

Andrew N. Buchanan. *World War II in Global Perspective, 1931-1953: A Short History.* Wiley Short Histories Series. Newark: Wiley Blackwell, 2019. 264 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-119-36609-6.

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World War II is one of the most popular historical topics in the United States, generating novels, movies, and monuments across the country. What American popular memory of the war often misses, and what Andrew N. Buchanan addresses in *World War II in Global Perspective, 1931-1953*, is the truly international dimension of this conflict and the impact it had on far-flung peoples and regions. While Buchanan admits that his temporal framing from 1931 to 1953 will surely draw modest academic debate, his conclusions about the global interconnectedness of the conflict and the galvanizing force of the United States is convincing and well researched. Drawing on secondary sources from experts in their field, Buchanan's impressive synthetic overview is chronological, though the author deviates often to explain past causes, present circumstances, and future repercussions. The ability to incorporate such a vast stretch of time and conflict into a single narrative is daunting. The result, however, is a very well narrated political, military, and economic history of World War II and its global interconnectedness. In Buchanan's words, World War II "was both a site of global interconnection *and* an event—or an intersecting series of events—that sprawled messily over more than two decades of the mid-twentieth century" (p. 3).

Buchanan begins his story with the Great Depression, where political turmoil of the 1930s had

pushed the fascist and militarist leaders of Italy, Germany, and Japan to seek economically autarkic regional empires. Expansionism in its early stages was not a strict blueprint but an idea that was acted upon by the Axis powers at opportune moments. Buchanan argues that criticisms of appeasement had geopolitical considerations, which forced Britain and France to anxiously accept a stronger Italy and Germany as a bulwark against Soviet communism. The Nazi-Soviet Pact brought down Poland in a matter of weeks, and Soviet tanks rolled into the Baltic states and Finland shortly thereafter. The British and French began to mobilize their vast empires, drawing colonial subjects into another European conflict. In South Africa industrial output would double during the war, with coal exports quadrupling. The King's African Rifles, Royal West African Field Force, and other imperial auxiliaries were used in battle against Italian East Africa, three divisions sent to Burma to fight the Japanese, and countless others mobilized as part of the imperial supply chain. Similar recruitment in India, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the far-flung colonies of the British Empire gave the European war a vast reach. Buchanan explains that military service overseas introduced soldiers to new experiences and ideas that threatened the very fabric of imperialism. This "detribalization" held potentially dangerous

consequences for colonial rule and eventually helped to inspire independence movements of the postwar era.

The collapse of the French Republic in June 1940 was a key turning point in the conflict. Britain eagerly sought an alliance with the United States, and a growing circle of American elites recognized the potential their country had to become a world hegemonic power. Henry Luce's article in *Life* magazine hailed the "American Century" even before the United States had been officially drawn into the conflict (p. 55). Japan, stalled in China, faced a longer protracted war of attrition, and military leaders plotted to regain the initiative by invading Southeast Asia and pivoting toward Burma and India. Initially some nationalists in Indochina, Malaya, and Burma saw the Japanese as liberators, but their harsh rule often put them at odds with local populations. A telling example is Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army, which was composed of volunteers who sought to throw their weight behind the Japanese in a bid to oust the British from India. Britain's response to a lack of Indian support led to the promotion of the Muslim League and sowed deeper factionalism before the partition of the Raj in 1947. Nationalists across the globe would be faced with the dilemma of siding with their familiar colonial rulers promising equality, rights, or even independence, or gambling on the emerging powers of the Axis.

The desire for economic autarky to sustain a regional empire meant that Japan and the United States would eventually face off. The bombing of Pearl Harbor and the entrance of the United States into the war would fundamentally change the global dynamic of the war. According to Buchanan, America's entry into the war finally fused together the disparate regional wars into one worldwide conflict. The United States had interests in both theaters and the capacity to wage a two-front war. The combined chiefs of staff of the United Kingdom and the United States set out on a

truly global project to link food, resources, troops, oil, and war matériel to locations around the world where they were needed most. Supplies to bolster the Soviet Union were sent across the Pacific, Arctic, and Iran on built-from-scratch highways and rail. Air strips, harbors, railways, warehouses, and military bases linked the productive might of the United States with far-flung communities in Latin America, West Africa, the North Atlantic, Australia, the Pacific Islands, and Asia. Local help in building this infrastructure laid the groundwork for economic, military, and political connections between previously out of reach peoples and an ever-assertive economic powerhouse in the United States.

