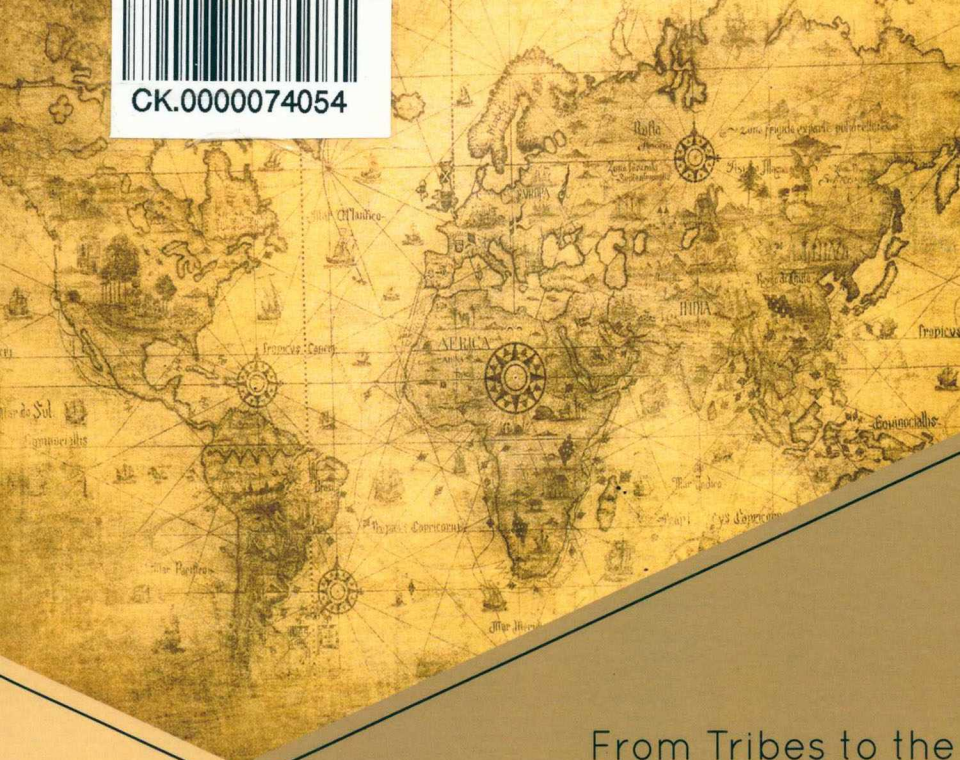




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From Tribes to the
Modern World-System

Anthropology and Global History

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Robert M. Carmack
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PRAISE FOR ANTHROPOLOGY AND GLOBAL HISTORY

Carmack's grand overview of human history and prehistory is a welcomed interdisciplinary contribution to the literature on world civilizations. The anthropological perspective means carefully viewing all societies and cultures in their own terms, showing how peoples in radically different societies and cultures understand their own systems and discussing how they fit within the larger world system. The world systems framework organizes the book, but is not uncritically accepted; instead *Anthropology and Global History* contrasts world systems interpretations with multiple competing perspectives. The opening vignettes and case studies in each chapter give colorful details that add life to the illuminating theoretical interpretations and explanations of how the contemporary world operates and what its future might be. —**John H. Bodley**, University of Washington

A masterful synthesis of the human condition across the grand sweep of time and space, from ancient tribal societies and empires to recent nation-states. By integrating "world-system" and "civilization" approaches to history, Carmack creatively charts a complex ebb and flow of societal interactions, conflicts, expansion, colonization and exploitation on a global stage. These dynamics are richly illustrated by and interpreted from the vantage point of the diversity of cultural traditions known to anthropology. Works of this commanding scope and insight rarely come along. Carmack's book is certain to impact the field for years to come. —**Robert Jarvenpa**, University at Albany, SUNY

"Carmack sees the rise of the West as part of a historical progression beginning with tribal societies and continuing to today's world of global conflicts. To read this invaluable book is to understand the stages of history over time and within their various geographic, cultural, and religious frameworks; it is to understand the rise of civilizations over the entire sweep of history, progressing from tribal societies to today's world of global conflicts; and it is to ponder the problems and prospects of the future."—**Warren Roberts**, University at Albany, State University of New York

