

# Theory of civilization and the caribbean history essay



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Oswald Spengler was a German historian and philosopher. He was born in 1880 in Blankenburg. His parents were Protestants. His father came from a family of mine engineers while his mother's family had a bias towards the arts. Spengler inherited both traits as was evident in his interest in both arts and sciences. He grew up in an emotionally reserved home, leading him to turn to books for solace (Spengler, Oswald).

Spengler studied a wide range of subjects in school including Greek, Latin, mathematics, natural sciences, poetry, drama and music. He also studied a wide range of courses at the universities of Munich, Berlin, and Halle including history, philosophy, mathematics, natural science, literature, music, and fine art. His doctoral dissertation was on Heraclitus, the Greek Philosopher.(Spengler, Oswald)

Spengler worked as a teacher in several schools around Germany. Scholars who have attempted to study this German Philosopher note that his life was relatively uneventful and punctuated by long spells of loneliness. He died in 1936(Spengler, Oswald)

Oswald Spengler is best known for his controversial book *The Decline of the West*, published in 1918, coinciding with the collapse of Germany. This was the first of his two-volume work. It was subtitled "Form and Actuality", while the second volume was subtitled "Perspectives of World History". (Stimely, n. pag) The emergence of first volume of *The Decline of the West* was received with mixed reactions around Europe. The main critics of this book were professional scholars and historians who claimed that Spengler was an

amateur, not a trained historian. In spite of this, the book was a great success.

Spengler's approach to history was inspired by Goethe, a German writer and Nietzsche, a philosopher (Spengler, Oswald). His approach entailed taking a direct look at things as opposed to strictly scientifically. Spengler was of the view that science often masked the real meaning of things and that the so-called professional historians were victims of this kind of blindness. As a result, Spengler believed in his ability to not only unravel the mystery that is history but also to predetermine it. According to Spengler, history is not the study of a consistent progression of events, but "a comparative study of cultures" (Spengler, Oswald). He rejected the linear view of history in support of the cyclical, implying that history comprised of events and developments that generally repeated themselves in cycles.

Spengler was strongly opposed to the traditional way of categorizing history in terms of ancient, medieval, and modern. Instead he majored on eight cultures, sometimes referred to as Spengler's cultures. These cultures are Egyptian, Indian, Babylonian, Chinese, Classical (Greek and Roman), Mexican, Arabian and Western. (Spengler, Oswald) Each one of these cultures has its own unique features. For example the Egyptian culture was symbolized by their preoccupation with religion, architecture, such as the pyramids and art. Each culture too, evolves through a cycle of stages more or less like a plant through the stages of youth, maturity and then death (decline). Each culture, according to Spengler goes through its stage of civilization which could be referred to as its declining phase. In other words, civilization, according to Spengler is what remains of a culture after its

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development phase fades. In his book, Spengler mainly centers on comparisons between the Classical and Western cultures and civilizations. He noted that the civilization of the West since the late nineteenth century exhibited similar characteristics to ancient (Greek and Roman) civilization in its decline. He claims that in each of these cultures' 1000 years of active life there existed a cycle of development and decline (Stimely, n. pag). In his book, Spengler described the then Western culture as doomed and headed for extinction just like all the other high cultures that had existed earlier. He faulted it as being based on the illusion that everything would always get better and better eternally, instead of understanding it as having a distinct and fixed life-span moving from birth to maturity and then onto death just like in a living organism. The West, according to him was in the heart of its civilization phase and its end was probably just decades away.

During the civilization phase, in a high culture there exists severe social disorder, mass movements of people, persistent wars and unending crises. At the same time, emergence of great megalopolis is witnessed, causing the surrounding rural areas to be drained of their strength, brains and spirituality. The residents of these new urban centers soon grow into immoral and materialistic people. Soon the push for democracy and a free press set in following the desire to amass more wealth and money. This leads to conflicts and supremacy battles between the new culture and the original culture, marked by bloodshed and strangulation of democracy. Only blood is seen as strong enough to overturn the rule of money. Eventually, the cities start to depopulate, with the people going back to the countryside and re-inventing their old religious and artistic symbolisms. This results in

the end of the culture and the civilization that came with it. According to Spengler these phases recur within a period of time and at some point in future, these great cultures will experience phases similar to those that they went through years back. He predicted that there would be recurrence of such events as the world wars followed later by a nearly united Western civilization.

Spengler's theories opened up inspiring and divergent social views in the western civilization. A number of scholars and analysts continue to ponder over whether or not Spengler's analyses are correct, in spite of some of his predictions having come true. Many critics viewed his work as outright pessimism, although he remained one of the most read authors in the early 20th century years. Even his critics acknowledge that his greatest strong point was the parallel comparisons he made between the classical and western cultures. His strength in the arts played to his advantage during his study and analysis of different cultures. He is considered by some to have paved the way for National Socialism (Spengler, Oswald).

The history of the Caribbean dates back to around 4500 B. C. Before the voyage of Christopher Columbus to the Americas and the subsequent colonization, civilization in the Caribbean was clearly organized and operational. It is believed that the coming of the Europeans into the Caribbean introduced ethnocentric beliefs that ensured the collapse or disintegration of their civilization. With more and more European countries claiming territorial shares in the Caribbean, rivalries emerged among these European nations, making the Caribbean battleground for European wars for many years. In addition to the instability caused by these wars,  
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diversification was introduced in the Caribbean region bringing in new religions, cultures, architectural designs among others.

Caribbean civilization has evolved from an ethnically and racially plural society to a relatively inclusive society comprising almost entirely of migrants from Africa, Europe and Asia. These peoples share a common history of colonialism and slavery in a blend of great diversity, thus making it a one-of-a-kind civilization. In addition, the Caribbean has a unique physical environment that has further played to attract in more foreigners, thus further diversifying their culture. Despite their widely varied backgrounds, the people of the Caribbean managed to forge a unity that resulted in one culture characterized by shared political ideologies, a common language and corporation aimed at improving each others lives.

Looking back at Spengler's theory of civilization, it can be argued that it fell short in addressing racial differences among different cultures as is the case in the Caribbean. Spengler preferred to look at race as a minor difference in the members of the same race. He viewed race as not being of significant implications on the unity or disunity among people of the same culture. In so doing, Spengler contradicts the science of biology and heredity. In the Caribbean case, the unique mixture of people from different racial backgrounds was a significant factor in the development of their civilization.

Further, Spengler considers each culture and civilization as a closed and isolated unit, bound together only by a common strong idea or belief. Critics argue that such ideas cannot undergo organic evolution as purported by Spengler since they are a mere creation of the human mind, lacking any

substance. If that were the case, the Caribbean civilization would have been long gone the way of the classical culture. By only studying a few cultures, Spengler was, according to critics, not better placed to generalize on the fate of all civilizations since he did not have accurate information.

Finally, Spengler's theory claims that each of civilization came into being independently without borrowing from other cultures. The Classical cultures existed and became extinct in totality. On the other hand, the West viewed their modern civilization as a rebirth or continuation of the Classical civilization. The similarities in some of these cultures therefore clearly points to the fact that there exists an inter-relation between them that continues to survive the test of time. The Caribbean civilization borrows from a number of other cultures and civilizations from Europe, African and Asia shaping them into a single strong culture.