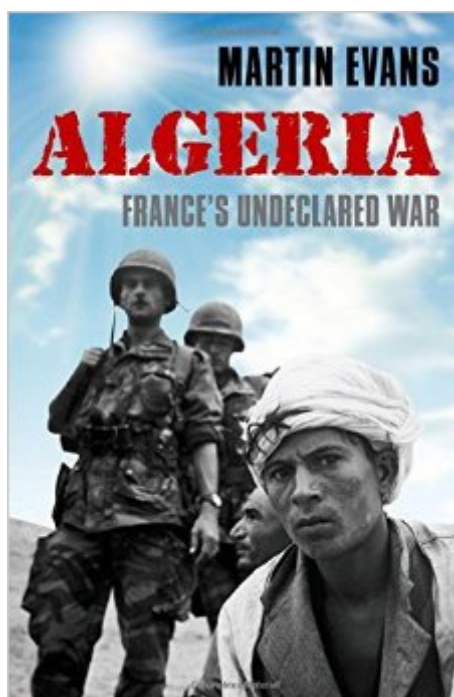


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Algeria: France's Undeclared War (Making Of The Modern World)



Synopsis

Invaded in 1830, populated by one million settlers who co-existed uneasily with nine million Arabs and Berbers, Algeria was different from other French colonies because it was administered as an integral part of France, in theory no different from Normandy or Brittany. The depth and scale of the colonization process explains why the Algerian War of 1954 to 1962 was one of the longest and most violent of the decolonization struggles. An undeclared war in the sense that there was no formal beginning of hostilities, the war produced huge tensions that brought down four governments, ended the Fourth Republic in 1958, and mired the French army in accusations of torture and mass human rights abuses. In carefully re-examining the origins and consequences of the conflict, Martin Evans argues that it was the Socialist led Republican Front, in power from January 1956 until May 1957, which was the defining moment in the war. Predicated on the belief in the universal civilizing mission of the Fourth Republic, coupled with the conviction that Algerian nationalism was feudal and religiously fanatical in character, the Republican Front dramatically intensified the war in the spring of 1956. Drawing upon previously classified archival sources as well as new oral testimonies, this book underlines the conflict of values between the Republican Front and Algerian nationalism, explaining how this clash produced patterns of thought and action, such as the institutionalization of torture and the raising of pro-French Muslim militias, which tragically polarized choices and framed all subsequent stages of the conflict.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Evans' book provides an excellent history of French Algeria, from the initial invasion in 1830 through to its end in the "undeclared war" of 1954-62, with a "where are they now" coda briefly summarizing developments following the declaration of independence. The initial section of the book outlines how the French conquest unfolded, the French settler community evolved (and seized all their privileges against the Muslim majority), and the Muslim majority moved towards a more explicit concept of Algeria as a country and Algerian nationalism as a cause. It effectively sets the stage for the struggle to come, making clear the strong forces arrayed against any chance of reconciling the two communities. It's an excellent background, with much content that I hadn't seen elsewhere. Evans' summary of the "war" period covers the developments in Algeria and in France, but places heavy emphasis on the role of French policymakers and politicians in seeking to craft a "third way" based precisely on such a reconciliation - while the FLN's own development and its campaigns inside Algeria are covered, Evans treats these in more summary form. Similarly, when de Gaulle is returned to power in 1958, Evans then focuses on the evolution of de Gaulle's own thinking, and how de Gaulle's initial continuity with the "third way" strategy of prior governments moved towards a successive abandonment of each of the constituent parts of that strategy as the irreconcilable nature of the conflict steadily became more clear. On the FLN side, the increasing dominance of the military faction is described, setting the stage for what happens upon Algerian independence (as the military faction seizes power) and what has shaped the country ever since.

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