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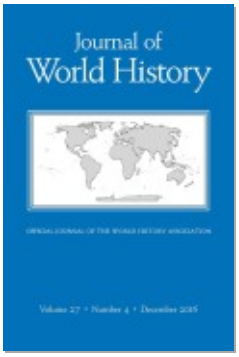
The Rise of Western Power: A Comparative History of Western Civilization by Jonathan Daly (review)



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remain at the heart of all democratic political life everywhere" (p. 370). The expansiveness of the Revolution's ambitions proved too great to fully succeed, but provided at least a partial template for all reform movements and revolutionary upheavals to follow.

No book, of course, can treat all aspects of the French Revolution without controversy. Though making several nods towards the revolutions occurring in France's overseas colonies, McPhee's treatment of the Haitian Revolution is largely restricted to its effects upon European France. Survey students may want more detail on many of the grand events of the Revolution, which are often treated abruptly between thematic sections. Discussions of the process of Revolutionary politics are sometimes minimized in favor of quick descriptions of outcomes. Yet in many other respects, McPhee's book merits commendation, as a rare major French Revolution survey text that has no readily identifiable ideological bent. Its integration of political positions and historiographical methods is outstanding.

Liberty or Death provides professors, students, and interested general readers with an integrated and sophisticated treatment of the French Revolution. The book merits serious consideration for adoption in classes on the French Revolution and on broader French history, as well as comparative courses on the Age of Atlantic Revolutions. Many scholars will appreciate the book's incorporation of social history, particularly in the chapters concerning the Terror, which will make several interpretations based largely on elite intellectual history found elsewhere appear more questionable. Indeed, the full book exhibits the fecundity of grounding political culture more strongly in social context. Those looking to understand the national experience of the Revolution in France should turn first to this survey.

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The Rise of Western Power: A Comparative History of Western Civilization. By JONATHAN DALY. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. 664 pp. $150 (cloth); $47.95 (paper).

Professional historians who are ambitious enough to embark upon a gargantuan and solitary effort of summarizing nearly one thousand years of history are very rare specimens. Yet Jonathan Daly has undertaken such a task. This is by no means an ordinary history book for advanced undergraduate students. The entire work revolves specifically around

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the issue of answering the conundrum of why the West rose at a particular moment in time. This requires an introductory chapter (twenty-seven pages) overviewing innovation in world civilization, breezing through several continents, and summarizing several thousands of years of developments. Daly does not really bother covering Roman or Greek history (or any other ancient history) as he considers it irrelevant to the puzzle he is trying to solve. For him, the solution starts with the Middle Ages, and it is fair to say that the book looks at processes over the last one thousand years (only) to analyze the so-called Great Divergence between the West and the "Rest." For Daly, the urban revolutions (chapter 2), the papal revolutions (chapter 3) coinciding with "stubborn political fragmentation" (p. 80), and the military revolutions (chapter 4) of the medieval era were all crucial to later developments, such as the European "discovery of the world" (chapter 5), the printing revolution (chapter 6), which is closely intertwined with the emergence of the Reformation (chapter 7), and the subsequent scientific revolution (chapter 8). Interestingly, colonization during the early modern period is subsumed under a chapter entitled "Commercial Revolutions" (chapter 9), which is followed by more mainstream interpretations of political revolutions from Britain in the seventeenth century to the Napoleonic era in the early nineteenth century (chapter 10) and subsequent industrial (chapter 11) and technological revolutions (chapter 12). The book closes with a chapter (chapter 13) on crises of the West, with a focus on the two World Wars as well as the Cold War, and another chapter on the emergence of social revolutions ("Explosions of Rights") (chapter 14). It includes 120 pages of endnotes referring the reader to more specialized studies, an impressive seventy-page bibliography, and a useful fifty-page index.

