

The Master Narrative of European History

Renaissance. Europeans rediscovered many Greek and Roman texts. Humanism took hold, the belief that human beings can secure a happy life on their own, without divine intervention.

Reformation. Luther and others preached that individuals on their own could worship God, without intermediaries. Study of the Bible was emphasized, spurring literacy. The grip of Roman Catholic orthodoxy was broken, dogma retreated, religious toleration and religious pluralism took hold. People were free to look at the world rationally and without superstition.

Scientific Revolution. Emboldened by the new atmosphere of openness, Newton and others developed theories explaining the universe, thereby confirming the power of reason and stimulating confidence that human beings could gain control over nature and turn its powers to their own ends.

Nation-States. Governments consolidated their grip, raised taxes, and built up strong militaries. They brought internal order and, because they sought economic and military power, stimulated the development of science, technology, and commerce.

Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth century popularized science, ridiculed superstition, preached religious toleration.

Democratic Revolution. Upheavals in England, the United States, and France introduced constitutions and the rule of law, organized elections, brought about the awakening of the masses, and opened the way to democracy.

The Industrial Revolution. The rational and systematic application of machine power to economic activity brought about a spectacular upsurge in productivity. Wealth increased, the standard of living shot up, and a new era in human history was launched.