



Book Review

A History of the Twentieth Century in 100 Maps. By TIM BRYARS and TOM HARPER. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2015. Pp. 240. ISBN 978-0-224-20247-1. \$45.00.

A History of the Twentieth Century in 100 Maps is an elegant book, impressive in presentation and skillfully composed by two experts in the field of cartography. At 8½ x 11 x 1 inches, its pages meeting ANSI/NISO Permanence of Paper requirements, it has a welcome heft. With the promised 100 full-color maps (overbrimming with a dozen more), many of them double-page spreads, it delights the eye; with the rich contextual description that accompanies each map, it also delights the mind. Toponymists, social historians, and the general public can find much to admire in this volume.

Co-authors Tim Bryars and Tom Harper bring to its design not just a wealth of knowledge but also an evident zest for their work. Bryars, a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, is an antiquarian map and book dealer in London and, pre-pandemic, a key figure in the annual London Map Fair. Tom Harper, a specialist in educational mapping, is a lead curator of antiquarian mapping at the British Library, where he has co/curated such notable exhibits as “Maps and the Twentieth Century: Drawing the Line” (2016-17) and co-authored *Magnificent Maps: Power, Propaganda and Art* (2010).

As to the scope of *A History of the Twentieth Century in 100 Maps*, Bryars and Harper provide a necessary clarification in the Introduction (8-13): “The narrative of the book flows around the idea of a ‘British’ twentieth century” (8). This perspective might have been usefully specified in the title, perhaps *A History of Twentieth-Century Britain in 100 Maps*, akin to the University of Chicago’s more recent title, *A History of America in 100 Maps* (Schulten 2018). The Introduction provides other important ideological frames for the work too, especially the authors’ foundational insight that maps convey political and social history, not just geographical information. Maps, Bryars and Harper insist, are “human-constructed filters, virtual realities laid over the real world” (13), and the authors assume a basic understanding of cartographic theory on the part of their readers. The Introduction, then, prepares audiences for both the British focus and the global reach of the selected maps, which range from the official and permanent to the popular and

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ephemeral, including one printed on a handkerchief and one enacted as “Land Art”, traced by the footprints of creator Richard Long. The premise that maps are cultural artifacts suggests, after all, that the whimsical models are as much a social commentary as they are consciously informative.

The volume is organized chronologically in four sections, each beginning with a two-page micro-history. “A Weary Titan? 1900-1918” (14-59) takes up the turn of the century through the end of the Great War. Many of the maps here portray Britain on the world stage, especially the archetypal 1901 Navy League Map, with territories of the British Empire colored in red; a map of the legal opium market, from an atlas of global trade; and military and propagandist maps from the Boer Wars and World War I. Others portray more insular life, with railway routes and an early London Underground map (although Beck’s iconic 1933 map is surprisingly absent in the ensuing pages). Two selections in particular suggest the younger target of maps’ audiences. One used by school children to practice geography has no placenames or identifying titles at all, while another, the last in this section, offers “An Ancient Mappe of Fairyland,” where Little Boy Blue rests not far from Peter Pan’s Never-Never Land.

The second section, “Top Dog! 1919-45” (60-115), notes in its introduction that, with the German and Ottoman colonies mandated to Britain by the League of Nations after World War I, the British Empire reached its greatest territorial extent, and map selections convey this stretch as well as its discontents. Included, for example, are a map of the Amritsar massacre, a pivotal event in the fight for Indian independence, and a map of crop, livestock, and fishery production in New Zealand, 10,000 nautical miles from England. These are interspersed with the fanciful: a map of the Hundred Acre Wood on the endpapers for A. A. Milne’s 1926 *Winnie-the-Pooh*; a landscape of “English Literature,” produced by Rand McNally of Chicago for US tourists; and a map of Australia in a miniature atlas, plucked from the library of Queen Mary’s Dolls’ House, painstakingly created for the queen consort and displayed in 1924 at the British Empire Exhibition. All these appear before a somber selection of maps from the Second World War, among them a street map of parade routes for the Nazi rallies in Nuremberg and an Ordnance Survey map of Mayfair Square reprinted by the Germans for use by the Luftwaffe.

