

beginning of the twentieth century. Kimmage traces the rise of the concept in the first half of the century and then its gradual decline under criticism from both the left (which saw the paradigm as too white and too imperial) and the right (which saw it as too multinational), through to its evaporation after the end of the Cold War. Presidents once routinely touted the West in their speeches, and universities required introductory courses in Western civilization. No more. Kimmage outlines the costs of this loss: the idea had provided a reason for international engagement, a compass for dealing with authoritarian challenges from states such as China and Russia, and a broader guiding principle for U.S. foreign policy.

Running Against the Devil: A Plot to Save America From Trump—and Democrats From Themselves

BY RICK WILSON. Crown Forum, 2020, 352 pp.

Snappy, breezy, entertaining, passionate, and full of unnecessary obscenity, this book implores Democrats not to throw away the 2020 presidential election, telling them exactly what to do and what not to. Wilson, a former Republican political consultant, has the zeal of a convert. Some of his advice is elementary: for example, only 15 swing states will matter in the general election. Other admonitions are more compelling. With Donald Trump as the incumbent, the election will be a referendum on his presidency. But because Trump practices “pure, unadulterated opportunistic politics,” Democrats will have to beat him at his own game. They should refuse to feed Trump issues that

he can use against them (including socialism, reparations for slavery, and the Green New Deal). Instead, Democrats should engage in “shallow, content-free campaigning,” concentrating on a unifying message of common purpose and traditional values. Trump will stop at nothing to avoid a loss, so Democrats must be prepared to respond to the worst attacks they can imagine. A brisk read, the book delivers sobering insights that must be heeded before the Democrats choose their nominee.

Western Europe

Andrew Moravcsik

Germany: A Nation in Its Time—Before, During, and After Nationalism, 1500–2000

BY HELMUT WALSER SMITH.
Liveright, 2020, 608 pp.

This magisterial study addresses the central question in modern German history: How and why did the country embrace a racial and cultural nationalism that ultimately led to war and genocide? Smith denies that German nationalism is, as some historians argue, a single doctrine, let alone an intrinsically aggressive one. To support this thesis, Smith provides a sweeping history beginning in 1500, when Germany was an amalgam of regions, cities, and principalities. For most of the next four centuries, as Germany’s sense of cultural coherence grew, it remained a relatively peaceful region with a benign sense of

national identity that neither excluded domestic minorities nor threatened external neighbors. Even in the nineteenth century, as a nationalist project to unite Germany took hold, the country remained relatively peaceful, with a few brief, if notable, exceptions, such as the Franco-Prussian War. And for the last 75 years, Germans have developed what Smith describes as a “compassionate, empathetic realism about belonging.” The “nationalist age,” from 1914 to 1945, when the politics of identity turned horribly violent, is thus an exception. Smith describes its excesses—from the slaughter on the eastern front to the Holocaust—in moving detail, but he seems, like many historians before him, somewhat baffled by their ultimate cause.

Two Blankets, Three Sheets

BY RODAAN AL GALIDI. World Editions, 2020, 400 pp.

The author of this best-selling novel, translated from the Dutch, emigrated in 1998 from Iraq to the Netherlands to avoid military service. He then spent nine years in a Dutch government-run housing center as an undocumented asylum seeker. He was denied citizenship but taught himself Dutch and published a book in 2009 that was awarded the EU Prize for Literature. His newest novel is an account, by turns comic and heart-rending, of an applicant’s interaction with the asylum apparatus in the Netherlands. The asylum seeker arrives a trusting person, assuming that acceptance is just around the corner. Officials welcome him with two blankets and three sheets and tell him that he must constantly report

those items’ location—a first hint that he is actually stuck in a Kafkaesque world of seemingly arbitrary legalistic procedures, in which truth is subject to bureaucratic whimsy. Day to day, he is treated much like a Victorian schoolboy, subject to petty humiliations and punishments. Some asylum seekers in Europe wait for decades for legal status, enduring a series of determinations designed to make asylum more difficult to obtain. No other book I have read makes the soul-destroying effects of European asylum procedures more vividly clear than this one.

Europe’s Burden: Promoting Good Governance Across Borders

BY ALINA MUNGIU-PIPPIDI. Cambridge University Press, 2019, 344 pp.

European countries are unparalleled in their use of economic, cultural, legal, and other tools to peacefully project influence abroad. But critics often charge that Europeans do not do enough to raise standards of governance elsewhere—particularly in their own neighborhood. In this wide-ranging book, a political scientist argues that European efforts to use nonmilitary means to promote the rule of law and good governance outside the EU—in particular, to quash corruption—have not been hugely successful. She cites examples from a dozen countries from Egypt to Moldova. Yet one wonders if such criticism, backed by calls for a more “comprehensive” anticorruption policy, hold the EU to an unrealistic standard. After all, few efforts to promote democracy and good government are successful. It seems incontrovertible that EU investment,

trade, and diplomatic support made all the difference in at least three recent cases. Without such aid, Ukraine would almost certainly have collapsed, Kosovo would be dysfunctional, and Tunisia would have made less progress than it has. Perhaps Europeans should be more modest, as many development analysts counsel, and learn to accept “good enough” governance.

