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Editorial Review

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This multivolume set, compiled by two history professors, reaches all the way back to the Renaissance to try to elucidate the meaning of historical movements and events that form the basis of our world today. The overall approach is chronological, with most volumes devoted to a particular century. The exception is the first volume, which covers the reconquest of Spain from the Muslims, starting in the eighth century, and ends the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the New World. Each volume then in turn analyzes 12 seminal events or developments whose repercussions can still be felt today in some way, for example, “The Development of Movable Type, c. 1450”; “The Founding of Jamestown, 1607”; “The War of the Spanish Succession, 1701–14”; “The Unification of Germany, 1871”; and “China’s Rise to Global Importance, 1978–present.” Each of the 60 chapters begins with an introduction providing a quick summary of the event or development, an interpretive essay placing it in both a historical and contemporary context, followed by further sections devoted to key individuals, places, battles, or documents. The documents included provide an intriguing collection of primary resources. Some may already be well known—the Marshall Plan, Darwin’s *The Descent of Man*—while others are more out of the ordinary—a “Letter to an Old Crusader” from the twelfth century and a “Description of Inca Fashions” from a conquistador, for example. Each volume also has a “Glossary of Terms and People” and a time line as a part of its appendixes. Overall, this set takes an interesting approach to investigating such a broad and wide-ranging topic. This is clearly a credible and practical reference tool, but one cannot help but wonder how a user would come across these volumes without the prior knowledge of what they contain. --Michael Tosko

Review

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