

A H I S T O R Y O F

MODERN EUROPE

VOLUME TWO

FROM THE FRENCH REVOLUTION TO THE PRESENT



John Merriman

A HISTORY OF MODERN EUROPE

VOLUME 2

From the French Revolution to the Present



JOHN MERRIMAN

Yale University



W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
New York · London

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Printed in the United States of America

First Edition

The text of this book is composed in Adobe Fairfield Medium
with the display set in Weiss Titling.

Composition by Compset Inc.

Manufacturing by Courier, Westford. Four-color illustrations printed by NEBC.

Book design by Charlotte Staub.

Cover illustration: *Prague, Nostalgia*, 1938, by Oskar Kokoschka. Private collection. Photograph courtesy Christie's, London.

Frontispiece: *Boulevard des Capucines*, 1873–1874, by Claude Monet. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Purchase: The Kenneth A. and Helen F. Spencer Foundation Acquisition Fund. © 1993 The Nelson Gallery Foundation. All reproduction rights reserved.

The Library of Congress has catalogued the one-volume edition as follows:
Merriman, John M.

A history of modern Europe : from the Renaissance to the present/
John Merriman

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-393-96885-5

1. Europe—History—1492— I. Title.

D228.M485 1996

940.2—dc20

95-50028

CIP

Acknowledgments and copyrights continue on p. 1426, which serves as a continuation of the copyright page.

ISBN 0-393-96928-2(pbk.)

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110

<http://web.wwnorton.com>

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 10 Coptic Street, London WC1A 1PU

A HISTORY OF
MODERN EUROPE



*For Laura Merriman and
Christopher Merriman*

PREFACE

Why a new history of modern Europe? The collapse of communism in 1989–1990 and the break-up of the Soviet Union have redrawn the map of Central and Eastern Europe. A reconfigured Europe calls for a new history. This survey of modern European history explores the roots of the economic and political problems that continue to beset Western and Eastern Europe. For example, it shows how the simmering ethnic tensions that burst into bloody civil war in Bosnia after the disintegration of Yugoslavia echoed the quarrels that eroded the stately Habsburg monarchy a century earlier. To convey an understanding of the complex tensions that still exist in Europe, this survey offers balanced coverage of Russia and Eastern Europe, as well as of the West.

Not only recent events but recent scholarly initiatives suggest that this is the time for a new synthesis. For example, the text draws on the exciting studies in the social history of ideas, approaches that stand at the intersection of intellectual, social, and cultural history. It explains how artistic patronage during the Renaissance and the Golden Age of Dutch culture reveals some of the social foundations of art. Recent studies on the family economy, village and neighborhood life, and the changing structure of work have all enriched this book's account of the transformation of European society from an overwhelmingly peasant society into an increasingly urban and industrial world. The account of the emergence of mass politics in the nineteenth century draws on recent studies of popular culture and the symbolism and power of language.

I have adopted a narrative framework with the goals of both telling a story and analyzing the central themes of the European experience. Each chapter of *A History of Modern Europe* can be read as part of a larger, interconnected story. Moreover, this book stresses the dynamics of economic, social, and political change.

The story of the emergence of modern Europe and its influence in the world is first of all peopled with extraordinary characters, well known and unknown. The text brings the past to life, presenting portraits of men and women who have played major roles in European history: religious reformers

such as Martin Luther and Jean Calvin; Queen Elizabeth I, who solidified the English throne, and Maria Theresa, who preserved the Habsburg monarchy; King Louis XIV of France and Tsar Peter the Great, two monarchs whose reigns exemplified the absolute state; great thinkers like Kepler and Voltaire; Napoleon, both heir to the French Revolution and despot in the tradition of absolute rulers; and the monstrous Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin. But ordinary men and women have also played a significant role in Europe's story, and they are in this book as well, making their own history. These chapters thus evoke the lives of both leaders and ordinary people in periods of rapid economic and political change, revolution, and war.

Of the central themes in our story, the politics of states and of peoples is the first important one. The growth of strong, centralized states helped shape modern Europe. Medieval Europe was a maze of overlapping political and judicial authorities. In 1500, virtually all Europeans defined themselves in terms of family, village, town, neighborhood, and religious solidarities. Dynastic states consolidated and extended their territories while increasing the reach of their effective authority over their own people. Great Powers emerged. Then, with the rise of nationalism in the wake of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era, demands of ethnic groups for national states encouraged the unification of Italy and Germany and stirred unrest among Croats, Hungarians, and Romanians, who were anxious for their own national states. Ordinary people demanded freedom and political sovereignty, with revolution both a reflection of and a motor for political change. The emergence of liberalism in the nineteenth century and then the quest for democratic political structures and mass politics have transformed Europe, beginning in Western Europe. Even the autocracies of Russia and Central and Eastern Europe were not immune to change, and there the quest for democracy still continues.

