



# How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World & Everything in It

*By Arthur Herman*

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Arthur Herman

Who formed the first literate society? Who invented our modern ideas of democracy and free market capitalism? The Scots. As historian and author Arthur Herman reveals, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Scotland made crucial contributions to science, philosophy, literature, education, medicine, commerce, and politics—contributions that have formed and nurtured the modern West ever since. This book is not just about Scotland: it is an exciting account of the origins of the modern world. No one who takes this incredible historical trek will ever view the Scots—or the modern West—in the same way again.

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

"I am a Scotsman," Sir Walter Scott famously wrote, "therefore I had to fight my way into the world." So did any number of his compatriots over a period of just a few centuries, leaving their native country and traveling to every continent, carving out livelihoods and bringing ideas of freedom, self-reliance, moral discipline, and technological mastery with them, among other key assumptions of what historian Arthur Herman calls the "Scottish mentality."

It is only natural, Herman suggests, that a country that once ranked among Europe's poorest, if most literate, would prize the ideal of progress, measured "by how far we have come from where we once were." Forged in the Scottish Enlightenment, that ideal would inform the political theories of Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, and David Hume, and other Scottish thinkers who viewed "man as a product of history," and whose collective enterprise involved "nothing less than a massive reordering of human knowledge" (yielding, among other things, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, first published in Edinburgh in 1768, and the Declaration of Independence, published in Philadelphia just a few years later). On a more immediately practical front, but no less bound to that notion of progress, Scotland also fielded inventors, warriors, administrators, and diplomats such as Alexander Graham Bell, Andrew Carnegie, Simon MacTavish, and Charles James Napier, who created empires and great fortunes, extending Scotland's reach into every corner of the world.

Herman examines the lives and work of these and many more eminent Scots, capably defending his thesis and arguing, with both skill and good cheer, that the Scots "have by and large made the world a better place rather than a worse place." --Gregory McNamee

#### From Publishers Weekly

Focusing on the 18th and 19th centuries, Herman (coordinator of the Western Heritage Program at the Smithsonian and an assistant professor of history at George Mason University) has written a successful exploration of Scotland's disproportionately large impact on the modern world's intellectual and industrial development. When Scotland ratified the 1707 Act of Union, it was an economic backwater. Union gave Scotland access to England's global marketplace, triggering an economic and cultural boom "transform[ing] Scotland... into a modern society, and open[ing] up a cultural and social revolution." Herman credits Scotland's sudden transformation to its system of education, especially its leading universities at Edinburgh and Glasgow. The 18th-century Scottish Enlightenment, embodied by such brilliant thinkers as Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith and David Hume, paved the way for Scottish and, Herman argues, global modernity. Hutcheson, the father of the Scottish Enlightenment, championed political liberty and the right of popular rebellion against tyranny. Smith, in his monumental *Wealth of Nations*, advocated liberty in the sphere of commerce and the global economy. Hume developed philosophical concepts that directly influenced James Madison and thus the U.S. Constitution. Herman elucidates at length the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment and their worldwide impact. In 19th-century Britain, the Scottish Enlightenment, as popularized by Dugald Stewart, became the basis of classical liberalism. At the University of Glasgow, James Watt perfected the crucial technology of the Industrial Revolution: the steam engine. The "democratic" Scottish system of education found a home in the developing U.S. This is a worthwhile book for the general reader, although much of the material has been covered better elsewhere, most recently in T.M. Devine's magisterial *The Scottish Nation: A History, 1700-2000* and Duncan A. Bruce's delightful *The Mark of the Scots*. (Nov.)Forecast: Clearly modeling this title on Thomas Cahill's *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, Crown may be hoping for comparable sales but probably won't achieve them.

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From Library Journal

This latest work by Smithsonian historian Herman (The Idea of Decline in Western History) invites comparison to Duncan Bruce's recent The Scottish 100: Portraits of History's Most Influential Scots (Carroll & Graf, 2000), which reveals the Scottish ancestry of such notables as Immanuel Kant and Edvard Grieg. The subtitle of Herman's book says it all. Hyperbole? Perhaps. But a skeptic could easily be converted by Herman's deft presentation of simple historical facts. Scots have made massive contributions to education, science, history, and political thought just think of Adam Smith, David Hume, James Boswell, and James Watt, to name but a few. This work sets a high academic standard yet is carefully leavened with colorful anecdotes. The rendition of blowsy George IV's visit to Edinburgh, "hosted" by Sir Walter Scott, is hilarious. Herman is both lively and informative in debunking the myths we hold about the Highland Clearances and the development of clan tartans. Recommended for all academic and larger public libraries. Gail Benjafield, St. Catharines P.L., Ont.

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