

# History 1.0

The World We Live In *Revealed*

VOLUME 1: THE CARDINAL CULTURES

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## A Note to Parents

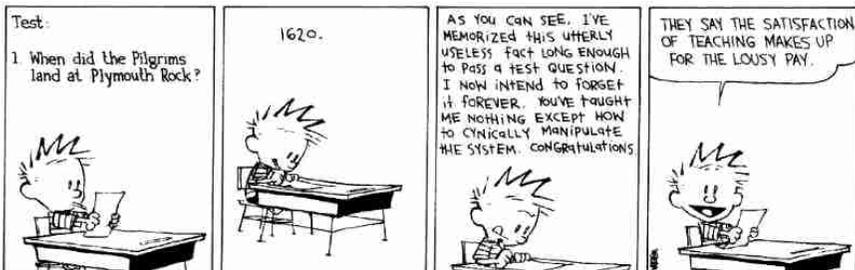
This is not merely the story of the world. Learning stories about the past is all fine and good up to a certain point. History, however, is something more.

Of course, as adults looking back on your experience of history education, you are right to be wary of what comes next. If what passes for serious history today is as bad as what we were taught in school, then you are right to want to avoid that for your child.

After all, of what use is a subject that bombards us with an indiscriminate number of facts about what happened to the overwhelmingly many people that lived through all the ages in all the different places—or, worse—a subject posturing as “truth,” but which is really just “our story” (whether patriotic or revisionist) and which cuts us off from each other and sets us up to be pawns in the never-ending culture wars?

We need a subject that connects us to each other and helps us understand the world we live in.

In my more generous moments, I like to think that was the intention of the folks who invented “social studies” to try to replace history. Memorizing dry facts about people who died a long time ago, they thought, can’t help us to navigate through the world as we experience it.



Why not focus on the world of today instead?

Unfortunately, we all know how that turned out. Instead of learning about the pilgrims arriving in New England and the building of transcontinental railroads, kids are now taught about the walkabouts of Australian aborigines, the biodiversity of the Amazonian rain forests, and what it takes to climb Mt. Everest.

“What did you learn in school today?” parents ask. “I don’t know,” is the child’s response—and they mean it!

An irrelevant “study of the past” has been replaced with an incomprehensible jumble of cultural topics about the present.

The point here is not to criticize the presentation of any particular topic in social studies, nor to advocate for any particular approach to the topic. The point is that the modern idea of telling kids about *the now* without explaining *how we got to now* is no education at all. It collapses our awareness down to the moment we live in. It robs us of the context that is necessary to make sense of what we see. It denies us access to the causes—often many and remote—of the events unfolding around us—without which significant thinking about those events (let alone effective action or activism) is impossible.

The world has never been more complex and interconnected, or more full of possibilities—for those who can make sense of it.

That’s what this series is about: revealing and explaining a world that is so profoundly worth knowing.

\* \* \*

It is important to note that the *History 1.0 series* is aimed specifically at junior high or “middle school” students, and is meant to be read *by* them—not *to* them. If your child has not reached the level of independent reading required, then the content will also be out of reach.

That doesn’t mean you can’t read it along with them. Indeed, as a parent or guardian, I highly recommend that you do. My hope is that when you do, you will find yourself saying, “*I wish I had a history book like this when I was a kid!*”

As for readers at other levels, high school students are directed to the *4-Hour Historian* series that is designed specifically for students at that level. Young adults and life-long learners are welcome to sample any and all of my works, but are invited to try the *History of Now* first, which is designed for readers 21 and up. Much of the same content is covered in all these books, but each is designed to address the context and needs of readers at importantly different stages of life and who have different experiences of history as a subject. If as an adult you find the *History of Now* too difficult, try the *4-Hour Historian*. As for families of elementary school students, stay tuned! I don’t have books ready for you just yet, although I do offer a “My First History Class” and a “Big Picture History” series on-line, along with the much more complete *History At Our House* program.

