Andre Gunder Frank, William McNeill, Fernand Braudel, Philip Curtin, and others.

As told in Marks's fast-paced version, industrialization created the material wealth and financed the expansion, control, and warfare of the past several centuries. The divergence of the West from the rest was not inevitable. But many questions remain, not the least of which is the book's stopping point at the most global (twentieth) century. What are the more recent costs of European hegemony and its divergence from other possible world systems? The acknowledged "gap" left behind when the West escaped the constraints of the biological old regime does not explain the persistence of inequality. And were there not a number of regimes in which agricultural success drove political centralization? What were the limitations to growth and transformation? Where is the story of resistance?

Pacific Historical Review, Vol. 72, No. 4, pages 623–670. ISSN 0030-8684
©2003 by the Pacific Coast Branch, American Historical Association. All rights reserved.
Send requests for permission to reprint to: Rights and Permissions,
University of California Press, 2000 Center St., Ste. 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

624 Pacific Historical Review

How did globalization succeed, and how did its forces enable European hegemony to take hold?

Told globally, African and American examples would have supported the author's thesis. Instead, the China-centered East Asian perspective focuses on the story of a British-led European American world system. Where does that leave much of Africa and the rest of the Western Hemisphere? Those parts of the world marginalized by European hegemony are also largely marginalized by Marks's condensed treatment. Africa is presented as an integrated whole, referred to as if (like China) it were a single empire. Unlike China, whose access to sources of coal sustained an era of growth, major regions of the African continent were underdeveloped and transformed by centuries of slavery and capitalism, deforestation and climate change, with the end result that the continent's population centers languished as markets for goods manufactured elsewhere. Likewise, Latin America and the Caribbean felt the downside of the Columbian Exchange and received devastating diseases.

What makes this an ecological narrative? The focus is on fossil fuel energy, el Niño-induced famines, and access to certain resources that proved critical during the era of industrialization—silver, opium, coal, and sugar. The limitations on population growth and world societies' ability to escape through the use of coal, and later oil, are the other ecological threads woven into this story. Few would argue with Marks's conclusion that the post-September 11 world is increasingly threatened by global inequalities and environmental patterns of global warming. Then why are the crises and struggles that punctuate the equilibrium of the earlier stages of globalization given short shrift? Lacking an understanding of countervailing forces and resistance to hegemony, Marks's narrative offers neither insight nor hope in the search for a sustainable and just planetary future. It does serve as an eloquent launching point for such a venture.

Washington State University, Vancouver

CANDICE GOUCHER

Hunting and the American Imagination. By Daniel Justin Herman. (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001. xviii + 356 pp. \$29.95)

In this cultural history of hunters from the colonial period to the beginning of the twentieth century, Daniel Justin Herman argues that hunting was an important and yet constantly changing ingredient of Anglo American identity. The central transition was