

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**ROBERT W.
STRAYER:**

In chapter 6, Africa and the Americas reenter the story of civilization. Why are African and Native American histories during the second wave era treated in a single chapter of *Ways of the World*, chapter 6, while those of Eurasia got three full chapters? Is this a bias in favor of Eurasia or might it reflect the distribution of population?

For a very long time, the Eurasian continent housed around 80% of the human race, with the rest distributed between Africa and the Americas. Does this seem to you a sufficient reason for treating Africa and the Americas less fully than Eurasia? However you might come down on this question, it is clear that incorporating Africa and the Americas into the history of the ancient world enriches world history in many ways. For example, it allows us to see a certain unity to the story of humankind. After all, the development of human societies the world over seems to follow some broad patterns.

Everywhere, most of human history occurred in the gathering and hunting era. Then the momentous turn of the agricultural revolution occurred separately and in several distinct areas of Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas alike. And after that, those more complex societies that we call civilizations arose in all three major continental regions.

The civilizations of Africa and the Americas were fewer in number and smaller in size than those of Eurasia. Their rich religious traditions did not spread so widely as Buddhism and Christianity did in Eurasia. The domestication of animals, metallurgy, writing were all less elaborately developed in the Americas and Africa than in Eurasia. And more of their people lived in societies without large cities, states, or empires.

Now, all writers and teachers of history have to make choices about what to include and what to leave out. There's always too much to fit in any book or in any history course. So you may want to cast a critical eye on the choices that I have made. Do they distort our understanding of the human past or do they represent an appropriate balance among the competing demands of world history? And what alternative choices can you imagine?