While discussing dynastic rivalries and then nationalism, the book also considers how wars themselves have often generated political and social change. French financial and military contributions to the American War of Independence further accentuated the financial crisis of the monarchy of France, helping spark the French Revolution. French armies of military conscripts, replacing the professional armies of the age of aristocracy, contributed to the emergence of nationalism. The defeat of the Russian army by the Japanese in 1905 brought political concessions that helped prepare the way for the Russian Revolution of 1917. The German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian empires disappeared in the wake of the bloodbath of World War I; the economic and social impact of that war generated political instability, facilitating the emergence of fascism and communism.

Like politics, religion has also been a significant factor in the lives of Europeans and in the quest for freedom in the modern world. Catholicism was a unifying force in the Middle Ages; European popular culture for centuries was based on religious belief. However, religion has also been a frequently divisive force in modern European history; after the Reforma-

tion in the sixteenth century, states extended their authority over religion, while religious minorities demanded the right to practice their own religion. Religious (as well as racial and cultural) intolerance has scarred the European experience, ranging from the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain at the end of the fifteenth century, to Louis XIV's abrogation of religious toleration for Protestants during the seventeenth century, to the horror of the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. While religion has become less politically divisive in modern Europe, endemic religious conflict in Northern Ireland and the bloody civil war in Bosnia recall the ravaging of Central Europe during the Thirty Years' War.

The causes and effects of economic change are a third thread that weaves through the history of modern Europe. The expansion of commerce in the early modern period, which owed much to the development of means of raising investment capital and obtaining credit, transformed life in both Western and Eastern Europe. The Industrial Revolution, which began in England in the eighteenth century and spread to continental Europe in the nineteenth, was related to a rise in population and agricultural production but also manifested significant continuities with the past, and drew on technology that had been in place for centuries. It ultimately changed the ways Europeans worked and lived.

Europe's interaction with the rest of the world is a fourth major theme that runs through this history. Europe cannot be studied in isolation. Europeans, to be sure, have learned from Muslim, Asian, and African cultures. Through commercial contact, conquest, intellectual, religious, and political influence, and, finally, decolonization, the European powers and cultures have affected the histories of non-Western peoples.

European history remains crucial to understanding the contemporary world. The political, religious, economic, and global concerns that affect Europe and the world today can best be addressed by examining their roots and development. At the same time, the study of European history in itself can enrich our lives, as we contemplate not only the distressing failures and appalling tragedies of the past, but also the exhilarating triumphs that have been part of the European experience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I was about ten or eleven in Portland, Oregon, I decided to write a history of the world, country by country, beginning with Albania. Surrounding myself with books, I reached the F's or G's, five or ten pages for each country, before giving up. Lawrence Robinson of Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon, rekindled my interest in history, at a time when my passionate devotion to basketball and baseball overwhelmed everything else. I also owe a debt of thanks to Albert Feuerwerker and Gerhard Weinberg, in whose courses I learned a great deal when I was a somewhat floundering undergraduate at the University of Michigan. In graduate school, still at Michigan, Charles Tilly, now at the New School for Social Research, first encouraged me to keep my eye on the dynamics of economic, social, and political change, and their effect on ordinary people. This I have tried to do. And I have also always believed that meaningful detail and color reveal the rich texture of the past, and that history can be vivid and compelling. I have tried to write this history with that in mind. Bertolt Brecht's poem "A Worker Reads History" poses questions that I still think are important to answer

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?
The books are filled with the names of kings.
Was it kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?
And Babylon, so many times destroyed,
Who built the city up each time? In which of Lima's houses,
The city glittering with gold, lived those who built it?
In the evening, when the Chinese wall was finished
Where did the masons go? Imperial Rome
Is full of arcs of triumph. Who reared them up? Over whom
Did the Caesars triumph? Byzantium lives in song,
Were all her dwellings palaces? And even in Atlantis of the legend
The night the sea rushed in,
The drowning men still bellowed for their slaves.

Young Alexander conquered India.
He alone?

Caesar beat the Gauls,
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Philip of Spain wept as his fleet
Was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears?
Frederick the Great triumphed in the Seven Years War. Who
Triumphed with him?

Each page a victory,
At whose expense the victory ball?
Every ten years a great man,
Who paid the piper?

So many particulars.
So many questions.

