

## LEARNING ABOUT THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

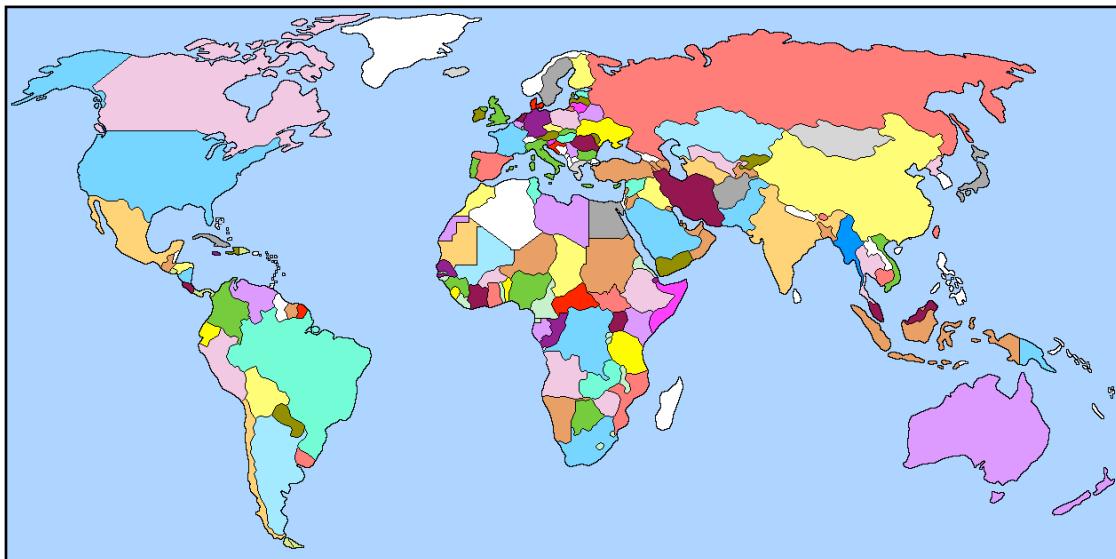
### I. A New Approach to History

#### A. What is history?

1. The normal view of history is that it is “the study of the past.” That is why most people don’t care about history! If it’s about *the past*, but we live in the *present*, then history doesn’t seem to be about “real life”?
2. The goal of *History At Our House* is to show you a different kind of history: **a revelation and explanation of the world we live in.**
  - a) We all need the world *revealed* to us beyond what we see in our home town. There *is* a great big world out there—and we need to know about it!
  - b) But *why* is the world the way that it is? Only history can answer. Only history can *explain* what happened to make the world the way it is.

#### B. The Challenge of Connecting Past and Present

1. A big part of the challenge of studying history *as a way to understand the world* is how complicated **that world** is to begin with!
2. There are nearly two hundred countries in the world. That’s too many to make sense of.