Since readers will inevitably be drawn to compare *History 1.0* and the *4-Hour Historian*, I want to be especially clear about the relationship between these two series, which are just beginning and which will grow side by side. The first volume in each series covers essentially the same material, but they are *not* interchangeable. It’s important to choose the right one for your student. The *4-Hour Historian* is a series of **anti-textbooks**. I mean it! It is an *antidote* to be administered to students who have already had a dose of what passes for history education in our

schools. ***History 1.0***, as the name suggests, is designed as a first serious pass through history. It is for students who have not yet had to pass through the gauntlet of any conventional history yet. The two series are designed to converge on the same end point, and to allow both sets of students to move on to the advanced high school series to come, which will be entitled ***History 2.0***. To be clear, ***History 1.0*** students should not move on to the ***4-Hour Historian*** series. They should move on to ***History 2.0***, which I hope will start to become available in 2020.

Scott Powell  
September, 2019  
Houston, TX

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *History 1.0*—a history series for middle schoolers that has a simple but important theme:

*The world is knowable. And it's worth it!*

What exactly does that mean?

First of all, by “the world,” I do mean *the world*. Everyone begins to learn about the wider world through a set of personal experiences, based on their own unique circumstances, but few ever understand the *world* in full, because there is only one tool that makes that possible: *history*—and only when studied properly.

History is the only tool that can provide us with a complete picture of the world we live in and a proper appreciation of how our lives are interconnected with those of people everywhere. A great way you can begin to explore this reality and prepare to study history is by walking through your house and randomly turning over cups and saucers, pots and pans, electronic devices and appliances—and by finding the labels on clothing, toys, and packaged foods of every kind. Notice where everything was made. (A few minutes is all it takes. I really recommend you stop reading, and do this now.) I guarantee you that many if not most of the things in your house are “Made in China,” and more of the items are made in countries *other* than your own, no matter what country you live in. The computer I’m writing this on was assembled in China. I drive a car designed in Japan. The coffee I’m drinking as I write this comes from Costa Rica. My favorite coconut water comes from Thailand. I live where it’s hot, and yet I can still have wild-caught salmon from Alaska for dinner. If you live in a frigid northern climate, you can get oranges from Florida and bananas from Panama (and thus the vitamin C you need) even in the winter. Your favorite app is just as likely to have been written by programmers in India or

Russia as anywhere else. The list of benefits we get from living in the modern, interconnected world is endless!

But that world is also more challenging to understand than ever. You can glimpse that complexity just by looking at a map. There are almost *two hundred* countries out there. How can we possibly take the patchwork of countries that exist and make sense of it, if we have to work with that many separate pieces?

One thing I certainly *won't* do is encourage you to memorize the names of all the countries and their capitals! Even if you managed to do it, you couldn't possibly keep them all organized in your mind and use that knowledge to learn history. It's just too much to handle.

The first thing we will do instead is sort through the plethora of countries out there, organize them into a useful framework of *cultural blocks*, and focus on the ones that matter most. Once we do that, the study of history becomes much easier. There are many fascinating cultures to study in the world, but some are more important, *historically speaking*, and we need to learn about them first.

We will study the outline of the history of each of the world's most important cultural blocks, and connect them together as we proceed. Our interconnected awareness will grow to resemble the actual interconnected world, so that we can see that what most people think of merely separate stories are actually parts of the history of *one world*.

