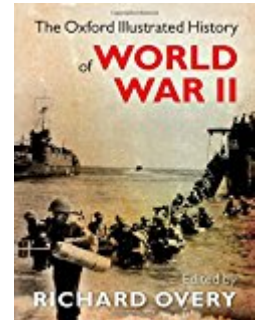


**Richard Overy, ed..** *The Oxford Illustrated History of World War II*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Illustrations, maps. x + 492 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-960582-8.



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**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air University)

The history of the Second World War has been revisited, reanalyzed, and revised on countless occasions since the conflict's end in 1945. *The Oxford Illustrated History of World War II* contributes to this continued reevaluation by proposing new arguments that focus on the war's wide-reaching international influence, as well as offering counterarguments to many claims found in earlier World War II histories. This anthology combines fourteen essays written by twelve historians, all of them distinguished experts in their respective fields. Their contributions reflect historical developments in current academic research. These essays address the war thematically rather than chronologically, which allows the authors to skillfully frame their own work as integral pieces of a much larger picture. Ultimately, the purpose of this work is to argue that because the Second World War was a "total" and global conflict, it influenced the entire international community—including the politics, militaries, economies, societies, and cultures of every country involved in the conflict.

Each essay supports the overarching argument of this anthology by describing how World War II saw the complete mobilization of countries' economic, human, intellectual, and technological resources. When assessing the conflict's origins, it is argued that the complicated legacy of World War I, the worldwide economic depression, and Western appeasement toward Axis aggression were major factors in initiating the war. Three subsequent essays cover the individual war efforts of imperial Japan, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany; Overy explains that because the Axis powers' military operations were largely independent of one another, the war can thus be viewed as three separate, overlapping conflicts.

The Allied war effort, too, is examined in great detail. On land and sea, the Allies proved that they possessed superiority over the Axis powers in manpower, weapons and equipment, military doctrine, and morale. More important than anything, however, was the Allied nations' ability to amend strategies, innovate technologies, and improve weapons and equipment. Though the al-

liance between the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union was politically fragile, as each country possessed separate war aims, they agreed on the unconditional surrender of their adversaries and therefore supported one another militarily and economically. The end of the war, however, saw the swift breakup of this alliance, the dividing of Europe between Western and Soviet camps, and the subsequent arms race that led to the Cold War.

The various home fronts of the belligerent nations are also addressed. As a “total” war, World War II effectively saw the mobilization of entire economies to keep the military and civilian bodies supplied and working toward victory. Propaganda had a large role in this mobilization; art and culture were utilized to maintain morale and inspire feelings of patriotism among the citizen population. Civilians were directly affected by the conduct of war, as they faced bombings, joined civil defense organizations, dealt with food and shelter restrictions, and took advantage of new employment opportunities. Even each country’s military came to resemble the larger civilian population, as mass conscription and volunteer enlistments alike significantly transformed the social structure and culture of each armed service. Civilian casualties, too, are studied. The conflict caused a tremendous amount of “unnatural deaths”—caused by forced labor, genocide, illness, imprisonment, or starvation rather than by combat—that far surpassed military deaths. The human cost of the war was truly tragic.

*The Oxford Illustrated History of World War II* is a welcome addition to an already-sizable array of literature on the global conflict. These historians offer well-researched and well-written essays that successfully illustrate the war experience. Photographs, illustrations, and maps contribute to the anthology’s intent of offering a relevant, comprehensive history, as these inclusions provide readers with additional lenses through which to view the conflict. Though it focuses

heavily on the European theater at the occasional expense of the Pacific, this work ultimately spans much of the entirety of the war, which, when dealing with a subject as far-reaching and influential as World War II, is no easy task. Ultimately, this anthology is successful in expanding the value of international understanding of the Second World War.

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