

[PDF] The War Of The World: Twentieth-Century Conflict And The Descent Of The West

Niall Ferguson - pdf download free book

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Author: Niall Ferguson

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Description:

From Publishers Weekly Why, if life was improving so rapidly for so many people at the dawn of the 20th century, were the next hundred years full of brutal conflict? Ferguson (*Colossus*) has a relatively simple answer: ethnic unrest is prone to break out during periods of economic volatility—booms as well as busts. When they take place in or near areas of imperial decline or transition, the unrest is more likely to escalate into full-scale conflict. This compelling theory is applicable to the Armenian genocide in Turkey, the slaughter of the Tutsis in Rwanda or the "ethnic

cleansing" perpetrated against Bosnians, but the overwhelming majority of Ferguson's analysis is devoted to the two world wars and the fate of the Jews in Germany and eastern Europe. His richly informed analysis overturns many basic assumptions. For example, he argues that England's appeasement of Hitler in 1938 didn't lead to WWII, but was a misinformed response to a war that had started as early as 1935. But with Ferguson's claims about "the descent of the West" and the smaller wars in the latter half of the century tucked away into a comparatively brief epilogue, his thoughtful study falls short of its epic promise. (*Sept. 25*)

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From Ferguson's eight-hundred-page reevaluation of the Second World War presents itself as a grand theory about ethnic conflict, the end of empire, and the postwar triumph of the East. The exact contours of the theory, however, remain unclear. Ferguson argues that the central story of the twentieth century is "the descent of the West," but he never really clarifies what "the West" means - Russia sometimes qualifies, sometimes not, depending upon what point Ferguson is trying to make. Ferguson is a skilled storyteller, and he offers many striking reflections on the bloodiest years of the past century, including a compelling analysis of appeasement. Unfortunately, the book as a whole is marred by sweeping judgments and jarring contradictions. A number of odd moves - such as the grouping of Hoovervilles with Soviet labor and German concentration camps - point up another conspicuous shortcoming: Ferguson's failure to make sense of America's power.

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