

Wallerstein I. *The modern world-system: capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century*. New York: Academic Press, 1974. 410 p.

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*The Modern World-System* is a historical interpretation of the origins of the capitalist world-economy. It locates these origins in the sixteenth century in the construction of a new European division of labor based on integrating production processes in different "zones" termed core, semiperiphery, and periphery. The political counterpart of this economic structuring is the rejection of the reconstitution of a world-empire and the creation instead of an interstate system composed of hypothetically "sovereign" states. [The SSCJ® indicates that this book has been cited in over 820 publications.]

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The origins of *The Modern World-System* appear in my work during the 1950s and 1960s concerning modern Africa.<sup>1,2</sup> I found in writing about it and especially in teaching about it that my arguments often seemed to be too *ad hoc* and lacked sufficient historical depth. I therefore sought some "comparative cases" of the emergence of modern nation-states. I thought I might find them in sixteenth-century western Europe, and hence, I began to read about this period.

In fact, I discovered something other than I expected. I found, or I clarified to myself, that the very concept of "comparative analysis of the trajectories of nation-states" was false and dangerous, and that what was happening was, in my view, not the parallel historical develop-

ment of multiple instances of the phenomenon of nation-states but rather the singular development of a historical system, the capitalist world-economy. I therefore had to invert a number of theoretical premises.

The outcome of this was *The Modern World-System*, whose first volume was published in 1974 (followed by a second in 1980,<sup>3</sup> a third in process, and more in prospect). This turned out to be an attempt to *interpret* historically the modern world-system and simultaneously to develop an *analytic* framework to describe the processes first of this particular world-system and then of world-systems in general.

The work was intended to be neither idiographic nor nomothetic but one that used a methodology that rejects the validity of this distinction. While *The Modern World-System* was full of historical detail, I tried to explain the theoretical framework not only in its "theoretical reprise" but also in an article published in 1974: "The rise and future demise of the world capitalist system: concepts for comparative analysis."<sup>4</sup> This article has also been cited often. The simultaneous publication of the two works certainly fed the discussion of each.

A large part of the impact of the book was due to two facts, I believe. First, the emphasis on overcoming the idiographic-nomothetic distinction spoke to intellectuals both in history and in the social sciences who were looking for this kind of message. Second, the emphasis on the world-system as the unit of analysis, which replaced the nation-state as the unit of analysis, helped resolve some intellectual impasses that were being felt by many in the 1970s. [For additional discussions of this subject, see references 5 and 6.]

1. Wallerstein I. *Africa: the politics of independence: an interpretation of modern African history*. New York: Vintage Books, 1961. 173 p. (Cited 30 times.)
2. ———. *Africa: the politics of unity: an analysis of a contemporary social movement*. New York: Random House, 1967. 274 p. (Cited 30 times.)
3. ———. *The modern world-system II: mercantilism and the consolidation of the European world-economy, 1600-1750*. New York: Academic Press, 1980. 370 p.
4. ———. The rise and future demise of the world capitalist system: concepts for comparative analysis. *Comp. Stud. Soc. Hist.* 16:387-415, 1974. (Cited 130 times.)
5. Hopkins T K & Wallerstein I. *World-systems analysis*. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982. 200 p.
6. Wallerstein I. *Historical capitalism*. London: Verso, 1983. 110 p.