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From Tribes to the Modern World-System

Robert M. Carmack

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A global history of the world's societies and cultures necessarily must be multidisciplinary. Anthropology is my own professional discipline, and this fact no doubt has influenced in diverse ways the chapters that follow. Nineteenth-century anthropological pioneers such as Edward Tylor ([1871] 1958) and Lewis Henry Morgan ([1877] 1963) applied global perspectives to their evolutionary histories of culture, and they included Europe and the United States as examples of "civilized" cultures. Franz Boas (1920, 1966) and A. L. Kroeber (1919, 1948) were among the most influential U.S. successors to the early pioneers, and both helped create the field of "historical ethnology" ("the history of world cultures"). By the second half of the twentieth century, anthropologists such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1962) in England and John Howland Rowe (1965) in the United States were elaborating historical ethnologies that not only took into account knowledge of the past from the Renaissance period but also the European and Asian classical civilizations. Anthropologist Ralph Linton's classic treatise on global history, *The Tree of Culture* (1959), was written during that same time period and is a particularly elegant and extensive history of the cultures and civilizations located throughout the major regions of the globe.

Historical studies with a global perspective mushroomed during the final decades of the twentieth century, spurred on by closely related fields drawn from the diverse social sciences, especially the historical subfields of sociology, economics, political science, geography, and ecological and religious studies. While I was a graduate student at UCLA, my historical anthropology studies (Carmack 1972) were inspired by my mentors H. B. Nicholson and M. G. Smith. These two renowned scholars both engaged in historical research,

Nicholson, a specialist in Mesoamerican history, and Smith, author of elaborate West African political histories.

More recently, anthropologists have increasingly turned to more global issues within the wider field of "historical anthropology." The fact that recent introductory cultural anthropology texts now include considerable historical information on the diverse peoples of the globe demonstrates this growing historical trend in anthropology and the social sciences in general (for example texts, see Scupin 1995; Kottak 1991; Harris 1987; Bodley 1994). Anthropologist Eric Wolf's widely praised global-oriented book, *Europe and the People without History* (1982), became one of the most influential studies within the social sciences. My own debt to Wolf's historical writings will become clear in the following chapters. Nevertheless, the historical account to follow has been formulated according to multidisciplinary social scientific theories and sources of information. The works of historical scholars from the diverse disciplines are clearly of equal relevance to the anthropological sources in the chapters to follow (for specific references to scholars cited in the text, see the bibliography).

My historical research has involved many months of labor in diverse archives, especially in the United States, Latin America, and Europe. Furthermore, I spent numerous months residing among the peoples of Latin America—especially in Mexico and Central America—and this led to an understanding of how important it is to integrate oral with written history. The French historian Marc Bloch (1961) asserted that to understand history of the past one should, if possible, spend time with the peoples presently residing within the diverse natural settings under study. An on-the-ground approach to history in one region cannot be adequate preparation for reconstructing the history of the many other regions of the world. Nevertheless, it is helpful to rely as much as possible on historical scholars who have resided in these regions and engaged in on-site research.

The account to follow differs in significant ways from the prolific genre widely known as "world history." The primary goal here is to reconceptualize world history from a "global" perspective, primarily through the lens of two expansive concepts: "world-systems" and "civilizations." This integrated, dualistic framework has been constructed by scholars interested in global histories that take as their subjects all peoples and cultures, and for all periods of time. The term "global" as employed in the chapters to follow refers to two interrelated historical conditions: (1) global in the sense that a particular type of society and culture was dominant throughout the world (early on these were "tribal" peoples, later "states and empires"); and (2) a modern system of interconnected states and institutions whose relationships have extended throughout the entire globe (referred to here as the "Modern World-System").

