



10-1-2005

Lee Harris, *Civilizations and Its Enemies: The Next Stage of History*

Laina Farhat-Holzman
lfarhat102@aol.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr>

 Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Farhat-Holzman, Laina (2005) "Lee Harris, *Civilizations and Its Enemies: The Next Stage of History*," *Comparative Civilizations Review*: Vol. 53 : No. 53 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol53/iss53/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Civilizations Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

trying even to eliminate time by such slogans as “*competing in time*,” “*time war*,” “*elimination of immediacy*,” “*the end of the job*,” “*death of distance*,” “*instant delivery*,” and so forth. But looking at the consequences of these slogans, one can observe “*jobless economy*,” “*budget deficit*,” “*foreign trade deficit*,” “*creative accounting*,” “*corporate crime*,” “*overcrowded prisons*,” and so forth, which are de facto pessimistic outcomes of Western progress. It is interesting to notice that a concept of progress was or still is a political tool in Japan to break with the influence of the Chinese Civilization’s pessimistic Confucianism by promoting “optimistic” Western Civilization. The author did touch to certain degree a similar issue concerning Russia, which is de facto at the crossroads since Peter the Great, who wanted to modernize and Westernize Russia, and the Communists, who wanted to construct a new anti-Western civilization, as well as President Putin in the 21st century, who wants “computers” but not the western type of democracy. It means that Russia still debates the issue of “Westernization versus Russification,” an issue still not resolved.

By the end of his book, the author promises to compare the idea of progress in the West and the non-Western world, saying at the beginning that Western intellectuals concentrate only on the study of Western intellectual history, which implies that we are “narrow-minded;” perhaps we are. This part of the book looks as a repetition of other chapters, lacking a summary done under a form of clear criteria and attributes provided in a table.

Masaki Miyake is an accomplished historian of European history, who published 20 books and many scientific papers at many international conferences, so his book on *Civilization and Time* looks like a recapitulation of his knowledge on this topic with signs of wisdom of a mature thinker. He has also done a very good job bringing to us time-oriented ideas of the Oriental philosophers and historians, who otherwise without the author’s help, could be unknown for us from other civilizations. The topic of civilization and time is a very crucial one, just sketched by the author. It seems that further investigation should provide more model-oriented comparative studies, based on graphics and clear criteria, supported by historic cases and data.

Also, it seems to me that *tempus fugit!*

Andrew Targowski

Lee Harris, *Civilization and Its Enemies: The Next Stage of History*. Free Press, 2004.

We are living in a time that Samuel B. Huntington characterized as “a clash of civilizations.” Islam, going through a phase that somewhat parallels the early Reformation in the west, some four hundred years ago, has dragged us into their struggle. Many of us in the intellectual community are having a difficult time understanding the stakes of this struggle. We are accustomed to being critical of our own society, a good thing in educated and democratic countries, but in our very criticisms, we fail to remember the world we came from. Lee Harris has provided an antidote to our crisis of forgetfulness in this book, *Civilization and Its Enemies*.

Forgetfulness. Harris claims that we have forgotten how fragile civilized order is. We have forgotten what an enemy is. How often it is suggested that an enemy is just a friend that we haven’t done enough for yet. In reality, says Harris: “the enemy is someone who is willing to die in order to kill you.” While it is true that the enemy always hates us for a reason, it is HIS reason not ours. He does not hate us for our faults any more than for our virtues. He has projected onto us his own internal description of “the enemy.”

Ruthlessness. In a conflict between a gentle, reasonable and liberal community and a ruthless brute who will stop at nothing, the ruthless brute historically has been the winner. This is a historic truth that 10,000 years of human history will validate. This does not mean that we must become as ruthless as our enemy, but we do need to be tough enough to meet their force with our force. Rational discussion won’t do it. Try reasoning with the assassins on television who decapitated aid workers or manual laborers. How far would reason go? Pacifism only works when the enemy has a conscience.

Military Honor Code. When a society sets up a military class to defend it, it runs into the historical truth of the defenders becoming the oppressors. The only protection from this is a strict code of honor: in Sparta, for example, the military took an oath of loyalty to the state’s elders and citizens. In modern armies, it is a code of honor: patriotism, duty, and obedience to civilian authority. This code of honor to democratic rule is new—and fragile. Our last challenge was when President Truman fired General MacArthur during the Korean War. If times become bad enough, this protection could fail.

Fantasy Ideologies. History will show us that much human activity is driven by fantasy ideologies, unprovable and often unreasonable beliefs that get rationalized and serve murderous purposes. This is the intellect engaged in theater, not reason. Medieval Christianity and early

Islam collided in the Holy Land, each imbued with a fantasy ideology that stemmed from religion and a belief in an unprovable thing: that the dead in this conflict would go directly to heaven. The 20th century was full of fantasy ideologies promulgated by people otherwise equipped with logical minds. Italian fascism, German Nazism, Japanese fascist Shintoism, and Russian Communism were all fantasy ideologies that had little relationship with fact, yet had enough power to fool millions of people until the bubbles they created burst.

The latest fantasy ideology is Militant Islam, that has delusional belief not only in an improbable afterlife, but in the certainty of prevailing over the rest of their co-religionists and then the rest of us. This is not a Clausewitzian war they have declared on us. No real political objectives. It is magical thinking that if God makes all things occur, they will occur. There is no cause and effect here, just effect. Fantasy and dangerous.