*We live in it. We can know it. And it's worth it!*



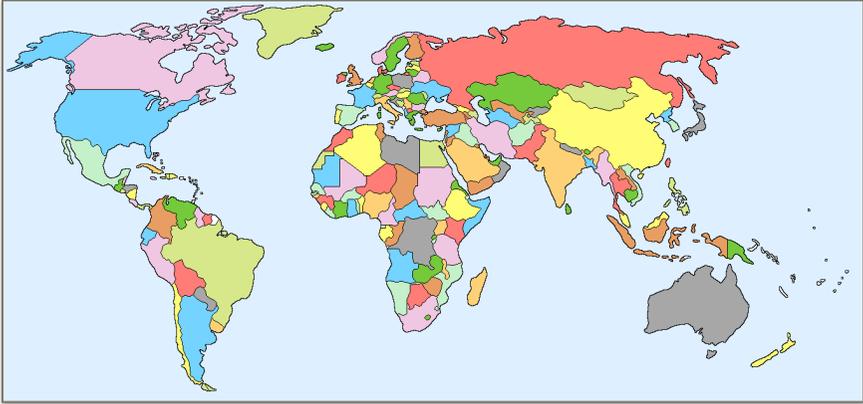
# **Part 1**



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## CHAPTER 1: Getting Organized

How do we take this patchwork and made it manageable?



Map 1: Trying to learn and combine the histories of two hundred separate countries would make the task of understanding world history impossible.

We must learn to see the world not merely as a collection of countries, but as an organized set of *cultural blocks*. There are only ten major ones, so it's good to be able to readily identify them, and certain individual countries as well.

To begin with, there are five countries that are major cultures in and of themselves. They all have large populations and have made a big impact on history as individual nations. They are 1) the United States of America, 2) Russia, 3) China, 4) Japan, and 5) India.

By far the most important one today is the United States of America. No country plays a remotely comparable role in world affairs. America is the world's only combined military, economic, and cultural superpower.

What exactly does that mean?

The United States is the only country with fleets of aircraft carriers that patrol the world's oceans, each with a more powerful force on board than most countries' entire military. It also possesses a vast arsenal of nuclear weapons, any single one of which can destroy an entire city! And it has "stealth" bombers that others countries could not even detect, if America chose to use them in an attack. And that is just the tip of the iceberg of America's military power.

To say that the United States has "economic power" means a few different things, but mainly that America is a very large and rich country. Other countries want to trade with America, sometimes in exchange for protection. Also, Americans have created businesses and products that are uniquely popular all around the world, from McDonalds and Coca-Cola, to Disney and Marvel; from Starbucks to Google, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Twitter, Facebook, etc. Without a doubt, the United States is at the center of world trade and especially the commercialized Internet.

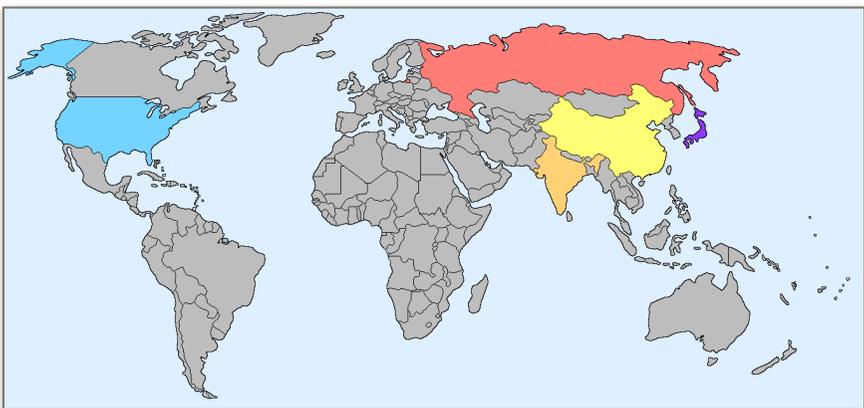
Which is part of its "cultural power." Everyone in the world uses American social media platforms. Everyone watches the latest Avengers and other Hollywood movies, streams American television programs, listens to American "pop" music, and "follows" American celebrities and political leaders. No other culture has anywhere near as much of an impact on fashions and trends around the world.

China is a distant second. It is the world most populous country, and now the source of a vast array of goods labeled "Made in China," as you surely discovered by surveying the labels on the items in your own house. As a result, China has quite recently been transformed from a poor country into a rich one, and its leaders want to leverage that success to make China the most important country in the world. China is not a free country, however, and the Chinese way of life is hardly known around the world, let alone

appealing to others. China’s impact on the world is mainly through trade for now, although its military has become the third strongest in the world and is growing rapidly.

