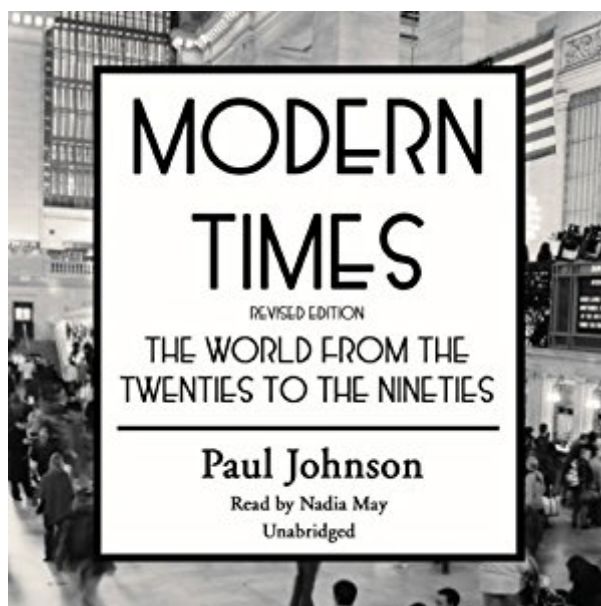


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Modern Times: The World From The Twenties To The Nineties



Synopsis

The classic world history of the events, ideas, and personalities of the twentieth century. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Paul Johnson is opinionated and a good writer and this history is very readable. "National Review" named it one of the top 100 books of the century and, although I'm not a political conservative, I found myself in agreement with much of what Johnson says. "Modern Times" begins with the end of World War I and focuses on the personality of actors on history rather than impersonal trends or philosophies of history. Johnson sums up his own philosophy with a quote from Alexander Pope: "The proper study of mankind is man." His opinion of the 20th century cast of characters is scathing more often than not. He trashes Woodrow Wilson -- a sound judgment in my opinion -- defends Harding, claims Coolidge was a good President, is lukewarm toward Hoover, considers Roosevelt frivolous and empty-headed, favors Truman, and adores Eisenhower. Churchill is his great hero. The totalitarians -- Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler -- are depicted as venal gangsters. Johnson is unflinchingly anti-Communist throughout, an opinion that proved sound when the rot of the Soviet Union and its satellites became obvious in the late 1980s. (The first edition of this book was published in 1983.) Nehru, Gandhi and many other third world personalities get tossed into the category of lawyer/politicians with little to recommend them as leaders of countries. Fault can be found with Johnson; minor errors of fact and questionable statements dot the book -- and he rushes breathlessly on without defending many of his opinions. However, if he argued them all out the book would be 10,000 pages long and dull as an airline steak knife. It is perhaps his tendency to be

provocative that makes this history interesting -- as so many others are not.

I am an historian, with nearly a Ph.D in the subject. I teach history at the community college level. I have 100's of history books, many of the 20th century. Johnson's book is highly moralistic and interpretive, more so than most history books, and frankly, more so than professional historians (which Johnson is not) would prefer. But it is a brilliant interpretation of the 20th century, one with guts. But it's not the popular interpretation because historians are affected by ideology just like everyone else. There are some tremendous anecdotes in the book, some information that mainstream histories do not, and never will, provide. That, in itself, makes the book unique and worthwhile. Every chapter is rich, full of interesting data, and intelligent interpretation. I don't agree with all of Johnson's interpretations; but he is always provocative and he makes the reader think. That, along with his emphasis on the decline of moral responsibility, is why a number of people don't like the book. Americans need to read the chapter "America's Suicide Attempt"--the history of the '60s we still don't get. "The Collectivist Seventies" explains a lot to those of us who lived through the malaise of that decade. "Caliban's Kingdoms" and the "Bandung Generation" are masterful exegeses of non-Western history. Again, I don't agree with everything here; but I do appreciate the fact that Johnson provides information and ideas that are never found in mainstream histories produced by professional historians who are writing to gain praise from their peers. They can't write this because, as Johnson argues, the 20th century (including academia) accepted that "God is dead." And to a conservative Catholic (which I'm not, but Johnson is), that propels the entire century.

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