

perspective; and, they may also flesh out their understanding of the period's cultural shifts. Furthermore, the text allows educators to engage students in a more complex dialogue of the city and the region (and in the case of censorship—the state). If not used as an assigned text, it is definitely one to read for lecture enhancement. Finally, this work is extremely accessible—not just for scholars of all fields and students (both undergraduate and graduate) but also the general public. Aronson has provided a fine work which will undoubtedly be appreciated by many.

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Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns. *The War: An Intimate History, 1941–1945*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007. Pp. 480, illustrations. Cloth, \$50.00.)

The War is the companion piece to the PBS series by the same name. As such, it is intended for the same general audience and follows the same themes and formats as the documentary. Readers who enjoyed the documentary will enjoy the book. Those familiar with Ken Burns' work will find this book familiar. Geoffrey Ward and Ken Burns are long-time collaborators; their other collaborations include the Civil War documentary that made Burns a household name.

The twist for *The War*, both the documentary and the book, is that, unlike the Civil War and some of his other subjects, World War II is within the living memory of Americans, albeit fewer with the passing of time, and that Ward and Burns have offered their version of the War at a peak of public interest. Like the documentary, the book tells the story of United States involvement in World War II through the stories of men and women who lived through the war. The result is an attractive book in an oversized format containing many compelling photographs and extended quotations from diaries, letters, and reminiscences.

Ward and Burns begin the book discussing their reluctance to revisit the subject of war after their seminal Civil War documentary. Eventually, they were convinced to do so by the many requests from veterans and their families to cover the Second World War. Ward and Burns give due credit to other efforts; *The War* is part of an explosion in commemoration and

public exploration of the meaning of World War II found in such works as Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*, Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, the television series *Band of Brothers*, and many other projects. In that vein, Ward and Burns contribute to the collection and telling of the stories of those who remembered the war. They write that through following the stories of these people, they concluded that the "overarching theme" that could not be ignored "is a truth, we think, as old as history itself, but one we always forget, especially in a society like ours, addicted as we are now to the breathless embrace of spurious celebrity, to the great tyranny of those synthetic 'heroes' have over the rest of us. It is a truth that this kind of nostalgia, and the mindless inattention that issues from it, prevents us from knowing" (xvii). Although they reject nostalgia as inhibiting our understanding of history, their conclusion that "There are no ordinary lives" (xvii) parallels the theme of average citizens, citizen soldiers, doing great things while enduring the hardships of war that is commonly found in World War II commemoration.

The shortcoming of Burns' approach, which stands out more in the book than in the documentary, is the difficulty of blending the grand narrative with the intimate memories of his witnesses. Although Ward and Burns do make mention of the sweeping military, diplomatic, economic, and political forces at work, they do so mainly to provide context for the recollections of their witnesses. Perhaps as a reflection of the average person's feeling of being caught up in a larger drama, at times those connections are not always clear. One result of their approach is that the book switches back and forth between nostalgia for the Good War and an insistence on the horror and senselessness of war. As with similar projects, reminiscences often illuminate the banality of war along with the heroism of average people. The stories in *The War* are accepted at face value. Some of the juxtapositions between the photographs and the stories are interesting and compelling. Another obvious shortcoming is that Ward and Burns focus on the American experience almost exclusively. It is possible to finish the book without realizing the truly global nature of World War II. For example, references to the Red Army appear only toward the end of the book. Reviews of the documentary noted the focus on the American experience and its potential to distort what was a truly global disaster.

As a complement to Ken Burn's documentary, the book is a success. Readers who want to explore the historical meaning of World War II more deeply or

broadly might find it a good starting place. Ward and Burns successfully tell the story of American involvement in the war in a little over 400 pages, and this includes many images. This is a not insignificant accomplishment in a field full of massive tomes.

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