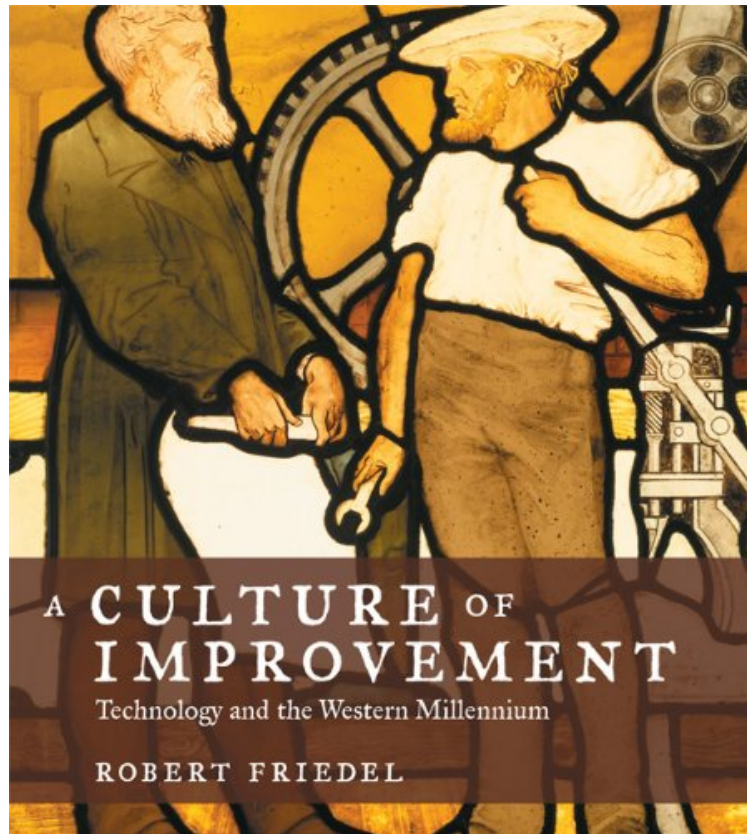


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A Culture of Improvement: Technology and the Western Millennium (MIT Press)

Robert Friedel

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Robert Friedel : A Culture of Improvement: Technology and the Western Millennium (MIT Press) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Culture of Improvement: Technology and the Western Millennium (MIT Press):

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. The March to the Future By Mike3746 Several years ago, the education channel in our town had a show called "Connections" in which the story was told of how common things of the modern world came to be through the most fantastic journey of inventions. This book encompasses just about everything we have today and tells how it all came to be. But, the author goes to the extreme of telling not just about the inventors, the tinkerers and the capitalists who profited from them, it tells the intriguing human side of technology and how it impacted the lives of the people who benefited and also suffered because of them. It is a remarkably detailed adventure through the history of how modern people came to be. I found it to be a book I could hardly put down and once I did, I was eager to get back to it. It takes the reader from the first black smiths to the super sonic transport, from the invention of thread and yarn making to the launching of satellites. It is the remarkable story of western civilizations, north of the Mediterranean, west of the Volga, and how they advanced steadily, relentlessly and

with ever quickening pace to make the world we know. Do not expect gratuitous recognitions to other cultures or apologies to nature or to overtaken primitive societies. This is a factual, no-holds-barred history of industry and how the European men and women made things that made things happen. It explores ruthlessly the insanely driven mechanics, the dusty masons, the sooty handed artisans who were there at the first laying of the foundation corner stone of western civilization. I strongly recommend this book to anyone who wants to find out just how it is we arrived here and now. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very informative read! By MsBee89 I loved how the chapters were divided and it comes a nice span of time in history. Definitely worth the buy! 2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Culture of Excitement By Richard Pilbrow This book is such a treasure trove . . . A thrilling read of constant discovery. We live in a complicated world and this amazing piece of scholarship reveals how it came about. Everything we take for granted. How it happened. From the plough to the microchip, I was constantly surprised and excited to discover how things really came to pass. The story of so many individuals' struggles to improve and innovate is inspiring. This is a big book. When I began I had no idea of what riches it would reveal. (the eBook version is easier to handle) but every page offers new insights. A great and absorbing read.