While writing this book, I have necessarily accumulated a good many debts to colleagues and friends. At Yale, Roberto González-Echevarria, Ivo Banac, Mark Micale, Lee Wandel, Henry Hyder, Vincent Moncrief, Linda Colley, Robin Winks, Geoffrey Parker, David Underdown, David Marshall, Richard Brodhead, Piotr Wandycz, Laura King, and, above all, Mark Steinberg and David Bell, shared their knowledge and expertise. I also want to thank Jeffrey Burds of the University of Rochester, Harold Selesky of the University of Alabama, Laura Englestein of Princeton University, Leslie Page Moch of Michigan State University, John Lynn of the University of Illinois, Richard Stites of Georgetown University, David Cannadine of Columbia University, Jim Boyden of Tulane University, Paul Hanson of Butler University, Michael Burns and Robert Schwartz of Mount Holyoke College, Thomas Kaiser of the University of Arkansas, Christopher Johnson of Wayne State University, Louise Tilly of the New School for Social Research, Paul Monod of Middlebury College, Peter McPhee of the University of Melbourne, Judy Coffin of the University of Texas, Austin, John Sweets of the University of Kansas, General (ret.) Harold Nelson, David Large of Montana State University, Kathleen Nilan of Arizona State University, Elinor Accampo of the University of Southern California, Jim McClain of Brown University, Alan Forrest of York University, George Behlmer of the University of Washington, Mary Jo Maynes of the University of Minnesota, Thomas Head of Washington University, Jonathan Dewald of the University of Buffalo, Johan Åhr of Muhlenberg College, as well as Margaret McLane, Jan Albers, Martha Hoffman-Strock, Daryl Lee, Tom Maulucci, Mark Lawrence, and Michael Levin. I would also like to thank Daniel Orlovsky of Southern Methodist University, and Max Oberfus of Washington University, Mary O'Neal of the University of Washington, and a number of anonymous readers.

For much of the time I have been working on this book, I was Master of Branford College at Yale. At Branford, my former assistant and long-time friend Larue Brion made it possible for me to do both. I also want to thank Betsy McCauley and Jerri Cummings in the Department of History at Yale. My colleague Jonathan Spence completed his splendid history of modern China, also with W.W. Norton and Co., in remarkably good time, showing me that a long survey could not only be started, but finished.

I want to thank Christopher and Lois Johnson, Ted and Joby Margadant, Roberto and Isabel González-Echevarria, Bob Schwartz and Marietta Clement, Dick and Cindy Brodhead, Steven Kaplan, Edward Rohrbach, David Bushnell and Karla Klarin, Jeanne Innes and John Innes, Yves and Colette Lequin, Maurice and Marie-Claude Garden, and Victoria Johnson, all good friends who have wondered politely when these two volumes would finally be finished. I hope they will enjoy the result. Many of these chapters were written and revised in Balazuc in the Ardèche in France. To Guy Larochette and Marie-Elise Hilaire, Thierry and Carole Lacharay, Jacques and Catherine Imbertèche, Max and Doris Brioude, Huguette Laroche, Pierre Soares, Lucien and Catherine Mollier, and Hervé and Françoise Parain, among others, and in Collioure, to Jean and Gila Serreau and Philippe Calmus and Corinne Mouchard, *amitiés*.

I have nothing but the greatest admiration for W.W. Norton and Co., very special publishers to whom I am indebted. At Norton, Ruth Mandel resourcefully and imaginatively suggested illustrations and relentlessly tracked down those on which we decided. Bonnie Hall, Adam Dunn, Claire Acher, and Neil Hoos helped with photo research; Roberta Flechner did an excellent job laying out the book; Tim Holahan took care of many details that made production-time work sessions at Norton both useful and enjoyable. David Lynch and Joan Rosenblatt read the galleys and caught a number of errors.

Donald Lamm, chairman of the board and former president of W.W. Norton and Co., embodies the best in publishing. He has helped make Norton a very special place. Don first proposed this project to me. As preliminary discussions moved along, Steve Forman took up editorial responsibility. He has not only been a wonderful editor, but also a friend. Sandy Lifland's deft, skillful, and patient work as developmental editor has contributed greatly to the book. It has also been a great privilege and pleasure to work with her.

Peter Gay read chapters with his usual care and skill; as always, we lunched and laughed, debated and discussed. For more than two decades, I have valued his friendship, and that of Ruth Gay.

Carol Merriman has also read and edited every chapter with a keen eye. She has tolerated with patience and good humor the almost constant presence of this book, along with other projects, in our lives for a decade, as well as my usual quirks and growing obsessiveness. The writing of these

volumes has been part of the young lives of Laura Merriman and Christopher Merriman, certainly more than each might have preferred as they grew older. I dedicate this book to them in appreciation and with much love.

Balazuc (Ardèche), France
December 1995



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