The World Historical Gamble. All history has been propelled by individuals willing to take what Harris calls “The World Historical Gamble.” When men are willing to risk everything, including their lives, for a result, they take a big gamble. When they win, the world changes. Examples of this were Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon, Martin Luther nailing the theses to the door, the American colonists’ Declaration of Independence. He quotes Hegel: “It is precisely at this point that we encounter those great collisions between established and acknowledged duties, laws, and right, on the one hand, and new possibilities which conflict with the existing system and violate it or even destroy its very foundations and continued existence, on the other.” Today, says Harris, we are in another such epoch. “None of our currently existing ideas and principles, concepts, or categories will fit the new historical state of affairs that will emerge out of the crisis”: empire, national self-interest, multilateralism, sovereignty—are all on the way out.

The Liberal World Order. When people speak about “world opinion” or the “global community,” it is a concept, not a reality. The Liberal World Order is as fragile as the willingness of nation-states to believe in it. What happens when you have an enemy who doesn’t? Ruthlessness kicks in and the most ruthless will roll over the liberal world order unless the reasonable join together in mutual defense. We are at that point now.

Tolerance. The sort of tolerance practiced in the Liberal World Order is also a fragile concept. Tolerance only works when all sides

practice it. Those who refuse to practice it must not receive it from others. This is a code than can only work with mutuality.

Today's Enemy. The Traditional Enemy was a state with its own means of production and grievances that were comprehensible. Hitler and Stalin were clear about their purposes. Today's enemy is different. They have no state power and nothing produced by themselves: "as V.S. Naipaul has observed: the only technical mastery displayed by the terrorists of 9/11 was the ability to hijack and to fly Jumbo airliners into extremely large buildings, neither of which they were capable of constructing themselves." Same for Saddam Hussein. Everything he had was bought.

The Future of the Modern Nation State. In history, states came into existence because people fought for their freedom and won. Such states will fight for themselves too when attacked, unless their people have amnesia. But the majority of nation states today exist because someone else liberated them or created them out of nothing. Such states may not be viable. Harris compares the origins of Israel and the Palestinians. Israel fought every moment of its existence for survival and has thrived. The Palestinians have existed on a fantasy of "deserving" a state and the fantasy that they will "push the Israelis into the sea." This is not a realistic *modus vivendi* and doesn't have much modern viability as the basis for a nation state.

Cosmopolitanism—liberal or team? Harris provides the example of Diogenes. He called himself "a citizen of the world." This meant that he saw no obligation to the city-state that reared him. This illusion is only as good as the city being willing to support him. We do not have World Government. This is only an intellectual concept and has only the teeth we are willing to give it. We still owe our allegiance to that place that either reared us or gave us sanctuary.

CONCLUSIONS: We are, for all purposes, the single super power and the only force capable of dealing with this new enemy. We must not become an arrogant empire, and must only be first among equals. Finesse.

Intellectuals in the developed world must abandon the pursuit of abstract utopias and fantasy ideologies and return to the real world. We must be critical of our own distorted thinking. Stop the culture war.

We must struggle to overcome the collective tendency of civilized men and women to forgetfulness. Otherwise the next stage of history won't be very agreeable.

I think this is an essential book for intellectuals to read, argue with,

and think about. Harris has a very interesting grasp of world history.

Laina Farhat-Holzman

John E. Wills, Jr., *1688: A Global History*. New York, London: W.W. Norton, 2002.

A first impression of John E. Wills, Jr.'s *1688: A Global History* is its resemblance to travel writing. With ease and a degree of informality, the author conveys us anecdotally across the world's cultures, from the maritime colonies of Latin America, Africa, and East and South Asia, through the imperial centers of China, Japan, and Europe, with concluding segments in the varied realms of Islam. Between Europe and Islam, we encounter the European thinkers, e.g., Newton, Leibniz, Locke, et al., whose new science and rationalism will eventually undermine and drastically alter the courses of traditional societies.

Professor Wills enlivens the reader's global journey with insightful narratives. In the court of the new Qing (Manchu) Dynasty, the brilliant Kangxi emperor strains the patience and stamina of courtiers with extremes of funerary ceremonies to honor the grandmother who nurtured and sustained him. The Russia of Peter I takes dire measures against the "Old Believers" whose fanatical resistance threatens the Westernization that Peter deems essential to the achievement of parity with the West. At Versailles Louis XIV gains absolute power by enmeshing noble magnates in ceremonial activities; as they vie for royal favor, their powers dissipate. Along with the great ones, the author presents also many of the lesser known and obscure figures of the late 17th Century.

There is an African chief on the Congo River who enters history because he wrote (or dictated) a letter in Portuguese to a Capuchin priest, identifying himself by a name in Portuguese; this document implies a revelation of two hundred years of Portuguese trade and cultural penetration of that part of Africa. In Siam, a Greco-Venetian adventurer, who calls himself Constantine Phaulkon, gains for a few perilous years the royal favor, and controls the trade of the kingdom, favoring independent English merchants (he had been in the employ of the English Company), to the frustration and detriment of the great Dutch East India Company. Phaulkon isn't exceptional: everywhere Europeans can be found playing influential roles. The Scottish General Patrick Gordon leads a Russian army; the Tyrolean Jesuit Eusebio Kino extends Catholic missions beyond Mexico into Arizona; other