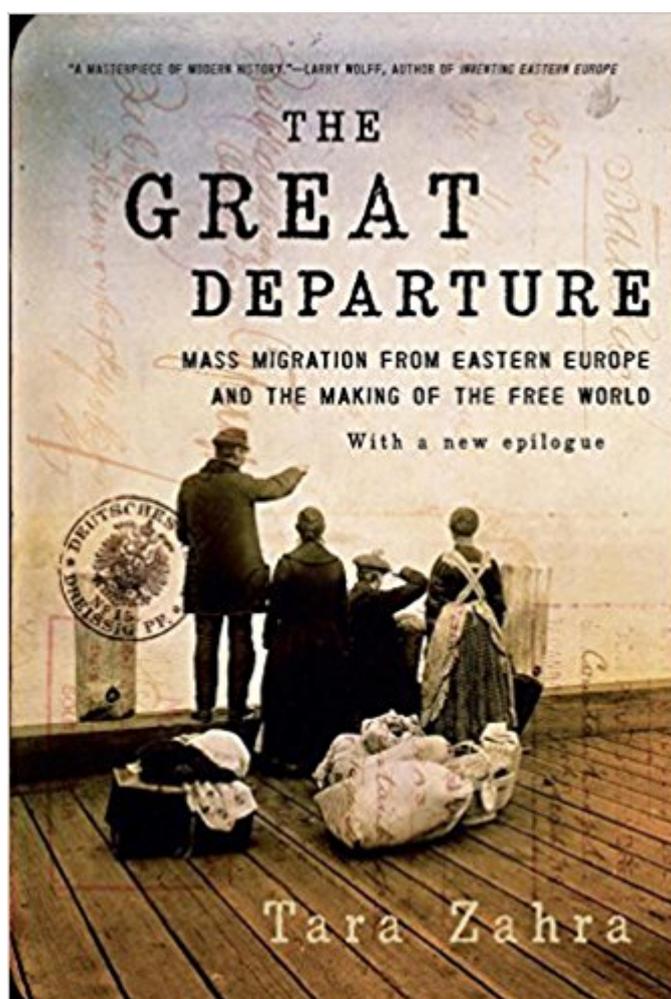


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The Great Departure: Mass Migration From Eastern Europe And The Making Of The Free World



Synopsis

“A masterpiece of modern history.” —Larry Wolff, author of *Inventing Eastern Europe Between 1846 and 1940*, more than 50 million Europeans moved to the Americas in one of the largest migrations in human history, irrevocably changing both their new homes and the ones they left behind. As villages emptied and the fear of depopulation ran rampant, anxiety over “American fever” existed alongside the promise of a brighter social and economic future. On both sides of the ocean lives were transformed by these decades of mass departure. Tara Zahra’s sweeping history with a timely new epilogue on today’s refugee crisis offers insight into issues of global migration that remain of crucial importance.

Book Information

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; 1 edition (March 28, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393353729

ISBN-13: 978-0393353723

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.1 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 15 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #54,815 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #86 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Emigration & Immigration #176 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Europe #617 in Books > History > Europe

Customer Reviews

“A perceptive history of migration and eastern Europe.” —

Economist “[Zahra] has uncovered a narrative that is complex,

multifaceted.” —Julia M. Klein, *Chicago Tribune* “Zahra handles this immensely complicated and multidimensional history with remarkable clarity and feeling.” —Robert

Levgold, *Foreign Affairs* “A significant work of social history bound to please serious readers and scholars.” —Kirkus Reviews (starred) “[An] absorbing and comprehensive

history.” —Library Journal “In this riveting book, Tara Zahra takes the story of immigration that Americans know so well and weaves it into a larger story of emigration that we have long neglected. Full of hope and promise, of desperation and tragedy, it is perhaps the most

important story of the twentieth century. With all the drama of a novel and all the nuance of history writing at its best, *The Great Departure* is a must-read. — Alison Johnson, Harvard University

“In this spare, deeply researched, and unfailingly analytical book, Tara Zahra frees the great migration of Eastern Europeans to the West from romantic myth and dissects all its human and moral complexities. — Robert D. Kaplan, of *In Europe’s Shadow: A Journey Through Two Cold Wars in Romania and Beyond*

“Meticulously researched, *The Great Departure* shows mass emigration from all sides, including individual stories of poverty and maltreatment but also positive changes that emigration brought to women. This book is equally relevant for Americans, showing why and how many of their ancestors left their countries, and for Europeans confronted with an unprecedented wave of immigrants today. — Slavenka Drakulic, author of *A Guided Tour through the Museum of Communism*

Tara Zahra is a professor of modern European history at the University of Chicago and a recent winner of the MacArthur Fellowship. She is the author of two award-winning books, *Kidnapped Souls* and *The Lost Children*. Zahra lives in Chicago, Illinois.

