

Comparison of Two World History Textbooks

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Introduction

World-history textbooks do more than collect facts. Their chapter structure, maps, timelines, case studies, and choices of emphasis teach readers how to interpret the past. A textbook arranged around themes encourages comparison across regions, while a largely chronological textbook makes sequence and causation easier to follow. These differences become especially important when the subject is decolonization, a process that unfolded across several continents and cannot be reduced to a single date or one European decision. (Morillo; Bulliet et al.)

Stephen Morillo's *Frameworks of World History* and Richard W. Bulliet and his coauthors' *The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History* both place imperialism and decolonization within a global narrative, but they organize and explain that narrative differently. Morillo's framework is more explicitly thematic and comparative. Bulliet's textbook generally moves through periods and regions in a more chronological sequence, using political, economic, technological, and social developments to connect one era to the next. The original comparison was right to identify that contrast, although it overstated the idea that one book is thematic while the other is simply chronological. Both textbooks combine chronology and themes; the difference is one of emphasis rather than an absolute division. (Morillo)

Criteria for Comparing the Textbooks

A fair comparison should examine more than which book is easier to read. Five questions are especially useful. First, how does each author define the historical problem of decolonization? Second, how are causes and consequences organized? Third, does the book connect events in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas rather than treating each region in isolation? Fourth, does the narrative help students recognize change over time? Finally, what kinds of evidence, concepts, and pedagogical features help readers form an interpretation instead of merely memorizing names and dates?

Decolonization itself requires a broad definition. It includes the formal end of colonial rule, but it also concerns anticolonial nationalism, war, negotiation, partition, economic dependence, migration, racial hierarchy, cultural recovery, and the building of new states. Some territories gained sovereignty through negotiated transfer, whereas others experienced prolonged violence. Political independence did not automatically end unequal trade, foreign military influence, or institutions inherited from empire. A textbook that treats independence as a neat endpoint may therefore obscure the continuing effects of colonial rule.

Morillo's Thematic and Comparative Framework

Frameworks of World History is designed around large analytical structures that can be applied across time and place. Morillo frequently asks readers to consider networks, hierarchies, cultural systems, and patterns of interaction. In a discussion of imperialism and decolonization, this approach draws attention to the ways empires connected distant regions while ranking peoples and territories unequally. Colonial administrations, commercial routes, missionary activity, labor migration, military service, and education created networks that anticolonial movements later used for their own purposes.

This thematic organization is valuable because it prevents decolonization from appearing as a collection of unrelated national stories. Indian, Vietnamese, Algerian, Ghanaian, Kenyan, and other movements differed greatly, yet many confronted common problems: foreign political authority, racialized claims of superiority, extraction of labor and resources, and debates over whether Western institutions should be rejected, adapted, or claimed as universal rights. A framework based on imperial cultures and imperial hierarchies enables students to compare those experiences without assuming that every movement followed the same path.

Morillo's approach also helps readers see that empires were not maintained by force alone. Schools, legal systems, censuses, maps, railways, language policies, and categories of identity helped colonial governments define and administer populations. Anticolonial leaders often emerged from institutions created or reshaped under colonial rule. They might use the colonizer's language, constitutional arguments, mass newspapers, international law, or military experience to challenge imperial power. This is one of the central paradoxes of decolonization: the institutions of empire sometimes supplied tools for resistance.

The weakness of a strongly thematic approach is that sequence can become less visible. Students may understand the concept of an imperial hierarchy but struggle to remember why a particular crisis occurred when it did. The First World War, the Great Depression, the Second World War, the creation of the United Nations, and Cold War rivalry changed the possibilities available to colonial governments and nationalist movements. If those turning points are subordinated to a conceptual framework, readers may need additional timelines or regional narratives to understand immediate causation.

Bulliet's Chronological and Regional Narrative

The Earth and Its Peoples generally gives greater prominence to chronological development. Its chapters move through major periods and then examine political, economic, social, and environmental change in multiple regions. This structure makes it easier to trace the movement from high imperialism through the world wars and into the postwar collapse of European colonial empires. Students can see how one phase altered the conditions of the next.