The global world history to follow, therefore, begins with the tribal peoples of the prehistoric period and ends with the Modern World-System composed of interacting nation-states of the contemporary world—hence the subtitle “From Tribes to the Modern World-System.” The world’s societies and cultures are examined primarily in terms of their extended interactions. Given this external focus and theoretical grounding, the historical information on which the following chapters are based must necessarily be highly selective and therefore more illustrative than comprehensive. Vignettes and case studies presented throughout the chapters constitute an attempt to illustrate historical developments that were extremely complex, numerous, often global, and therefore difficult to treat adequately in depth. The vignettes and case studies provide snapshots of historical processes operating through time in local, regional, and global settings.

Some form of selective approach to a global history, of course, is inevitable, given the vastness of the data available and the complexity of world history itself. The integrated “world-system” and “civilization” approach to follow offers the potential for gaining new social scientific insights into, as well as useful summaries of, the societies and cultures that have flourished across the globe through time. A central goal is to integrate information on the peoples and cultures of the entire world into a coherent and creative global history.

The focus on “sociocultural” processes in the world history presented below points to the fact that it is strongly oriented to the social sciences in general rather than to a more strictly narrative form of history. It is now widely recognized that in all the major social sciences large numbers of scholars actively engage in historical studies, and increasingly with a global focus. This has resulted in the proliferation of such “subfields” as historical sociology, economic history, political history, historical ecology, historical geography, and historical anthropology. The field of “history” itself has generated numerous topical specializations, among them “comparative history,” “social history,” “quantitative history,” “folk history,” “gender history,” “cultural history,” and “global history” itself.

The term “worlds,” widely employed in the chapters to follow, merits clarification from the outset. “World” refers not to physical or geographic entities but to sociocultural constructions that may achieve global expression (“global” in the two senses defined above). The scientific—and, to a lesser extent, humanistic—goals of any sociocultural study are well served by broadly comparing the many “worlds” of human history—hence, a global perspective. Comparison and generalization are methods that broadly define how scientists of all stripes carry out their studies. They compare defined units of study, seek to establish generalizations about them, and finally

attempt to explain the causes of identified general tendencies. If we are to engage fully in comparison, the ideal goal will be to study *all* worlds, including those located around the globe today as well as those from the past.

The work of social scientists, including historical scholars, is not without controversy. Serious ethical issues arise in connection with conducting on-site historical research, as well as interpreting sensitive documentary and ethnographic sources. Indeed, social scientists are increasingly concerned with the human dilemmas and problems faced by peoples in the diverse regions of the globe. My research on the history of civil war in Guatemala during the 1970s and 1980s, for example, raised serious ethical issues (Carmack 1988). At the time, the country's military regime had launched a campaign of ethnocide against its native Mayan peoples, and the campaign had critical global implications. Many social scientists—including myself—are caught in a moral crossfire: To what extent should they write about current history if in the process they endanger their standing when their studies reveal governmental (or other institutional) abuses? Must they remain silent in order to continue providing valuable information that might help in setting straight the historical record? Most historical scholars choose to speak out against the repression of peoples whose history and current way of life are under study. As with my own case in Guatemala, however, this can be dangerous and in some cases may become a matter of life or death (p. 38ff.).

For most scholars, the social sciences, including the genre of global socio-cultural history conceived here, are more than a profession; they are necessarily involved in humanistic endeavors that affect every aspect of who they are and what they do. Indeed, an underlying goal of the account to follow is to present history, past and present, in a form that potentially inspires readers to become more personally involved in the ethical dilemmas and physical dangers that have faced, and continue to face, the diverse peoples of our troubled globe.

An increasingly central goal of the contemporary social sciences concerns the necessity of studying *all* peoples and cultures historically. Much can be gained by critically examining the sociocultural worlds for the entire globe, and from the beginning of human history up to the present time. It is imperative to know about peoples from the past in order to understand the full spectrum of sociocultural worlds. Equally important is the fact that a historical perspective helps us to understand the universally dynamic side of social life in general. Only through history—and especially global history—can the seemingly ever-changing nature of societies and cultures be properly grasped.

The global and historical orientation of the kind of history explored in the chapters to follow makes it an ideal discipline for fulfilling the broad liberal “educational” goals of appreciating the views of other peoples and critically