



Preface and Acknowledgments

Why a Fourth Edition?

The past may not change, but our history of it does. History—the narratives that historians write—is relevant to us because historians are influenced in their selection of what and how to write about the past by their engagement with issues and problems that confront us today.

As I was working on the first edition of this book in the year 2000, environmental historian J. R. McNeill published *Something New under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century*. In that book, McNeill observed that he thought that a hundred years hence, at the end of the twenty-first century, historians and others looking back at the twentieth century would be struck by the significance, not of the two massive world wars, the rise and fall of fascism and communism, the explosive growth of the human population, or the women's movement, but of the changed relationship of humans to Earth's natural environment. As an environmental historian myself, I found that observation compelling and incorporated an ecological theme in my narrative. The world holds many surprises, but one has to be how much faster McNeill's prediction has arrived. It hasn't taken a century, but just a few years, for the importance of the change in our relationship to the environment to thrust itself to the forefront of our understanding of the recent past, and to give the epoch in Earth history we are now in a new name—the Anthropocene.

When I first wrote this book, I did so because a new body of scholarship on Asia had made it possible to reconsider the usual answer to the question

of the origins of the modern world: “The Rise of the West.” The new scholarship on Asia—which Jack Goldstone dubbed “The California School” because so many of us lived, worked, or published in California—raised questions about how and why the modern world came to have its essential characteristics: politically organized into nation-states and economically centered around industrial capitalism. Our findings that Asian societies had many of the characteristics others had seen as exclusively European and thus “causes” of the “European miracle” led us to argue that similarities cannot cause differences and to look for alternative explanations for how and why the world came to be the way it is. Andre Gunder Frank and Kenneth Pomeranz pulled this scholarship into two important books that changed the way we now understand how the world works, decentering Eurocentric explanations of history. One of the contributions of the first two editions of this book (2002 and 2007) was to bring to students and teachers a fresh narrative of the origins of the modern world that incorporated this new body of scholarship.

That continued to be the case with the third edition (2015), which in addition placed the environmental storyline into an ever more prominent position in the book’s narrative. It was only in the 1980s that climatologists had begun to understand El Niño events, and in the 1990s that rising levels of carbon dioxide coming from industry and tailpipes might cause the global climate to warm. From that initial realization that humans are forcing global climate change, we have now come to understand that humans are changing, overwhelming, or displacing other global processes of Nature as well on scales never before seen in human history. Readers or instructors familiar with earlier editions will notice sections on environmental issues throughout the book, as well as others highlighting Africa and income inequality. Those additions, combined with the placement of all notes at the end of the book, necessitated new pagination and a new index in the third edition.

Once again, recent developments have prompted me to offer a revised, fourth edition of this book. The fallout from the financial crisis of 2008 known as “The Great Recession” has shaken the faith of many around the world in the workings of the post–World War II global economy, especially those whose jobs vanished as factories closed or relocated to countries with lower wages and environmental protections, or residents of rural areas where farm incomes dropped and employment opportunities for young people eroded and many migrated to urban areas, fueling a sense of unfairness and anger toward those who allowed those downward pressures to continue to build. In many places around the world, the globalized economy and its easy flows of capital and labor have destabilized people’s lives, fueling opposition

to the globalized world and the elites assumed to be running it. Often these resentments come together in particular individuals who come to power as strong nationalists (such as Donald J. Trump in the United States, and others in Brazil, Hungary, and Poland), and in the BREXIT movement in the United Kingdom where a slim majority of citizens voted to leave the European Union.

What I have attempted in this edition is to put these challenges into the long-term perspective adopted for this book. Doing so, we can see that Mr. Trump and nationalist leaders in other countries can best be understood in the context of the history of globalization and the differential effects those forces have had within nations and globally. I have also added three new sections on migration patterns in past eras (in chapters 3, 5, and 6) to put the current politicization into a broader historical context. And I have re-envisioned nationalism, the significance of the Great Depression of the 1930s and the world wars that preceded and grew out of it as a way of contextualizing what I think are the latent dangers now of the rise of nationalism around the world. These revisions have added several pages and new sections to chapter 6. Rather than break that chapter into two or three smaller chapters, I have chosen to keep the chapter intact but have reorganized the sections into four main parts and provided readers with a detailed table of contents that shows the headings and subheadings in each chapter. That should help readers and instructors alike plan the best way to approach each chapter.

