

LEARNING ABOUT THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

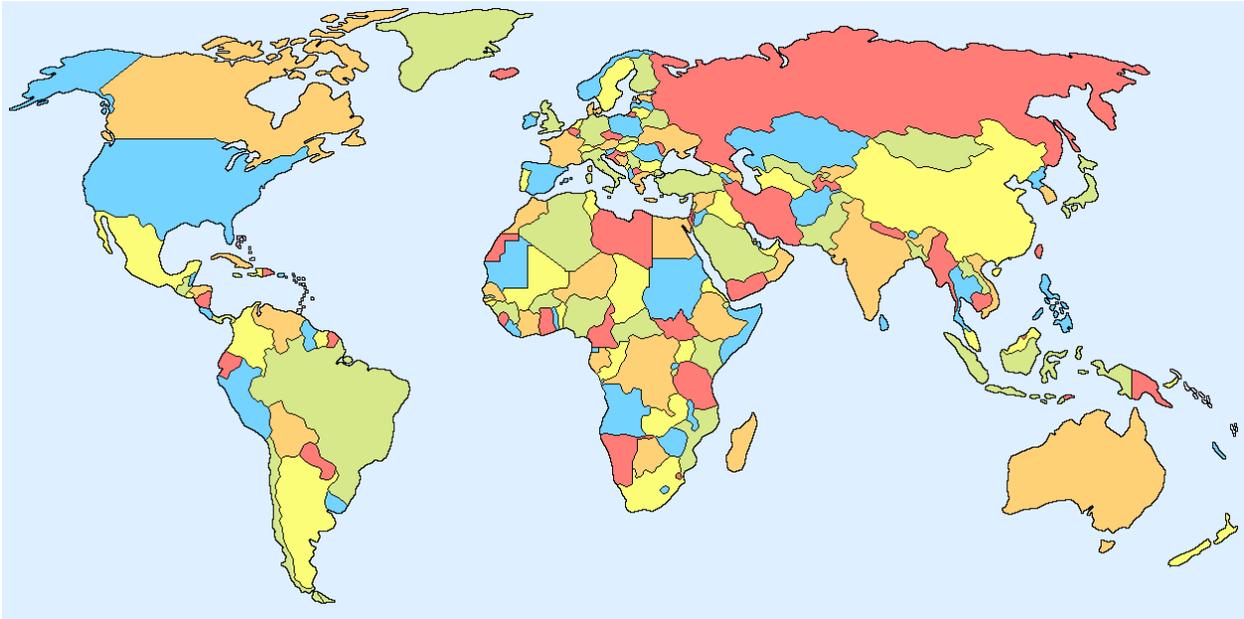
I. A New Approach to History

A. What is history?

1. The modern or conventional view is that history is “the study of the past.” That is why so few people care about the subject. If history is about *the past*, but we live in the *present*, then what does it have to do with “real life”?
2. The goal of *History At Our House* is to show you a different way of thinking about history. The definition of history used in this program is: “History is the revelation and explanation of the world we live in.”
 - a) The first part of this definition is crucial. All “students” young and old need the world *revealed* to them beyond what they experience on a daily basis. There *is* a wider context that affects us all, whether we know it or not—and we *do* need to know it!
 - b) The second component—explanation—is also key. Why is the world the way that it is? Only history can answer. The world became what it is by a chain of events *in the past* that brought us to the present. The proper goal of history is to uncover the events that shaped the world into what it is—so that we can make sense of the world we see around us.

B. Making The World Knowable: The World as an Interconnected Agglomeration

1. A big part of the challenge of studying history as a way to understand *the world* is how complicated *the world* is to begin with!
2. There are nearly two hundred countries in it, in a strange and confusing configuration. Some are huge. Some are minute. Some have multiple parts, sometimes separated by other countries. Some are inside of others! The pattern can only be described as an “*agglomeration*,” which means a “jumbled cluster” (like a bunch of randomly smushed play-doh of different colors).
3. Another feature of the way modern countries are organized is that they are all remarkably connected to one another, no matter how far apart they are. The Internet connects the entire world in one communication network. Modern air travel allows us to reach any country in the world within a day. Modern commerce relies on supertankers and massive cargo ships that move goods from one corner of the globe to the other in a “globalized” system of trade. These multiple layers of connectivity (and many more) render the agglomeration of the world’s countries into a single integrated whole—a meaningfully and complexly interrelated whole. The world we live in is not just an agglomeration of nearly two hundred countries. It’s an *interconnected agglomeration*.

