

void and usher in related scholarship, but it makes its own mark as a study that helps to articulate a familiar and yet elusive peculiarity of American culture and society.

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Cataclysms: A History of the Twentieth Century from Europe's Edge. DAN DINER (translated by William Templer and Joel Golb). Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007. Pp. 322, index. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 978-0-299-22350-2.

By invoking the “Eastern Question,” Dan Diner’s *Cataclysms: A History of the Twentieth Century from Europe’s Edge* provides a counter-perceptual geopolitical history of the cascade of events occurring between 1917 and 1989 that led to the “cataclysmic” eruptions of the twentieth century. From the first and second world wars to the decolonization and repolarization during the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the text’s theater of conflict is viewed, Diner writes, from the perspective of “a virtual narrator situated on the legendary steps of Odessa, looking outward south and west...as with a palimpsest, this geography reveals a repetitiveness of events originating in a continuous struggle for control of the Straits – of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles” (p. 6). Situated from the vantage of this major Black Sea port, his gaze chronicles the events that occurred in eastern and southern European theaters of war, and spans from the Baltic southeastward across the steppes of Europe to the Aegean and back up the legendary straits of Thermopylae.

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria at Sarajevo in June 1914 inaugurated the industrial slaughter of the twentieth century, and to illustrate the epochal shift in the technology of warfare and the staggering impact of the machine gun on the battlefields of “The Great War,” Diner observes:

At the Battle of the Somme in 1916 British troops marched towards the German lines in formation to the sound of bagpipes without seeking cover, kicking a rugby ball ahead of them as they marched. They seemed stoically unfazed by the prospect of death in a hail of machine-gun fire. For their part, the German gunners merely had to reload their machine guns. They could not believe their eyes: the British were marching to their doom like lemmings, their officers at the fore....The cult of the horse and the naked blade was apparently the last attempt on the part of the traditional warrior caste to escape the increasing depersonalization of warfare (pp. 27, 29).

Diner’s perspective incorporates Hitler’s “Operation Barbarossa” – the doomed Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and the role of the Greek Civil

War as a Cold War proxy under the Truman Doctrine. He states that the “Eastern Question with its essential Greek component...is closely bound up with the emergence of Russian power – just as European history in the modern era plays out *sous l’œil des Russes* (under the eyes of the Russians)” (pp. 8-9).

Diner writes that “witnessed from Odessa,” this “history plays itself out in eastern Central Europe,” and consequently he organizes the topographical dimension of the text’s historical narrative accordingly. His purpose in framing the narrative away from the European center to its periphery is to provide a “spatial shift” to “create an effect of temporal estrangement” rendering the twentieth century with a historical remoteness. Unlike the slew of trendy geographers – political, critical, and otherwise – whose Anglophile framings have rendered the United States as an imperial power attempting to force a *Pax Americana* on the world, Diner argues that on the contrary it was the European catastrophes of the first and second world wars that acted as crucibles that forged the necessity of US supremacy in military and economic terms. Diner invokes Hegel’s argument that in comparison to the traditional polities of Europe, America represents a “civil [*bürgerlich*] society without a state” in that “America, founded on a plurality of denominations...was remote from a societal order relying on the primacy of the state as enshrined in Continental tradition” (p. 14). Diner argues that the “New World commonwealth” of America admitted its citizens as individuals, neutralizing ethnic and national affiliations. In contrast, European revolutions from the seventeenth to the twentieth century were driven by a philosophical-historical telos that employed violence to speed up historical time to topple *ancien régimes* and install *républiques universelles*. The divine kings and czars became manifested in the polities of European nation-states, which when inflamed by ethno-nationalism and imperial ambition, provoked the “cataclysms” of the first and second world wars.

Incorporating Ernst Jünger’s view that the second world war constituted a *Weltbürgerkrieg* (“universal civil war”), Diner argues that the goal of its Allied and Axis protagonists was the *political* destruction of the other. This was exemplified at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 when Franklin D. Roosevelt, backed by Winston Churchill, demanded nothing less than an unconditional surrender from the Axis powers – in effect decapitating the ideological basis of Nazism and fascism. The Cold War soon became a protracted struggle of values between the ideologies of capitalism and communism, the former (according to Diner) perceived as a crusade for freedom and the latter embracing an ideal of literal social equality. By framing “East” versus “West,” this struggle acts as one “interpretive axis” that “cuts through nations, states and societies” for Diner’s text, while the other axis focuses on “conflicts and oppositions based on primordial emblems of belonging...ethnicity, nationality, religion and culture” (p. 4).

Against this macro-ideological analysis of the panoramic conflicts of the twentieth century, Diner recounts the political polarization that col-

ored the political cartography of Europe after “The Great War” and the Paris Peace Conference:

In 1919, Central Europe looked as if it were hurtling toward radical transformation. In Berlin the Spartacus League staged an uprising. In Vienna all signs pointed to storm. In Bavaria, the Munich Soviet Republic was proclaimed. Bolsheviks were in power in Hungary. They were able to open path for the Russian Revolution straight to the center of Europe (p. 59).

This spawned conflict not only within Hungary and Romania but also between Poland, Germany, and Russia (now donning the mantle of the Soviet Union), which inevitably led to the broken August 1939 pact between Josef Stalin’s communist state and Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist Third Reich. Diner examines in *minutia* the political machinations and maneuvers that led to the installment of Hitler as German chancellor on 30 January 1933. By teasing out the parliamentary paralysis and intrigue operating in the Reichstag, Diner illustrates that “The enigma of German history is not that Weimar was buried but rather *the identity* of those who dug the grave” (p. 152).

Diner’s perspective recounts not only the ensuing Jewish holocaust in Nazi-controlled regions of Europe but also the earlier Armenian genocide of 1915. Within this region of southern Europe where the “occidental” cultural boundary of Greece meets the “oriental” cultural boundary of Turkey, Diner chronicles what he calls the “*translatio imperii* of our time” (p. 200) when the “Eastern Question” resurfaced as the midwife to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. Diner notes that both the British and Americans viewed Greece as a “soft spot” and “possible gateway for Soviet expansion into the eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, the Near East and possibly also southern Europe – Italy and France” (p. 214). With the British relinquishing their role as imperial masters in the region, the Truman Doctrine was inaugurated on 12 March 1947 in a dramatic speech by the American president to a joint session of the US Congress. Diner writes that the doctrine was “the Cold War’s birth certificate” (p. 200) and signaled that US\$400 million would be spent on Greece and Turkey “precisely at those points where the continental power of Russia and the maritime power of Britain had collided for generations” (p. 201). This relaying of the “imperial baton,” which a slew of aforementioned trendy geographers have long held evidence as the copper fastening of American imperial ambition, was much more complex and problematic than the simple fall of one empire and the rise of another.

The salience of the “Eastern Question” perspective in *Cataclysms* became very apparent to this reviewer while reading Diner’s text on the Greek island of Corfu in August of 2008, as hundreds of miles eastward Russian tanks rolled into south Ossetia in the Republic of Georgia and Russian destroyers sharked their way across the Black Sea towards the coastal region of Abkhazia. An excerpt from Diner’s text discussing the British imperial geographer Halford Mackinder brought the book’s geopo-

litical argument sharply into focus:

A century ago, Halford Mackinder identified southern Russia and the Black sea region as the ‘pivot of history.’ The judgment of this renowned geographer—later advisor to both the British delegation at the Paris Peace Conference and the Allied forces of intervention on the Black Sea’s northern shore during the Russian Civil war—was inspired by the constellation of forces prevailing throughout the nineteenth century. During that period, England and Russia were opposing protagonists in a world embracing conflict, its epicenter situated in the Ottoman Empire, with further manifestations in the western Asian and central Asian perimeter of British India. Afghanistan was the perimeter’s pivot—the scene of the ‘Great Game’ (p. 7).

With striking contemporary overtones marked by the Bush administration’s support of the neo-con technocrat President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili and underestimation of Russian resolve to maintain dominance over its former “republic” to the current Obama administration’s intent to make Afghanistan the premier theater of American military intervention in its pursuit of Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, *Cataclysms* should be mandatory night-table reading material for a Presidential geographer, if one is ever appointed.

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The State of Disunion: Regional Sources of Modern American Partisanship. NICOLE MELLOW. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. Pp. viii+228, maps, index. \$55.00 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-8018-8812-0.

Popular and academic analysis of recent American election seasons has highlighted the notion of “red states” and “blue states,” and the distinctiveness of certain regions, “Appalachia” and the “South” perhaps most particularly. With appeal to both political scientists and geographers, Mellow adds some analytical insight to such spatial understanding by tracing the post-war entrenchment of regions in American politics. This book represents a well-researched case for the geographical understanding of politics.

The task of *The State of Disunion* is to explore what Mellow sees as a primary cause of the increase in partisanship of American politics, namely its increasing regionalization. The discussion begins with a solid interpretation of regional concept (although with surprisingly few references to geographical scholarship). Mellow advances a view of regions that encompasses both material and imagined elements. An overview of the New Deal consensus and its fracture follows, the divisions presented in terms of