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Book Review

Robinlynn Stewart

Margaret Macmillan's *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*, is a detailed narrative, encapsulating six of the tensest, most politically charged months of the early twentieth century. Macmillan, the Warden of St. Anthony's College, former Provost of Trinity College, Professor of International History at Oxford, and great granddaughter of British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, delves into the initial six months of fierce negotiations following the 1918 Armistice that ended the First World War.

Historians, including Ruth Henig, David Andleman, and David Muzzey, have consistently attributed the cause of the Second World War to the punitive nature of the Treaty of Versailles. In contrast, Macmillan's theory contends that the flawed treaty, created out of expediency rather than principle, is not to blame for the onset of World War II. She developed her thesis by addressing the complex political situation Woodrow Wilson, Georges Clemenceau, and David Lloyd George faced in 1919, as national needs often trumped those of the international community. She has further argued that although the impetus for waging a Second World War does not lie within the constructs of the treaty, the compromises struck in 1919 laid a foundation for modern conflicts in Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Macmillan's narrative suggests there was more to the Paris Peace Conference than merely settling peace terms; it was a chance to reshape the world. Unfortunately, the conference created more complications than it solved.

Macmillan's narrative notes the various strengths and weaknesses of each delegation, analyzing the decisions made regarding the stability of the post-war world. *Paris 1919* delves into various diplomatic diaries, letters, papers, and other primary sources to accurately uncover how the most prominent nations of the world presented the Weimar Republic with such a flawed and punitive treaty in June 1919.

While *Paris 1919* navigates its readers through the complexities of the Treaty of Versailles and attached League of Nations Covenant, Macmillan goes a step further in her analysis to evaluate the peace settlements presented to Germany's

Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Ottoman allies. Chapters discussing the creation of Yugoslavia, Iraq, Palestine, and Syria examine the struggle between new ideas of self-determination and international cooperation against established imperialist desires to divide the spoils of war. Documenting the backdoor dealings between French and British diplomats that ensured the old political system emerged triumphant; she smoothly incorporated the growing swell of nationalist sentiment in these regions led by men like Feisal I and İnönü Ismet. In doing so, Macmillan has delivered a comprehensive analysis of the failings associated with the mandate system and identified the foundations for domestic and political unrest throughout these regions in the modern era.

Although organized into thematic sections, denoting various struggles the Council of Four encountered during the pivotal first six-months of peace negotiations, Macmillan's work provides readers with a thorough understanding of the personalities and motivations of the peacemakers. However, the narrative's layout can often prove overwhelming in identifying the chronological flow of events. While isolating each issue and its consequences, the text frequently leads a reader to feel as though they have previously examined a specific period earlier in the text. During Macmillan's examination of the February 1919 struggle to establish Palestinian and Jewish states, she addressed aspects of the topic that are discussed several hundred pages before, within her chronological analysis of the Treaty of Versailles. While this mix of chronological and thematic writing can prove awkward at times, this issue is more of an inconvenience than a deterrent in reading Macmillan's narrative.

Paris 1919 analyzes many of the most disastrous decisions regarding the post war world. Macmillan masterfully weaves together the various topics into a credible account of the Paris Peace Conference. Using an abundance of primary and secondary sources, she has infused these complex negotiations with a bit of life after years of standard historical monographs, all while maintaining the customary accusations of failure attributed to the Council of Four. While this work does not remove culpability from any member of the Council, it provides a critical examination into the massive challenges world leaders encountered at the conclusion of the Great War. According to famed British economist John Maynard Keynes, although Wilson, Clemenceau, and Lloyd George were offered an opportunity to recreate the world, what emerged was "a peace that completed the economic destruction done to Europe by the war" (182). Each delegation entered Paris with their personal agendas and hope for the future. Unfortunately, most parties left

feeling they produced a fundamentally imperfect document.

While aspects of Macmillan's argument negating the culpability of the German peace settlement are sound, much of *Paris 1919's* analysis concerning the terms of the German treaty reinforces the arguments of those historians who assigned fault for the Second World War on the Treaty of Versailles. Macmillan credits the League of Nations as a "great experiment," yet she glosses over how the organization's lack of enforcement strategy failed to prevent Hitler's forces from invading those nations it was designed to protect. Furthermore, the harsh reparation issue, demilitarization of Germany, and steep territorial losses are widely considered a basis for Hitler's rise to power in the 1930s. Macmillan argues that Hitler desired to expand the German nation, regardless of the loss of land from the Treaty of Versailles.

Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World, is an important resource in modern world history. Macmillan's narrative has utilized several of the most relevant primary sources to date and develops many frequently neglected events that occurred during the Peace Conference. She conducts a critical review of the various personalities and decisions, presenting a relatable and informative narrative. *Paris 1919* reminds its audience how events transpiring almost a century ago continue to be relevant in modern world events. Macmillan's text masterfully connects the various mistakes of the Paris Peace Conference to the Cold War, rise of Communism in China, and current turmoil in the Middle East. However, her primary argument, disputing claims that the Treaty of Versailles was a significant cause for the Second World War, is best left for the reader to decide.

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Our reviewer: Robinlynn Stewart is a recent graduate from American Public University with a masters in American history. Her area of focus examines the Progressive Era and the American home front during the Great War. She lives in the Washington D.C. area and is currently working on expanding her thesis addressing the 1917 threats against the President act for professional publication.