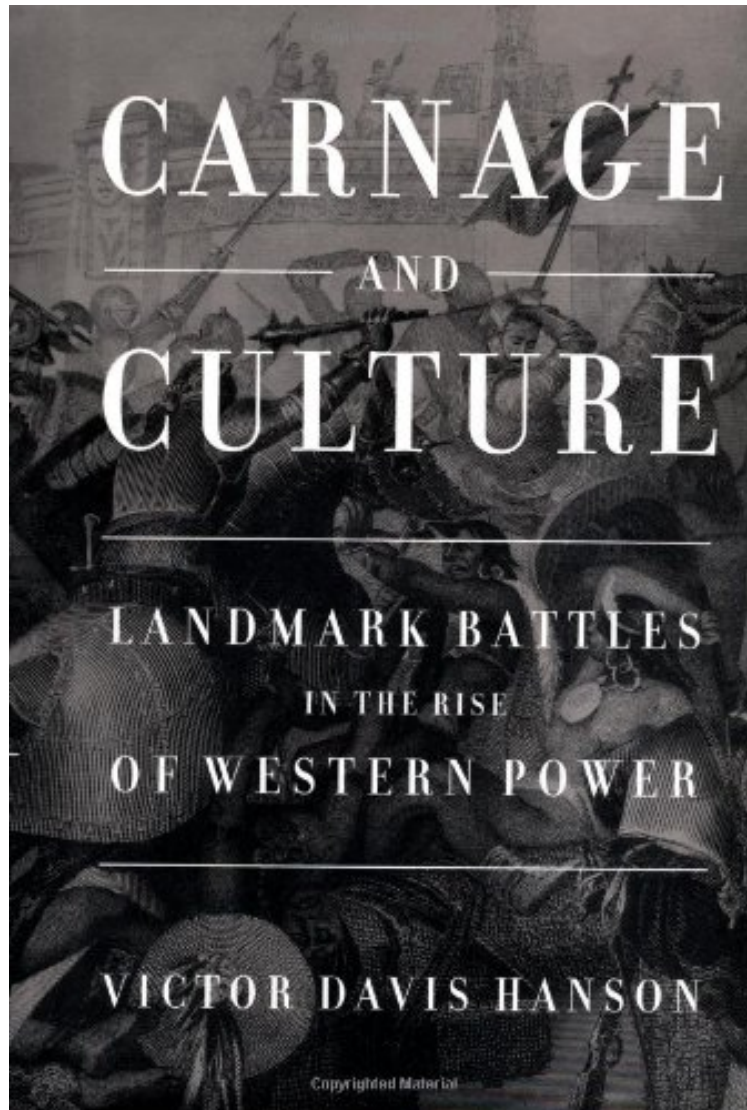


# Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power

*Victor Hanson*

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**Victor Hanson : Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Well written, thought provoking study of the western way of warBy Trainman95630I have been reading VDH political opinions for years and listen to him on talk radio whenever I can. I think he has an awesome intellect and his views on the current political issues match up with mine. So not surprisingly

I thought this book was a well written, well argued and engaging text about the western way of waging war, what has made western armed forces generally more successful when engaging in military actions against other cultures. He highlights 10 decisive battles in which in most cases, although outnumbered, on foreign ground with extended supply lines, western expeditionary forces from Alexander the Great to the British in South Africa to Cortez in Mexico were able to successfully rout the enemy. The standard answer for why the western way of war is so lethal and in the most part triumphant against other cultures is "superior technology". VDH digs deeper than that offering up the western liberal ethos of political freedoms, capitalism, individuality etc as underlying factors in western military campaigns. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A Description of our Culture that Defies the Liberal culture. By John Matlock Hanson presented a view of how democracies go to war using ordinary average people that clearly explain a bunch of things like why did a war based culture like the Spartans or the Nazi's in WW II lost. His writing is clear and easy to follow, although he knows more big words than I do and so I read this one with a dictionary (a big one) beside me. Obviously this is a specialty interest of mine, but if it is yours, reading Hanson is an excellent place to start. I suggest that you start with his Soul of Battle that talks about three successful generals and then go to this one as this is a more wide spread coverage. 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Who we are By Bill Powell I always know I've read a classic when I have to pause and think a great deal at the end of each chapter. Victor delivers in this book. As a student of Military History I have read of all of the battles prior to reading Carnage and Culture, however I was never able to consider the repeating patterns of western military behavior until now. Although I greatly enjoyed Jarrod Diamond's Gun's Germs and Steel, there were many parts that I felt Jarrod was really reaching with his hypothesis on why the west came to dominate the world. I feel Carnage and Culture does a great job explaining the impact of culture and why it can be a far more powerful factor than technology, geography or any other perceived advantage a civilization might possess. Fantastic book.

