

Introduction

Civilization is an interlude between ice ages.

—Will Durant

World history has traditionally studied people and events that have shaped or changed the way that people live on this planet. Yet, a study of world history must also probe the cultures of those people and interpret the geographic areas and time periods in which these events have taken place. This concept of historical people and events as related to culture is the nature of social studies.

Culture consists of what a group of people eats, wears, speaks, and believes. It also includes how the group wages war, views art, uses technology, and buries its dead. Culture is, especially, how a group of people views itself in relation to others.

Culture creates discernable patterns that aid not only in understanding civilizations, but also in comparing and contrasting those civilizations. It is neither superior nor inferior; it is simply different and unique. All culture is acquired, either by initiation or through the inheritance, imposition, or absorption of other cultures. Understanding the multiplicity of world cultures allows one to unlock the shackles of bias and prejudice and discover the nature of humankind.