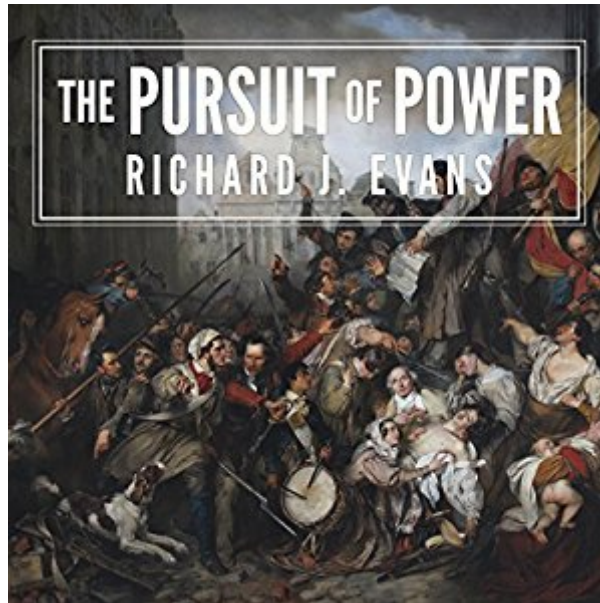




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The Pursuit Of Power: Europe: 1815-1914



Synopsis

Richard J. Evans's gripping narrative ranges across a century of social and national conflicts, from the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 to the unification of both Germany and Italy, from the Russo-Turkish wars to the Balkan upheavals that brought this era of relative peace and growing prosperity to an end. Among the great themes it discusses are the decline of religious belief and the rise of secular science and medicine, the journey of art, music, and literature from Romanticism to Modernism, the replacement of old-regime punishments by the modern prison, and the dramatic struggle of feminists for women's equality and emancipation. Uniting the era's broad-ranging transformations was the pursuit of power in all segments of life, from the banker striving for economic power to the serf seeking to escape the power of his landlord, from the engineer asserting society's power over the environment to the psychiatrist attempting to exert science's power over human nature itself. The first single-volume history of the century, this comprehensive and sweeping account gives the listener a magnificently human picture of Europe in the age when it dominated the rest of the globe.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I purchased this book on the basis of newspaper reviews and the author's considerable reputation as an historian. I expected a readable history of the main currents in politics, society and the economy in Europe over the century covered. The book does not disappoint. But the author overreaches by also trying to cover the major developments in art, music, literature and the frontiers of

science. That treatment is too often superficial and not related to the book's main focus. His treatment often comes off as no more than name dropping. Do we need to know that the French Symbolists and Impressionist paintings may have influenced the music of Debussy and Ravel? To show the spread of science, on pages 497 to 498 Evans rattles off a list of scientists and their achievements, but without drawing connections to their work or the impact on the further advancement of science. For example, the significance of the work of the Curries, Rontgen and Rutherford (mentioned) and Max Planck (not mentioned) ushered in the exploration of the atom, which would dominate the physical sciences in the 20th century. The book is organized into sections and subsections in which Evans explores various themes. Information and facts can come from all directions to prove a generalization. That can sometimes be interesting, but also disconcerting. In discussing the changing concept of modern time Evans brings in racing tea clippers, the sinking of the Titanic, the depiction of time and motion in early 20th century paintings, experiments in the French cinema and Einstein's theory of special relativity (pages 393-394). The facts don't always integrate and the generalizations don't entirely convince. The narration is aided by 20 special maps and a lovely midsection of glossy color reproductions of art related to historical events. There is a 10 page guide to further reading. The book is directed at the general reader, so there are no scholarly notes. Even with its shortcomings and excesses, that only take up only a small part of the book, Evans has written a fascinating, readable narrative history of the European century before it plunged into world war.

This book is not a new synthesis by any means, in fact there aren't even any source notes on the body of the text, but it is a very solid and well written survey of the political, cultural and social history of Europe from the Congress of Vienna to the outbreak of WW1. If all you are interested in is political history this will not be for you, as only about 1/3 of the book is pure political history. Evans gives equal time to the lives of the "normal people" and the events that had deep influence on them. If you are familiar with Evans' previous works on European history than you know that the book will be readable despite its considerable length.

The distinguished Oxford Historian Richard Evans has given us a kaleidoscopic view of European civilization during the century it came to dominate the globe. A reader will learn a lot by going through this very long book (848 pages in the print edition without footnotes or endnotes.) In my opinion too long for the average lay reader. Evans offers us a bottom-up socio-political history where the focus is more on the average citizen and culture than the political elite. In essence Evans

discusses how Europe came to terms with the political earthquakes brought about by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars and the industrial revolution. In 1815 the so called Concert of Europe is brought into being by Metternich as a conservative reaction to the French Revolution. That framework largely keeps the peace until 1848. Nevertheless the ideas of the French Revolution bubble up and gradually work to democratize European society as the franchise is extended to more and more people. He highlights the conflict between the liberal reformers in the bourgeoisie and their more democratic counterparts whose visions extend to feminism and socialism. Along the way nationalism becomes the most powerful force in Europe as Italy and Germany unify and the minorities within the decaying Austrian and Ottoman Empires revolt. It is those revolts that light the match that starts World War I. Nationalism also becomes the motivating force in the establishment of European colonial empires in Asia and Africa. Territory abroad yielded political prestige home. The power of nationalism proves itself in 1914 when the previously anti-war socialist parties all vote for war credits in their respective nations. All told *The Pursuit of Power* is well worth the read, but it will take a patient lay reader to get through it all.

This was a good book about what was to me the missing century between Napoleon and the Great War. It also really helped me understand the roots of modern liberalism and progressive politics. It really helps explain how the world was leading to Great War.

Very good summary of Europe during this important period. Have read other books by this author and he continues his excellent scholarship and analysis. This book gives a fine understanding to this era before World War I.

A perspective of XIX century Europe that is original and complete. At times too verbose and lacking some structure shifting from one topic to another. However fascinating and informative.

It is good. Not for leisurely reading though. Primarily suited for the serious student of Europe's 19th century social history

A great read and a wonderful writer.

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