The quarter century following World War II is covered in the third section, “Bust to Boom to Bust. 1946-72” (116-161). Here Bryars and Harper demonstrate the impact of the Cold War and related technological advancements, dramatically illustrated in a map of Southampton with isodose contours showing the radius of contamination from hypothetical nuclear blasts. Some selections boast official publication, such as the Royal Navy’s map of Queen Elizabeth II’s 1953 tour of the Commonwealth and a map of the Suez Canal Zone delivered to the Directorate of Military Survey map library in the midst of the 1956 stand-off. Others derive from more popular sources. The football weekly *Shoot!* produced a map depicting the origins and shirt colors of dozens of teams. George Allen & Unwin published a map of Middle Earth, designed by Christopher Tolkien, son of J. R. R. Tolkien, in 4,500 copies of the first edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Examples like these, in every section of the book, remind readers that names on maps include not just the place names that mark them but also the names of individuals and publishers who design and distribute them.

The final section, “Out of the Red and Into the Blue 1973-1999” (162-223), carries Britain to the close of the twentieth century. Conflicts in Rhodesia, the Falklands, and the streets of Belfast generate official and unofficial military maps, while a student-drawn map of George Orwell’s 1984 world, divided into Eurasia, Oceania, and Eastasia, presages an ominous future. More immediate concerns—and pleasures—present themselves in a map of the hunting districts of Great Britain; a London Gay City Map, enclosed in the 1992 *Spartacus International Gay Guide for Gay Men*; the Live Aid logo, in which an outline map of Africa is depicted as the body of a guitar; and the 1999 millennium tapestry map hand-stitched by community members across the UK. Here again, the accompanying narratives prove as enlightening as the maps themselves. The commentary on the 1996 auction of the original Mercator *Atlas of Europe*, for example, not only explains the accompanying map but also describes the original collection, hand produced by mathematician Gerard Mercator, ca. 1570, whose name has become synonymous with the cylindrical-projection maps that became the standard for navigation.

Reluctant to let their audiences go, Bryars and Harper add three more maps in a Postscript (224-29): a *Viz* map of Europe from a hand-drawn poster; a composition of aerial photography from 5,500 feet with over 70,000 images digitally assembled into a mosaic; and a map of Ground Zero, a defining moment for the whole world at the turn of the twenty-first century. Following this Postscript, closing materials include Endnotes (230-32); a List of Maps, alphabetically arranged by title, with provenance and dimensions (233-34); suggestions for Further Reading (235); Picture Credits (236); and a useful although not exhaustive Index (236-40).

So multiform are the maps, mapmakers, and cultural perspectives in *A History of the Twentieth Century in 100 Maps* that the work is difficult to reduce to a simple summary, and the limited scope of this review does not do it justice. Assuredly, it deserves the discerning quotations culled from reviews by Claire Fullon in the *Huffington Post*, Henrietta Verma in *Library Journal*, and Henry S. Cohn in *The Federal Lawyer* and posted on the University of Chicago Press website (2022). It also deserves, to a certain extent, the critique by Keisha Lai (2015), who notes a few gaps and argues in particular that the work disappoints in not providing more comprehensive discussion of the post-World War II dismantling of the British Empire. Nonetheless,

the Introduction warns readers that the selection process had been thorny, and that, faced with an abundance of choices, the editors had made every effort to be comprehensive and even-handed.

With good reason, the enthusiastic consensus declares the work, in Lai's words, "visually stunning", so much so that one could wish for the advantages of a larger scale. The book offers compelling images on page after page, but when artifacts as large as that millennial tapestry, which measures 190 x 200 cm, and the poster-sized depiction of the fall of Yugoslavia, with map, text boxes, and symbols that stretch it to 81 x 110 cm, it is difficult to appreciate their detail. If I had to navigate from Never-Never Land to King Arthur's Avalon on that "Ancient Mapped of Fairyland", I would need Tinkerbell's GPS because many of its magical toponyms are too small for my human eyes to decipher. Perhaps anticipating my dilemma, the editors enlarge a portion of it for inclusion on pages 6-7, immediately before the Introduction. Happily, the collection is also available as an ebook and as a PDF (ISBN 978022620501), which allows one to expand beyond 100% and mitigates the problem, at least to the extent that clear resolution allows.

Certainly, the University of Chicago Press does well to have included this handsome publication in its storehouse and to have followed it not only with Schulten's volume but also *A History of the Second World War in 100 Maps* by Jeremy Black (2020). The press's attention to cultural studies wrapped in map papers confirms Bryars and Harper's conviction that place names serve as much more than simple geographical markers.

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