Through vivid depictions of historic battles, Victor Davis Hanson reveals the connection between the West's superiority on the battlefield and its rise to world dominance. Why have Western values triumphed? Why are Western ideas and practices spreading unopposed throughout the globe? In this sweeping and ambitious work of military and cultural history, Victor Davis Hanson convincingly argues that it all comes down to the Western knack for killing. Hanson is a superb writer with a particular gift for dropping the reader into the midst of clashing armies. With his trademark zest for bringing the gritty realities of battle to life, he vividly re-creates nine important confrontations between Western and non-Western armies, from the stunning Greek victory at Salamis in 480 B.C. to Cortez's conquest of Mexico City in 1521 to the grueling urban warfare of Vietnam's Tet Offensive. But Hanson goes beyond the conventions of the guns and trumpets genre to reveal the cultural underpinnings that determined the course and consequences of each engagement and in the process advances a bold and provocative thesis about the reasons for Western global dominance. Replying to those who stress environmental and other nonhuman factors in the rise of Western hegemony, Hanson shows that the rise of the West was not a fluke of geography or germs but a logical result of Western cultural dynamism as manifested in its ways of making war. Each battle illustrates a crucial element in the distinctive and powerful matrix of Western identity. Hanson delineates the characteristics of successful armies including individual initiative, superior organization and discipline, access to matchless weapons, and tactical adaptation and flexibility. Then he shows how these characteristics develop and flourish as a result of such traditional Western institutions and ideals as consensual government, free inquiry and innovative enterprise, rationalism, and the value placed on freedom and individualism. These are the cultural values that have enabled Western armies, often vastly outnumbered and far from home, to slaughter their opponents and impose their social, economic, and political ideals on other civilizations. Through his detailed reconstructions of these battles, some of which were actually lost by Western armies, Hanson tells the story of the rise of Western global dominance. He thereby joins the great debate about the character and future of the West, sparked by recent controversial works by authors such as Samuel Huntington, Paul Johnson, and Francis Fukuyama.

.com Many theories have been offered regarding why Western culture has spread so successfully across the world, with arguments ranging from genetics to superior technology to the creation of enlightened economic, moral, and political systems. In Carnage and Culture, military historian Victor Hanson takes all of these factors into account in making a bold, and sure to be controversial, argument: Westerners are more effective killers. Focusing specifically on military power rather than the nature of Western civilization in general, Hanson views war as the ultimate reflection of a society's character: "There is a cultural crystallization in battle, in which the insidious and more subtle institutions that heretofore are murky and undefined become stark and unforgiving in the finality of organized killing." Though technological advances and superior weapons have certainly played a role in Western military dominance, Hanson posits that cultural distinctions are the most significant factors. By bringing personal freedom, discipline, and organization to the battlefield, powerful "marching democracies" were more apt to defeat non-Western nations hampered by unstable governments, limited funding, and intolerance of open discussion. These crucial differences often ensured victory even against long odds. Greek armies, for instance, who elected their own generals and freely

debated strategy were able to win wars even when far outnumbered and deep within enemy territory. Hanson further argues that granting warriors control of their own destinies results in the kind of glorification of horrific hand-to-hand combat necessary for true domination. The nine battles Hanson examines include the Greek naval victory against the Persians at Salamis in 480 B.C., Cortes's march on Mexico City in 1521, the battle of Midway in 1942, and the 1968 Tet Offensive in Vietnam. In the book's fascinating final chapter, he then looks forward and ponders the consequences of a complete cultural victory, challenging the widespread belief that democratic nations do not wage war against one another: "We may well be all Westerners in the millennium to come, and that could be a very dangerous thing indeed," he writes. It seems the West will always seek an enemy, even if it must come from within. --Shawn Carkonen

From Publishers Weekly "The Western way of war is so lethal precisely because it is so amoral shackled rarely by concerns of ritual, tradition, religion, or ethics, by anything other than military necessity." Ranging from Salamis in 480 B.C. to the Tet offensive in Vietnam, Hanson, a California State at Fresno classics professor, expands the scope of his *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece*, offering a provocative look at occidental aggression as illustrated by nine paradigmatic battles between Western and non-Western armies. Hanson sheds the overly romanticized view of battles as nationalist or ethnic honorifics and vividly portrays the deadly killing machines Western powers evolved for the destruction of non-Western opponents. Throughout, Hanson stresses the technology based lethality of Western warfare, and the role of individual initiative as opposed to the more collectivist strategies of the Persians, Carthaginians, Arabs, Turks, Aztecs, Zulus, Japanese and Vietnamese opponents who get a chapter apiece. The single Western defeat chronicled in these pages, of the Romans in Cannae in 216 B.C., shows a victorious Hannibal unable to capitalize on his win. (The idea of the citizen/soldier, the role of civic militarism and the republican ideals of Rome seem to be the reasons why not.) A number of Hanson's conclusions will engender debate, such as his claim that America won in Vietnam, but failed to recognize it, as well as the larger claim that "free markets, free elections, and free speech" have led directly to superior forces. The book's last few chapters are fairly driven by that idea, which, along with precise, forceful writing, sets it apart from the season's secondary-sourced, battle-based military histories. (Aug.)

Forecast: Hanson's direct, literate style and his evenhandedness should appeal to the liberalist middle of the left and right alike. By isolating the ingredients of military success via elaborate examples, the book can potentially draw on two separate military-history readerships: those looking for theory and those for action.

Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Examining a select group of battles throughout history, Hanson (classics, California State Univ., Fresno; coauthor, *Bonfire of the Humanities*) maintains that Western nations are the world's best when it comes to waging war. From Salamis in 480 B.C.E. to the Tet offensive in 1968, Western forces have prevailed. Western soldiers typically have more of a commitment to the cause for which they are fighting, and they use technologically superior weapons, Hanson argues. Countries in Asia and Africa are not prepared to wage war on the same scale as Western nations because their governments are not as stable, funding is not as great, and the tradition of militarism does not exist. Hanson's ultimate concern is not with conflict between East and West but with the increasing possibility of civil war within Western nations, which might result in bloodletting on a scale previously unknown. Though victim of the occasional error (e.g., a Russian AK-47 does not resemble an American M-16), he makes a cogent argument for keeping a cautious eye on future conflicts. However, while he claims that this book is written for the general public, his style is difficult for the average reader. Only large public and academic libraries collecting in this area need to consider. Grant A. Fredericksen, Illinois Prairie Dist. P.L., Metamora Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.