

THE RHYTHM OF THE WEST

A Biohistory of the Modern Era AD 1600 to the Present

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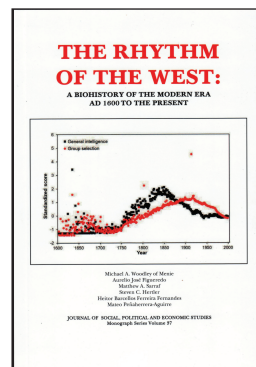
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Is Western civilization generally progressing or declining? Optimists point to high levels of wealth and subjective well-being and low levels of poverty, crime, and mortality, alongside over a century of mostly sustained economic and cognitive growth — the latter reflected in the threepoint per decade increase in IQ test performance, known as the Flynn effect. But contemporary research indicates that in recent decades the Flynn effect has faltered and gone into reverse.

The *Rhythm of the West* offers a rigorous and empirically robust theory to elucidate this adverse turn of fortune as well as the progress foregoing and attending it. Prior to the British industrial revolution and the end of the preceding Little Ice Age, life throughout Western Europe was brutally difficult. Harsh environments with scarce resources forced European populations to compete with one another for survival and expansion. Unpleasant as this was, it laid the groundwork for the peaceful and prosperous industrial (and post-industrial) age that was to follow, the relaxed existential conditions of which enabled the development of specialized economic niches and complementary specialized cognitive skills, with the Flynn effect emerging as a consequence of the cultivation of the latter. Intergroup competition favored or selected for those populations highest in general intelligence (g) and intra-group altruism.

These traits are in fact foundational to advanced civilizations, as they promote innovation in all fields of intellectual endeavor. The implications for the future of the West are dire, making the authors' findings all the more important and worthy of serious attention.



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