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Michael D. Richards, Paul R. Waibel. *Twentieth-Century Europe: A Brief History.* Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1999. 219 pp. $16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-88295-946-7.

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This was a difficult book to review because final judgment depends ultimately on what one is looking for in a text book on twentieth century Europe. This is an admirably succinct, intelligible and intelligent brief survey of a complex and confusing age. And, despite its brevity, it is fair and reasonable in its judgments, if perhaps a bit middle-of-the-road in its interpretations. Would I use it in my course on twentieth century Europe? No, but I could understand someone else deciding to do so–if one wanted an inexpensive textbook only as background, as a kind of safety net for weaker students or ones with little or no background in the subject, or if one were to build a course around a close reading of primary sources /documents and did not want an overpowering text which would intimidate the students, then this is the book of choice. In a survey course on Europe since the Reformation, if you wished to avoid using a single textbook and needed a textbook for the last segment of the course, again this would be a good choice. If your students are lacking in both ability and interest and can only manage a two hundred page book in a semester, then this would be close to ideal. It is eminently readable, if not exciting. Students who mastered it would actually learn a great deal about the century.

Having presented my bottom line, as it were, let me tell you more about the details of the book. The organization has to be one of its notable advantages. The authors divide the century into four periods, 1900-1919, 1919-1939, 1939-1961 and finally 1961-present. The only really arguable dividing point might be 1961, which the authors justify on the grounds of the creation of the Berlin Wall. Each part is about fifty pages in length, each part subdivided into three chapters, again of almost equal length. So, for purposes of establishing weekly assignments this book could not be easier to use. The question, of course, is whether a chapter of that length could serve as a sufficient source of ideas and information for a week's work. But before dismissing this text already you need to recognize that the authors do a remarkable job of including a great deal of information and ideas into short spaces.

Part One, 1900-1919, looks pretty much as one might expect: a chapter on Europe in the decade before the outbreak of war, a chapter on the first three years of the war, and then a chapter on the closing year of the war and the peacemaking efforts of Versailles. The treatment of the various great powers and of the social structure of Europe before the war are succinct and adequate, but the treatment of the long term diplomatic causes of the war is almost totally absent. What happened to the Moroccan Crises, the Balkan Wars of 1911-12, and, most importantly, the Bosnian Annexation Crisis of 1908-09? The authors provide a safe description of the events of July 1914 which led directly to the war but several of their comments are tantalizingly sketchy when it comes to the question of national responsibilities for the start of war; I am not certain that students in an introductory course will note the possible meanings.

The chapter on World War I itself I found to be factually sufficient but lacking in color and imagination; the war almost emerges boring. While life in the trenches was boring, the war overall should not appear such. The authors astutely separated out the Russian Revolutions of 1917 and the ending of the war and peacemaking to a separate chapter, but then did a poor job of explaining the admittedly difficult, even confusing, two revolutions of 1917. Not that there are errors of fact or meaning, but somehow the end result is neither clarity nor interest.

Part II, 1919-1939, encompasses in three chapters again the standard twenty year span between World War I and World War II . One chapter talks about things after the first war and the third chapter talks about things in the decade before the second war. The most different chapter of the entire book is the chapter in between. For the first and only time, the authors abandon the straight-forward chronological approach and take up certain unchronological themes: intellectual trends such the revolutionary changes in science, Freudianism and postwar despair, but, in a most awkward change in the middle of the chapter, the authors also discuss various

social classes, including comments on peasants and agriculture. The chapter on the twenties predictably but briefly recounted the woes of the great powers, one-by-one, even including a brief account of the smaller states. The third chapter, on the thirties, understandably focuses more on the new or emerging dictatorships and a typical description of the international events of the thirties which constitute the coming of World War II. I was disappointed with the material on Nazism and Stalinism although what is presented is accurate and even important; it is simply insufficient and dull.

