

What Is Civilization?

Look over the various historians' definitions of civilization. What do they have in common? Where do they disagree? (Use more than one color or notation method to identify these similarities/differences.) Create your own definition based on the evidence that you have.

Definition 1 (Duiker & Spielvogel, *World History*, 2016):

Page 8: A **civilization** is a complex culture in which large numbers of people share a variety of common elements. Historians have identified a number of basic characteristics, including the following:

1. *An urban focus.* Cities became the centers for political, economic, social, cultural, and religious development.
2. *New political and military structures.* An organized government bureaucracy arose...armies were organized to gain land and power for defense
3. *A new social structure based on economic power.*
4. *The development of more complexity in a material sense.* Surpluses of agricultural crops freed people to work in occupations other than farming. ... as urban populations exported finished goods in exchange for raw materials from neighboring populations, organized trade grew substantially.
5. *A distinct religious structure*
6. *The development of writing.*
7. *New forms of significant artistic and intellectual activity.* For example, monumental architectural structures.

Definition 2 (McKay, Hill, et al., *A History of World Societies*, 2012):

Page 36: In the ancient world, residents of cities generally viewed themselves as more advanced and sophisticated than rural folk – a judgment still made today. ... Beginning in the 18th century, European scholars described those societies in which political, economic, and social organizations operated on a large scale, not primarily through families and kin groups, as “civilizations”. Civilizations had cities; laws that governed human relationships; codes of manners and social conduct that regulated how people were to behave; and scientific, philosophical and theological ideas that explained the larger world. Generally, only societies that used writing were judged to be civilizations, for writing allowed laws, norms, ideas, and traditions to become more complex. ... The idea of a civilization came to mean not simply a system of political and social organization, but also particular ways of thinking and believing, particular styles of art, and other facets of culture.

Definition 3 (Stearns, *World Civilizations: A Global Experience*, 2017):

Page 22: After the rise of agriculture, the introduction of **civilization** as a form of human organization was a crucial step for many people. Civilization first developed in Mesopotamia, after about 3500 BCE on the heels of several changes in technology and communication. Human organization along civilization lines did not emerge everywhere at the same time, and many regions – even some successful agricultural economies – avoided it altogether, at least until much more recently. Hunting-and-gathering and nomadic societies lacked the economic surplus necessary to develop civilization and often actively disliked the constraints they saw in civilization as well.

Civilizations normally demonstrated four distinctive features, operating powerfully in combination. First, they developed greater amounts of economic surplus, beyond subsistence needs, and they distributed this surplus unequally. This provided funds for new kinds of monuments. It also heightened social inequalities compared to other “non-civilized” kinds of societies. Second, civilizations developed formal governments with at least small bureaucracies. Leadership thus became more specialized than in simpler agricultural or nomadic societies. Third, almost all civilizations, including all the early ones, had writing. This facilitated trade over long distances by facilitating standardized communication; it enhanced recordkeeping. And fourth, they developed larger and more important urban centers as cities emerged as concentrations of populations.

Definition 4 (Hansen & Curtis, *Voyages in World History*, 2017):

Page 860-61, Quote from Gandhi: "Let us first consider what state of things is described by the word 'civilization'. Its true test lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of life. The people of Europe today live in better-built houses than they did a hundred years ago. This is considered an emblem of civilization and this also matter to promote bodily happiness. ... This is civilization. Formerly, men worked in the open air only as much as they liked. Now thousands of workmen meet together and for the sake of maintenance work in factories or mines."

Definition 5 (Dictionary.com, 2016):

Civilization

1. an advanced state of human society, in which a high level of culture, science, industry, and government has been reached.
2. those people or nations that have reached such a state.
3. any type of culture, society, etc., of a specific place, time, or group:
4. the act or process of civilizing, as by bringing out of a savage, uneducated, or unrefined state, or of being civilized:
5. cultural refinement; refinement of thought and cultural appreciation:
6. cities or populated areas in general, as opposed to unpopulated or wilderness areas:
7. modern comforts and conveniences, as made possible by science and technology:

My Definition: