University of Hawai'i – West O'ahu DSpace Submission

CITATION	Rosenfeld, A. (2010). Review of *Europe since the Seventies*, by Jeremy Black, H-German . *H Net Reviews.*
AS PUBLISHED	http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=30381
PUBLISHER	H-German
VERSION	Modified from original published version to conform to ADA standards.
CITABLE LINK	
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Book Review: *Europe Since the Seventies*

Jeremy Black. *Europe Since the Seventies*. London: Reaktion Books, 2009. 256 S. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-86189-424-3.Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. viii, 330. $85.

By Alan Rosenfeld

Turning Away from the Cold War

The primary innovation of Jeremy Black's Europe since the Seventies is his decision to select 1970–rather than 1945–as a launching point for his overview of contemporary European history. In order to accomplish this, he consciously deemphasizes the events of 1968 and 1989 with their mass demonstrations and expressions of popular dissent. Instead, he stresses the role of long-term socioeconomic developments. Black presents the 1970s not only as a "terrible decade" for Europe, but also as a "profound rupture" with the previous twenty-five years of postwar reconstruction and economic growth (p. 160). Black thus seeks to engage a younger generation of readers, for whom "the Cold War is a dimming memory" (p. 7). In addition to a global economic crisis, spurred by rising oil prices and a diminishment of America's influence in western Europe, Black sees the collapse of "right-wing authoritarian regimes" in Greece, Portugal, and Spain as a central facet of this tumultuous decade (p. 8). This perspective forms the second unique dimension of Black's approach, that is, replacing the standard binary East-West framework used to discuss postwar Europe with a tri-zonal model that places southern Europe on equal footing with the eastern and western zones.

Black challenges the privileged position of the Cold War in twentieth-century European history by highlighting continuities in Russian and Eastern European politics and society before and after the collapse of communism. The author is certainly not loath to recognize fundamental changes in the post-communist landscape, including the expansion of the publishing industry, the privatization of government assets, the reemergence of nationalism, and the strengthening of criminal syndicates in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, Black calls attention to the persistence of a "shadow-establishment" of secret services in the post-Soviet era, which he views as a "carryon of the structure of the Communist state" (p. 158). His most illustrative example is that of the former KGB agent Vladimir Putin, who as Russian president, Black argues, "suppressed opposition, ended freedom in the media and centralized

government authority" (p. 231). Black also accuses Putin of "destroy[ing] movements for human rights" and appointing so many of his Soviet-era cronies that the "KGB came to control the country" (p. 232). Such a critical assessment of post-communist politics is certainly compatible with the author's view of the collapse of the Soviet bloc as the result of pragmatic economic considerations rather than an "intellectual crisis of Marxism" (pp. 193-194).

Minimizing the ideological conflict of the Cold-War period leaves Black with substantial space to explore migration as a defining element of postwar European history, a topic he covers extensively in chapter 3. Black points to economic factors to explain general emigration flows from Africa, Asia, and Mediterranean Europe to northern and Western Europe, deploying a model of multiple cores and peripheries with "complex overlapping relations between them" (p. 72). On the positive side, the author credits transnational migration with functioning as a "safety valve" for southern European countries. This situation reduced unemployment pressures while simultaneously meeting demands for labor in wealthier nations that grappled with low birth rates, aging populations, and the rising costs of health care and social services. On the other hand, Black traces the emergence of a European identity "defined by both birthplace and destination." Coupled with an "emphasis on an ethnic definition of nationhood," this attitude has created a series of two-tiered national identities, with foreign immigrants typically relegated to a "secondary legal and social position" (pp. 19, 71). Importantly, the author effectively links contemporary migration patterns–drawing particular attention to the presence of Muslim minorities–to the strengthening of right-wing nationalist parties across the European continent. At the same time, however, he places much of the blame for xenophobic politics on the victims themselves, citing the "unwillingness of many immigrants to integrate" (p. 236).

Starting the narrative in the 1970s also enables Black to accentuate the similarities between the economic challenges of that period and those of the present day, including spiraling energy costs and market competition from East Asian imports. Although he attributes the recession of the 1970s primarily to the oil price crisis, he names additional contributing factors, ranging from shortages of raw materials to a post-1960s "decline of the emotional drive for a new political order in economics" (p. 139). Black deserves credit for pinpointing specific aspects of the global economy that posed challenges for postwar Europe, namely the growing role of the service

industries, international competitiveness, outsourcing, and the transnational mobility of money, credit, and debt (p. 134). He thus moves beyond a focus on government regulation and planning, by considering the ways in which the "decline of the metal-bashing manufacturing industries" and trade unionism have challenged "working-class ideas of appropriate masculine behavior" (pp. 135-136).

Black takes a decidedly critical view of the European Union, advancing the argument that greater continental integration on the economic and political levels has alienated large numbers of European citizens by pitting EU regulations against national interests. Black provides as an example the ongoing tension between member states' desires to combat unemployment at the national level while simultaneously responding to EU demands for containing inflation (pp. 212-213). Furthermore, he claims, European tariffs on Asian imports have privileged producer over consumer interests. This state of affairs has put the role of the European Commission under scrutiny and has generated disagreements amongst national cultures about the appropriate extent of government regulation (p. 152). Indeed, Black underlines the EU's inability to "give itself a cultural identity let alone a unifying message or myth," noting the importance of regional identities and the "growing concern about the ability of Western European states to assimilate their Muslim minorities" (pp. 117-118). He does applaud the European Union's effectiveness in providing smaller member states with a voice in international politics, and lauds the EU as a useful tool in addressing environmental issues (pp. 243- 244). Ultimately, though, Black dismisses the European Union as "really a 1950s institution with 1950s solutions" (p. 242).

The greatest strength of Europe since the Seventies is Black's ability to weave a historical narrative that continually speaks to present-day concerns, including economic recession, environmental change, European integration, and challenges to national identity posed by immigration. While certain readers might be frustrated by Black's efforts to downplay the significance of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the volume certainly warrants consideration as required reading in a graduate course on contemporary Europe. It would be a thought-provoking complement to monographs that name 1945 as the beginning of contemporary European history. Unfortunately, although the prose is generally clear and jargon-free, the author assumes too much background knowledge on the part of his readers–when, for example, he first mentions corporatism, the Social Market Economy, and the Prague Spring–for his text to be an appropriate choice for an undergraduate

course (pp. 18, 31). Some readers will also undoubtedly be disappointed by the absence of citations and the extremely brief bibliography. Finally, while Black should be commended for the geographic breadth of his work and his consistent attention to regional variance, the United Kingdom does not receive the same coverage as France, Germany, or Russia. Black claims that his text is a "British contribution to the debate on and process of integration," but it functions more as a British analysis of the last forty years of continental European history (p. 244).