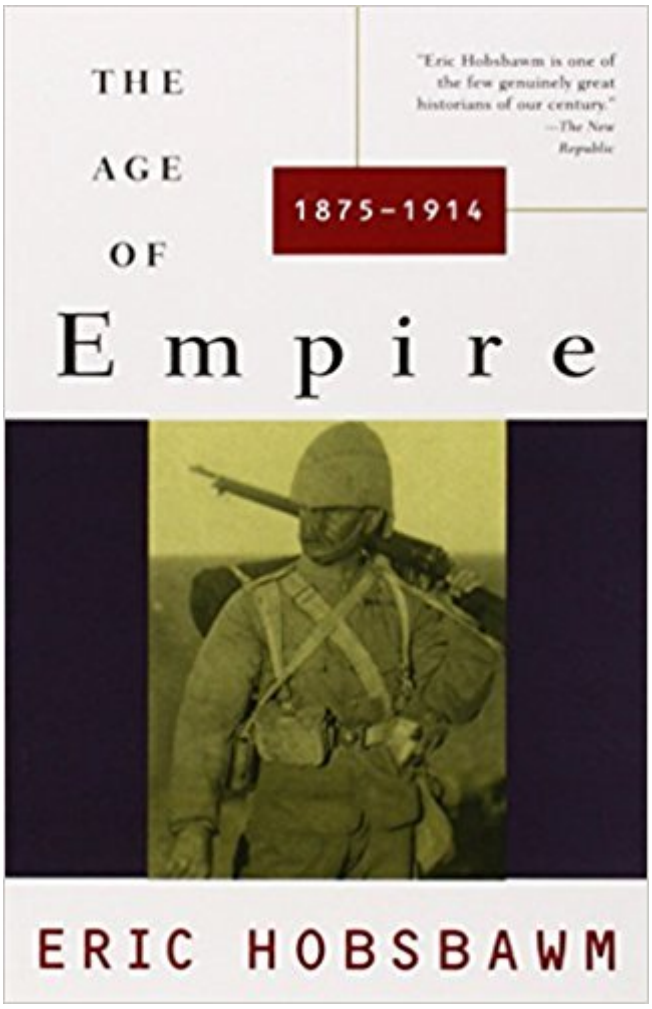
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The Age Of Empire: 1875-1914



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Synopsis

Erica Hobsbawm discusses the evolution of European economics, politics, arts, sciences, and cultural life from the height of the industrial revolution to the First World War. Ã Â Hobsbawm combines vast erudition with a graceful prose style to re-create the epoch that laid the basis for the twentieth century.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this sequel to The Age of Capital , the author "probes the contradictions of a largely tranquil age that stood on the brink of global slaughter. Hobsbawm’s delvings possess a breadth and depth that few historians have equaled, and this wide-ranging chronicle is essential to our understanding of a modern world divided into hostile camps," praised PW. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Preceded by The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848 (1962) and The Age of Capital, 1848-1875 (1975), this completes Hobsbawm’s probing analysis of the forces that shaped and defined the 19th century. His approach continues to be thematic rather than chronological; geographical scope is global but with decided emphasis on European and American developments. Hobsbawm moves skillfully through a variety of topics, e.g., the roots of feminism, scientific change, the rise of the working class, and the race for overseas acquisitions. Hobsbawn’s Marxist orientation is never dominant or obtrusive. Though not easy to read, The Age of Empire , like its companions, will stand the test of time. Mark R. Yerburgh, Trinity Coll . Lib., Burlington, Vt.Copyright 1988 Reed Business