The second largest military power today is Russia. Russia once tried to challenge America’s primacy in the world by promoting a form of government called “communism,” which failed and was eventually modified or abandoned everywhere it has been tried. Russia now plays a more limited role in world affairs. Like China, Russia is not a free country, and its culture is not known or copied by others. It is not nearly as important a trading nation as China either, but because it has the second most powerful military—including many nuclear weapons—it can choose to affect other countries by force or the threat of it.

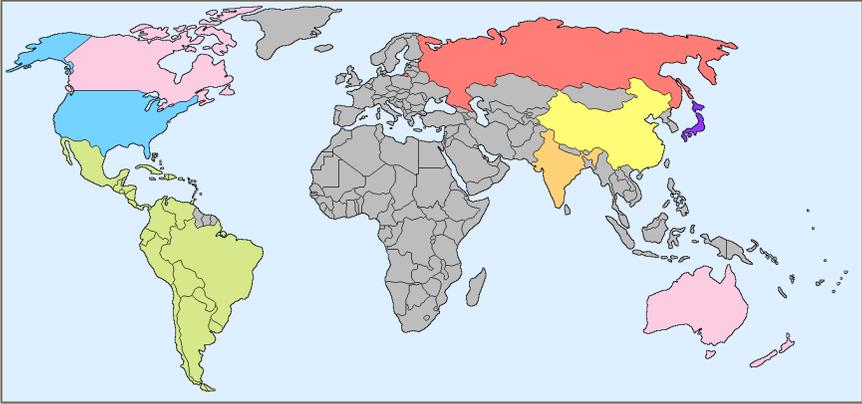
Other than these “big three,” there are only two countries that are historically important on their own. Japan is the most economically significant of these. It is a former empire that now focuses on peaceful trade, making popular brands such as Sony, Nintendo, Toyota and Honda. India is an ancient culture that now plays a limited role in shaping the world, but it has the second largest population of any country, and is the most populous democracy.



Map 2: It’s important to be able to find the five most important national cultures on a map. The United States (blue), Russia (red/pink), China (yellow), India (orange), and Japan (purple) are by themselves “cultural blocks.”

There are other obviously large countries on the map, and it's good to be able to quickly grasp where they are, as well as how they are related. Two of the largest countries geographically are Canada (between the two main parts of the United States) and Australia (a continent unto itself in the southern hemisphere). Together, and with New Zealand (mainly two big islands southeast of Australia) they make up most of the world once colonized by people from Britain (other than the United States, which broke away from the British Empire and became a separate block). Because these countries share the same language and democratic forms of government passed down to them from England, I call this block the "Anglosphere." ("Anglo-" means having to do with England or English culture.) While it's good to be able to identify Canada, Australia, and New Zealand separately on a map, it's also important to see that they make a "block" of similar cultures that can be usefully thought of together as well.

The same goes for all the countries in the Americas where Spanish and Portuguese are spoken (including Mexico—bordering the United States to the south, and Brazil—the last of the especially big countries that stands out on the map, in South America). Together, they make up another major cultural block. This block is often called "Latin America," but most people could not tell you why. It's not something that really makes sense to people today, because it refers to the ancient past. I prefer to use the term "Iberosphere." I realize that might sound strange as well, but here's why I like it: it refers to the fact that all the countries in this block share the same mother countries—Spain and Portugal—which together make up a part of Europe called "Iberia." (Geographically, Iberia is a peninsula, like Florida or the "boot" of Italy.) I find that the term "Iberosphere" fits nicely alongside "Anglosphere" in my mind, as I think about the major cultural blocks. Again, it's good to know some of the individual countries within the block—Mexico and Brazil in particular—and perhaps a few others, if you would like to look them up, but observe how when we group them



Map 3: Grouping countries based on their common cultures into “cultural blocks” helps organize our understanding of the world. The Anglosphere (light pink) and Latin America / Iberosphere (light green) are two useful blocks to know, along with the major countries that make them up.

together the map, it really helps to organize the picture of the world.