My reason for recounting this story of the changing circumstances of this book is not to provide a rationale for another edition. Rather, it is to point out that history is living and relevant to current concerns, not the “dead hand of the past” as some might see it. Both new scholarship and new issues and problems can prompt us to reexamine the past and to rewrite history to take account of the changes in both. That way the stories we tell about the past continue to be relevant and helpful to us in the present. For if they weren’t, what would be the point? We need all the help we can get, and historical perspective is an essential aid to living in and through the present to a better future.

In addition to the intellectual debt I owe to Andre Gunder Frank, Kenneth Pomeranz, and John R. McNeill, I want to thank them for their personal involvement with the first edition of this book. Others who were instrumental in conceptualizing that project include Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giraldez, whose work following the silver trail around the world opened new vistas for me and other scholars and who organized the 1998

Pacific Centuries Conference at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, where we thrashed out ideas over lunches and dinners, and where the idea for this book originated. Others who read and commented on the first edition include my Whittier College colleagues José Orozco and Dick Archer; Steve Davidson, professor of history at Southwestern University; and the editor of the Rowman & Littlefield series *World Social Change*, Mark Selden. Erik Ching, Bradley Davis, Kathryn Davis, Peter Lavelle, Ray Patton, and David Pizzo provided helpful comments and offered important suggestions for adding clarity and helping students navigate through my argument in this fourth edition.

For their response to the ideas in the book and the book itself, I want to acknowledge the first- and second-year students who have taken History 101, Introduction to World History, and read and commented on the first, second, and third editions of *Origins*, and to thank my colleagues, Professors Elizabeth Sage and José Ortega, who team-taught the course with me and from whom I learned much about the history of Latin America, Europe, and the Atlantic world. Like their predecessors, the history majors in History 480, Capstone Seminar, read widely and deeply on topics that found their way into this book, exploring environmental history (Spring 2010), the early modern world (Spring 2012), Eric Hobsbawm (Spring 2013), “the seventeenth-century global crisis” (Spring 2014), the Columbian Exchange (Spring 2015), the twentieth century in global, ecological, and historical perspective (Spring 2016), the environmental history of the early modern world (Spring 2017), and empire and environment in the modern world (Spring 2018). I especially want to thank the members of the Capstone Seminar (Spring 2019). These students read and critiqued the third edition and many of the draft revisions for the fourth edition. I found their comments and critiques invaluable. I say “thank you” to these students: Michael Atwood, Trent Beauchamp-Sanchez, Koren Dalipe, Brianna Drakopoulos, Carlos Gonzalez, Madeline Kirkwood, Mikaela Malsy, Alicia Penny Packer, Jonathan Ramirez, Kelsey Sherman, Carly Stevens, Daniela Vega, Astra Yatrousis, and Jourdan Zelaya. Special thanks also goes to Professor Kenneth Curtis, who invited me to meet with the members of his graduate seminar at California State University–Long Beach. They engaged me in a wonderful discussion of the ideas that draft revisions of this book sparked.

A grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (FB-36592) supported composition of the first edition. Philippe Beaujard kindly (and promptly) gave me permission to use one of his maps (see map 2.2). At Rowman & Littlefield, Susan McEachern was instrumental in bringing the first

three editions to print, kept me apprised of feedback from students and faculty who read and used *Origins*, and encouraged me to get working on this fourth edition. For their attention to detail, I want to thank Professor Robert Entenman and Yuhin Ng for pointing out errors in the second edition that needed correction. Any that remain in this edition are mine. Joyce Kaufman continues to offer companionship, love, and support, knowing what it means to be a publishing scholar at a college that values teaching effectiveness first and foremost. And as did our faithful and beloved dog companions Budd, Rembrandt, and Stanton, Seger now reminds me to look forward to each new day.

Copyright Rowman & Littlefield.
Please do not copy or distribute.