



The Rise of Empires: 1870-1919

Summarized Edition

Charles Downer Hazen
Summarized by Michael Stewart

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The Rise of Empires: 1870-1919 (Summarized Edition)

Enriched edition. From the Franco-Prussian War to the Paris Peace Conference: Rivalries, Railways, and Empire on the Road to World War I

Introduction, Studies, Commentaries and Summarization by Michael Stewart

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Introduction

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Between triumphant nation-building and catastrophic rupture, *The Rise of Empires: 1870-1919* traces how Europe's accelerating quest for greatness built towering capacities while eroding restraints, as industrial muscle, imperial reach, nationalist passion, and confident statecraft combined to enlarge prosperity and prestige yet also tightened rivalries, hardened doctrines, and multiplied points of friction, until the very instruments of progress: mass production, mass politics, and mass armies, pressed societies into choices they could not easily reverse, shaping a world whose glittering promises and mounting anxieties defined the late nineteenth century and carried their momentum into the unsettled opening decades of the twentieth.

This volume is a work of narrative history by the American historian Charles Downer Hazen, set chiefly in Europe and its overseas entanglements from 1870 to 1919, and issued in the early twentieth century when many of its events were still fresh in public memory. Hazen presents a concise survey rather than an exhaustive archive, guiding readers through the principal diplomatic, political, and social developments that link the age of national consolidation to the postwar reordering. He writes for the general reader and the student alike, situating events within clear cause-and-effect arcs while resisting distraction from the central currents of change.

Readers encounter a calm, synthesizing voice that favors clarity over flourish and proportion over polemic. The narrative moves briskly yet with deliberate pacing, pausing to explain terms, institutions, and recurring dilemmas before returning to the flow of events. The tone is judicious and explanatory, giving attention to motives without reducing decisions to caricature. Hazen's style emphasizes structure: sequences of actions, reactions, and unintended outcomes that accumulate into recognizable patterns. The book does not require expert background, but it rewards careful attention to connections, offering a reading experience that balances accessibility with the intellectual satisfaction of following a coherent, cumulative argument.

The central themes are those that defined the period: the consolidation of nation-states, the emergence and rivalry of empires, the delicately maintained balance of power, and the growing weight of public opinion in foreign and domestic affairs. Industrialization altered strategy and society alike, reshaping finance, logistics, and the tempo of crisis. Ideas—nationalism, liberalism, socialism, and their critics—provided languages of legitimacy and protest that crossed borders even as governments sought control. Hazen highlights how ambitions abroad and pressures at home interacted, how competition promised security yet courted danger, and how institutional innovation both contained and, at times, intensified the risks it tried to govern.

Without relying on sensational revelations, the book shows how incremental choices accumulate into major turns. It follows shifting alliances and diplomatic experiments, while noting the roles of leaders, parliaments,

parties, and publics in shaping trajectories. Economic considerations—trade patterns, industrial capacity, fiscal constraints—enter the analysis as conditions that enable or limit statecraft, rather than as afterthoughts. Attention to communications and transportation illuminates how distance shrank and decision time compressed. The result is a portrait of interconnected systems in which successes produce new vulnerabilities, and in which the pursuit of stability creates feedback loops that complicate the very equilibrium that statesmen profess to defend.

For contemporary readers, the book matters because it illuminates recurring problems of international life: arms races that promise deterrence yet inflame suspicion, alliance networks that offer protection yet entangle decision-making, and global markets that enrich societies while transmitting shocks. It clarifies how emancipation movements, minority questions, and imperial structures generated claims of self-determination that would reverberate far beyond Europe. Hazen's early twentieth-century vantage point is itself instructive, reminding us that interpretations are shaped by proximity to events. Engaging it critically helps readers discern continuities and ruptures between past and present, and to evaluate present debates about order, power, and legitimacy with historical perspective.

Approached in this spirit, *The Rise of Empires: 1870-1919* offers a guided tour through decisive years without presuming to close the debate they still inspire. It equips readers to see how multiple logics—strategic, economic, ideological, and cultural—converge to produce outcomes no

single actor intended, and to appreciate why historical understanding depends on tracing patterns as well as contingencies. As a study built for comprehension rather than spectacle, it invites steady, reflective reading. What emerges is not a catalogue of dates but an integrated view of forces that remade the world and continue to shape questions of security, justice, and responsibility.

Synopsis

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The Rise of Empires: 1870-1919 presents Charles Downer Hazen's survey of the political transformations that reshaped Europe and its global reach after the Franco-Prussian War. Beginning with the emergence of a unified German Empire and the completion of Italian national unification, Hazen sketches a new balance of power defined by shifting ambitions and anxieties. France rebuilds as a republic, Britain weighs continental commitments, and the Habsburg and Russian empires confront the Eastern Question. Organized chronologically but attentive to themes, the narrative asks how industrial growth, nationalism, and imperial rivalry interacted to produce a precarious order whose tensions would culminate in general conflict and a complex peace.

