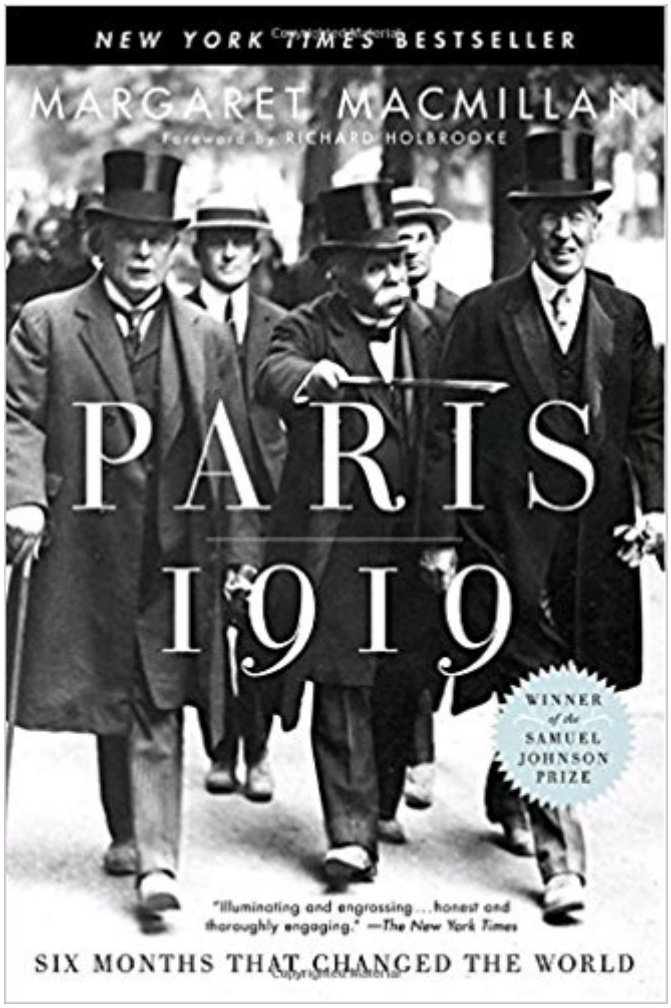
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Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed The World



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Synopsis

National BestsellerNew York Times EditorsÃ¢â ¬â„¢ Choice Winner of the PEN Hessell Tiltman Prize Winner of the Duff Cooper PrizeSilver Medalist for the Arthur Ross Book Award of the Council on Foreign RelationsFinalist for the Robert F. Kennedy Book AwardFor six months in 1919, after the end of Ã¢â ¬Å“the war to end all wars,Ã¢â ¬Â• the Big ThreeÃ¢â ¬â •President Woodrow Wilson, British prime minister David Lloyd George, and French premier Georges ClemenceauÃ¢â ¬â •met in Paris to shape a lasting peace. In this landmark work of narrative history, Margaret MacMillan gives a dramatic and intimate view of those fateful days, which saw new political entitiesÃ¢â ¬â •Iraq, Yugoslavia, and Palestine, among themÃ¢â ¬â •born out of the ruins of bankrupt empires, and the borders of the modern world redrawn.

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Customer Reviews

A joke circulating in Paris early in 1919 held that the peacemaking Council of Four, representing Britain, France, the U.S. and Italy, was busy preparing a "just and lasting war." Six months of parleying concluded on June 28 with Germany’s coerced agreement to a treaty no Allied statesman had fully read, according to MacMillan, a history professor at the University of Toronto, in this vivid account. Although President Wilson had insisted on a League of Nations, even his own Senate would vote the league down and refuse the treaty. As a rush to make expedient settlements replaced initial negotiating inertia, appeals by many nationalities for Wilsonian self-determination would be overwhelmed by rhetoric justifying national avarice. The Italians, who hadn’t won a battle,

