

Gerald D. Nash. *The Crucial Era: The Great Depression and World War II, 1929-1945*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. Second edition. Pp. x, 213. Paper, \$18.70.

In the second edition of this useful and highly interpretive survey, Gerald D. Nash, professor of history at the University of New Mexico, describes the years from 1929 to 1945 as "some of the most fateful and decisive in the history of the United States." While combating a Great Depression in the thirties and waging a World War in the forties, Nash contends that the United States underwent an "organizational revolution" that restructured its economy and society, setting itself on a course, radically different from the past, which has persisted to the present day. More specifically, he maintains that Americans

fashioned a government that functioned as manager of the economy; they invented the American social welfare state; they brought government into the arena of human and civil rights, feminist causes, and the battle against racism; they expanded government's role in the management of natural resources; and they found a place for government as a patron of culture. In the process they did much to expand bureaucracy in American life. And they created patterns in American diplomacy that guided their successors in the next generation.

Nash does not claim more for the period than he is able to support, if not prove, in the body of his text. He sees the changes of the '30s and '40s as precedents, each of which he describes in turn and then masterfully traces through the second half of the century in his final chapter, "Legacy of a Crucial Era." A sharpened analytical focus, two new chapters on women's experiences, and additional attention to the era's impact on the South and West more than justify this new edition.

The strengths of this text are its treatment of the domestic New Deal and its discussion of World War II's impact on the homefront. In clear, concise, and insightful prose, Nash covers topics frequently ignored by earlier historians, while adequately treating everything from the causes of the Depression to the plethora of New Deal agencies. He demonstrates that the impact of the era on the South and West is dramatic and far-reaching, so great indeed that both sections had joined the rest of the country in the twentieth century by 1945. Along with this attention to sectional history, Nash examines the experiences of women, Afro, Native, and Hispanic Americans, and maintains that all these groups made some progress in the period and, just as importantly, laid the groundwork for greater advances in succeeding decades.

While on the whole admirable, this text is not without its shortcomings. Principal among them is its extremely short account—some ten pages in total—of the military campaigns in the war. Nor is Nash's hand as sure or as detailed in describing the diplomacy of the war years. He notes, for example, that some writers have blamed Roosevelt for yielding "too much" of Eastern Europe to Stalin at Yalta, but fails to mention that others have shown that the president did not give away anything that the Red Army had not already occupied. Because this manuscript is unusually clean, some small errors leap out at the reader: Alice Paul is misnamed "Alicia" (p. 81), Admiral Ernest J. King becomes "Harold" (p. 132), and General Jonathan Wainwright is "Nicholas B." (p. 133).

But these are minor quibbles about an excellent short history of the United States in two highly significant decades. Since Nash concentrates heavily on the domestic scene, adopters of this text might want to supplement it with Robert A. Divine, *Roosevelt and World War II*, or select chapters from Stephen E. Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism*, on the diplomacy of the period, and James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War II*, for more detailed coverage of the military campaigns.

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