First World Encyclopedia Article

First World

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First World

The world's more wealthy, politically powerful, and industrially developed countries are unofficially, but commonly, designated as the First World. The term differentiates the powerful, capitalist states of Western Europe and North America and Japan from the (formerly) communist states (**Second World**) and from the nonaligned, developing countries (**Third World**) in world systems theory. In common usage, First World refers mainly to a level of economic strength. The level of industrial development of the First World, characterized by an extensive infrastructure, mechanized production, efficient and fast transport networks, and pervasive use of high technology, consumes huge amounts of **natural resources** and requires an educated and skilled work force. However, such a system is usually highly profitable. Often depending upon raw materials imported from poorer countries (wood, metal ores, **petroleum**, food, and so on), First World countries efficiently produce goods that **less developed countries** desire but cannot produce themselves, including computers, airplanes, optical equipment, and military hardware. Generally, high domestic and international demand for such specialized goods keeps First World countries wealthy, allowing them to maintain a high standard of material consumption, education, and health care for their citizens.