

Western civilization persuasive essay

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Western Civilization: Beginnings to Present Although Western culture has been defined by both Christian and secular values across the course of time, the West's primary goal is to achieve economic supremacy, using Christian and secular philosophies, as well as colonization and technological innovation as means to achieve this goal. Of the features that define western culture, the most unique is democracy. Originating in ancient Athens, democracy created a sense of pride in one's government which, in later centuries, would evolve into nationalism.

In Athens, democracy allowed the people to have a say in their government, furthering the unification of their empire and thus strengthening it. Out of this democratic world came many of the world's oldest philosophers, including Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates who challenged the world around them and attempted to rationalize it with mathematics and even proposed the idea of elements. It was this inquisitiveness and curiosity that would be harnessed on a much greater scale in the Enlightenment, which would allow Europe to flourish.

As their Greek neighbors had before them, Rome too adopted a democracy in order to unite their people after a tyrant king Tarquinius and prevent placing the control of their nation into the hands of one man, which would eventually allow Rome to expand and connect with the trading routes of the silk roads. Even after the roman republic, Julius Caesar, as the first emperor of Rome, would do any means necessary to extend the borders of Rome as far as he could to obtain profit from war. This suggests that Romans were more concerned of the profits to be made by the war than the democratic beliefs that defined their government.

The romans were also tolerant of many religions as long as they paid taxes for keeping their religions suggesting that money and riches was more important to them than having everyone follow one religion. This was certainly true as Christians emerged in Rome, upsetting the local Jewish population who paid taxes to the state, giving them leverage towards the Roman politics to persecute them. This however ended as Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity in the fourth century A. D. As emperor Constantine saw that it would be more beneficial to stop persecuting the Christians and accept them to avoid another civil war, he became a Christian. This was only the start as Christianity spread throughout the European continent and Emperor Theodosius established it as the official religion of Rome in 380. This proved especially beneficial for the empire as it allowed Rome to be governed during its greatest extent. When Rome official fell in 476 to the barbaric tribes of the Germanic region, Christianity was the uniting factor as the chaos of local groups sought to hold power. Out of this developed a complex feudal system comprised of lords, vassals, and serfs along with the power and wealth of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church demanded enormous amounts of money from the people as they sought redemption in times stricken with the Black Death and famine thus allowing the monasteries to emerge as the source of riches and the Church as the largest landholder in all of Europe. As the Church's power grew towards the first millennia, and had sucked the wealth from nearly all of its local citizens, they desired to find the holy land. Despite the first commandment of "thou shall not murder" and the Christian idea of "turn

the other cheek,” the Crusades were some of the bloodiest battles in European history.

These crusades, although against Christian ideals, provided a vast amount of wealth for Europe and reconnected them to both their Greco-Roman history and the Silk Road trading network, furnishing them with a vast source of economic profit. As the Catholic Church continued down this path of non-Christian ideas including penance, a devote monk by the name of Luther sought to put the church back onto the path of Christ. This however was not favorable for the Church’s income and they eventually excommunicated Luther from their church.

Luther was not about to give up however and his ideas spread quickly with the development of the printing press shortly before, weakening the Catholic Church’s grip on the citizens. This combined with the reunification of Europe and their Roman history, led the people of Europe to a more questioning mindset, further weakening the Church, and eventually leading them to the enlightenment. The enlightenment is the period in western history from the early 1600s through the 1700s as the medieval church worldview’s stepped aside for revolutions in science, politics and philosophy. The Enlightenment was a time when the opinions and ideas of the Church, which were formally in charge of both the economy and the government of Europe, were challenged through a more secular point of view brought about by the scientific revolution and integration of foreign cultures by the age of exploration. The secular beliefs of the enlightenment were more beneficial for European economic affairs in the High Middle Ages because, with the age of exploration underway, there was many foreign ideas entering Europe and

having a more secular governmental and ideological system would be more accommodating and accepting of outside policy allowing for better trade.

Also the enlightenment view was very in line with the discoveries of the scientific revolution allowing the inventing process to be spurred on. Some of the key inventions of the scientific revolution include the magnetic compass, lateen sails, and advanced map making technologies which allowed for the Spanish to cross the Atlantic Ocean and reach the Americas. The lateen sail and compass also allowed for better navigation to the Indian Ocean trading network, an essential source of wealth for the Europeans as they began their climb to economic supremacy.

In 1492, once Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue was the beginning of a new era in the history of the world. His discovery marks the beginning of Colonization and imperialism as the Spanish and French began exporting tons and tons of silver from modern day South America and trading it to China for their silk, porcelain, and tea commodities. But silver was not the sole source of economic power received from the colonies, they were also great places to build plantations and thus the slave trade began.

The trans-Atlantic Slave trade was when millions of Africans were ruthlessly taken from their homes and shipped to the Americas in horrid conditions. In general, the ruthlessness of the slave trade goes specifically against the Christian values of “ Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” and other teachings of Christianity which shows how the economic benefits that came through the slave trade was enough for them to ignore the defining factor of European culture for the past five hundred years to make some coin.

This overlooking of Christian values was popular throughout the people and as Frederick Nietzsche said " God is dead" signified the end of the Church's power in Europe as it became replaced with monetary lust. As Europeans spread across the globe and began forcing their way into the Asian countries it became a vital part of Indian Ocean commerce and as they established ports and colonies in India, China, and Japan they began to bring with them an idea of imperialism. Europeans came about this idea as they became an economic power nearly overnight in world commerce and they were also able to coerce ideas onto older, existing civilizations.

In Europe, nationalism drove many young explorers to go on expeditions for buried treasure and biblical references like the Ark of the Covenant or the Garden of Eden. Imperialism, or the overseas extension of nationalism, led many European explorers to believe, despite the Christian belief of acceptance of every race, that they were better than anyone and everyone else especially as they became the civilization that defined success and advancement in the world. This overextension of nationalism would end up bad however for the Europeans as it would cause cultural blinders and then revolutions as was the case of the Sepoy Rebellion.

Imperialism would prove very beneficial for the Europeans Economy as it encouraged individuals to charge more for products because nationalistic view said that " European gold was worth more than Foreign gold," making individuals demand more for their products. Also Imperialism encouraged the establishment of many colonies throughout Asia and the Philippines giving them massive amounts of silver, making them economically superior. Back in Europe however, rises in nationalism led to competition between the

European states and the division of Europe into two major groups of alliances.