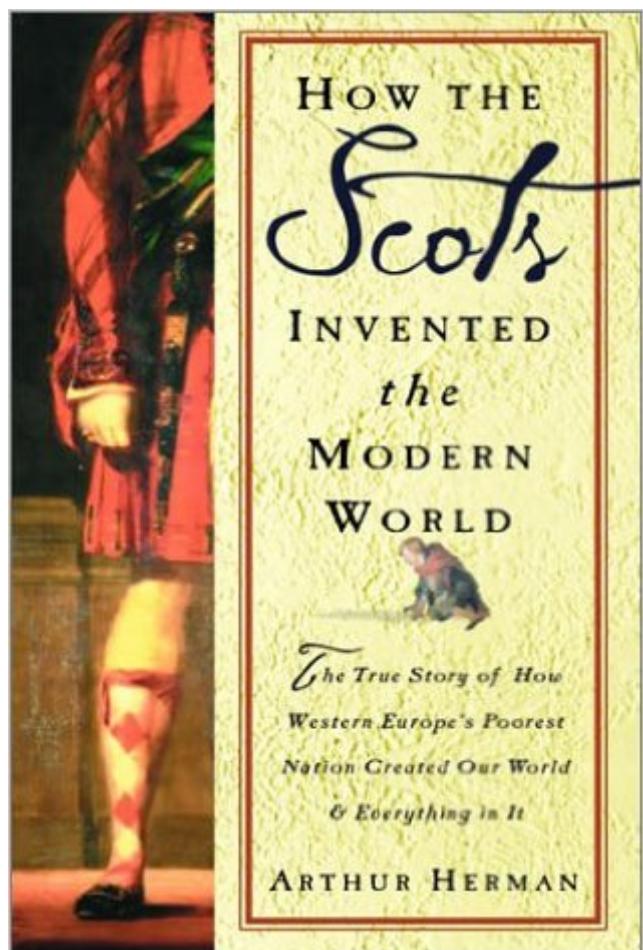


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How The Scots Invented The Modern World: The True Story Of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World And Everything In It



Synopsis

Who formed the first modern nation? Who created the first literate society? Who invented our modern ideas of democracy and free market capitalism? The Scots. Mention of Scotland and the Scots usually conjures up images of kilts, bagpipes, Scotch whisky, and golf. But as historian and author Arthur Herman demonstrates, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Scotland earned the respect of the rest of the world for its crucial contributions to science, philosophy, literature, education, medicine, commerce, and politics—“contributions that have formed and nurtured the modern West ever since. Arthur Herman has charted a fascinating journey across the centuries of Scottish history. He lucidly summarizes the ideas, discoveries, and achievements that made this small country facing on the North Atlantic an inspiration and driving force in world history. Here is the untold story of how John Knox and the Church of Scotland laid the foundation for our modern idea of democracy; how the Scottish Enlightenment helped to inspire both the American Revolution and the U.S. Constitution; and how thousands of Scottish immigrants left their homes to create the American frontier, the Australian outback, and the British Empire in India and Hong Kong. How the Scots Invented the Modern World reveals how Scottish genius for creating the basic ideas and institutions of modern life stamped the lives of a series of remarkable historical figures, from James Watt and Adam Smith to Andrew Carnegie and Arthur Conan Doyle, and how Scottish heroes continue to inspire our contemporary culture, from William “Braveheart” Wallace to James Bond. Victorian historian John Anthony Froude once proclaimed, “No people so few in number have scored so deep a mark in the world’s history as the Scots have done.” And no one who has taken this incredible historical trek, from the Highland glens and the factories and slums of Glasgow to the California Gold Rush and the search for the source of the Nile, will ever view Scotland and the Scots—or the modern West—in the same way again. For this is a story not just about Scotland: it is an exciting account of the origins of the modern world and its consequences. The point of this book is that being Scottish turns out to be more than just a matter of nationality or place of origin or clan or even culture. It is also a state of mind, a way of viewing the world and our place in it. . . . This is the story of how the Scots created the basic idea of modernity. It will show how that idea transformed their own culture and society in the eighteenth century, and how they carried it with them wherever they went. Obviously, the Scots did not do everything by themselves: other nations—Germans, French, English, Italians, Russians, and many others—have their place in the making of the modern world. But it is the Scots more than anyone else who have created the lens through which we see the final product. When we gaze out on a contemporary world shaped by technology, capitalism, and modern democracy, and struggle to find

our place as individuals in it, we are in effect viewing the world as the Scots did. . . . The story of Scotland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is one of hard-earned triumph and heart-rending tragedy, spilled blood and ruined lives, as well as of great achievement.â •â "FROM THE PREFACE

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Customer Reviews

Some of his more dour Scottish readers may very well tell Arthur Herman that he's mixing in a little bit of nonsense here. HOW THE SCOTS INVENTED THE MODERN WORLD is a glowing tribute to the Scots but he does go over the top a bit in giving them credit for more than they actually achieved, and also more than the Scot's ever claimed for themselves. This book however is a serious study of Scotland in the 18th century, particularly the period following the Act of Union with England in 1707 known as the Scottish Enlightenment. THE SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT is actually the book's UK title but that doesn't mean too much to us here. Far more eye-catching and interesting sounding is the title used for the US edition. This however creates a problem for the author. Its pop-culture sounding theme gives the impression that we will be engaged in competitive national chest-beating such as HOW THE IRISH SAVED CIVILIZATION and comparing lists of who accomplished what as in SPREZZATURA: 50 WAYS ITALIAN GENIUS SHAPED THE WORLD. Here the Scots supposedly not only CREATED OUR WORLD [but also] EVERYTHING IN IT!. Such claims don't allow the book to be taken very seriously but that is exactly how Herman wants it to be read. It's therefore a credit to him that his presentation of the facts and his arguments are good enough to allow him to make his point. If we were to compile lists, one that would show Scottish prowess would be that of great thinkers of the 18th century. Start with Adam Smith, David Hume,

Walter Scott, James Watt and Lord Kelvin. There is also John Stuart Mill. Those who were less thinkers and inventors but doers were David Livingstone and Scottish-Americans such as John Muir and Andrew Carnegie. It is the presence of transplanted Scots like Carnegie which underlies one of the authors main points.

A more conventional title would have been 'The Scottish Enlightenment and its influences on the modern world.' The book is divided into two sections, 'Epiphany' and 'Diaspora'. Few will need an introduction to notions of a Scottish diaspora, but 'epiphany' is an interesting twist on 'Enlightenment'. The conventional academic gloss on the Enlightenment focuses on French appeals to 'reason' culminating in Kant's categorical truths. The followers of Edmund Burke generally dismiss the 'French Enlightenment' as a corruption of the British Enlightenment which focused on 'compassion' rather than 'reason'. Herman takes both to task for forgetting the evangelical sources of our modern world. Herman starts his story with crusty John Knox and his blend of revolutionary violence, predestination and universal literacy. Knox's reliance on the whirling dervish of 'revival meetings' and individual study of biblical sources provides Herman with all he needs to found the enlightened modern world in foggy Scotland. He is not shy about introducing Christian roots to what became an atheist philosophy. The transition from spiritual epiphany to materialist enlightenment might have been an interesting thread, but Herman avoids the issue. It is enough to boost the Scottish role and leave it at that. Personally, I found this all a bit more intriguing than convincing. The leap from Knox (1505 - 1572) to Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) required a detour from church history into the foggy bottom of British politics before emerging with a secular history of the Enlightenment. While I enjoyed getting a Scottish view of the 'English' civil war and detailed account of parliamentary debate over the Treaty of Union (1707), the story is simply too brief.

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