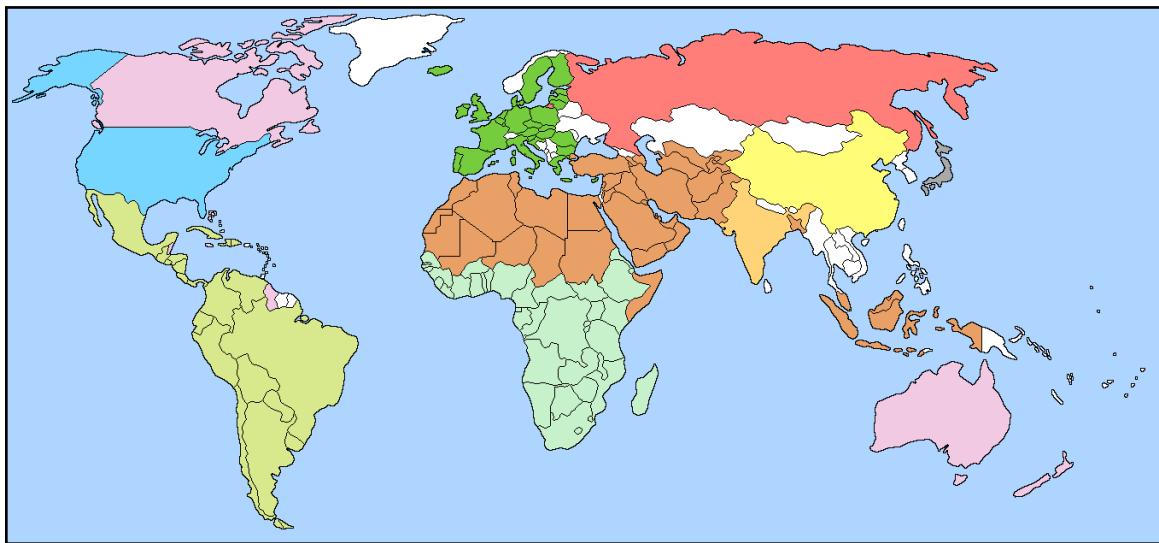


The pattern of the world’s countries today is too complex to use as a base for learning about history.  
We need a simpler set of building blocks.

### C. Making The World Knowable: Seeing The Ten Major Cultural Blocks

1. To understand the world, we must learn to see it in terms of its most important countries and groups of countries.
2. The most important countries have:
  - a) military power - lots of weapons to defend themselves, or even attack others
  - b) economic importance - they make lots of things other people want to buy
  - c) cultural influence - their ideas and beliefs are respected, copied, or feared by others
3. The five most historically important countries in the world today are:
  - a) **The United States** - It is the world's greatest military superpower by far, and also the world's richest and most influential country. No country can compare today.
  - b) **China** - This ancient nation is a distant second, but still a very populous and now economically important country. The "Made in China" phenomenon is much more important than could have been imagined just 40 years ago.
  - c) **Russia** - This former communist country engages in relatively little international trade, despite its huge physical size and resources. What makes it important is its huge military (the second largest in the world).
  - d) **Japan** - This island nation once tried to create a massive empire, but it was stopped by the United States and is now an American ally in Asia. It is a technologically advanced country that makes many products people want to buy.
  - e) **India** - This second most populous nation (with more than a billion people) has a religion called "Hinduism." It affects the world by staying loyal to this set of beliefs.
4. Some countries are not as important as the "big five" by themselves, but they participate in alliances or associations where they can achieve more together than they could apart. We will use the term "cultural block" to refer to such groupings. There are five of them:
  - a) Germany, France, and Britain used to be among the world's great powers. Now they affect the world through the partnership called the **European Union**. Since there are generally no border controls between these countries and they use the same money (the "Euro") they almost act like a single "United States of Europe."
  - b) A big area from northern Africa across to South East Asia is also a major cultural block. None of the countries in this block have great military power but they share the religion of Islam in common. This block—**the Islamic World**—does impact the course of history today. Most followers of the religion of Islam are peaceful people, but a modern Islamic idea called *Islamism* promotes terrorism and is responsible for many wars in the world today.
  - c) Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (along with a few smaller countries) make up the non-American, non-British **Anglosphere**. This group of countries used to belong to the British Empire. It is not important enough to change the course of history by itself, but its members are allies of the United States.
  - d) Another group of countries that used to be inside European empires is the **Iberosphere** (or, as it is sometimes known as "Latin America"). Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina are the main members of this block of nations once controlled by their mother countries, Spain & Portugal (together known as "Iberia").

- e) The final major cultural block in the world is **Sub-Saharan Africa**. Its nations are poor and still struggling to develop stable governments. They are distinct from northern Africa (which is part of the Islamic World) by the wide acceptance of Christianity and influence of European culture upon them.
- f) Not all the countries of the world fit into a model with ten major blocks. This does not mean they are of no interest. It simply means that they do not affect history as much as the other countries or blocks.
- g) Here's what the world looks like when organized into cultural blocks:



Thinking of the world in terms of historical building blocks gives us a much clearer picture. Some of the cultures that direct the course of history today are countries. Some are collections of countries that affect the world in combinations that can be called “cultural blocks.”