Island Stories: An Unconventional History of Britain

BY DAVID REYNOLDS. Basic Books, 2020, 304 pp.

One of the more amusing aspects of Brexit has been the tendency of Conservative Party leaders in the United Kingdom to analogize leaving the EU to heroic past triumphs, comparing Brexit to the waging of World War II, for instance, or to the famous British victories at Agincourt in 1415 and Waterloo in 1815. Many non-Britons (and many Britons, as well) find such comparisons risible. Reynolds, a historian, seeks to explain why some of his compatriots view the United Kingdom in this grandiose way. Although he has written a number of weighty books on twentieth-century history, this volume—lively, slender, and timely—is more reminiscent of his historical documentaries for BBC television. His pithy summaries of British experiences of and beliefs about empire and decline demonstrate why the fanciful Brexit analogies are misguided. The reader is left to wonder, however, why these narratives remain persuasive to Britons in a way that has no parallel in the rest of Europe.

A Twentieth-Century Crusade: The Vatican's Battle to Remake Christian Europe

BY GIULIANA CHAMEDES. Harvard University Press, 2019, 440 pp.

This pathbreaking book offers the first serious historical account of the modern diplomacy of the Catholic Church—an organization that for the first three-quarters of the twentieth century was more powerful than any other nonstate actor. The church, which viewed democracy with suspicion, began its international activities in 1917 with systematic opposition to Wilsonian liberalism and Soviet communism. In the interwar period, it signed “concordats” with any government—including fascist ones in Germany, Italy, and Spain, and also the newly independent Baltic states—that promised to deepen Catholic influence in family law (opposing divorce and, later, abortion), education (creating space for religious teaching), and civil society (where religious symbols would remain part of civic life) and to provide state support for the church. Famously, the church remained silent on the persecution and extermination of the Jews during World War II. After the war, the church became a consistent bulwark against communism. This became particularly important after the war, when the church reconciled with democrats and promoted Christian democratic parties in Europe in order to bolster resistance to the influence of the Soviet Union. The church took a more conciliatory stance on decolonization, rightly sensing that the developing world might be fertile ground for future expansion.

Is Europe Christian?

BY OLIVIER ROY. TRANSLATED BY
CYNTHIA SCHOCH. Oxford
University Press, 2020, 112 pp.

This book, widely discussed when it first appeared in French, critiques the notion that Europe is fundamentally Christian, an idea in vogue in far-right populist rhetoric. The author is a specialist in Islamic culture but also—tellingly, given the book’s short length, thin documentation, and occasional factual lapses—a celebrated French public intellectual. He grabbed headlines in the past for arguing, convincingly, that Islamist terrorism has little to do with Islam. Here, he effortlessly skewers the pieties surrounding the idea of a Christian Europe, insisting that the continent today is extremely secular and multicultural and that most right-wing nationalists ignore or reject Christian teachings on sex, abortion, and the role of women. Why have calls for a Christian Europe gained such traction? His provocative answer is that since the 1960s, a “totalitarian” left has foisted on European countries a political correctness comprised of libertarianism, hedonism, and the marginalization of the church. Right-wing populists appeal to Christianity to rebel against this discourse. But since they are not actually religious, they wind up simply reinforcing the “dechristianization” of Europe by draining meaning from the symbols of Christianity. Unfortunately, the book ends with just a single paragraph on how to rebalance secular and religious values.

Western Hemisphere

Richard Feinberg

U.S. Hegemony and the Americas: Power and Economic Statecraft in International Relations

BY ARTURO SANTA-CRUZ.
Routledge, 2019, 238 pp.

Santa-Cruz argues that since the 1970s, the United States has successfully preserved its core interests in Latin America through “thick” economic statecraft, a sophisticated approach that embeds liberal values, mutual gains, and strategic restraint in commercial diplomacy. With some regrettable exceptions—including supporting the brutal overthrow of a progressive government in Chile in 1973 and fruitlessly twisting arms to corral support for the 2003 invasion of Iraq—the United States has eschewed heavy-handed unilateralism in the Americas. In separate chapters on Canada, Mexico, and Central and South America, Santa-Cruz pushes back against the notion that U.S. influence has steadily declined in the Western Hemisphere but declines to pin down the indicators or key measurements of Washington’s sway. Santa-Cruz denounces U.S. President Donald Trump’s raw exercise of coercive power as counterproductive and badly, perhaps irreparably, damaging to the United States’ reputation and legitimacy. Integrating international relations theory and detailed histories, this book is an ambitious, landmark contribution against which future studies of inter-American relations will be judged.