and the French, who'd been saved from catastrophe, were the greediest, says MacMillan; the Japanese plucked Pacific islands that had been German and a colony in China known for German beer. The austere and unlikable Wilson got nothing; returning home, he suffered a debilitating stroke. The council's other members horse-traded for spoils, as did Greece, Poland and the new Yugoslavia. There was, Wilson declared, "disgust with the old order of things," but in most decisions the old order in fact prevailed, and corrosive problems, like Bolshevism, were shelved. Hitler would blame Versailles for more ills than it created, but the signatories often could not enforce their writ. MacMillan's lucid prose brings her participants to colorful and quotable life, and the grand sweep of her narrative encompasses all the continents the peacemakers vainly carved up. 16 pages of photos, maps.Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In an ambitious narrative, MacMillan (history, University of Toronto) seeks to recover the original intent, constraints, and goals of the diplomats who sat down to hammer out a peace treaty in the aftermath of the Great War. In particular, she focuses on the "Big Three" Wilson (United States), Lloyd George (Great Britain), and Clemenceau (France) who dominated the critical first six months of the Paris Peace Conference. Viewing events through such a narrow lens can reduce diplomacy to the parochial concerns of individuals. But instead of falling into this trap, MacMillan uses the Big Three as a starting point for analyzing the agendas of the multitude of individuals who came to Versailles to achieve their largely nationalist aspirations. Following her analysis of the forces at work in Europe, MacMillan takes the reader on a tour de force of the postwar battlefields of Asia and the Middle East. Of particular interest is her sympathy for those who tried to make the postwar world more peaceful. Although their lofty ambitions fell prey to the passions of nationalism, this should not detract from their efforts. This book will help rehabilitate the peacemakers of 1919 and is recommended for all libraries. Frederic Krome, Jacob Rader Marcus Ctr. of the American Jewish Archives, CincinnatiCopyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Following the cataclysm of the Great War, victorious European and American leaders were left in the unenviable position of determining what should be done with the wreckage of Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and other nations of eastern Europe. Never before in history had there been a need to simultaneously redraw the borders of so many lands. The decisions made by the Allied leaders at the Paris peace conference of 1919 were contentious, heated, sometimes illogical,

misinformed, wise, capricious, and more. And the outcomes caused by the resulting Treaty of Versailles affect large portions of the world to this day. The story of how those leaders reached those decisions has the potential to make for compelling reading, but the volume of details necessary to fully explain that tale can also drown it. Such is the case with Margaret MacMillanÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Paris 1919.Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•No bones about it: this is a challenging book. ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s more scholarly than popular in style and itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s not the sort of book youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ll want to take on holiday. This isnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t a criticism, just a statement of fact. I admit to having approached it like a plate of broccoli; I didnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t finish it because I was enjoying it so much as I finished it because I felt it was good for me. The initiating causes of what we now call World War I are complex and the consequences of its aftermath more complex still. It might just be that there are no shortcuts if one really wants to have a firm grasp on it all. If you approach the subject with this attitude, you just might make it through all 494 pages of this book.MacMillanÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s text is best when sheÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s discussing the personalities behind the treaty negotiations, including the Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Big ThreeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•: AmericaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Woodrow Wilson, Great BritainÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s David Lloyd George, and FranceÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Georges Clemenceau. Wilson is drawn in relatively unflattering terms as an exasperatingly stubborn and preachy moralizer, a man who relied on his own inflated sense of intuition rather than his experienced diplomatic corps, and someone who was naive about european politics. Lloyd George generally comes off well as a savvy politician, wit, and masterful orator (but who could at times show a shocking unfamiliarity with the geography of nations whose fate he was deciding). Clemenceau is described as a generally wise elder statesman who has the inside track on european affairsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â|and the motivations of his bitter historical rivals, the Germans. One gets the feeling that he was the realistic pragmatist to WilsonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s dreamy, half-informed naif. There are many other personages thrown into the mix as Paris was filled with petitioning leaders and aspiring leaders-to-be, all angling for their piece of a future Europe or one of its colonies.Where I struggled with this book was in its repetitious chapters regrading the details of national borders, their geography, and the names of all of the small towns that comprised them. This is all important information if one wants to understand the facts informing the decisions made by the allied leaders, but it makes tough sledding for a reader with only moderate interest. This is where the book succeeds better as a scholarly record that a popular account. Many of these details are repetitiously sleep-inducing and one of the primary reasons that I thought I might not actually have the drive to finish it. Having said that, if you have the will to keep plowing ahead, youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ll