How technological change in the West has been driven by the pursuit of improvement: a history of technology, from plows and printing presses to penicillin, the atomic bomb, and the computer. Why does technology change over time, how does it change, and what difference does it make? In this sweeping, ambitious look at a thousand years of Western experience, Robert Friedel argues that technological change comes largely through the pursuit of improvement -- the deep-rooted belief that things could be done in a better way. What Friedel calls the "culture of improvement" is manifested every day in the ways people carry out their tasks in life -- from tilling fields and raising children to waging war. Improvements can be ephemeral or lasting, and one person's improvement may not always be viewed as such by others. Friedel stresses the social processes by which we define what improvements are and decide which improvements will last and which will not. These processes, he emphasizes, have created both winners and losers in history. Friedel presents a series of narratives of Western technology that begin in the eleventh century and stretch into the twenty-first. Familiar figures from the history of invention are joined by others -- the Italian preacher who described the first eyeglasses, the dairywomen displaced from their control over cheesemaking, and the little-known engineer who first suggested a grand tower to Gustav Eiffel. Friedel traces technology from the plow and the printing press to the internal combustion engine, the transistor, and the space shuttle. Friedel also reminds us that faith in improvement can sometimes have horrific consequences, as improved weaponry makes warfare ever more deadly and the drive for improving human beings can lead to eugenics and even genocide. The most comprehensive attempt to tell the story of Western technology in many years, engagingly written and lavishly illustrated, *A Culture of Improvement* documents the ways in which the drive for improvement has shaped our modern world.

By virtue of its range, quality, length (nearly 600 pages) and comprehensiveness, Robert Friedel's book will go to the top of the list as the standard text for an introductory Charlemagne-to-George-Bush course on the history of technology. (Times Higher Education Supplement) A rare, detailed, nontheoretical survey that exposes the veins of invention that run through Western culture, creating an astonishing picture of achievement through its careful accumulation of small details. Under Mr. Friedel's firm touch it begins to be possible to feel something like the primal pulse of this culture. (Edward Rothstein *The New York Times*) Friedel's dazzling tour de force describes almost every aspect of technology. (Joel Mokyr *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*) Robert Friedel... can not only impart the lesser-known details of a familiar story but masterfully show how strange and wonderful it is that things happened the way they did. (Adam Keiper *The Wall Street Journal*) "From steam engines to calico printing, from cheesemaking to supersonic flight, this is the one place to go if you are fascinated by technology and want to know how it has shaped the modern world. In *A Culture of Improvement*, Robert Friedel has elegantly synthesized decades of scholarly research in the history of technology into a lively and insightful account of modernity." (Ruth Schwartz Cowan, Janice and Julian Bers, Professor of the History and Sociology of Science, University of Pennsylvania, author of *The Social History of American Technology*)... [T]his book is also a rare, detailed, nontheoretical survey that exposes the veins of invention that run through Western culture, creating an astonishing picture of achievement through its careful accumulation of small details. Mr. Friedel surveys the kinds of inventions and technologies that developed in the West over centuries, compiling a roster of innovation that encompasses everything from textiles to time telling. Under his firm touch it begins to be possible to feel something like the primal pulse of this culture. (Edward Rothstein *The New York Times*) This is a splendid book, recalling Mumford's *Technics and Civilization* in its scope and erudition. It challenges to think carefully about the idea of progress, the 'culture of improvement,' and the uneasy relationship that persists between freedom, power, and social responsibility in the modern technological world. (Merritt Roe Smith, Cullen Professor of the History of Technology, MIT) About the Author Robert Friedel is Professor in the Department of History at the University of Maryland. He is the author of *Pioneer Plastic: The Making and Selling of Celluloid*, *Edison's Electric Light*, and *Zipper: An Exploration in Novelty*.