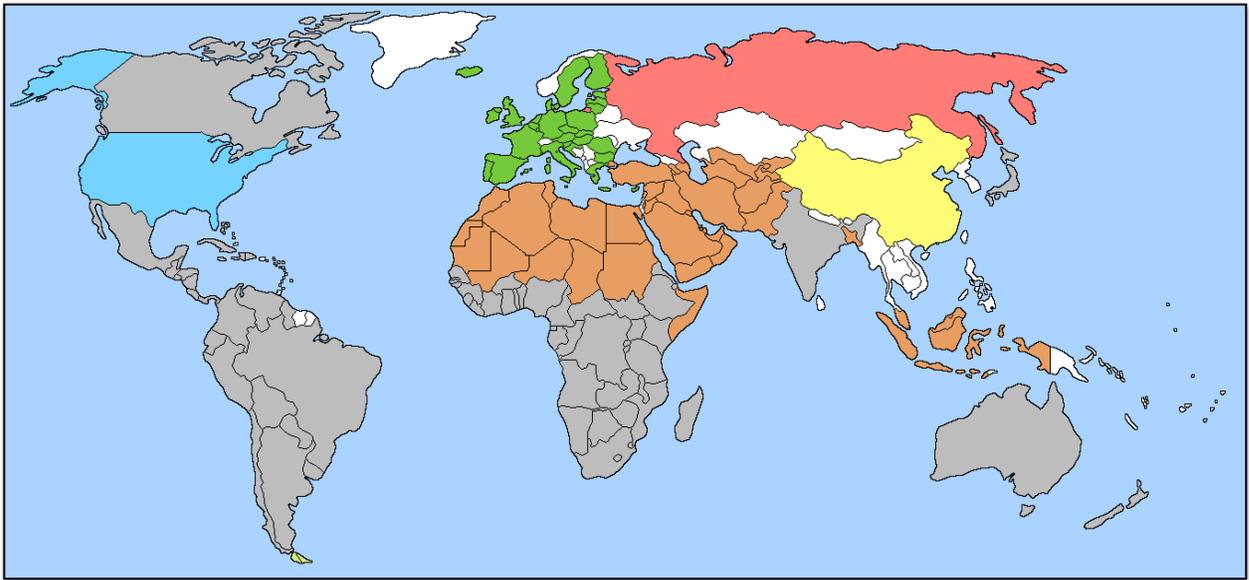


II. Preparing to Study Asia and Africa as Parts of the World

A. One More Step: Identifying the Cardinal Cultures

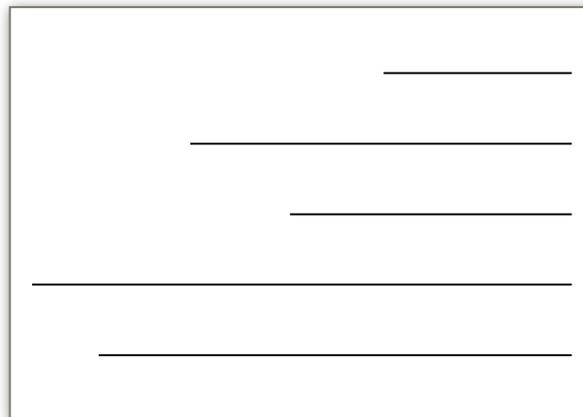
1. Taking the world's nearly two hundred countries and organizing them into *ten* major cultural blocks is a useful way to prepare for the study of history. It makes the world a much more manageable sum.
2. Ten blocks is still a lot of separate parts to work with, however. One further distinction will help us to study the past in a manner that is focused on what matters *most of all*.
3. The world we live in is organized in such a way that certain major cultures impact the course of events more than others. These especially important cultures have contributed to the character of the world to a greater degree than even the other major blocks. (Metaphorically, some cultures are in the "driver's seat"; some are passengers.)
4. A different useful formulation is that: the history of the world *hinges* on certain countries and blocks. Their actions determine the way the world evolves. The ideal way to describe the powerful role that such cultures play is to refer to them as "cardinal" cultures. (The word "cardinal" means "of prime importance," and is derived from the Latin root word "cardo," meaning "hinge.")
5. Without a doubt, the *United States* is the country with the most military power, the largest economy, and the greatest cultural influence on others. It is in a leadership role in the world. The course of history hinges on America's choices and actions.
6. The other cardinal cultures (of lesser, but still cardinal influence) are the *European Union, China, Russia, and the Islamic World*.
 - a) Europe's culture is the reason why European languages are the most widespread around the world, and why European forms of government are in use in countries as different as America and China.
 - b) China is a country that has undergone a radical change in recent times. Forty years ago, it would not have been a cardinal culture. It would have struggled to make the list of major cultures. But now just about everything seems to be "Made in China."
 - c) Russia is the only country other than the United States that has a powerful military that it uses to try to shape history. At this time the most dramatic example is how Russia continues to use its military to try to control the history of Syria. It is also a cardinal culture because it regularly aligns itself *against* the United States.
 - d) The Islamic World is the only cultural block in the world defined by a religion. This by itself makes it significant, but it is a *cardinal* culture because of the widespread presence of terrorism within its culture. Islamic terrorism, since the attacks of "9-11" on the United States, has produced a massive shift in history. The United States is now engaged in a "War on Terror," that has literally changed life on earth.
7. Japan, India, the Anglosphere, the Iberosphere, and Sub-Saharan Africa are major cultures but they do not affect history in a similar way or to a similar degree.



Of all the major cultural blocks, only the United States (blue), the European Union (green), Russia (red), China (yellow) and the Islamic World (brown) play an indispensable role in shaping the history of the world in our time and thus qualify to be thought of as “cardinal” cultures.

B. A Model of the History of the World

1. The final step in preparing to study the major cultures of Asia and Africa to see how they fit into the world is to create a timeline of world history based on the cardinal cultures.
2. Here is the basic diagram as it looks on a standard 8.5”x11” page turned on its side:



3. Using approximately the same color-coding from the maps above to symbolize the major blocks as lines, the diagram represents the history of each block as a “time line,” where the length of the line tells us the relative length of the history of each block. The modified diagram on the next page also has a couple other modifications...



1. From top to bottom, the timelines of the diagram represent: the *United States*, *Europe*, *Russia*, *Islamic World*, and *China*. The arrows point from the past to the present (and the future).
2. The one additional feature of this diagram is that the timeline of the Islamic World is split basically into two parts, because it is a civilization that has a precursor: ancient Egypt & Mesopotamia. The Egypt of the pharaohs and the parallel kingdoms and empires of the Mesopotamia (which is today known as Iraq) are a known historical culture, which was conquered and replaced by Islamic culture.