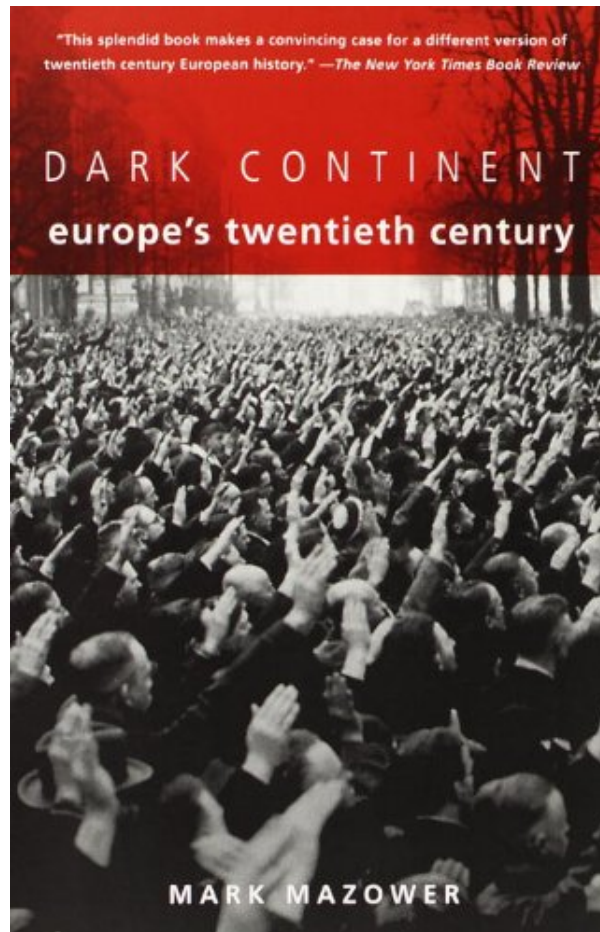


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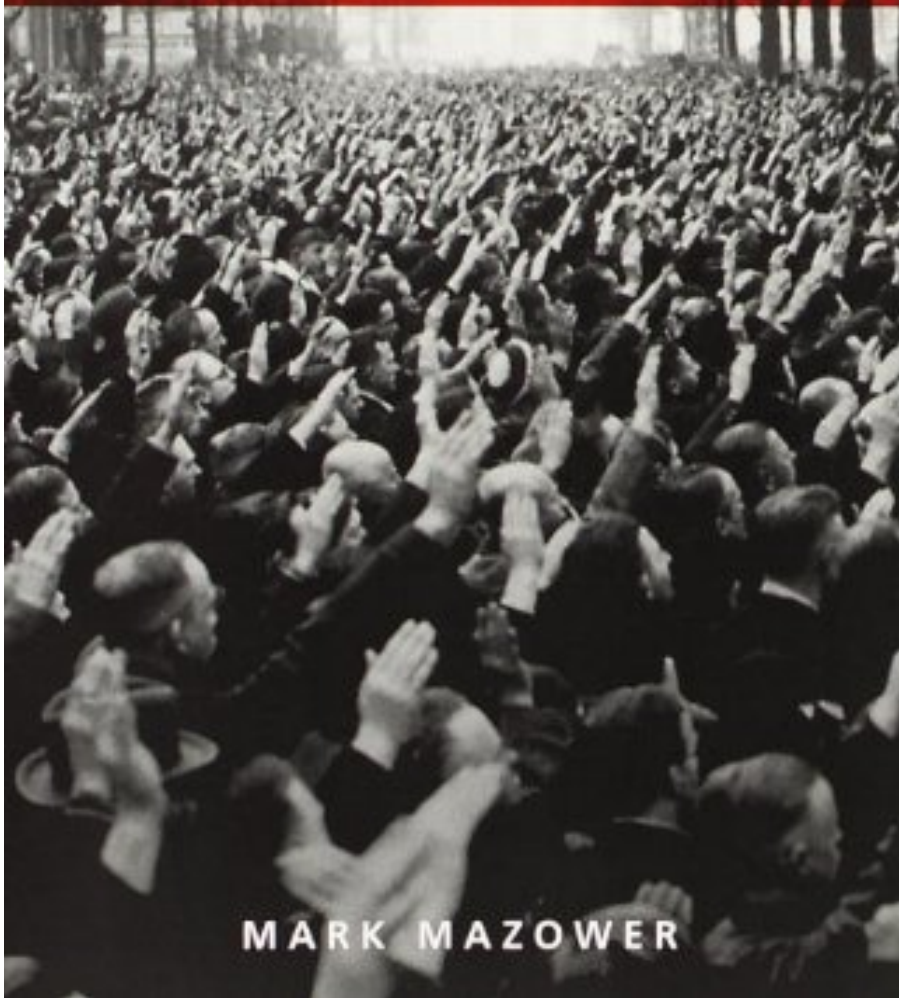
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# DARK CONTINENT

## europa's twentieth century



MARK MAZOWER

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"A useful, important book that reminds us, at the right time, how hard [European unity] has been, and how much care must be taken to avoid the terrible old temptations." --Los Angeles Times

Dark Continent provides an alternative history of the twentieth century, one in which the triumph of democracy was anything but a forgone conclusion and fascism and communism provided rival political solutions that battled and sometimes triumphed in an effort to determine the course the continent would take.