As Soviet forces waged a brutal land war against the Wehrmacht, the Allies launched invasions of North Africa, Sicily, and eventually Normandy, yet Buchanan reminds us that these were not simply European affairs. With Brazilian forces in Italy and a Mexican Air Squadron in the Battle of the Coral Sea, the world became more involved in the second half of the conflict. Franklin Delano Roosevelt had urged these powers to officially join the Allies in time to become a powerful voting bloc in the newly established United Nations. Far from the purely German view of the Wehrmacht, the Atlantic Wall that guarded western Europe from invasion was manned with the help of Soviet prisoners of war from Kazakhstan, Poland, Ukraine, Mongolia, and even captured Korean draftees against forces from multiple Allied countries. As the Axis powers collapsed, this consolidated global conflict then unwound into multiple regional conflicts across the world.

Burmese, Malayan, and Filipino guerrillas had waged war against the Japanese in the Asian theater, only to be precariously made enemies of Britain, France, and America as they tried to reign in colonies or stabilize the political situation. Sukarno's harsh anti-communist battles paved the way for Indonesia's hard-fought independence after the war. Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam seized the

opportunity offered between the end of Japanese power and return of French power to declare independence, though the emerging tensions between the West and communism meant that conflict there would continue until 1975. Malaysia fought on until 1954 and Algeria until 1962, and the Philippines gained independence in 1946. Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party (CCP) won a civil war in 1949 against Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist Guomintang.

Buchanan argues that insurrections, rebellions, and protests across the former colonial empires were the main ripple effects of World War II, and everywhere Britain, France, and America scrambled to put out fires. Pan-Arabism in the Middle East, the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya, and soldier protests across Eurasia all drew inspiration from the moral justifications of the war laid out by the Allies. After the Soviet Union successfully tested their own atomic bomb, Joseph Stalin gave approval for Kim Il Sung's North Korean army to invade South Korea. The newly formed United Nations sent a coalition, funded and led largely by the United States, to contain the threat of communist expansion. A new global conflict was taking shape. Fearing a rebuffed American ally on their border, Mao sent Chinese troops across the Yalu River and fought the UN forces to a stalemate at the 38th Parallel by 1953. American economic and military predominance had limits in Asia, and much of the rest of the twentieth century was spent trying to secure this region against the perceived communist threat.

The economic and military mobilization of resources and manpower brought on by World War II saw the integration of women, minorities, enemy prisoners of war, colonial subjects, and the major belligerents. Eight million foreign workers were used in Germany during the war. Rapid urbanization around Allied centers of shipping, local employment, and cross-cultural interaction sped up and emboldened nationalist movements across the globe. The Japanese Co-Prosperity Sphere may

have ultimately failed to rally Asian people against the Allies, but the blistering success of their armies early in the war had permanently shattered the aura of European or American rule. The United States also seized the initiative with the Atlantic Charter and Bretton Woods Conference to lay the foundation for the world they wanted to lead after the war was won. This ideological reckoning would inspire uprisings after the war in the name of self-determination from Algeria to Indonesia and draw Latin American countries closer to American hegemony. America's assertiveness during the war plays a vital role in Buchanan's unfolding narrative of the United States replacing Britain as the world's leading power. To Buchanan, World War II was a global catalyst for political, military, and economic change.

By the end of this period of conflict, America had established itself as a world superpower with an "empire of bases" (p. 208). Over one hundred thousand war brides from Europe and Asia returned home with American GIs (p. 207). "Windrush" colonial workers filled a labor gap in the UK and fundamentally changed the makeup of the Allies' home populations. The death toll was staggering, but for Americans it was a justified moral victory. The author warns that the "American Century" was a short one and that the ghosts of peoples who suffered more than American citizens are becoming louder and more assertive in the twenty-first century. Buchanan argues that a more global and interconnected approach to American history is needed to understand the experiences and desires of people around the world today.

This short history is the perfect book for anyone interested in research outside the popular American memory of World War II. The notes and further readings sections will point interested readers toward credible experts in their regional fields. The author avoids most historical debates on hotly contested issues in favor of a broader narration. Mentions of historical debates are made, but Buchanan avoids serving as histori-

ographical judge. The writing is accessible for amateurs and professional historians alike, and the book would serve as an excellent companion textbook to a graduate course. The only criticism might be that on glancing through sources one finds that a majority are American or British, despite the author's more global thesis. The value in this edition for American historians is to move beyond the American or Eurocentric outlook of the conflicts of the twentieth century to understand the geopolitical issues of today. Buchanan has accomplished this quite well.

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