The chronological method is particularly effective in explaining why decolonization accelerated after 1945. European imperial powers had been weakened economically and militarily by war. Colonial soldiers and workers had contributed to wartime victories while remaining subject to unequal rule. The language of self-determination gained international force, although it was applied inconsistently. The United States and Soviet Union both criticized older European empires while pursuing their own strategic interests. New international institutions offered anticolonial leaders additional forums in which to make claims. Placing these developments in sequence helps readers understand that the postwar independence movements did not arise suddenly.

Bulliet's regional treatment also helps students distinguish among different paths. British withdrawal from India was accompanied by the catastrophic partition of British India into India and Pakistan. Indonesia fought to secure independence after the Japanese occupation and a Dutch attempt to restore colonial control. Vietnam's struggle became entangled with the Cold War. Algeria's war against France involved settler colonialism and intense violence. Ghana's independence under Kwame Nkrumah represented a different political trajectory. A chronological narrative makes these differences concrete.

However, chronological organization can fragment the global process if each region is encountered in a separate section. Students may remember the sequence within India or Algeria without comparing how nationalism, labor, religion, race, gender, and international politics operated across cases. The book must therefore use cross-references, thematic questions, maps, and synthesis sections to keep the world-historical connections visible.

Causes of Decolonization

Both textbooks are strongest when decolonization is presented as the product of several interacting causes rather than one decisive event. Anticolonial nationalism developed before the Second World War. Intellectuals, workers, peasants, veterans, religious leaders, women's organizations, and political parties challenged imperial rule for different reasons. Some demanded representative government within an empire before moving toward full independence. Others rejected colonial authority more directly. (Cooper; Morillo; Bulliet et al.)

Economic change was equally important. Colonial economies were often organized to export raw materials and import manufactured goods, leaving territories vulnerable to price changes and dependent on external markets. Wartime requisitioning, taxation, inflation, and labor demands could intensify dissatisfaction. Urbanization and education created new political constituencies, while transport and print networks helped movements coordinate. Neither textbook should make Europe the only actor by suggesting that colonies became independent merely because imperial powers decided to leave.

The world wars weakened the legitimacy of imperial claims. European governments presented the

wars as struggles for freedom while maintaining colonial rule. Japan's wartime victories in Asia damaged the image of European invincibility, even though Japanese occupation brought its own coercion and violence. After 1945, anticolonial movements operated within a global environment shaped by the United Nations, human-rights language, superpower rivalry, and emerging solidarity among states in Asia and Africa.

Morillo's conceptual categories make these shared pressures easier to compare. Bulliet's chronology makes it easier to see when the pressures converged. Read together, the books show why theme and sequence are complementary: structural inequality explains long-term resistance, while particular wars, elections, strikes, negotiations, and international crises explain the timing and form of independence.

Consequences and the Problem of the Postcolonial State

Formal independence represented a major transfer of political authority, but it did not remove every colonial structure. New governments inherited borders that sometimes joined communities with different political histories or divided populations across states. They inherited administrative systems designed for imperial control, economies dependent on a narrow range of exports, and unequal access to education and infrastructure. Leaders faced pressure to build national unity while also responding to regional, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and class differences. (Cooper)

The Cold War further complicated sovereignty. Newly independent states sought development assistance, security, and diplomatic support, but alignment with either superpower could create new forms of dependence. The Non-Aligned Movement attempted to create political space outside the two blocs, although member states held different interests and systems. Coups, civil wars, authoritarian rule, and foreign intervention cannot be explained simply as failures of decolonization; they emerged from a mixture of colonial legacies, domestic conflicts, global economic pressures, and Cold War competition.

A thematic textbook helps students recognize patterns such as economic dependency, state-building, and contested identity. A chronological textbook shows how those problems developed after the moment of independence. Bulliet's sequence may therefore make the transition from colonial to postcolonial politics clearer, while Morillo's categories help explain why the formal change in sovereignty did not always transform deeper hierarchies.