Zahra describes the experiences of Central European emigrants, and the policies of nations that affected those who migrated during the *fin de siècle*, throughout both World Wars, the Cold War, and beyond. Zahra’s intent is to reveal patterns in emigration and immigration policies among Eastern and Western states. Her book contrasts with other historians, who predominantly focus on the quantities of Europeans migrating to the United States. Instead, Zahra places the focus of *The Great Departure* on the motivations for Europeans to emigrate, the effects that their leaving had on their homeland, and how European governments attempted to prevent emigration from happening (6). Zahra reveals a plethora of patterns in emigration policies among European and North American states that emerge in the late nineteenth century and continue to this day. The patterns include ideas on mobility and freedom, state control of emigration as a means to achieve political goals, the influence of mercantilist ideas, using ethnic groups as scapegoats, and the adjustment of policies in order to encourage the immigration of preferred migrants. One of the more interesting patterns is the conflicting view between Eastern and Western powers on what freedom is. To Western states, freedom was inextricably tied to mobility, and was increasingly considered a “human right,” whereas Eastern states “sought to protect the ‘freedom’ of citizens by keeping them at home” (55, 246). Initially, emigration was seen as a major problem

for government. Mercantilist philosophies that valued the population as a source of economic and political power, left governments fearful (9). Attempts, such as the trial of Jewish travel agents in 1889, were made to stop the mass exodus of people (23-24). As it became clear that states could not halt emigration entirely, they began to take a more opportunistic approach by utilizing emigration as a means to serve their goals. Zahra points out that “emigration came to be seen as a potential solution to various social and political problems, which resulted with several European states developing strategies aimed at encouraging or forcing “undesirable” or “surplus” citizens to leave (10). Some states achieved this through the establishment of penal colonies, while others gave in to rising nationalist trends by attempting to homogenize their population. Ironically, this effort at homogeneity had the side-effect of endowing marginalized communities with increased mobility, and therefore, at least in some sense, increased freedoms (10, 17). In summary, Zahra’s *The Great Departure* is a masterful examination of the patterns of emigration in the modern age.

Enjoy reading about the immigrants from 1872 about 1900 I’m still reading. My grandfather came from Bohemia in 1882 I find this period of time the most interesting enjoyed the book.

Lots of information presented as you would expect from a course on human migration. 300 pages of tight text, 100 pages of notes and bibliography.

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It is comprehensive

"The Great Departure" by Tara Zahra is a well-written examination of the emigration of people from eastern and central Europe in the last two hundred years or so. What I had assumed to be a fairly personal decision without government involvement was so much different than that--there was government legislation, intervention, and downright prejudice regarding who was allowed and encouraged to emigrate, and the the government in question attempted to keep at home. Ms. Zahra also looks at the receiving countries' attitudes and policies, and there was the same racism and prejudice. Ms. Zahra does a nice job of boiling this all down into an easy to read book that will change what you know about emigration and immigration practice and policy in the time and place

in question.

Notwithstanding the praise on the book jacket this is not a particularly good book. The subject could be interesting and parts of the book are (letters from recently arrived immigrants to their families in the old country), but it is flawed. The writing is lame. Like a lot of nonfiction, the author's points could have been summarized in a magazine article -- immigration was hard, the conditions in the US were not so great, there was prejudice against immigrants, lots of emigrants did not stay but returned home. No clear depiction of the societies the immigrants were leaving. A large portion of the book deals with post WW2 immigration, which is too recent to be interesting. The author concludes with a chapter on the benefits of immigration in general. Her arguments are bit simple minded, unlikely to persuade anyone who thinks differently, and entirely irrelevant to what purports to be a book of history.

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