

# The admirable side of genghis khan: a modern marvel



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In Jack Weatherford's book *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*, readers are immediately presented with a side of history not usually seen. Weatherford portrays Genghis Khan as a sympathetic, smart, brutally determined ruler who goes from an impoverished orphan to "the world's greatest conqueror" (9). Through a plethora of evidence and real-life research, including spending several years in Mongolia where Khan lived, Weatherford successfully proves that Genghis Khan was not a monster but the usher of the modern world, changing the future through his ideas of kinship, his military prowess, and his implementation of new laws.

The first chapter of the book recounts Khan's takeover of Bukhara and then goes back in time to his childhood. Khan is shown as a sympathetic character; Weatherford repeatedly mentions the death of his father and subsequent abandonment from the Tayichud Clan. Khan grows from these experiences and comes up with a modern idea that was novel at the time. The book says, "for Temujin, such chosen forms of fictive kinship were already proving more useful than the ties of biological kinship" (28). Khan decided to choose whom he trusted instead of basing trust off of familial ties alone. In his time, the idea that allies could not be related was almost unheard of, and now, thanks in part to Genghis Khan, the idea of kinship has become less important and military leaders focus instead of the advantages of relationships rather than the familial bonds. This became important when Khan adopted more and more tribes into his own and wanted his people to feel united. Weatherford writes, "He organized his warriors into squads, or *arban*, of ten who were to be brothers to one another. No matter their kin or tribal origin, they were ordered to lie and fight together as loyally as

brothers..." (52). Genghis Khan proves his intelligence by modernizing the system in which people were organized.

In order to gain all his followers, Khan first had to conquer them.

Weatherford shows Khan as someone who is brutal only when necessary, a contrast to most history textbooks which paint him as a bloodthirsty savage. One battle in particular shows that, " Temujin, who had lost the battle but gained public support and sympathy among the Mongols, who were increasingly fearful of the cruelty of Jamuka" (42), was even more merciful than many of his contemporaries and rivals. His warfare was focused on bringing people together, not splitting them apart. Weatherford's treatment of Khan as a modern is completely correct; the way Genghis Khan treated his enemies and absorbed them into his own people was revolutionary to the steppes, and the idea that he was a cruel man only came thousands of years later when scientists during the Enlightenment decided that " the Mongoloid race exhibited a close relationship to the orangutan, the Asian ape" (257) and were therefore less human than Caucasians. Khan was a powerful and good leader, and because of his military prowess he was able to unite people from the east coast of China all the way to Europe.

The final way in which Genghis Khan proved he was more a modern man than a monster was his invention and implementation of laws which he called the Great Law. Weatherford writes, " Genghis Khan's law did not delve into all aspects of daily life; instead, he used it to regulate the most troubling aspects" (68). Khan did not base his law off of a religion or civilization; rather he took laws that existed among the steppe tribes and changed them to adapt to his new society as discussed in a previous paragraph. These laws, <https://assignbuster.com/the-admirable-side-of-genghis-khan-a-modern-marvel/>

unusual for their time period, are almost all in effect today in modern America and in countries around the world. The first law he enacted forbade the kidnapping of women. The second law, “ declared all children legitimate, whether born to a wife or a concubine” (68). It also forbade the selling of women into marriage, for both the sake of the women and the men who fought over the brides and ended up fighting amongst themselves. This Great Law is truly what makes Genghis Khan a modern man in the eyes of Weatherford—and myself. Khan’s ideas of family and trust were important, and his military prowess achieved universal fame, but it was his Great Law that united his followers and influenced other codes of law in multiple continents. Weatherford is not exaggerating when he says Khan “ shaped the modern world of commerce, communication, and large secular states more than any other individual” (267).

History has remembered the Mongols as savages, a group of people intent on destroying civilization one after the other, and Genghis Khan was seen as the instigator of it all. The book reads, “ Whereas the Renaissance writers and explorers treated Genghis Khan and the Mongols with open adulation, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in Europe produced a growing anti-Asian spirit that often focused on the Mongols, in particular, as the symbol of everything evil or defective in that massive continent” (254). Because of this backlash, many people have forgotten the ways in which the Mongols have influenced modern society. They invented international postage stamps, abolished torture, promoted religious tolerance, and created a trade network that spanned hundreds of thousands of miles. Some will say Genghis Khan was cruel; he did kill many people in his lifetime, and it is understandable to

have this opinion at first. But as one delves further into his history, they learn he did what he had to to survive and was never more cruel or vicious than was absolutely necessary. Jack Weatherford's account of Genghis Khan is accurate and as complete as can be with the evidence available, and readers will emerge thoroughly convinced of Genghis Khan's influence on the modern world and his place in history as one of the greatest rulers of all time.