

offers an extended essay on the politics of European union, leaving the reader swimming in a sea of acronyms: EMU, EFTA, CAP, QMV, SEA, EMS, CFP, ECSC, EEC, EURATOM, OPEC, EDC

In 1962 Stringfellow Barr wrote *The Pilgrimage of Western Man*, a brief history of western civilization organized around the idea of European unity. The usual politics was there, leagues and battles, but so too were the artists and philosophers so that one came away from the book with a feeling for what it meant to be European, an appreciation of the ideals, aspirations, norms, styles, sensibilities, and values that gave a specific texture to population migration, trade expansion, law, politics, and war in that particular region of the world. This is really what is lacking in Alcock's book: a comprehensive well-rounded, and up-to-date synthesis of the kind presented in many of the European history survey texts on the market today. This book's fourteen chapters will get one's students literally from Plato to NATO in the course of a fourteen-week semester, but of the genius of Plato and his relation to the classical inheritance they will have learned little; and the same can be said of NATO and the Cold War. Moreover, the interpretive structure framing individual chapters is sometimes outdated; the Pirenne thesis is no longer one of the key explanatory models for what was once called the "Dark Ages;" few now see the fall of Constantinople in 1453 as responsible for the introduction of Greek learning in Italy and the subsequent emergence of the Renaissance; and for over twenty-five years historians have spoken of a Catholic Reformation antedating Luther rather than simply a counter-reformation in response to him. As for an awareness of European women's history--well, thirteen queens do get mentioned in the course of the book.

The text is readable and the author's grasp of political history is impressive. But I cannot recommend it as appropriate reading for an undergraduate survey course. Most undergraduates would be overwhelmed by the unending flow of information. And with very little in the text to help them construct a hierarchy of significance, they would, I am afraid, put down the book convinced that history is nothing more than a laundry list of names, dates, and events, a view history teachers and scholars in this country have been combating for the past half-century.

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William Woodruff. *A Concise History of the Modern World: 1500 to the Present.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. Second edition. Pp. xii, 401. Paper, \$18.95; ISBN 0-312-21332-8.

It would be difficult to imagine how anyone could write a better overview of the last five hundred years of world history. William Woodruff's book is filled with relevant facts, appropriate questions, interesting anecdotes, and insightful

interpretations. Regrettably, the book contains no illustrations, but there are twenty-five useful maps.

The major theme in the work is "the struggle for power" among sovereign states. Emphasizing power as the "master key" to understanding world affairs, Woodruff finds that it is impossible to make a clear separation between "the power of the sword" and "the power of the purse." While many nations have at times concentrated on conquering territory, other nations have been more concerned with economic gain. Although tending to minimize abstract principles, Woodruff nevertheless recognizes that at times "intangible power—intellectual, philosophical, spiritual and religious—has swayed world events." Thus, his book has a great deal to say about the power of ideas associated with individuals such as Christ, Mohammed, Luther, Voltaire, Marx, Hitler, and Gandhi.

In organizing his account, Woodruff uses a combination of chronology, major topics, and regional geography. Beginning with the "Asian-dominated world" of five hundred years ago, he then tells the story of how Western nations emerged into leadership roles in both power and ideas, followed by a "resurgence of Asia" during the last half of the twentieth century. The book contains excellent chapters on topics such as the scientific revolution and the enlightenment, the rise and fall of European imperialism, the rise and fall of Marxist-Leninist systems, the impact of the two world wars, and the continuing problems of poverty and ethnic conflicts in much of the contemporary world.

Woodruff has some very stimulating things to say about the value and limitations of historical knowledge. "Only by using the past to cast light on the present," he observes, "can we hope to know how the world has come to be what it is and where it might be headed." He recognizes, on the other hand, that historical data do not provide for any easy predictions of the future. He correctly observes that it is not possible to make a neat distinction between historical facts and interpretations, and that there is an inherent element of subjectivity to the latter. While recognizing how different perspectives lead to different interpretations, nevertheless, Woodruff goes too far when he writes that there exists "no objective reality independent of the writer." By way of analogy, different photographers capture different aspects of reality. Yet, if they view reality from different points of view, they nevertheless take photographs of a material reality that exists independently of their cameras.

Woodruff's audience is probably somewhat limited. Since the book includes so many short references to events, individual people, and political organizations, a reader without some background in global history would feel overwhelmed by all the details. Most serious students of history, on the other hand, would probably tend to look to more specialized works. The most appreciative readers will be those individuals—possessing some historical background—who wish to refresh their memories with a concise synthesis filled with informed and stimulating observations.

Norwich, Hildegard von Bingen, and Margery Kempe. Heoneta Leyer's work,

As a possible textbook for history courses, Woodruff's book has some limitations. It would be too advanced for most high school students, and it is not comprehensive enough to serve as a single text in a college-level course. For teachers who like to use a combination of original sources, films, and readings devoted to special topics, however, Woodruff's work could be very useful in providing the general historical background that students need.

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Lester K. Little & Barbara H. Rosenwein, eds. *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*. Williston, VT: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. Pp. xi, 396. Cloth, \$64.95; ISBN 1-57718-007-0.

This excellent book would be very useful for students in upper-division as well as graduate courses in medieval history. Graduate students preparing for comprehensive examinations will find in this volume an indispensable guide to the latest historiography. Unfortunately, the price places this book beyond the budget of most students. Each university library, however, should have multiple copies for the use of students. The editors, two distinguished medievalists, begin by stating that "the Middle Ages aren't what they used to be." They then trace the development of the term "Middle Ages" in their brief, but informative introduction. Many changes have taken place in medieval historiography over the past thirty years. Rather than offer a brief sampling of each new trend, the editors wisely decided to explore in depth four areas that have been marked by intense investigation and discussion. The book is thus divided into four parts, each with a succinct introduction: the fate of Rome's western provinces, feudalism and its alternative, gender, and religion and society. A number of sources have been translated for the first time from German, French, and Italian.

In Part I (chapters 1-6), the editors look at four areas of debate concerning Rome's western provinces that have emerged in the recent work of historians: ethnogenesis of the new peoples, accommodation between Rome and the new peoples, archaeology and history, and conversion of the new peoples. Walter Pohl synthesizes the main findings of scholars on ethnogenesis and notes that ethnic definitions were especially fluid in times of migration. The debate between Walter Goffart and Chris Wickham regarding Roman/barbarian relations covers two chapters. Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse examine the archaeological evidence in the light of the Pirenne thesis. Part I concludes with a section on the conversion of the new peoples to Christianity. Ian N. Wood deals with Gregory of Tours as a reliable source in relation to Clovis, while Alexander Murray explores examples of the mutual borrowing of Christianity and pre-Christian magic.