Part III, 1939-61, predictably has one chapter on World War II, one chapter on a combination of the Cold War and decolonization and finally a chapter on economic and social recovery in Europe, both West and East. The chapter on World War II may frustrate readers who believe that World War II is a crucial event of this millennium, never mind this century. The authors summarize in sweeping fashion the military back-and-forth of the fighting and discuss equally briefly the Home fronts, collaboration, resistence, the Holocaust and the end of the war; many aspects of the war are simply missing. The chapter on the Cold War was amazing. It was like watching someone walk through a mine field to see how the authors handled the questions involved in the origins of the Cold War, including issues such as the use of atomic weapons, etc. Of course, there was something of an abrupt and awkward moment when the discussion shifted from the Cold War to decolonization, but it was discomforting only for the moment. I thought that the chapter on reconstruction was the only one in which too much time had been given to a topic.

Part IV, 1961-present, returns to a very strict chronological approach in the three chapters, with the first chapter being the period 1961-73, the next 1973-1989 and, of course, 1989-present in the last. Theoretically each chapter has a theme or general idea, but in actuality it does not all fit together that well. What fits in the end is the time period . And perhaps we are to close to see more than that at this point. But I did find that things appeared more disparate, scattered, unconnected in these three chapters. One minute we are discussing guestworkers and then terrorism, then recovery, then Thatcherism. Are these all connected somehow other than all having happened around the same time?

I read the last chapter of the book with anticipation and concern; I have been so often disappointed with recent analyses of the near-decade since the Revolutions of 1989. Yet this was the chapter I liked the best since the post-World War II material began. This chapter does not pretend to have a unified view or perspective. Space is limited but the authors make very intelligent and perceptive summations on some of the most complex and frustrating developments of this decade: the Revolutions of 1989, German unification, the disappearance of the Soviet Union, and the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Only the section on cultural and intellectual trends–existentialism, Structuralism, and poststructuralism–seemed to me to be excessive reductionism, i.e. reducing complex and often contradictory matters to simplistic explanations.

Before closing we need to take note of certain other features of the book: bibliographies, appendices, maps and tables. At the close of each chapter a few suggestions for further reading and viewing appear; perhaps eight to ten books with brief annotations and sometimes 2 or 3 film/video titles, again with helpful annotations. Thus I was a little surprised–considering the size of the book–when there appeared an appendix with additional sources, including new suggestions for websites, CD-ROMs, and videotapes. I must say that this section seemed an afterthought and a ploy to convince us how up-to-date the volume is. And if that appendix was a disappointment, my reaction to Appendix II was even more negative. For a book of this size to spend four pages on abbreviations and acronyms is mystifying. The authors themselves indicate that the do-nothing character of the maps that appear was a matter of policy choice, but, I have to tell you, I find that kind of map to be a waste of my time. Maps are wonderful things, and they can be made to teach interesting and difficult matters, such the extension of power or the formation of power blocs, etc. These maps, as the authors say, do nothing at all. For example, the map titled "Europe During the Cold War" simply shows the borders of the nations of Europe at some unspecified time during the Cold War. And there are no maps of Africa or Asia during decolonialization. In fact there are only four maps in the whole volume.

Finally a comment on the tables which appear from time to time. Some are appropriate and useful–e.g., a small table (1/3 of a page) on inflation in Weimar Germany–but this followed by an almost two-page table of fifty significant books of this century. This latter table is in chronological order only and has no annotations of any kind. A table of Jewish Victims of the Holocaust has two slightly different columns of figures with number of victims by nation but with no explanation why we need two sets of figures.

Back to my first thoughts. This is not a bad book . It has its virtues and certainly it would be an appropriate

choice for adoption in certain circumstances. But if I had my choice I would still pick Gilbert's *End of the European Era* or even Paxton's (not in paperback) or Stromberg's *Europe in the Twentieth Century* or my favorite for my own reading, Barraclough's *Introduction to Contemporary History*. But, then again, I guess one could ask if we have to read what the student's are required to read?

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