



The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History

By J. M. Blaut

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This influential book challenges one of the most pervasive and powerful beliefs of our time--that Europe rose to modernity and world dominance due to unique qualities of race, environment, culture, mind, or spirit, and that progress for the rest of the world resulted from the diffusion of European civilization. J. M. Blaut persuasively argues that this doctrine is not grounded in the facts of history and geography, but in the ideology of colonialism. Blaut traces the colonizer's model of the world from its 16th-century origins to its present form in theories of economic development, modernization, and new world order.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Blaut (Univ. of Illinois) challenges the notion of "Eurocentric diffusionism": the pervasive presumption that superior Western culture has naturally flowed outward, bringing modernization to the rest of the world. In four chapters the author argues in detail that the historical propositions supporting European preeminence are myths. The conquest of the New World was simply the result of greater maritime accessibility to America, and the rise of Europe, after 1492, was due to the immense wealth of subsequent colonial accumulation. This is a highly analytical, provocative, and scholarly work. While not always convincing in certain aspects, it belongs in libraries serving readers interested in a revisionist view of world history.

- *William F. Young, SUNY at Albany Lib.*

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Review

"No scholarly book could possibly be totally new or original in this era, but Blaut's powerful and tightly focused opus comes close in the way he has marshalled and distilled a vast array of literature and evidence and the vigor and rigor with which he has pursued his central theses--propositions of unusual intellectual significance and timeliness. I find his argument quite persuasive and potentially mind-altering....This is a work with truly revolutionary implications, a badly needed recasting of our badly flawed, conventional First World vision of ourselves and the thrust of modern history. This could come to be regarded as a landmark achievement." --Wilbur Zelinsky, PhD, Penn State University

"This is a dogmatically written, occasionally outrageous, and absolutely spellbinding book. It is a strongly argued, alternative interpretation of the basic causes for the rise of the west to the hegemonic position it has occupied for perhaps five centuries....It is a major contribution to the debate now coming to the fore in the field. It makes its contribution through a merciless critique of mainline theories, by its selective synthesis of subaltern scholarship (both theory and piecemeal empirical evidence), and by its integration of whatever evidence exists to support this alternative position....I would plan to recommend it to my students as highlighting many of the controversies of the field and as representing an exaggerated version of one possible position." --Janet Abu-Lughod, Ph.D., The New School for Social Research

"Will add excitement to courses in world history and self-critical Western Civilization and European history courses. I have adopted this provocative new book for my graduate colloquium on theories of world history and think that undergraduates too would enjoy Blaut's clarity of analysis and passionate writing. He depicts Eurocentric diffusionism as a pernicious ideology justifying European and United States colonial and neocolonial domination of the rest of the world. His largest chapter refutes 'the myth of the European miracle,' the decisive superiority that Western Europe allegedly had achieved independent of outside help. Blaut, a historical geographer, has assembled a wealth of evidence for many parts of the world both for the long period before 1492 and for the transitional period of 1492 to 1688. As one who has taught European history since the early 1960's and world history since the late 1980's I enthusiastically welcome this exciting book which challenges and explains assumptions about European superiority." --David M. Fahey, Miami University -Adopted for Theories of History (World)

"Jim Blaut has written an exciting book that successfully challenges conventional Eurocentric diffusionism. The text is very accessible and is well documented with numerous concrete historical examples. The book is

very popular among the students that I teach." --Daniel Weiner, Associate Professor of Geography, West Virginia University

"My students are enthralled by the accounts in the book of the participation of other regions of the world in the making of modern world history. The book is easy to read without the need for much prior knowledge. Nearly a quarter-century after its publication, the book's themes are just as relevant--if not more so--for helping us understand the process of globalization today."--Sing C. Chew, PhD, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research--UFZ Leipzig, and Humboldt State University

"...Attributing European supremacy, in part at any rate, to something resembling chance - Blaut throws down the gauntlet to those still coddling the model of an Inside/Outside world [his language] waiting to be 'modernized' and saved from itself." --B. Marie Perinbam, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland

"Blaut could offer us sound leadership, in heeding Chaudhuri's (1990:43) sound admonition that 'the ceaseless quest of modern historians looking for the 'origins' and roots of capitalism is not much better than the alchemist's search for the philosopher's stone that transforms base metal into gold' -and still less to look for them under a proverbial lamppost in European history, when most of the gold was, and still is, to be found elsewhere in the world." --Andre Gunder Frank, Faculty of Economics, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

"...an engaging book...a clear and accessible style, generally valid assertions, and an explicit sense of geography. The book serves as a valuable foil against a persistent Eurocentric bias in historical interpretationeffectively challenging how we look at the world."
(*The Professional Geographer* 1993-10-31)

"....someone sounding off on a favorite topic can be fascinating, and Professor Blaut, an American, is certainly that."
(*New Scientist* 1993-10-31)

"Drawing from his many years of research on the historical and political geography of non-Western development, Blaut challenges the concept of diffusionism as believed and practiced by most scholars to explain the spatial inequalities of global wealth....Blaut presents arguments in a clear, highly readable, and engrossing fashion....Blaut's greatest contribution is to call on readers to rethink the multitude of flawed Eurocentric assumptions upon which modern scholarly inquiry is based."
(*Growth and Change*)

About the Author

J. M. Blaut, PhD, until his death in 2000, was Professor of Geography at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The author of *The Colonizer's Model of the World* and *Eight Eurocentric Historians*, Dr. Blaut was a recipient of the Distinguished Scholarship Award from the Association of American Geographers (AAG). Awards in his name are given annually by the Cultural and Political Ecology Specialty Group and the Socialist and Critical Geography Specialty Group of the AAG.

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