

## RESEÑAS

Frank McDonough, *The Origins of the First and Second World Wars*. Cambridge University Press, 1997. Pp iv, 122. Maps, summaries, illustrations, document case study and document case study questions, and a chronology of events.

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The First and Second World Wars are two of the most written-about subjects in history, but it is not very common to find a book that approaches both conflicts at the same time. This is what Frank McDonough, a Senior Lecturer at Liverpool John Moors University, has done in his book *The Origins of the First and Second World Wars*. With this book (he admits it in his introduction) he does not intend to offer another interpretation or theory of why these conflicts took place or compare both wars, but to prove through the analysis of events, and comparison of different theories that these conflicts were not the result of one single cause but an accumulation of events and situations that resulted in the wars. The book is very practical especially for students or anybody who wants to have a first general idea of the wars, their causes, and interpretations of why they occurred.

The book is divided in two parts. The first one includes chapters one and two and the second part includes chapters three to five. The origins of World War I (WWI) are analyzed in chapter one where the author studies six events that influenced that period and led to the war: the rise of Germany as a military and economic power; the claims for self-determination and self-government in Bulgaria and the Balkans; the division of Africa and Asia among the European states based on economic reasons; the creation of European alliances; Germany's "world policy" of expansion; and the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand by a young Bosnian. In order to prove these explanations, McDonough includes the text of original documents that relate to some of the events of this chapter: for example the letters and telegrams that evidence the views and attitudes of Tsar Nicholas appealing to Kaiser Wilhelm II; or Sir Edward Grey refusing to promise Germany a pledge of British neutrality, etc. He also offers some case-study questions based on the texts of original documents to help the reader draw his own conclusions about the origins of the war. Chapter two lays out different theories about the reasons for the war. McDonough analyzes several interpretations that represent various points of view, such as the interpretation which considered all participants in the war responsible for the outbreak. Two other interesting positions are the one by German historian Fritz Fischer who blamed Germany for "preparing and launching the First World War", and one by another German historian; Gerhard Ritter, who considered Fisher's work "an act of national disloyalty..." He believed that Germany's policy was mistaken but defensive.

The same structure can be found in the second part of the book, which is dedicated to World War II (WWII). First, the author provides an explanation of events that led to that war in chapters three and four. He then provides a historical interpretation in chapter five. In chapter three, the author makes an account of the events which occurred in the interwar period, detailing the European situation after WWI as well as the measures taken by the European nations and the United States to restore peace and order in Europe. As in chapter one, the author offers a selection of texts from original documents, such as one by Hitler

where he declares his view of the Versailles Treaty, or another one which is a communist pamphlet about the Paris Peace Settlement. Again case-study questions are included in this chapter. Much of chapter four is dedicated to Hitler, his rise to power, and his influence on the events that led Europe to war, although he also mentions other conflicts of that time which added to the already unstable situation. In the face of these events, the author explains the solution adopted by Chamberlain: the policy of appeasement which did not prevent the war and would be very much discussed in the years to come. Chapter five is dedicated to the historical debate about WWII. It brings up an issue not always well-clarified: that WWII was not only a European war but also an Asian-Pacific war, although the author does not explain in depth this side of the war. This chapter is divided into sections dedicated to different participating countries and their leaders such as Hitler, Chamberlain, Mussolini, Stalin and how their influence in the events of that time led to the war, as well as an examination of the French policy.

In chapters one, three and four McDonough uses maps which help the reader understand the importance of some of the divisions made by the European nations after both wars, for example, the territorial changes after the Balkan wars in 1913, the plans of the European powers in 1914 or the territorial expansion of Nazi Germany from 1936 to 1939. Also he includes illustrations which make reference to jokes and ironic situations to have an idea of the mood of the people during those years, such as the one in chapter four where there is an illustration about Hitler's foreign policy where he appears mocking the other democratic leaders.

McDonough provides a series of tools mentioned in the above explanation of the division of the book (different descriptions of the events that led to the wars, 22 texts of original documents and their document case-study questions, 5 maps to show territorial changes, 2 summaries of historical theories with opposing views about the origins of the wars, and a chronology of events to facilitate the recognition of important dates, which covers the whole period of the book, from 1871 through 1941) so the reader can draw his own conclusions.

In conclusion the book is well-written and stands out for its great number of notes and references at the end of each chapter which contain introductory and general sources, texts of original documents, and books dedicated to the study of the roles of the participating countries in the conflicts, as well as a complete bibliography divided by subject and type of sources. This book summarizes the most important events before the wars and the theories which explained them. Although it does not add any new information it can clarify ideas and be a first approach for finding sources to study the subject in depth. The book presents an efficient organization of ideas and an effective use of sources. It is helpful for anybody interested in the subject but especially for students and teachers who might want to use it in their classrooms.

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