

The Modern World-System of Immanuel Wallerstein

Wallerstein's first volume on world-systems theory (*The Modern World System*) was written in 1974. Wallerstein argues that the modern world system is distinguished from empires by its reliance on economic control of the world order by a dominating capitalist center or 'core' in systemic economic and political relation to 'periphery' world areas.

Wallerstein rejects the notion of a third world, claiming that there is only one world connected by a complex network of economic exchange relationships; a "world-economy" or "world-system" in which the "dichotomy of capital and labor" and the endless "accumulation of capital" by competing agents (historically including, but not limited, to nation-states) account for frictions. This approach is known as the world-system theory.

Wallerstein locates the origin of the modern world-system in 16th-century Western Europe and the Americas. An initially slight advance in capital accumulation in [Britain](#), the [Dutch Republic](#), and [France](#), due to specific political circumstances at the end of the period of feudalism, set in motion a process of gradual expansion. As a result, only one global network or system of economic exchange exists in modern society. By the 19th century, virtually every area on earth was incorporated into the capitalist world-economy.

The capitalist world-system is far from homogeneous in cultural, political, environmental and economic terms; instead, it is characterized by fundamental differences in social development, accumulation of political power, and capital.