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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Derek W. Urwin. *The Community of Europe: A History of European Integration Since 1945*. London and New York: Longman, 1995. xii + 283 pp. \$25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-23199-3.

Reviewed by Jody Neathery (Rice University)

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The Community of Europe is unique in being both an engaging and informative account of the historical process of European integration. This eminently readable book is divided into seventeen short chapters. Each presents a clear idea, while maintaining chronological accuracy. While this book contains less of a “thesis” than an analysis of historical events, it presents the process of integration as an erratic and often contentious one. The biggest contribution this text makes to the burgeoning body of literature on the European Union is to bring alive the issues European integrationists faced with each successive step toward union.

This book was used early in my sophomore-level course on European integration at Rice University, immediately following some readings on the different ideas of a united Europe. My course met three times a week for an hour, and we read and discussed two chapters (about 30 pages) each class period—an amount we found to be quite feasible.

The Community of Europe was an invaluable part of the course for several reasons. First, it went a long way toward evening the information playing field for my students. Many of the students in the course had very little exposure to European politics, while a few had already taken several European politics courses. This book provided a needed encapsulation of the politics of the times, wrapped into a discussion of integration. Although some students did still need some supplementary readings to appreciate the political background of Europe, Urwin’s book went a long way toward an understanding of domestic and international political issues from 1945 to the present.

Second, the book provided a foundation for understanding some of the ongoing institutional and policy disputes among members of the EU, which was useful since our next two sections of the course dealt with the institutions and policies of the EU. For example, Urwin’s chapter on the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) clearly presents the hopes of integrationists that coordinating the coal and steel market would lead to “spillover”

in other policy areas. Urwin then proceeds to discuss the limitations of that reasoning, with regard to the actual political and economic functioning of the ECSC.

Exposing students to the history of the emergence, for example, of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was useful in introducing the complexity of this policy area. Later in the course, when we studied agricultural policy, I was pleased to find my students drawing upon information from Urwin’s book to examine both the economic and social goals of the CAP. The texts we used during the policy section of the course lacked the historical context.

Ironically, some of the reasons for using this book can also be viewed as liabilities. Because of its historical approach, class discussion was sometimes stunted, as I believe the students read the book with the intent of learning “facts,” rather than identifying and critically thinking about historical interpretation. The next time I use this book, I will work more at encouraging the latter process among my students. The transition from this section of the course to other sections felt somewhat abrupt, largely because I called upon students’ evaluative skills more frequently later in the course. However, I did feel that the benefits of spending a good deal of time on the historical process of integration outweighed any liabilities.

The Community of Europe was a different kind of text for me to use because of its historical as opposed to evaluative approach. However I found it to be favored by the students and a useful complement to my other texts. I did spend some time searching for a good historical overview of European integration when I was preparing the syllabus, and Urwin’s book was the best single text I could find that covered this. It provided a readable history, largely free of the impenetrable, acronym-laden jargon that often characterizes EU literature.

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