Mark Mazower strips away myths that have comforted us since World War II, revealing Europe as an entity constantly engaged in a bloody project of self-invention. Here is a history not of inevitable victories and forward marches, but of narrow squeaks and unexpected twists, where townships boast a bronze of Mussolini on horseback one moment, only to melt it down and recast it as a pair of noble partisans the next. Unflinching, intelligent, Dark Continent provides a provocative vision of Europe's past, present, and future-and confirms Mark Mazower as a historian of valuable gifts.

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Most helpful customer reviews

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Thoughtful

By R. Albin

This insightful overview of modern European history was apparently written in the early 1990s and is probably a response to some of the triumphalism that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of Mazower's basic points is that European history does not show a teleological progression to the triumph of democracy and liberal capitalism. Mazower opens with the large scale failures in Central and Eastern Europe of the democratic settlements of the Paris Peace Conference. He writes insightfully of the contradictions imposed by the ethnic heterogeneity of Eastern Europe, ideas of community minority rights, the concept of

nation-states, and the failures of the League of Nations system to guard minority rights. These strains were paralleled by and exacerbated by the great crisis of liberal capitalism whose most dramatic manifestation was the Great Depression. Against this background, Mazower stresses the major alternatives to traditional liberalism capitalism and democracy, communism and German fascism, were not aberrations but derived from deeply rooted alternative versions of social organization.

Prefiguring his excellent book on the Nazi Empire, Mazower provides a particularly good analysis of the Nazi state and Empire as an alternative path of European history. He stresses also that the Nazis were defeated in large part by the exertions of the Soviet Union, a somewhat ironic outcome in which communism came to the rescue of liberal democracy. Mazower follows with a nice analysis of the opening of the Cold War and the postwar boom, something that occurred in all European states, including those in Eastern Europe under Soviet domination. This boom resulted partly from greater state involvement in the economy and was accompanied by expanding social services that brought considerable social peace. Others, like Tony Judt in his excellent book *Postwar*, have made this point as well. Mazower concludes with some nice analysis of the problems encountered by European states in the relative stagnant periods of the 1970s and 1980s, and the fall of the Soviet Union. Again, this is a careful analysis that attacks conventional triumphalism.

18 of 18 people found the following review helpful.

Read it at least twice

By Jose Hanson

I agree with an earlier reviewer that this is the best history of 20th Century Europe ever. Keen insights and fresh ideas leap off every page.

But it needs to be repeated: the *Dark Continent* is not an introduction to the subject. Unless you have a good knowledge of Europe and its history, this is not yet the book for you. Someday maybe, but for now save your money.

Some found Mazower's style dry and difficult. I started reading it in a coffee bar and got half-way through before I realized the time. That doesn't happen very often. To me, the writing is clear and fast-moving, and the threads are easy to follow.

Imperialism, colonialism, class, nation, prejudice, fascism, communism, democracy, apathy, capitalism, genocide, left, right, in-between, all are described in a calm, intelligent manner, which is perhaps why some see Mazower as being soft on Stalin or Hitler. You won't find hysteria or hyperbole, but then the facts speak for themselves without the need for comments by the author. Think about it: 60-million people were killed in "civilized" Europe in the first half of the 20th Century. With a story like that, a historian doesn't need to raise his voice to get the readers attention.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

A Masterpiece of Coherent History

By John Mccarthy

This is the most coherent presentation of 20th century European history that I have ever read.

The reason that I say this is because it explains more clearly than I have ever read elsewhere the causal connections that integrate what happened in Europe between 1914 and 1998 (the year that *Dark Continent* was published).

Mark Mazower, the brilliant author of this book, basically sees this entire period through a lens that is primarily, but not exclusively, socio-economic. In his view, to which I am persuaded, socio-economic

factors, both good and bad, were for the most part, the driving and controlling factors behind all the mega-events of 20th century Europe.

Consider each of them: World War I, the defeat of Germany, its economic and political collapse, the world wide depression, the rise of communism, fascism and Nazism, World War II, the Cold War, the Balance of Power, the economic socialization of Western Europe, the collapse of the Russian empire, worldwide decolonization, the rise of individualism. What a panoply of cataclysmic events, yet they all had their roots in socio-economic factors. One might say that all of these major movements and events were the result of rising and falling expectations. And, to some extent, all of them were poisoned by utopianisms of various shades and colors.

I recommend this book. It is a gem.

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