Central to the early chapters is Bismarck's diplomatic architecture, designed to secure Germany's position while preventing a two-front war. Hazen follows the web of understandings and treaties by which Berlin sought to isolate France and manage Austro-Russian rivalry, particularly in the Balkans. The consolidation of the German state, French political stabilization, and Italy's search for status unfold alongside Britain's preference for limited commitments. By tracing crises and settlements, including the management of Balkan disputes, the narrative shows how equilibrium depended on careful calculation and restraint. Hazen emphasizes the contingent character of this

system, noting how personal leadership and prudence could steady or unsettle it.

As the century turns, Hazen turns to the surge of imperialism and economic expansion that widened European competition. The scramble for Africa, strategic corridors in Asia, and maritime routes draw the powers into disputes beyond Europe, intensifying navalism and colonial bargaining. With Wilhelm II's assertive posture and Germany's naval program, Britain recalibrates, edging from isolation toward understandings with France and Russia. The alignment of the Triple Alliance and the gradual formation of the Triple Entente give the period a sharper polarity. Hazen connects these shifts to domestic pressures, industrial capabilities, and public opinion, showing how prestige and security concerns fused across continents.

The narrative concentrates on a sequence of prewar crises that tested the emerging blocs. Hazen recounts confrontations over Morocco, the repercussions of Austria-Hungary's moves in the Balkans, and the unraveling of Ottoman authority that emboldened neighboring states. The Balkan Wars alter calculations, expose fragile commitments, and heighten mistrust. He pairs diplomatic episodes with social undercurrents: organized labor, socialist parties, and nationalist movements expand mass politics and complicate decision-making. Military planning, conscription, and arms races deepen the sense of encirclement. Through these episodes, the book maps how repeated shocks narrowed options and hardened expectations, leaving governments increasingly dependent on rigid plans and alliances.

With 1914, Hazen moves through the July crisis and the rapid escalation from assassination to mobilization, underscoring the interplay of alliance obligations and timetables. Initial campaigns shift from hopes of swift decision to protracted attrition, especially on the Western Front, while the Eastern theaters, the seas, and colonial arenas broaden the struggle. Blockades, submarine warfare, and the organization of wartime economies reveal the reach of total conflict into civilian life. The account follows changing command structures, logistical strains, and the demands of finance and industry, stressing how material capacity and morale became as decisive as battlefield maneuver in sustaining the war effort.

Hazen highlights midwar inflection points, including the entry of new participants and internal upheavals that altered alliances and aims. Developments in technology and tactics—artillery coordination, aviation, armored warfare—reframe operational possibilities but also intensify costs. The strain on multiethnic empires grows, and political transformations recast fronts and war aims. Without dwelling on operational minutiae, the narrative traces how campaigns and diplomacy intersect late in the conflict, leading to armistices and a search for principles to guide settlement. By 1918, offensives and counteroffensives expose exhaustion as much as strength, setting the stage for bargaining that must reconcile security, punishment, and national aspirations.

The closing chapters turn to the postwar settlement, where delegates confront borders, reparations, and the design of a new international framework. Hazen examines

the rise of successor states, the appeal and limits of self-determination, and proposals for collective security. He situates the treaties within longer currents of nationalism, economic interdependence, and imperial retreat, showing how the peace both answered and perpetuated unresolved questions. Throughout, the book's argument links power politics to societal transformation, inviting reflection on how modern states marshal resources and narratives in times of stress. Its resonance endures as a guide to the origins of a world order still debated and revised.

Historical Context

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Between 1870 and 1919, European politics revolved around powerful nation-states, imperial administrations, and professionalized militaries. The Franco-Prussian War ended with German unification and the proclamation of the German Empire in 1871, altering the balance of power. France established the Third Republic, while the Habsburg domains functioned as the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Russian and Ottoman empires persisted despite internal strains. Britain presided over a global empire anchored by naval supremacy and the gold standard. Industrial capacity, railways, telegraphs, and expanding bureaucracies enabled central governments, foreign ministries, and general staffs to plan policy at unprecedented scale, interlinking European decisions with worldwide consequences.

Otto von Bismarck engineered a diplomatic system to preserve peace by isolating France and managing rivalries. The Congress of Berlin (1878) revised Balkan settlements, while the Dual Alliance (1879), Triple Alliance (1882), and Reinsurance Treaty (1887) exemplified flexible commitments. After Bismarck's dismissal in 1890, Kaiser Wilhelm II pursued Weltpolitik, backed by Navy Laws (1898, 1900) that fueled an Anglo-German naval race. Ideologies of nationalism and Social Darwinism circulated through a mass press and party politics, influencing cabinets and parliaments. Great-power status hinged on military preparedness and colonial reach, even as the Concert of