

## Book Review

Tom Taylor, *Modern Travel in World History*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2022. Pp. vii + 194. \$48.99 (paperback)

Tom Taylor's *Modern Travel in World History* is a short book about big connections. In thirteen chapters that move chronologically from the 'voyages of discovery' by Portuguese and Spanish explorers to the global impact of Covid-19 on movement and connectivity, Taylor effectively weaves together three themes—transportation technology, migration, and traveler accounts—to explain how and why people travel in the modern world. Along this journey, he provides insight on many social and cultural effects of travel through the use of fascinating vignettes that humanize large-scale historical periods.

Taylor begins this history at a moment in the mid-fifteenth century when innovations in technology allowed for the emergence of transregional movement. He describes in detail how treasure fleets of the Ming Dynasty plied the Indian Ocean in search of precious commodities and to impress distant kingdoms; he recounts how the Ottoman Empire's sack of Constantinople in 1453 led to a diminishment of land travel in Western Asia; and he explicates the importance of new ship designs and cartography to the success of Spanish and Portuguese transoceanic expeditions. While the voyages of Christopher Columbus, Vasco Da Gama, and Ferdinand Magellan will be familiar to readers, this is not a 'rise of the West' narrative. Instead, Taylor's motive is to demonstrate the revolutionary nature of this moment with regard to geographic movement. These voyages "reshaped global trade, cultural exchanges and systems of political and military power" that still resonate over five hundred years later (14).

The use of technology to overcome what Fernand Braudel called "limits of the possible" spurred innovations in transportation that linked far-flung parts of the globe. The British Royal Society sponsored expeditions led by the former pirate, William Dampier, and Captain James Cook that advanced scientific knowledge and curiosity about human nature. Once Europeans established footholds around the world, though,

Taylor describes how new forms of transportation in successive generations like steamships and railroads accelerated their control and domination in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. Interestingly, Taylor also describes how the transportation revolution furthered cultural exchange through the advent of leisure travel made famous by Thomas Cook, who aspired to create “tours for millions” and Thomas Stevens, a self-described “ordinary cowboy” from Britain who became the first person to ride a bicycle around the globe in 1886.

Taylor also devotes considerable space throughout the book to various migration streams including Jesuit missionaries, immigrant laborers, and refugees. In Chapter 4, he makes excellent use of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database to remind readers about how little we actually know about the mindset of those that actually experienced the Middle Passage and the brutality of the institution, apart from narratives from Olaudah Equiano and Venture Smith. His inclusion of the slave trade in the Indian Ocean and its comparison to the Transatlantic trade is especially valuable given the limited historical source materials available. As the slave trade reached its zenith, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed unprecedented growth in migration to the United States, Latin America, and East Asia due to economic disasters like the Great Depression, regional conflicts such as the Opium Wars and Boxer Rebellion in China, and the world wars. Taylor provides a succinct overview of many social and political changes that came from cross-cultural encounters, including debates over the meaning of citizenship, authoritarianism, competing ideologies, and expressions of nationalism.

If Taylor had stuck simply to technology and migration as a framework for his history, this book would have read similar to a textbook. However, his inclusion of a third theme—traveler accounts—makes the work especially satisfying. We are treated to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s description of smallpox inoculations in Istanbul, Ho Chi Minh’s clear-eyed assessment of the Treaty of Versailles after he was refused an audience with the French and U.S. delegations in Paris, and American John Scott’s report from inside of the USSR on the Great Purge. Taylor also highlights an analysis strategy from Subaltern Studies that encourages “reading against the grain” of historical sources from the privileged to understand the plight of those less fortunate. The experiences of Behramji Malabari and Cornelia Sorabji, who traveled from colonial India to England, shed light on the status of religious and ethnic minorities and attitudes toward women, child marriage, and various social ills. Finally, Taylor interspersed literary works from Bernard de Fontenelle to John Steinbeck that demonstrate how travel not only shaped people’s worldviews but also helped to fuel greater leisure travel to once unthinkable places, especially in the developing world. His final chapter on Continuity and Change after the Cold War raises important questions about who benefits economically from and whether travel is sustainable in the twenty-first century.

In a wide-ranging book on world travel that utilizes fascinating source material to expound on the three major themes, one wishes for the inclusion of additional, detailed maps that would complement the narrative and allow the reader to clearly visualize the broad geographic landscape. A second reservation I had while reading had to do with chronological balance. Since Taylor defines travel broadly as “going from one place to another” whether in distance or in the mind (2), occasional historical moments seemed hurried. Chapter 13, for example, begins with the decisions made by the ‘Big Three’ Cold War leaders at Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam and ends with genocide carried out in Rwanda in 1994 due to post-colonial ethnic tensions. However, I fully understand the difficulty of periodization in a book of this scope and, fortunately, Taylor has included a Further Reading section at the end of each chapter for those wanting to consult additional histories of specific events.

If the criteria for a survey in the Themes in World History series include that it be readable, thematically balanced, and reasonably comprehensive, *Modern Travel in World History* does an excellent job, and makes this book valuable to teachers of survey courses at both the advanced high school and undergraduate levels. I look forward to its inclusion in my classes.

---

**Benjamin Harris** is a teacher and Social Studies Department Chair at Bishop Kelly High School in Boise, Idaho. He can be reached at [bharris@bk.org](mailto:bharris@bk.org).