Although Daly is to be strongly commended for his use of a wide range of secondary sources to support his overall argument, some of his statements can raise eyebrows, especially when not followed up by specific references to back up his claims. Some examples: "The violence of Islam's early expansion contrasts with that of Buddhism and Christianity" (p. 17). I for one believe that many Jews, Persians, and pagans would have been surprised by that claim. "Of all the regions in the world during the medieval era, Europe witnessed the most ferocious combat" (p. 87). Given the Mongol slaughter (unless one somehow separates slaughter from combat), this reviewer found that claim puzzling, along with assertions that knights descended from bellicose Germanic warriors "displayed a furiousness in battle unusual on the world scene" (p. 91) and that Europeans "tended to fight with more indiscriminate violence than most of their adversaries" (p.133), especially since Daly at

the same time notes their sociability (pp. 139, 369). In addition, he also claims that a "passionate curiosity about the wider world gradually became a peculiarly European phenomenon" (p. 123); by contrast, other polities such as the Ottoman Empire "never displayed a profound curiosity about the wider world" (p. 127) or "the willingness to try new things, bordering on recklessness, that characterized European societies" (p. 222). For Daly, the latter are unique in that in the early modern period "in no other region of the world could one find anything like the European ferment, institutionalized scholarly research, abundance of philosophical approaches, interconnectedness of learned men and women, cross-fertilization of applied and theoretical sciences, or profusion of means and venues for sharing the fruits of research" (p. 198). This largely Whiggish institutionalist argument celebrating the genius of Western values and civilization (p. 370) does not pay a lot of attention to wealth (coal and colonies) as it is not causally related to innovation (p. 284), which explains his focus on cultural and intellectual habits of behavior and attitude related to industrialization (p. 295). Daly does not argue that Europeans were more inherently creative, but he does claim that "they built up and live in societies affording them far greater latitude for creativity—for trying new things, for innovating" (p. 362). It should therefore not come as a surprise that the book at times suffers from an overdose of name-dropping of scientists, along with their technological accomplishments. The fact that this study considers Crown Business publications and a weekly such as the *Economist* magazine as scholarly references may also cause some to frown. His section on "Warfare and the Origins of Representative Government" in chapter 4 is unfortunately not elaborated as fully as in the work of other sociologists.[1] Occasionally some claims are even outright surprising, such as his statement that "World War I was a philosophically absurd conflict [as] the main belligerents had similar social, economic, and political systems" (p. 338).

While Daly's ability to synthesize and to elucidate is considerable, the readers of this journal should be aware that this work is world history in a traditional sense. The non-West, especially in the second half of the book, is more often than not present as a side show, and the subaltern enslaved certainly do not speak. Rather, the effort to explain and celebrate the rise of the West results in an overall conclusion that "Western transformations had been made possible by liberating human creativity and initiative, freeing people up to coordinate their efforts at

[1] Such as Maurice Roche, *Exploring the Sociology of Europe* (London: Sage, 2010).

will, prizing innovation in every aspect of life, and placing fewer and fewer limits on the pursuit of impossible dreams" (p. 347). Only in the last four pages of his conclusion does Daly belatedly mention that the rise of the West "is leading to environmental catastrophe" (p. 400). For this reviewer, climate change, the rise of sea levels, the rapid spread of lethal pathogens, and so on may cause an enduring challenge not only to the ability of capitalism to continuously reproduce itself in the long run but potentially even to the survival of the human species. Since Daly remains quite optimistic that all these challenges can be met by further economic and technological developments, he would consider it unlikely that increasing socioecological exhaustion may undermine the stability of capitalism as a socioeconomic system. But to me it appears likely to be more a question of time rather than an imponderable. It is a pity that Daly did not consider environmental destruction, pollution, and exhaustion of resources as being intrinsic to the capitalist system itself, as well as to the rise of the West.

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Democracy: A World History. By TEMMA KAPLAN. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 155 pp. $78.00 (cloth).

Citizens of a Common Intellectual Homeland: The Transatlantic Origins of American Democracy and Nationhood. By ARMIN MATTES. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015. 266 pp. $45.00 (cloth).

The Struggle for Democracy: Paradoxes of Progress and the Politics of Change. By CHRISTOPHER MECKSTROTH. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 272 pp. $65.00 (cloth).

At the beginning of *The Struggle for Democracy*, Armin Mattes states, "By now it must be admitted that [democracy] has proved its appeal to peoples on every continent and every major cultural and religious tradition on earth" (p. 2). We can hope, then, that historians of democracy will increasingly find themselves thinking about the worldwide context of their subject and that world historians will find it equally hard to avoid thinking about the course of democratic development. In each case the demands made on a scholar are going to be high. The challenge is often going to be, for those interested in world history,