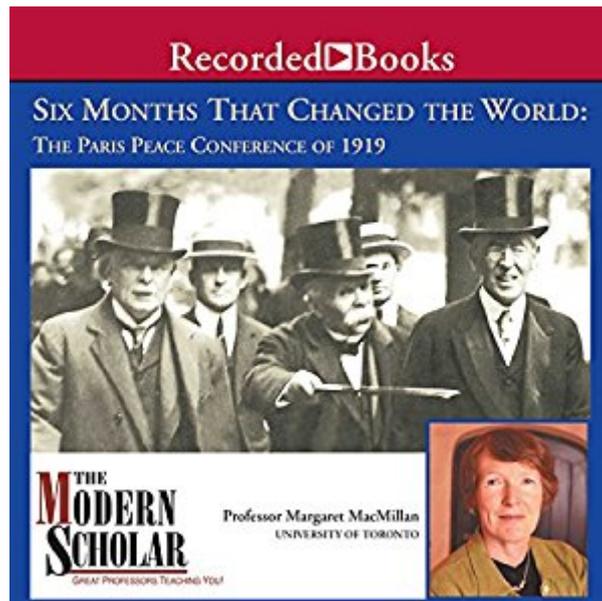


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The Modern Scholar: Six Months That Changed The World: The Paris Peace Conference Of 1919



Synopsis

The world will never see another peace conference like the one which took place in Paris in 1919. For six months, the world's major leaders - including Woodrow Wilson, president of the United States, David Lloyd George, prime minister of Great Britain, and Georges Clemenceau, prime minister of France - met to discuss the peace settlements which were to end World War One.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For the last couple of weeks, since finishing "Paris 1919", I have grappled with writing a review that would do justice to a book that is not only excellent reading, but also has the potential to reshape the way a reader views current events. Rather than wait longer for the writing muse who refuses to appear, I will take the more direct approach and simply write, "Buy this book and read it. It will afford you a greater understanding of international events unfolding in the world today." Margaret Macmillan is an exceptional history writer: engaging, direct and interesting (sometimes even funny), but also a wide-ranging thinker who sees and explains the vast sweep of history as well as the apparently minor ripples. She juggles the enormous cast of characters in the drama that unfolded in Paris, 1919 and explicates the myriad brought to the major players at the peace conference. Her knowledge of world history and her ability to explain it concisely are fully illustrated in her explanations of the various ethnic claims for land and self-rule individual; her ability to compare and contrast these claims is extraordinary. She quickly reduces the Big Five to the Big Four, as the Four themselves did when they eliminated the Japanese representative from most of the debate and negotiation - he could barely follow the mostly English conversation anyway.

This book is highly interesting due to the rich detail in which the author relates the history of the peace-making after World War I. Much to the reader's joy she devotes a lot of attention to the settlements in the non-European parts of the world, in what is a lively treatment of the issues in 1919 and the subsequent events. What in my opinion is the major shortcoming of the book, is that the purpose it has been written for becomes so apparent all along. The book should be termed "Paris 1919. An apology". Highly critical on all other settlements (the farther away from Europe, the more critical the author allows herself to be: see Turkey, Palestine, China), she asserts that "Versailles is not to blame". Indeed, the author too easily jumps to conclusions. The most widely cited conclusion of her book is that the reparations forced upon Germany are not to blame for the rise of Hitler and WW II. Indeed events of 1919 never can be fully the reason for subsequent events say in 1933 or 1939. But it would be interesting to learn how much these events in 1919 were responsible for later developments. This would require a detailed study of the period 1919 to 1939 and one can only wonder how an author writing about a few months of peace negotiations in 1919 could ever come to a sensible conclusion about this issue! It is appalling to see that the author is even being applauded for this "research". In fact, the only supportive argument the author offers, is that Germany until 1932 only had paid a comparatively small amount of its reparations - as if any debtor would relish about the (small) amount paid so far instead of the (much larger) sum outstanding! The facts are never presented by the author, only her conclusions.

This book is another fine narrative history in same vein as Robert Massey's *Dreadnought*, and Alistair Horne's *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916*. If you have an interest in the Great War and want history to come alive on the page, this book is one for you. In the introduction Professor MacMillan says; "For six months in 1919, Paris was the capital of the world. The Peace Conference was the world's most important business, the peacemakers its most important people." The six-month session in Paris that took place between January and June 1919 and involved representatives of 29 countries drew many of the boundaries of Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans that exist to this day, recreated Poland, set the terms by which the major powers would attempt to live with one another and forged the model for the future United Nations, among many other things. MacMillan tells the story by getting under the skins of the three primary actors, Woodrow Wilson, David Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau. She presents them with all their flaws and qualities and does not judge whether they were good men or evil fools as they struggled with a task of monumental difficulty as best they could. In the end, the author is writing what we may call a revisionist history of

the subject. It has long been felt that the Peace Conference was a miserable failure, that narrow national and partisan interests ruled the peacemakers, that the terms offered to Germany were too harsh and contained within them the seeds of the next war. Wilson, George and Clemenceau have been excoriated over the years but Professor MacMillan holds that they have unfairly been made the scapegoats for the mistakes of those who came later.

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