



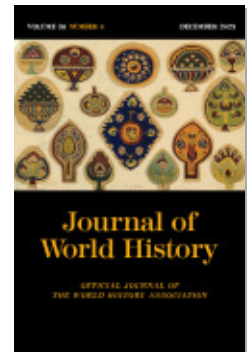
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*1942: When World War II Engulfed the Globe* by Peter  
Fritzsche (review)

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Journal of World History, Volume 36, Number 4, December 2025, pp.  
661-663 (Review)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2025.a984546>



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*1942: When World War II Engulfed the Globe*. By PETER FRITZSCHE.  
New York: Basic Books, 2025. viii + 556 pp. \$35.00. ISBN  
9781541603233 (e-book).

Peter Fritzsche's *1942* argues that most narratives that deal with the lessons of the war have been greatly colored by the way the war ended: with nuclear explosions. He recognizes that these explosions put the future existence of humanity at risk and thus attracted a lot of attention. However, Fritzsche also thinks this obsession with the end obscures the two most important questions that historians should be asking about the war: why and how it became a global conflict. Fritzsche does not focus on the end of the war—or even the beginning of the end—but on the many ways the events of 1942 turned a conflict that was restricted mostly to the European and Asian theaters into a world war. He does that not just by highlighting the strategic calculations of the belligerents but also by bringing together the social, cultural, and economic aspects of the war.

Fritzsche expertly utilizes two methodologies—continuity and intersectionality—to emphasize the centrality of 1942 in globalizing the war. Historians have usually framed the world wars as a break or a discontinuity in history: this is especially true for the Second World War. While the First World War was seen as a conflict between empires, the Second World War is seen as a conflict between ideologies with vastly different outlooks for the future of humanity. Fritzsche, however, frames the Second World War as also between colonial powers trying to extend their influence and control. As such, the war is not characterized as a discontinuity; rather, it is seen as part of the continuous struggle for imperial hegemony in the colonies. With such a narrative, Fritzsche has joined other historians, such as Richard Overy, who in the last decade have begun characterizing the Second World War as an imperial conflict.<sup>1</sup> One way that Fritzsche elevates the importance of imperialism during the war is by pointing out the pivotal role played by India in 1942. Colonial India became central to the politics, economy, and strategy of the Second World War as the Japanese Empire's expansion brought it to India's Eastern borders. Meanwhile, its freedom movement led by Gandhi captured the imagination of the whole world in

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Overy, *Blood and Ruins: The Last Imperial War, 1931–1945* (New York: Viking, 2022).

1942 and created rifts among the Allied powers. Fritzsche mentions that Gandhi's protests against British imperialism inspired the Jews in hiding or living in ghettos in Europe, as they identified with his demands for freedom and experiences with starvation. He notes that India created an ideological conflict in the Atlantic Charter because while the United States promoted self-representation, Britain did not want to see the dissolution of its empire. Fritzsche also discusses how the Second World War empowered colonized people and pushed colonial empires to the brink of extinction in many other regions of the world, including Singapore, Burma, Egypt, and the Philippines.

Fritzsche expertly weaves intersectionality into *1942* by putting the spotlight on people and communities who are often ignored in the Second World War histories in favor of heroic retellings of the brave combatants. He argues that soldiers and militaries of numerous nations being shipped to fight battles across the globe are only a small part of why the Second World War became a global conflict. The larger reason was that this conflict pushed large portions of the world's civilian populations to the frontlines of the war. These frontlines sometimes corresponded with the frontlines of military conflicts of the war and put civilians in harm's way, including the Nazi genocide of European Jews, the Japanese Empire's massacres of Chinese, and the targeting of civilian populations through indiscriminate aerial bombardments. Fritzsche brings up other frontlines created to meet the demand and supply of war: from weapons production to training soldiers for a global war. These frontlines were often in urban areas or spaces that attracted a large section of the civilian population as well as military personnel. Since the war drew all sorts of people to those spaces regardless of their gender, race, or background, it created social, cultural, economic, and political frontlines. Fritzsche best describes these frontlines in his chapters on the United States, showing how it prepared for the war while keeping its social and cultural mores intact. In *1942*, he discusses the marginalization of the Japanese after Pearl Harbor that ultimately led to their internment and the mistreatment and devaluation of women and their labor in factories crucial for the war effort. Fritzsche also discusses how segregation became a national problem because the United States decided to fight the war with a segregated military, and desegregated Northern Blacks were resegregated as they moved below the Mason-Dixon Line, since most of the army posts were located in the South.

In the introductory chapter, Fritzsche makes a bold claim that “this book explores roads across the world.” This eventually proves to be too ambitious a target for him to achieve, and by the time the reader reaches the conclusion of the book, any trace of how the book is about roads remains unclear. It creates a bit of confusion at the beginning of the book as the reader wonders if the roads were supposed to be real, metaphorical, or both. However, the faults of this book are minor and do not overshadow the two major achievements of the book: bringing colonialism and imperialism to the forefront of the history of the Second World War and the successful intersectional analysis of the social history of the war.

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*Islamesque. The Forgotten Craftsmen Who Built Europe's Medieval Monuments.* By DIANA DARKE. London: Hurst & Company, 2024. ix + 444 pp. \$16.10. ISBN 978-1-80526-097-4 (hardcover).

*Islamesque*, by the journalist Diane Darke, is a survey of Islamic influence in European Romanesque architecture, which argues that Islamic craftsmen were involved in the construction and decoration of Romanesque buildings. Darke positions her work as a challenge to the current tendency of whitewashing European history associated with the rise of far-right movements. In the first part, she discusses architectural decisions and types of decorations typical of the Islamic world. In the second part, she goes through case studies country by country. *Islamesque* has received positive reviews from BBC and The Guardian—both Darke’s affiliations.

The book’s strength lies in Darke’s attention to detail when it comes to architecture and art. Her interpretation of the zigzag motif as referring to flowing water is clever. She offers fascinating evidence demonstrating the presence of Islamic craftsmen on the European building sites, such as cursive marks carved in stone and wood, the use of Arabic numerals, and occasional right-to-left arrangement of Biblical scenes. In particular, the examples of churches with the layout typical of mosques were interesting. Darke’s analysis of Romanesque church decorations in conjunction with Islamic art is persuasive. She explains that animals not native to Europe appear in church carvings because they were executed by foreign craftsmen. This observation