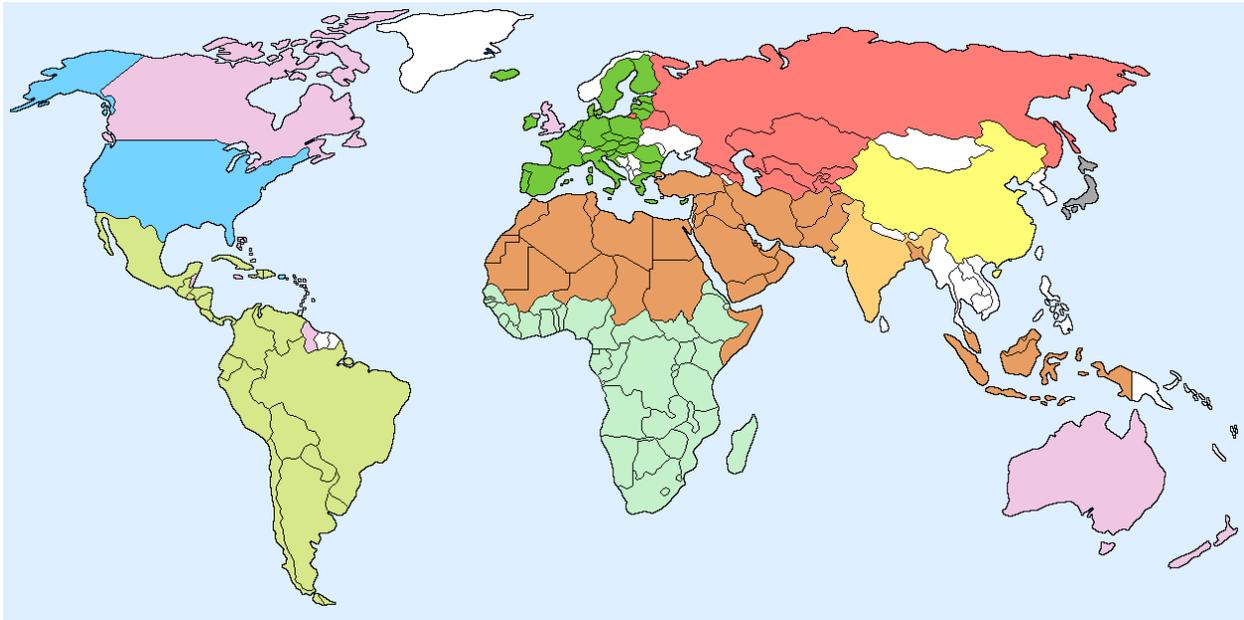


The pattern of the world's countries today is too complex to use as a base for learning about history. We need to learn to see the world in terms of its most important historical building blocks.

C. Making The World Knowable: The World Understood in Terms of “Cultural Blocks”

1. To penetrate beyond the complexity of the agglomeration, we must learn to see it in some more organized manner. If we focus on *historical importance* as a criterion for organizing our awareness, we can arrive at a clearer picture.
2. Some countries are so historically important that they deserve individual attention when studying history, and deserve individual attention. First among these is the United States, which is the world's greatest military superpower by far, and also collectively the world's richest and most influential country. No nation has ever played a more disproportionately important role in directing the course of history. Other countries, like China and Japan produce many goods and are economically important. Russia, for its part is militarily powerful, and thus dominates many of its neighbors. India is large, populous, and has a highly independent culture. Countries such as these merit special attention on their own.
3. Most countries, however, like most people, experience history as a “tide” of human events carrying them along, over which they have little or no control. If they have influence on history it is through 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, of which there are five major ones:
 - a) The European Union, composed of Germany, France, Italy, and many others.
 - b) The Islamic World, composed of countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Indonesia which are known for having a lot of oil, and for their religious uniqueness.
 - c) Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (along with a few smaller countries) make up the Anglosphere.

- d) Another group of former European colonies that is now independent is “Latin America,” or, alternatively, the “Iberosphere.” 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 by the wide acceptance of Christianity and influence of European culture upon them instead of Islam.
- 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 on the same scale. They are either entirely within the orbit of some major country or block, or they exhibit strong dependencies upon more than one major country or block. We must always be mindful of the role they might play in affecting how the major blocks act and interact.



Thinking of the world in terms of “cultural blocks” gives us a much clearer picture. *Cultural blocks* are countries (or closely connected groups of countries) that impart a distinctive thrust to history.