



## Europe on the Path to Self-Destruction: Nationalism and the Struggle for Hegemony, 1815-1945

**Jack L. Schwartzwald**

McFarland & Company (Jul 13, 2022)

Softcover \$95.00 (496pp)

978-1-4766-8340-9

*Exposing the massive consequences of personal relationships and political maneuverings, Europe on the Path to Self-Destruction is a sweeping summary of the critical events that shaped Europe over a 130-year period.*

In his history book *Europe on the Path to Self-Destruction*, Jack L. Schwartzwald reviews the political events that informed Europe's makeup from 1815 to 1945.

Taking the nineteenth century as one of the most consequential in Europe's history, the book covers both its positive developments and its negative ones. There were unprecedented advancements in communication, science, technology, and human rights. But these accomplishments are often overshadowed by darker deeds, as with colonialist brutality, political squabbles, and repressed rebellions. Such events, the book says, paved the way for disasters in the twentieth century, including the two most catastrophic wars in human history. The story of how this all unfolded is a long one, rife with bombastic personalities, world-changing triumphs, and needless, foreseeable tragedies.

Beginning with the Congress of Vienna, at which Europe's great powers divvied up territory in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, and ending with the Yalta Conference, during which the seeds of the Cold War were planted, this book covers a wide swath of European history. It also discusses some American history, usually in terms of how American actions and attitudes affected goings-on in Europe. This is most apparent in the final chapters, which chronicle World War II.

At once comprehensive and lively, the book intersperses serious talk of wars and lost opportunities for peace or victory with amusing anecdotes about the people involved. (Napoleon III, for instance, was known for spoiling his son and his dog.) It uncritically repeats popular historical myths of questionable provenance—for instance, Henry Morton Stanley's greeting to David Livingstone, for which there is no evidence beyond Stanley's own self-aggrandizing accounts, and the idea that the terrorist group the Black Hand orchestrated Franz Ferdinand's assassination rather than merely assisting the actual assassins. Further, the text includes some outdated terminology.

But the book's breadth allows it to show how the fate of each European nation is tied to the others: revolutions in one country spark similar rebellions across the continent, while one nation's unpredictability or aggression prompts others to put aside their differences in protective alliances. One nation rises on the back of another, only to fall again due to its own desire for revenge or its refusal to accept unpleasant realities. It is an object lesson in what happens when one refuses to learn from history.

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EILEEN GONZALEZ (July 18, 2022)

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