

Author's Chapter Summaries for Course Use by Konrad H. Jarausch

In contrast to other titles, Out of Ashes covers all of Europe (East and West), and addresses the entire century from 1900 to 2000. It focuses on the reversal from catastrophe to civility and shows the ambivalence of modernity. Each chapter has a clear structure, starting with an anecdote that raises questions, answered in the subsequent exposition that concludes with an interpretation. Additionally the volume contains portraits of significant individuals and more than two dozen key illustrations. Finally, it re-centers Europe around Germany and draws on recent Anglo-American as well as continental scholarship. The following are some of the key themes:

Part I addresses the First World War's challenges to the optimism of progress in the first quarter of the century which produced the competing ideological blueprints of modernity, called Liberalism, Communism and Fascism.

1. The book begins with imperialism as evidence of European hegemony over the entire globe. In line with post-colonial thinking, it treats empire as an unequal interactive process that linked and transformed colonizers and colonized.
2. The next chapter shows how European dominance came unglued with the breakdown of peace through the creation of enemies. In contrast to the "war guilt question," it stresses that all major powers were complicit since they pursued irreconcilable aims.
3. The argument then focuses on the shocking experience of carnage during the First World War. The new dimension of industrial warfare produced assembly-line killing during the stalemate of the trenches in the West and intermittent mobility in the East.
4. The text sees the Russian revolutions of 1917 as result of war-time strains in a somewhat backward country, striving to remain a great power. The Provisional Government missed its chance by staying in the war, inspiring Lenin's Bolshevik coup.
5. The analysis then focuses on the liberal Western alternative of modernization offered by President Woodrow Wilson. His program of national self-determination, political self-government and international cooperation in the League attracted much hope.
6. The presentation also shows that Italian disappointment in not getting sufficient spoils of victory produced yet another ideology called Fascism. This contradictory mixture of radical nationalism and socialism forged a new form of right-wing populism.
7. This first section concludes by emphasizing that these competing ideologies permeated the cultural conflicts over modernism during the 1920s. The modernist experimentation in the arts triggered a fateful neo-conservative backlash against modernity.

Part Two analyzes the catastrophic side of modernity, from the Great Depression onward, that propelled Europe into an even more devastating World War Two and culminated in the unspeakable atrocities of the Holocaust.

1. The exposition begins with the World Economic Crisis that ended the brief interwar recovery. The agrarian depression, stock-market crash, industrial decline and unemployment rise sowed doubt in democracy and made the dictatorships popular.

2. One answer was Soviet modernization through compulsory industrialization and collectivization that turned the country into an industrial giant. Unfortunately, the Stalinist form of transformation also increased repression via purges and the GULAG.
3. The book then argues that the other response was the organic modernity of National Socialism bringing Hitler to power in Germany. The Nazis exploited the collapse of the Weimar Republic by propagating the fantasy of a “people’s community.”
4. Liberal Internationalism proved unable to stave off the aggressiveness of the rival dictators who combined forces in the Nazi Soviet Pact. Hitler seized upon the injustices of the Versailles system to champion a radical revisionism that led to war.
5. The following chapter explains the surprising initial victories of the Wehrmacht as a novel combination of armored and aerial warfare. By attacking each victim separately the Blitzkrieg won an impressive degree of control over most of the continent.
6. In Nazi dominated Europe, Hitler sought to realize dreams of living space in the East through annihilation of political enemies and racial inferiors. This Holocaust ruptured the bounds of civilization by unleashing atrocities on an unprecedented scale.
7. The second section concludes with a discussion of the reasons for the allied victory which nearly destroyed Europe while liberating it. In the ideological contest, the more humane democratic version of modernity proved superior to the Fascist alternative.

Part Three focuses on the equally astonishing recovery of Europe from the ashes of self-immolation and global marginalization in the Cold War due to American aid and the lessons learned from the preceding catastrophe.

1. This story begins with the return of democracy in Western Europe by rebuilding its infrastructure and broadening its social base. Not only in the countries on the winning side but also among the defeated enemies, self-government received a second chance.
2. The next chapter illustrates how the states of the Eastern bloc, while also nominally democratic, in effect they became communist dictatorships. Stalinist industrialization and repressive politics turned them into Soviet copies and clients.
3. The book then explores the crises of the Cold War by looking at the division of Europe into hostile camps, which brought it to the brink of war. Especially the Berlin crises and the Polish, Hungarian and Czech upheavals tested international restraint.
4. At the same time the anti-colonial revolt forced the abandonment of the European empires through the national liberation of their former wards. The loss of colonial control diminished the continent’s power but brought mostly disappointing results.
5. Another focus of the presentation is the process of European economic integration which sought to prevent the causes of war. This promising development transformed the continent from a free trade area into a custom’s union with shared sovereignty.
6. The second time around cultural modernism succeeded in sweeping the scene through attractive consumer culture and popular entertainment. During the post-war era the modernizers in architecture and art finally won the battle against the traditionalists.

7. The third section concludes with an analysis of the victory of classical modernity through the planning of social reform in areas such as urban design and education. In the sixties the future looked manageable through the use of social science research.

Part Four, the most innovative section of the book, deals with perplexing challenges that upset triumphant modernity, such as the postmodern cultural assault and the pressure of globalized competition that the West barely survived but that brought down Communism.

1. This story begins with the anti-modern revolt in culture among the younger generation, the new social movements and postmodern theorists. Just when classical modernity seemed to have won the day, new social and cultural currents discredited it.
2. At the same time the economic transition from smokestack to IT industries undercut the basis of the Keynesian synthesis. The shift of Fordist production to Asia and the arrival of high tech deindustrialized Europe but also provided new opportunities.
3. The book then focuses on the implications of the nuclear stalemate in which the deterrent games of the superpowers risked atomic Armageddon. This prompted Europe to find its own voice in a conciliatory *Ostpolitik* that helped overcome the Cold War.
4. The surprising result of détente was the peaceful revolution in Eastern Europe that overthrew Communism through pressure from below. A complex interplay of economic failure, dissidence and reform resulted in a mostly bloodless transfer of power.
5. The presentation then goes on to assess the mixed success of the post-communist transition to democracy. Those countries that dared a rapid shift towards neo-liberal competition were more successful than those that clung to socialist practices.
6. While the continent gradually grew together again, Europe was confronted with a new set of global challenges for which it was unprepared. It suddenly had to cope with terrorism, migration, environmental concerns and the Euro crisis.
7. The last section ends with a reflection which argues the continent has learned more of the lessons of the twentieth century than the US. Europe has become more peaceful, prosperous, and egalitarian – in short an attractive model for the world to emulate.

The purpose of this book is therefore threefold. On one level, it seeks to inform readers of the basic course of the European drama during the twentieth century, played out between the grand ideologies of liberalism, communism and fascism. On another level, it presents a theoretical reflection on the ambivalences of modernity, the competition of different blueprints of modernization and the cultural struggle over various styles of modernism. And finally, it offers a cautionary tale which demonstrates the dangers of unrestrained faith in progress and argues for a taming of its dynamism so that mankind can realize some of its potential benefits rather than go down in flames of religious hatred, environmental degradation or nuclear catastrophe. The European story in the twentieth century suggests that challenges like the Cold War can be overcome if people use restraint, cooperate with each other and compromise on their aims.