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This concluding volume is Hobsbawm’s brilliant trilogy meets the standard of the earlier volumes: the seismic changes of the 19C - setting the basic parameters for almost all that has followed in the 20C and even the 21C - are explained and evoked. It is a supreme masterpiece of historical exposition that will fascinate even those who have read many histories on the period. Once again, I found myself underlining passages like an undergraduate and re-reading this more than once. This is not a narrative history but a cooly precise analytical one.The period begins with one of the greatest depressions that mankind had yet known. It marked the end of the liberal-bourgeois ascendancy, which was replacing the traditional aristocratic one with the democratic revolutions that followed the French (and to a lesser degree, the American) Revolution. As the regimes of Western Europe were growing ever more inclusive and even statesmen as powerful as Bismarck realized there was no turning back, this opened the political scene to an astonishing array of new ideas and possibilities. From the business-dominated conservatism and complacency of the previous 30 years, socialism, colonialism, the welfare state and a plethora of other notions emerged and were taken seriously by leaders who wanted to gain or maintain their power. Not only did this create new socio-political arrangements, but in the effort to "control the masses", it also spawned a new kind of political cynicism. If there is a marxist bias to this, it is here.A big part of this was the ascendency of the notion of nationalism. With the old certainties - religion, permanent rural "stations" in life as opposed to proletariat work in cities, fealty to traditional elites - the emerging "masses" required means of control. Loyatly to the "nation", defined by lauguage, ethnicity, history and place, become a kind of new God. It required consolidation, even the creation of a language (often by wiping out regional dialects) and schools that proffered ideology as well as a ladder for advancement into bureaucracy and other new jobs. It was a new kind of allegiance, which became very powerful in the coming decades, easily eclipsing the supra-national ideologies such as communism that were emerging yet still poorly organized.As the economic depression lifted, optimism returned with great, ultimately naive, force: many of the elite and even the common people thought that progress would be endless, an attitude that in many quarters survives to this day. However, in contrast to the liberal regime of openness and laissez faire, the handful of developed nations adopted a more mercantilist policy, combining protectionism and an industrial policy. Part and parcel of this was the colonial carve-up of the world by the industrial powers. This created a subordinate relationship, whereby the colonies represented protected markets for industrial goods and provided raw materials to enable their production in the empire’s imperial seat. There was a rhetorical "civilizing mission" to all of it,

but it only affected extremely limited elites.A major theme of the book is the lead up to WWI. While mentioning the bourgeois ennui with the long period of peace, Hobsbawm settles on the attitude of Great Britain as a principal cause The continent had a number of alliances, a kind of balance that ensured an equilibrium of some war but not too destructive. However, as the German Navy began to encroach on British prerogative, the basis of its far flung Empire, to compete for mastery of the seas. So, Britain uncharacteristically allied itself with France and Russia, upsetting the old balance. Add to that a technological arms race, and a major conflict became inevitable, though its form was hard to predict.There are many other interesting details, such as the evolution of science, which because less rigidly deterministic - relying on statistics rather than direct causation - and also more abstract, i.e. less commonsensical, less intuitive, more theoretical, particularly with new branches of mathematics and the new physics. In the arts, there was also a decline of realism, emphasizing the subjective and individual perceptions. In the meantime, the electorate continued to expand to the poor and even to the suffragettes. This is all covered too quickly, but it would represent a book in itself for a less superficial treatment.This is a really great trilogy. Though there is a volume that follows, I suspect it is a commercial add-on as the concepts in this are perfectly rounded out. The reader really can learn an enormous amount about how we have come to this place of capitalism and dislocation. I kept my enthusiasm for it until the end. Recommended with enthusiasm.

This is the third book in Hobsbawm’s economic history of the "long" 19th Century (1789-1914). The other two books are "The Age of Revolution" and "The Age of Capitalism."Like the other two books, this is an economic history, so it presumes the reader already has some knowledge of the major historical events of the period. For a more conventional European history, I’d refer the reader to "Europe: 1815-1914" by Gordon Craig.One hears so much about "Imperialism" -- always in a negative sense -- that’s it’s interesting to read about a period in which Europeans were unabashedly imperialistic. I had read elsewhere that the main reason imperialism failed was that it was uneconomical, but this is the only serious treatment of it I’ve read.One big surprise for me was that the European Imperial period was so short. The Imperial posessions were relatively few and unimportant before this period, and were essentially snuffed out by World War I (taking until World War II to entirely disappear).Although I have enjoyed Hobsbawm’s books, there are two warnings for the would-be reader. First, Hobsbawm is an unapologetic Marxist, so his economics all come from a Marxist angle. That’s actually not as much of a problem as it might seem, and it helps shed a lot of light on what the earlier followers of communism were thinking. Second, this is not an easy read. The material is difficult to begin with, and Hobsbawm’s writing style makes it more so.Still, I

found it worthwhile, I learned a lot, and I'm glad I read it. If the combination of history and economics interests you, just take it slowly and it will reward your efforts.

This book is fantastic! He lays out the exact reasons and situations that led the European continent to the brink of war, while explaining all sides.

As expected, Hobsbawm examines the history and historiography from the angle of the common people. His immense intellect pulls together the trends and forms a coherent and fascinating narration of the physical and economic circumstances and philosophical consequences of daily life in Europe during the 19th Century.

I gave this book four stars however it is undoubtedly a five star book. However, this edition's print is impossibly small. I had to return the book.Take care.

This series of books by Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution, The Age of Capital, The Age of Empire, The Age of Extremes, is incredibly informative and wonderfully written. But it is not an easy read.

Terrific!

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