**Another Voice Podcast with Eric Nelson**

**to accompany Strayer/Nelson, *Ways of the World*, Third Edition**

**Assessing the Legacy of the Mongols (Chapter 11)**

**SLIDE 11.1**

What pops into your head when I mention the Mongols?

**SLIDE 11.2 [Image: Mongol Russia]**

Few societies that we study during the third wave period resonate so strongly with people today. Modern popular culture has little to say about Song China or the Mughal Empire, but the Mongols are a different proposition. The image of a warrior on horseback, perhaps dressed in furs and carrying a dangerous looking weapon, is well-established in the collective memory eliciting associations with military prowess and, for some, ruthlessness and barbarity.

At least in part, the Mongols deserve their reputation. They were successful warriors and conquerors who built one of the largest empires in history. They were ruthless as well, famously slaughtering the populations of whole cities who resisted their armies. Indeed, the Mongols promoted their reputation for ruthlessness to gain military advantage, and they also mastered approaches to psychological warfare, going so far as to place whistles on arrows to increase the terror in their intended targets. These developments only enhanced their fearsome reputation with contemporaries.

That said, their reputation is also partially a function of the availability of sources about them. They were far from the first empire to emerge on the scene through a series of violent conquests, and the atrocities that they committed were not substantively different from those of earlier conquerors. However, unlike most victors, it was their opponents and subjects, not the Mongols themselves, who wrote the most influential accounts of their time. Because of this, we know remarkably little about the Mongols and much of what we do know is cast in a negative light.

**SLIDE 11.3 [Image: Chinggis Khan at Prayer]**

While the Mongols persist in the imaginations of people today, the long-term legacy of their empire on world history was less profound. The Mongol empire had little enduring cultural impact on Eurasia, unlike the Arabs, for instance, who spread the Islamic faith through their conquests. Little of the Mongol political order persisted past its collapse around 1350. Instead, perhaps the Mongol’s greatest contribution to the political history of Eurasia was to create a vacuum into which numerous new states emerged at about the same time following the collapse of Mongol authority. In constructing their empire, the Mongols destroyed a number of long established political regimes in Asia, including the Song Dynasty in China and the Abbasid caliphate in Southwest Asia. After the Mongol collapse new states emerged including the Ming in China, the Ottoman Turks and the Russian Empire which redefined the political landscape of Eurasia.

Legacy can mean many things. When world historians think about legacy, they are most interested in long-term impacts on government, culture or the social order. From this perspective, the Mongol Empire left only a modest legacy. But the image of Mongol warriors continues to resonate in historical memory and in the imaginations of people today.