There are three more major cultural blocks in the world. One is based on the religion of Islam. The Islamic world is the only cultural block that is based on a religious belief. Christianity in its many forms is prevalent in Russia, Europe, the United States, the Anglosphere, and the Iberosphere, but it doesn’t bind those cultures together into a block. Each of those cultures is too different in other ways. By contrast, even though the many countries within the Islamic world are different in various ways, the fact that they are Muslim countries does bind them together *despite those differences*. In some cases, such as with Saudi Arabia and Iran, their different interpretations of Islam make them enemies within Islamic culture—but still members of the same cultural block because of that religious bond. (You should be able to find Saudi Arabia and Iran on a map. Google them now, if you’re not sure where they are.)

Members of a cultural block don’t always get along! The next block with a common culture includes countries like Germany,

France, and Britain, which used to be among the world's great powers, as well as one another's enemies. Britain and France are still quite powerful militarily, but they, like their neighbors, have ceased to play a *national* role in how human life unfolds. They mainly work together in a partnership known as the "European Union" (EU). (Knowing where Germany, France, and Britain are on the map is essential to studying history. If you can't picture them in your mind, look them up right now.) The details of the partnership don't matter at the moment, but it might help you to know that the idea of the European Union is to take the separate countries of Europe and turn them into a "United States of Europe."

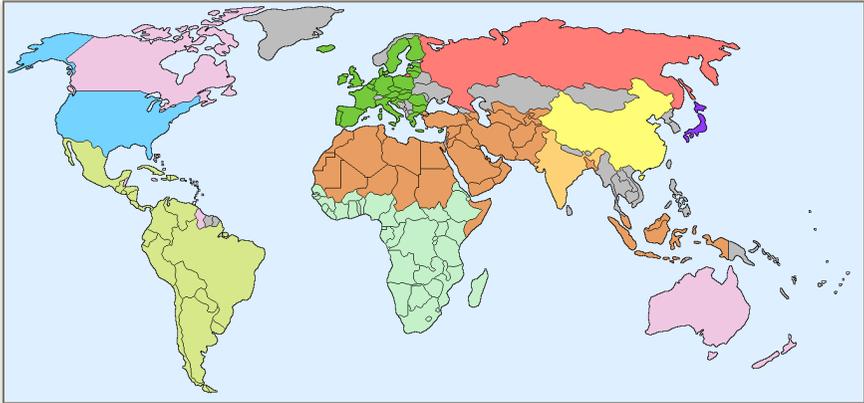
(As you may know, Britain voted to leave the European Union. This is called "*Brexit*." Even if Britain technically leaves the EU, however, its relationship to the Union, whatever form it takes, will continue to dominate its story.)

The final block of similar cultures that can be usefully grouped together is Sub-Saharan Africa. As the name suggests, it's a group of countries located "under" the Sahara desert of northern Africa. The countries of northern Africa are part of the Islamic world, but the people of Sub-Saharan Africa are mostly Christian, because they were once ruled by European empires. They are now independent, but they share a common experience of history that makes them different from their Muslim neighbors and binds them into a cultural block. (Most of these countries are not widely known, but you can start to orient yourself to its geography by finding South Africa and Madagascar on the map.)

When we combine all this information together, we get a nice framework for studying the history of the world.

In the *History 1.0* series, you'll have an opportunity to learn about every one of these major cultures, certain countries within them,

and still others. In order to learn as much as possible about the *world* in this first book in the series, we are going to focus on just the most important ones of all. I call them the *cardinal cultures*, because the word “cardinal” means “of special importance—that upon which something else hinges.”