generally be rewarded by the underlying drama.Deliberations over where national lines should be drawn was really an impossible task that no group of men, no matter how wise and thoughtful, could have concluded satisfactorily. Their charge was to divide Europe and its colonial possessions in a way that served the need for justice, defuse the potential for future conflict, leave Germany economically viable and weak (but not too weak), and realign borders so that like people would be together. But what did ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“like peopleÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• even mean? How could groups of people be ordered in cohesive patterns when the contradictory criteria of ethnicity, shared culture, language, and religion are considered simultaneously? It turns out that thereÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s often no way to meet all of these conditions in a single solution. More often than not, the final decision resulted in two or more sides that were unhappy with the result. The history of European and Asia Minor is simply too complex to arrive at a univariate solution for binding people together under a single flag. Combined with this complexity was the fear that making the wrong decision could lead to political unrest that would drive new nations to revolution and into the waiting arms of the BolsheviksÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •a very real and ominous concern which constantly shadowed the thoughts of the Big Three as they deliberated.MacMillan draws some conclusions at the bookÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s finale when she flatly asserts that the Treaty of Versailles was not responsible for setting the stage of World War II. The reparations levies against Germany were not ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“crushingÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• as they are commonly described today. The treaty had provisions for payments that were conditional on GermanyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s ability to pay and were tied to the countryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s economic performance, and there were many ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“creative financingÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• tricks used to reduce the money owed. Further, the allies seemed to have little stomach for vigorously enforcing the terms of the Treaty as the years wore on. MacMillan believes that the idea that the Treaty was to blame for GermanyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s misfortunes of the 1920s was mostly just convenient propaganda for Hitler and the Nazis.ThereÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s no doubt that MacMillan has completed a thorough reconstruction of what transpired at the 1919 peace conferenceÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •and I applaud her for her efforts to paint a detailed picture of events and discussions that took place almost a full century ago by carefully assembling thousands of disparate scraps. This is an important record of what happened at one of the most fateful diplomatic gatherings in modern history, and in that way, it serves as a valuable reference for historians everywhere. It just may not make for the most compelling casual reading, taxing the attention spans of all but the most dedicated reader.

I do not want to restate at length what has been said more eloquently by other reviewers, but my

impression was, on the plus side:+quite readable+rich in mostly interesting detail+I liked the organization by nation/regionDrawbacks:-lack of maps-one central thesis, namely that Versailles was not an unjust peace for Germany, remains more an assertion than a well reasoned hypothesis (and is actually presented after many independent contemporary voices, British and US American, are summarized, all highly critical of the treaty with Germany pp 467-470, thus undermining the author's claim of Versailles being a just peace). Arguing that the polish corridor should be no problem by comparing it with the situation of Alaska (without any major language or cultural barriers, affecting mostly very thinly populated areas) strikes me as naÃƒÆ'Ã Â ve. No doubt - in retrospect - that the "stab in the back myth" (the propaganda myth effectively used by enemies of the new German republic that Germany was not defeated in 1918 but betrayed by the left) could have been prevented by continuing the fight and parading into Berlin, but who was ready to pay the price for this at the end of the war?). In general, I had the impression that the German question was handled somewhat marginally rather than centrally, at least for my expectations (disclaimer: I am German born).I still do recommend the book though, I do not know of a better one about this treaty that shaped the 20th century so crucially .

This well-researched and well-written book convincingly demonstrates that the peace treaties that resulted from the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, and the attitudes the leaders of the victorious "allies" (Wilson, Clemenceau and David Lloyd George) took at that Conference are THE reason for all the conflicts that have been occurring in the Middle East ever since. That said, although I clearly was not the authors intent, the book also leads the reader to doubt that post-WWII American Presidents from Eisenhower through Obama (with the possible exception of the first Bush), or any of the advisors on whom they relied to formulate policy regarding the Middle East, were remotely acquainted with what went on at the 1919 Conference or how the outcome of that Conference made it inevitable that the conflicts that have characterized the Middle East since WWII (and continue to this day) would ultimately erupt, dominate the region, and would be beyond the ability of the US or any Western European nation to control.

I am reading Paris 1919 a second time, since there is an incredible amount of important historical information.In this book, Macmillan explains significant details about the peace negotiations leading to theTreaty of Versailles, which profoundly affected the rest of the 20th century. It would be a good idea ifcurrent world leaders would read this book.The reason for four stars instead of five is that the writing is good, but quite tedious. It is like taking arigorous college course rather than casual

reading.However, the subject and Macmillan’s mastery of it make Paris 1919 a very worthwhile read.I recommend it to anyone who is interested in modern history.

An attempt to define and explain how the victors in WWI tried to develop the patchwork of a new Europe and the near east. In retrospect, some careless and unwise decisions. Western arrogance on display. Versailles treaty and it’s contribution to tragic later events. Again demonstrates human fallibility, greed and errors of that time. We continue in the same vein, impelled by our human nature. Certainly worth a read.

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