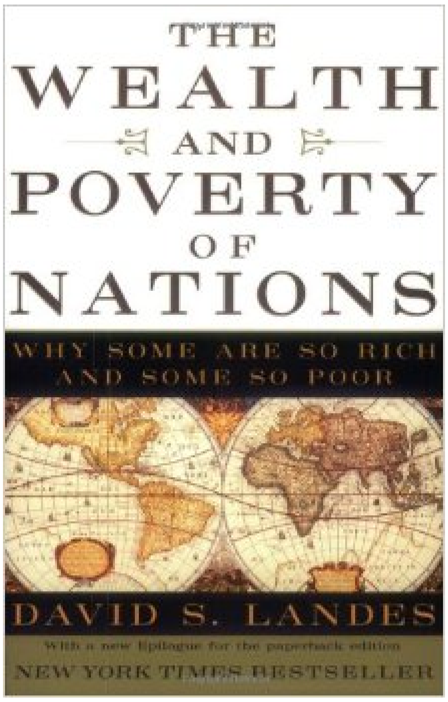
The Wealth And Poverty Of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich And Some So Poor



Synopsis

"Readers cannot but be provoked and stimulated by this splendidly iconoclastic and refreshing book."â •Andrew Porter, New York Times Book ReviewThe Wealth and Poverty of Nations is David S. Landes's acclaimed, best-selling exploration of one of the most contentious and hotly debated questions of our time: Why do some nations achieve economic success while others remain mired in poverty? The answer, as Landes definitively illustrates, is a complex interplay of cultural mores and historical circumstance. Rich with anecdotal evidence, piercing analysis, and a truly astonishing range of erudition, The Wealth and Poverty of NationsÂ is a "picture of enormous sweep and brilliant insight" (Kenneth Arrow) as well as one of the most audaciously ambitious works of history in decades. For the paperback edition, Landes has written a new epilogue, in which he takes account of Asian financial crisises and the international tension between overconfidence and reality. Maps

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As readers may note this is a controversial book, generating more than 140 reviews since it was first published in 1998. The continuing interest is due at least in part to its promotion by some political conservatives as an answer to books like Guns, Gems, and Steel by Jared Diamond. Indeed the very relevance of this book to contemporary policy-making is the fuel that maintains the flames of a healthy debate between those on the Left and Right. Landes' arguments are forceful and convincing as far as they go and his book is essential reading for every student of world history and economics. Whether his model takes us ultimately in the direction we as a civilization really want to follow is a more subtle and profound question.First, let’s refute some false charges against Landes. He is not a racist, or an apologist for capitalist exploitation, or an ethno-centrist. He fully acknowledges the influence that geography and natural resources have on a nation’s development potential and his critique of European colonialism is devastating. He completely rejects the theory of comparative advantage and long sections of the book are devoted to describing the exploitation of women and children in the early industrial periods of England and Japan.Landes is equally critical of forces that restrict or deny freedom of thought, showing clearly how they held back nations that should have played a more dominant role in world economics. In the case of European development the single most important villain was the Catholic Church but authoritarian and totalitarian regimes of all stripes come in for condemnation.

You and I are part of a fortunate minority. We are literate, we have access to phones and to the Internet, we are likely (save some unexpected disease or misfortune) to live to an old age. We are almost certainly belonging to what is known as ’The First World’, or to small rich minorities within the rest of the world. Most people in this world do not have those privileges - we live in islands of fortune within an ocean of poverty. And professor Landes tries to understand why. He tries to find out what is special about Western civilization (and Japan) - why Japan and the West got rich while the rest of the world lagged behind, and most of it still does.It is by the nature of such a book to be controversial, and Landes doesn’t pull his punches; his approach is neoclassicist, although hardly a dogmatic one. He is rough on Postmodernists, Saidian Anti-Orientalists, French and Japanese protectionists, Spanish Roman Catholics, and many others. Among the reviews you’ll read here, Landes irritates Catholics, third world enthusiasts, anti-Western intellectuals, extreme right wind Capitalists, anti-Japanese, and so on, and so on.So, you’ve got controversy. But what is Landes actually saying? Well, in brief, Landes book focuses on three major reasons for Wealth/Poverty: Geography, Infrastructure, and Culture.The discussion of Geography, early in the book, is at best half hearted. Some of the points seem valid - but you’re always inclined to say ’On the other hand’. Are there really fewer diseases in Europe then in Africa? maybe, but transportation is easier. The black death annihilated a third of the European population in the 13th century. Does Heat makes labour harder and less efficient?

The object of this book is to survey and explain the fast or slow economic development of different parts of the world from about 1500 to the present. Landes mainly takes a regional perspective looking at Europe, Asia, Middle East, Latin America, and so on with some refinement to the national scale (e.g. China vs. Japan, Britain vs. Spain).Landes strongly advocates the point of view that cultural values (work ethic, thriftiness, attitudes toward change, technology, women) are primary determinants of economic success or failure. Although many, including myself, find this thesis lacking and controversial, there is still an abundance of interesting and useful information in this book.On the plus side, Landes offers a wealth of fascinating anecdotes, introductory information on the history of technology that was new to me, a clear and definite argument, and above all gives the reader some sense of the importance of culture in the economic realm. Although I personally feel that Landes overstates the importance of culture, the points he makes do have some validity and are generally under appreciated. Moreover, the author is remarkably fair minded for someone advocating a controversial thesis.Don’t be fooled by the reviewers that make fun of the author for suggesting that eating with chopsticks has given Asians manual dexterity that is advantageous to their high-tech manufacturing sector. In fairness to the author, this statement is a single sentence in a 500 page book and he immediately admits that most of his colleagues smirk when they hear it.On the minus side, the author verges on severe cultural stereotypes a few too many times. The Asians are all thrifty and hard working while the Latins have been brain washed by the Catholic church.

Wealth by Permanently Lowering Your Taxes Tax-Free Wealth: How to Build Massive Wealth by Permanently Lowering Your Taxes (Rich Dad Advisors) Index Funds: Index Funds Investing Guide To Wealth Building Through Index Funds Investing With Index Funds Investing Strategies For Building Wealth Including ... Guide To Wealth Building With Index Funds) When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself Teaching With Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids’ Brains and What Schools Can Do About It