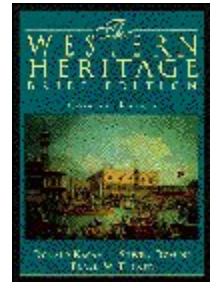


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Donald Kagan, Steven Ozment, Frank M. Turner. *The Western Heritage: Brief Combined Edition*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1996. xxix + 763 pp. \$42.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-02-361872-7.

Reviewed by David K. McQuilkin (Bridgewater College)
Published on H-W-Civ (February, 1996)



In many ways, reviewing a general text used primarily by first-year college students differs significantly from the task of reviewing a monograph or a professional work in a given academic field. First, the focus is much broader: one is concerned with purpose, quality, and effectiveness of the text language, topic coverage, and the degree to which student needs are addressed, among other considerations. Second, there is the requirement to examine text features, text aids, and ancillary instructional materials in order to assess their value to the textbook user. Third, there is greater emphasis on overview and evaluation of strengths and weaknesses as a text than on interaction with the author's thesis, arguments, or conclusions. As *The Western Heritage: Brief Edition* by Donald Kagan, Steven Ozment, and Frank M. Turner was written to serve as a basic first-year college text in Western civilization, it is appropriate that it be treated within this framework.

The idea of developing a one-volume, brief-edition text to encompass the course of Western civilization within a single term is not new. There are many such texts in the field, and I have used several during nearly twenty-five years of teaching the subject to first-year students. When compared with these other texts, *The Western Heritage* clearly holds its own, utilizing an effective, comprehensive, and balanced format. It does not pretend to be anything other than a "succinct overview of Western civilization." Do not be misled by this unpretentious attitude, however, for every effort has been made by the authors to include all of the expected text aids and ancillary instructional materials demanded in any substantive text. Moreover, these elements are incorporated in a manner designed to enhance the overall usefulness of the text rather than to overwhelm it. Among

the more useful text aids included are functional and easily read maps; plates used effectively to illustrate chapter concepts and material; internal topic headings and sub-headings as signposts within each chapter; charts and tables by period; and brief chapter outlines, italicized introductions, and summaries of key topics at the outset of each chapter. Also, each chapter contains a specific internal document relating to the chapter, review questions, and briefly annotated suggested readings. The text is followed by an extensive thirty-four-page index. Ancillary instructional materials include an Instructor's Manual with prepared test items, full-color map transparencies, a study guide with commentary and additional test exercises and questions, a computerized study guide with reinforcing feedback, and a computerized test bank keyed to the Instructor's Manual for IBM-compatible and Macintosh systems.

Equally important to the construct of any text are the goals that govern its philosophical orientation and intellectual focus. Here again, *The Western Heritage* reflects the desire of its authors that it serve as a general, comprehensive, and all-purpose text. Therefore, they reject any attempt to portray Western civilization from a "single overarching perspective," choosing instead to pursue a broad, multi-dimensional, and inclusive approach. The result is a balanced and flexible humanist narrative emphasizing the extensive range of influences that have collectively shaped the course of Western history. In short, *The Western Heritage* seeks to create a rich intellectual experience in which the student is encouraged to explore the historical currents of the past in order to understand both the dynamic and rapidly changing context of the contemporary world and the future. Some of the primary themes chosen by the authors to illuminate this process

include the evolution of Western liberal political thought, the centrality of religion in Western development, the impact of science and technology on society, and the influence of family and gender issues on human action and response.

No evaluation of *The Western Heritage* can be complete without asking whether it meets the needs of the audience it is specifically designed to serve. In this case, that audience is the first-year college student who most often takes Western civilization as an introductory course to meet some form of general education requirement. Most likely this student is not interested in history and does not possess any real historical knowledge or background. *The Western Heritage* does indeed meet the needs of the typical first-year student. At the most critical level, the text offers an uncluttered overview of Western civilization, including its strengths and weaknesses, in a direct and comprehensible manner. It is very topical in both structure and organization, and the chapters are modest in length. The language is terse, even economical, and is pitched at a level that is sufficiently

challenging, yet appropriate to the skill level of first-year college students. Even the presentation of the current historical controversies relating to Eurocentrism and to the Western civilization versus World civilization debate are effectively handled, so as not to confuse the novice student with unnecessary and little-understood theoretical arguments. Instead, the authors intend only to expose the student to these discussions, while allowing the classroom instructor the latitude to determine the level of exploration.

In short, *The Western Heritage* is a text that can be used by virtually any first-year college student. It is clear, concise functional, and adequately supported with recent historical scholarship. Moreover, the text achieves exactly what the authors intend it to achieve—that is, a succinct and balanced overview of Western culture and civilization suited to those whose knowledge of the subject is limited. Given this success, *The Western Heritage* has a definite place among current Western civilization textbooks, for it is compatible with a broad range of divergent teaching approaches and methodologies.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-w-civ>

Citation: David K. McQuilkin. Review of Kagan, Donald; Ozment, Steven; Turner, Frank M., *The Western Heritage: Brief Combined Edition*. H-W-Civ, H-Net Reviews. February, 1996.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=299>

Copyright © 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.