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Martin Conway, Pieter Lagrou, Henry Rousso, eds. *Europe's Postwar Periods - 1989, 1945, 1918: Writing History Backwards.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. 249 pp. $114.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4742-7650-4.

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The study of twentieth-century Europe entails many vexing problems for historians. Firstly, when does it end? The end of the Cold War in 1989 is often a convenient stopping point for historians examining the "short twentieth century," a transformative year that marked the close of the 1945 postwar parenthesis. Often treated as the end of history for Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Union is presented as somehow ending the persistent continental changes during its existence. In essence, the post-Cold War period is often treated as modernity, not history. Secondly, does each major event result from a series of lessons learned and mistakes repeated, or are they independent of one another? History is not linear; each postwar period does not simply create the environment for the next conflict. Therefore, historians cannot simply see twentieth-century Europe as a series of linear building blocks from one wartime onto the next. Thirdly, when do conflicts end? The signing of treaties or concessions in war usually mark the end of a conflict. However, this does not address the war's aftermath or the continuation of conflict and violence after the last wartime shots were fired. Demobilization, postwar occupations, and shifting national boundaries are processes that can take years to complete. Finally, which is more important to historical interpretation: how historical actors understood the past, their present, or the future? These are the questions that *Europe's Postwar Periods – 1989, 1945, 1918: Writing History Backwards* attempts to answer.

The ten contributors, all influential scholars in their own right, tackle these issues by writing history backwards, beginning with the years following the end of the Cold War and ending with the postwar period that succeeded World War I. Editors Martin Conway, Pieter Lagrou, and Henry Rousso have compiled a series of vignettes that upend standard historiographical methodologies. Chapters could conceivably be placed in a variety of orders because each essay relates to all three periods. Nine chapters are organized by the length of time addressed, tackling issues for all three postwar periods within each of them. The chapters "Demobilization," "Borders," "Justice," and "Future" contend with the direct consequences of war, whereas "States" and "Democracy" examine slightly longer time periods. Finally, "Empires," "Markets," and "Pasts" examine broader issues that move beyond the immediate postwar years.

Each of the three postwar periods, 1918, 1945, and 1989, deserve individual examination without bearing the weight of the past. By reading the past backwards, the contributors to this volume con-

nect the distinct features of each postwar period, including the decades that separated them, and argue that each can be seen in their own right without carrying a shadow of the previous decades. One component of this is an understanding of how historical actors envisioned the future based on their perceptions of the past. Péter Apor argues in his chapter, "Futures," that "the world of modernity is a world that constructs its present in the backyard of a projected tomorrow" (p. 81). Just as much as the past informs how we behave, the motivations and goals of historical actors are also guided by their vision of the future. Taking a reverse chronological approach to the past sheds light on those ideals. It also highlights the similarities and differences between the three periods without expecting a lineage of thought.

Admittedly, Pieter Lagrou acknowledges that "the triptych 1989-1945-1918 is an unabashedly Eurocentric way of conceiving history, or, rather it is the periodization of German history writ large" (p. 104). An ever-present historiographical trapping in twentieth-century European history is placing Germany as the center of gravity in the narrative. For the most part, this book avoids that problem. While Germany, by necessity, plays a major role, most of the chapters address issues that move far beyond German borders. The chronological reordering also breaks the problematic cause-and-effect history. Furthermore, while most historians are wary of teleology, they should not look at the past as divorced from the present in order to avoid it. An effective way to solve the teleologic problem, as demonstrated by this collection, is to treat the years following the end of the Cold War as a third postwar period rather as an end of European history. Doing so allows us to see the past in the context of the present without projecting modern ideals onto it.

Europe's Postwar Periods excels at challenging the narrative of modern European history. The reverse chronology can, at times, be jarring to some readers because it goes against the grain of traditional historical writing and the linear narrative that most readers expect to follow. That said, most of the authors flow seamlessly between the postwar periods. Many of the chapters induce a moment of reflection, a thought-provoking challenge to the way historians view the past. Naturally, each reader will be drawn to the themes that interest them the most. For me, it was Apor's "Futures" and John Horne's "Demobilizations." Both authors present well-written and compelling arguments that deserve further exploration. The innovative approach of this book makes it a must-read for those looking to dissect the past in an unconventional way—to see postwar periods for what they were, and most important, for what they were not.

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