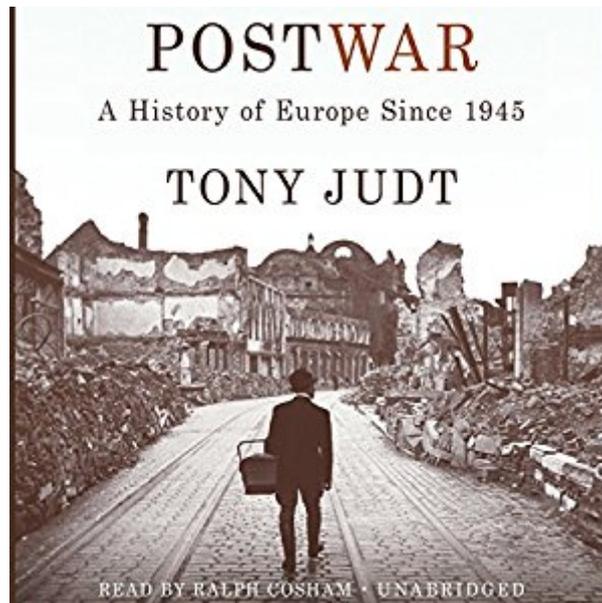


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Postwar: A History Of Europe Since 1945



Synopsis

A Finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and Named One of the Ten Best Books of the Year by the New York Times Book Review. Almost a decade in the making, this much-anticipated grand history of postwar Europe from one of the world's most esteemed historians and intellectuals is a singular achievement. Postwar is the first modern history that covers all of Europe, both east and west, drawing on research in six languages to sweep listeners through 34 nations and 60 years of political and cultural change—all in one integrated, enthralling narrative. Both intellectually ambitious and compelling to read, thrilling in its scope and delightful in its small details, Postwar is a rare joy. Tony Judt (1948-2010), the author of 11 books, was Erich Maria Remarque professor of European studies at New York University and director and founder of the Remarque Institute.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 43 hours

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Blackstone Audio, Inc.

Audible.com Release Date: January 7, 2011

Language: English

ASIN: B004IDNQOW

Best Sellers Rank: #83 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Europe #690 in Books > History > Europe

Customer Reviews

This is, in many respects, an outstanding book. Judt accomplishes the daunting job of providing a solid narrative overview of European history (excluding Russia/Soviet Union) from the end of WWII to the present. Accompanying the narrative is a great deal of astute analysis, both of major trends and of specific episodes. The book is divided into 4 major periods; the immediate post-war era of reconstruction and the onset of the Cold War, the great boom of the 50s and 60s with its major demographic, social, and economic changes, the recessionary period of the 70s and 80s, and the most recent period after the fall of the Soviet Union. The major theme is a multi-generational effort to build a Europe that avoids the mistakes that led to the catastrophes of the WWI-WWII period. Judt provides a guardedly positive view of European success. The factors that led to the catastrophe of the first half of the 20th century were strong nationalism and what might be called neo-mercantilism,

authoritarian/totalitarian states, powerful ideologies (particularly Marxism), and great internal social discord. Judt sees modern Europe, with democratic and pacific states, its emphasis on economic integration, and social welfare systems aimed at guaranteeing a minimum amount of social amity, as largely escaping the problems that led to WWI and WWII. Judt deals very well with the major events (and often their social consequences) that propelled Europe along this pathway. The crucial role of the US, and in an ironic way, of the Soviet Union, helped to rescue Western Europe from post-WWII devastation and provided an international framework that demanded western european cooperation.

The three main themes of this account of postwar Europe is the death of ideology, the role individuals in shaping history, and the birth of the European Union and a new way of life that rejects the extremes of Soviet Communism and American Capitalism. Tony Judt makes the case that the era of political ideologies was ending in the last half of the twentieth century. In Western Europe the birth of the welfare state and the combining of the left and right on various issues resulted in the end of the political extremism. While in Eastern Europe, Communism was unable to reform itself as seen in the failed uprisings in Hungary and Czechoslovakia ending in its final collapse in the period from 1989 to 1991. Moreover the repression of the Communist regimes combined with their economic mismanagement soiled the reputation of Communism in both Eastern and Western Europe. Despite these faults, Judt maintains that it was Gorbachev and his reforms which resulted in the fall of Communism. Judt's view of Gorbachev supports his thesis about the role of individuals in shaping history. Judt writes that Stalin in implementing harsh Communist governments throughout Eastern Europe discouraged Western European nations from pursuing a neutral course during the start of the Cold War. While Juan Carlos in Spain was able to transform Spain from being an authoritarian country into a democracy. Finally Milosevic and not any organized nationalist ideology helped to enflame the Serbs into committing war crimes in Bosnia during the nineties. The third theme of this book is the growth of the European Union that started as customs union for agricultural goods and then unified its monetary policy in the seventies which resulted in a common currency in 1999.

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