Change Over Time and Historical Thinking

The original comparison argued that both books help readers assess change over time, and that conclusion remains persuasive. Bulliet does so most visibly by arranging events in temporal order. A

reader can follow imperial expansion, wartime disruption, nationalist mobilization, independence, and postcolonial conflict. Dates and sequence support causal reasoning because students can distinguish conditions that existed before an event from consequences that followed it.

Morillo develops change over time through comparison of systems. Readers can ask how the organization of an empire changed, how networks expanded, how imperial ideologies were challenged, and how nationalist movements converted colonial categories into new political identities. This form of historical thinking is less dependent on a continuous narrative. It emphasizes transformation within recurring structures.

Each method has a risk. Chronology can become a procession of events without analysis, while themes can become abstract labels detached from particular human decisions. Effective teaching should combine the two. Students need enough chronology to know what happened and enough conceptual structure to explain why it mattered.

Placing Decolonization in Global Context

Both textbooks attempt to treat decolonization globally rather than as a story of European withdrawal. They connect imperial decline with war, economic change, migration, racial politics, international organizations, and competing models of development. This global perspective is essential because people, ideas, and strategies crossed borders. Indian independence influenced activists elsewhere; the Bandung Conference brought Asian and African leaders together; the Algerian War affected French politics; Caribbean and African intellectuals debated race and liberation in European cities; and anticolonial movements learned from one another.

A global approach also reveals that decolonization affected former imperial powers. Migration from colonies and former colonies reshaped European societies. Debates over citizenship, memory, reparations, language, and cultural heritage continued after independence. Museums, universities, and public institutions still confront the origins of collections and knowledge produced under empire. Decolonization is therefore not only a completed mid-twentieth-century event. It is also an ongoing debate over power, memory, and the distribution of resources.

Pedagogical Strengths and Limitations

For a student encountering world history for the first time, Bulliet's chronology can provide a clearer path through a complex subject. The reader knows where events fit and can connect turning points across chapters. Maps, timelines, illustrations, and primary-source excerpts can reinforce that structure. Its main limitation is the possibility that regional sections may feel separate unless the reader actively compares them.

Morillo's framework is more demanding but can produce stronger comparative analysis. Terms such

as networks and hierarchies invite students to move beyond national narratives and identify relationships among economy, culture, politics, and environment. The limitation is that students who lack chronological knowledge may find the framework difficult to anchor.

The original essay preferred *The Earth and Its Peoples* because its order was easier to follow. That preference is reasonable, especially for introductory study. It should not be treated as proof that one book is historically superior in every respect. A student preparing an analytical essay may find Morillo's framework more useful, whereas a student reviewing the sequence of independence movements may benefit more from Bulliet's structure.

Conclusion

Frameworks of World History and *The Earth and Its Peoples* both present decolonization as a global transformation shaped by imperial structures, nationalism, warfare, economic change, and international politics. Morillo gives greater emphasis to thematic comparison and the analysis of networks and hierarchies. Bulliet and his coauthors give greater emphasis to chronological and regional development. Neither book is purely thematic or purely chronological, and each requires readers to connect concepts with particular events. (Morillo; Bulliet et al.; Cooper)

Bulliet's textbook remains the more accessible choice for readers who need a clear sequence of change from imperialism through postwar independence. Morillo's approach is especially valuable for comparing how empires functioned and why political independence did not automatically eliminate inherited inequalities. The strongest understanding comes from combining the two methods. Chronology explains the timing of decolonization, while thematic analysis explains the structures that made resistance necessary and the problems that continued after flags and governments changed.

Works Cited

Bulliet, Richard W., et al. *The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History*. 6th ed., Cengage Learning, 2014.

Morillo, Stephen. *Frameworks of World History*. 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, 2013.

Cooper, Frederick. *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. University of California Press, 2005.