In the past fifteen years specialized works on the history, development, organization, and workings of the European Union (EU) have proliferated. Although very useful to scholars, these books do not necessarily translate into appropriate materials for use in the classroom. Undoubtedly, Europe’s drive to unity has left behind a mass of treaties, conferences, and institutions that often leave the non-expert scholar adrift in a sea of minutiae—which suggests the problems they present for students. Two recent works, however, provide excellent introductions to European integration specifically designed for students that, at the same time, provide good reference materials for scholars and teachers of postwar Europe.

Although both books are intended as introductions to the topic, they are quite different in their makeup and approach. Alasdair Blair’s *The European Union Since 1945* takes a more historical approach to understanding European unity. Blair quite carefully places the twists and turns of the course of European integration within its larger historical context, discussing the destruction of Europe as a result of World War II, the impact of the Cold War, the economic crises associated with the 1973 and 1979 oil shocks, and the new situation of a post-Cold War Europe. In part this is a result of the book’s chronological organization, but also reflects his overall understanding of European integration. As he states in his introduction, European integration has not been merely the process of transferring power from national governments to new supranational structures with the only recourse for member states being withdrawal from the process. Instead, he argues that European integration has been the result of pragmatic decisions by the member states to give up certain powers in order to deal collectively with problems no one member could adequately address. In this respect, Blair is clearly in the camp of scholars such as Alan Milward, who argue that that European integration has not fatally undermined national sovereignty but is a means of “saving the nation state.”[1]

From this perspective, Blair examines the historical contexts in which decisions about European integration were made and how various states saw integration as advantageous or disadvantageous. He clearly organizes the book with chapters on the road to the Treaty of Rome (1945–57), the construction of the European Economic Community from (1958–67), stalled progress toward integration (1969–79), renewed progress (1980–89), and European unity within a transformed Europe (1990–2004). He also includes a very brief chapter on the future prospects and contours of European integration. Blair fully explores the problematic relationship of Great Britain to European integration, tracing developments from its decision to stay out of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Economic Community (EEC), Margaret Thatcher’s demand for a budget rebate from the European Community in the early 1980s, and Great Britain’s choice to opt out of the euro.

At times Blair appears to be too much of a cheerleader for European integration. He sometimes has the tendency to reject Euroskeptics’ criticisms out of hand, without providing what might be a fair consideration of the reservations and concerns that many have over European integration or fully acknowledging potential problems or challenges in integration’s future. For example,
he does not see any potential problems with the fact that EU member states are not unified in their participation in policies such as the euro, labor markets, and the welfare state. He briefly argues that the wide range of views within the European Union is a strength, but does not adequately consider the pitfalls that an enlarged and more diverse European Union faces. In any case, Blair’s book is well written, concise, and clear and would be quite useful in an upper-level undergraduate classroom.

At just over 400 pages, Van Oudenaren’s book clearly goes into more depth and detail than Blair and is also much more occupied with exploring current issues and challenges facing European integration. In contrast to Blair’s chronological approach to European integration, Van Oudenaren’s book is organized into chapters on specific issues and topics. After two relatively brief chapters on the development of European integration, the book examines the institutions and laws of the European Union; market integration; policy integration, including the euro; external identity through global trade; foreign policy; and defense, enlargement, and the European Union’s relationship with the United States. Throughout the book, he focuses his analysis upon the question of whether the expansion of the European Union can go forward without undermining efforts to create a deeper and more cohesive union. He pays particular attention to problems of governance in a larger entity, identity in a more diverse entity, the impact of globalization on European integration, and the impact of a larger European Union on the goals of integration. He provides no clear answers to these questions, but is more interested in indicating the future questions and issues left to be tackled.

In contrast to Blair, Van Oudenaren more explicitly lays out the theoretical approaches to understanding European unity. The most important are neo-functionalism and inter-governmentalism. Neo-functionalism, based in large part to Jean Monnet’s vision, describes integration in specific sectors of the economy spilling over to other economic sectors. Continued economic integration would then lead to political integration. In contrast, inter-governmentalism sees national governments agreeing to supranational integration with other governments only as far as it lies in their political and economic interests. Although he introduces these frameworks, Van Oudenaren states very clearly that he is not tied to any of them and is more interested in giving a broad overview of the European Union.

Blair’s work has particular features that are assets to teachers and students. For example, a good set of maps illustrates the progression and enlargement of what has become the European Union at the beginning of book. This element is missing from Van Oudenaren’s work, which contains only one map of Europe. In addition, Blair has provided a useful glossary of important terms and an explanatory list of the important figures in the European expansion. Even more, he includes forty-two excerpts from key documents regarding European integration. Blair refers to these documents throughout the text of the book and provides short introductions to the documents that would be a great aid to students. Both works provide excellent chronologies of the course of European integration. One could imagine Blair’s book being used not only in history courses, but also in international relations and political science classes. Van Oudenaren’s book is clearly directed toward more specialized courses on European integration, in which it would serve very well as a touchstone text to be supplemented by more interpretive works.

Clearly, one problem with works dealing with current issues is that they quickly show their age. Even since the publication of these books, the European Union has begun to confront difficult issues such as the question of Turkish membership and problems with creating an EU constitution. Any teacher who wishes to use either of these books will need to supplement student readings to fill in these gaps. Despite this unavoidable problem, these two works are clear and concise introductions to European integration and provide excellent guides to an extremely complicated topic.

Note
