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The Last European War

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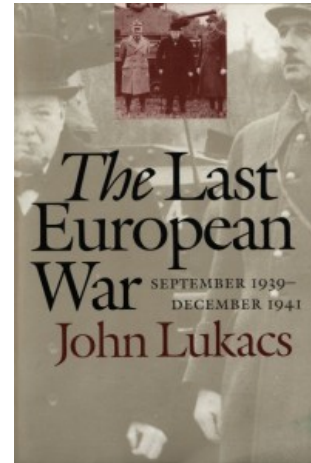
John Lukacs consistently writes some of the most interesting and informative work on the history of the twentieth century. I recently turned to one of Lukacs' older and larger works and I was not disappointed. In *The Last European War*, Lukacs turns to the opening years of what became World War II — the years when Britain and the Soviet Union fought the war against the Third Reich virtually alone.

Lukacs explains that the Last European War began in September 1939, whereas the Second World War began in December 1941. In this book, Lukacs (born in Budapest, Hungary in 1924) helps to explain how Europe found itself in this cataclysm just two decades after the end of World War I. One fascinating aspect of Lukacs' argument is his insight that Europe would be eclipsed by the United States as the Last European War would give way to the Second World War — and both the allies and the Axis powers saw this. This realization, Lukacs argues, largely explains Hitler's timetable.

Along the way, Lukacs tells the story of the war's early years with skill and style. He reveals an uncanny understanding of the personalities and dynamics that led to the war, and he takes ideas seriously. Lukacs is also quite ready to confront established theories about the war and settled opinions about its causes. *The Last European War*, first published in 1976, is now available in a new edition from Yale University Press.

An excerpt:

The French, unlike the English, feared death more than they feared defeat. But this statement, so cruelly condemnatory at first sight, must be qualified to a certain extent. The English, who had not been conquered by an invader for nearly one thousand years, knew in their bones that their defeat would mean a kind of death for England, that its effect would not be temporary. The French, on the other hand, knew in their heads, if not in their bones, the memory of national defeats together with the memory of their national recoveries. Still, in 1940, they gave up too easily.



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