Map 4: The European Union (bright green), the Islamic world (brown) and Sub-Saharan Africa (mint green) are useful cultural blocks to know. Thinking of the world in terms of such blocks, leave only a few countries apart (gray).

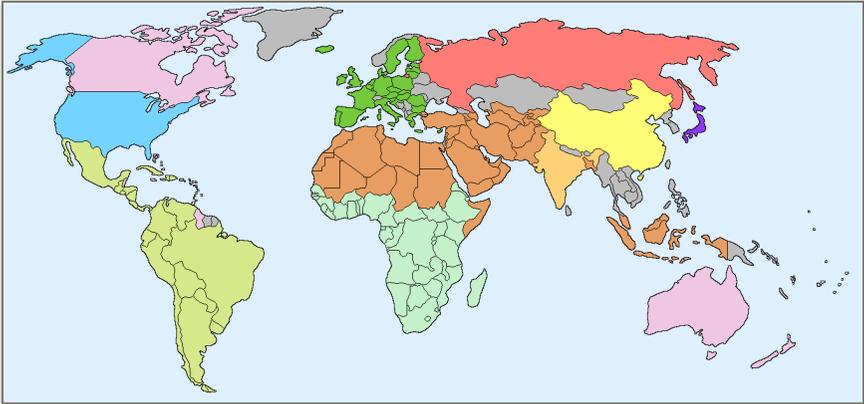
There are ten major cultures, but only five cardinal cultures. History *hinges* upon the actions of these five, more than any others. They are: 1) the United States, 2) China, 3) Russia, 4) the European Union, and 5) the Islamic world.

Of course, that doesn't mean that nothing else matters. It also doesn't mean that the cardinal cultures are “better” than everybody else. It means only that they are the most *historically* important cultural blocks at this time. So, if we want to understand the *world we live in*, we must start by studying them.

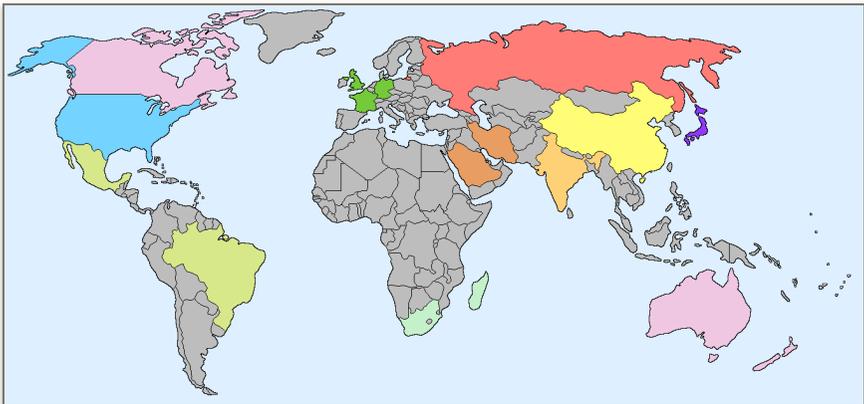
## CHAPTER 1 SELF-CHECK

1. What five countries are themselves *cultural blocks*? What makes each of them important?
2. What five *groups of countries* contribute most to the trajectory of history today as “cultural blocks”? What binds the different countries together into a common culture?
3. What does the word “cardinal” mean? What term means “the kind of culture upon which history hinges (at any particular point in time)?”
4. Use the map on the next page to quiz yourself, or print out a larger version that you can write on from the web page <http://historyatourhouse.com/history1.0>.

[ANSWER KEY PROVIDED AT: <http://historyatourhouse.com/history1.0>]



What are the five countries that are major cultures?  
 What are the five *groups* of countries that are major cultures?



Name all the separate countries that are shown in the colors representing the cultural blocks they belong to.

*If you cannot easily name all of them, I highly recommend printing the worksheet from the History At Our House web site and practicing. It isn't necessary to know where all the countries are in the world, but you do have to have some anchor points of geographical knowledge, or you will feel lost when studying history.*

