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REVIEW

OF THE BOOK: STOP THE WORLD THAT I WANT TO UNDERSTAND. A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE CONFLICTS OUR TIMES

By: Antonio Navalón,. Barcelona, Debate, 2010. 331 p. with bibliography and index of names.

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HISTORY AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR UNDERSTANDING THE PRESENT

With the thought-provoking title, *Stop the world that I want to understand. A guide to understanding the conflicts our times*, Antonio Navalón offers us a truly informative and accessible work. Much more than a journalistic nod to the comic strip Mafalda, this is an interesting and entertaining enumeration of the problems that attack us daily in television news broadcasts. The work is divided into three parts: the first of which, *What happened in the 20th century that we weren't able to see?*, is an essay of historic interpretation that charts the period from the 1st World War to the beginnings of the 21st century with an analysis of the origins of many of the conflicts of our present time. This overview that concludes with the Iraq war is used by the author to analyse the signs which, falsely accommodated in the western world,

were clearly there to be seen in the past but which no one appeared to take notice of. In short, thought-provoking and entertaining chapters, punctuated with references to literature and cinema, Navalón describes the Berlin of 1945, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the protests of '68, the dictatorial governments of Latin America, the rise to power of the ayatollahs, the conservative revolution, the demise of the USSR, the Gulf War, 9/11 and the Iraq War.

The second part of the book is entitled *From Orient to Occident, around the world in twelve episodes*. In an imaginary journey that begins in the Japan of Mishima and finishes up in Colombia, Argentina and Venezuela, the author examines the situation in countries like Korea, China, India and Pakistan. He also analyses the Middle East conflict before moving on to Russia under Putin, the Europe of the euro and the financial crisis in the United States. In the twelve chapters that make up this second part, the author develops a more personal and subjective chronicle of the conflict areas of today, the so-called geopolitical “hotspots” of the world. Navalón points to greed and the desire for rapid gain as the reason behind support given to countries like China (“we finance everything that will destroy us”, p. 143) rather than the more necessary support for countries of the former Soviet bloc. The consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall: religious conflict, the protagonism of China, the decline in the influence of the United States and the economic and political prominence of the European Union. The author devotes twelve pages to Spain (*Spain: the waste of a model*) in which he says “Spain is a country condemned to be unstable and socially dangerous” (p. 214) and points to three determining factors: the western country that has undergone the largest process of adaptation, ongoing territorial issues and the doubts he expresses with respect to the effects and administration of the first generation of Spaniards, who are wealthy, democratic and European.

It is in this second section of the book where Navalón himself is more engaged, committing himself in the judgements he passes on the blindness of politicians like Jimmy Carter and George Bush Jr. and especially so in his interpretation of the geostrategic importance of internal, invisible frontiers. Navalón, the political analyst, reappears in the interesting chapter devoted to Afghanistan (p. 107-111), where his interpretation remains unaltered despite Bin Laden’s capture (which Navalón does not refer to), in his insightful comments about the devastating effects of Chinese industrial production and in his vision of Pakistan. The second part of the book concludes with an enlightening analysis of the Wall Street crisis and the figure of Obama, whom he describes as a “phenomenon” and to whom he dedicates thirteen pages. On reaching this section, the reader cannot but acknowledge once again the dexterity with which the author makes his subject-matter accessible; the issues he deals with are anything but easy, but yet he manages to make them both enlightening and stimulating.

The final part of the work, *When destiny reaches us*, appears to have been included as a matter of urgency, no doubt on account of the succession of events since the bursting of the economic bubble. However, Navalón interprets what happened as the

consequence of the decisions of the President of the Federal Reserve Bank following 9/11. He concludes with a list of data/information on the economic bailout of 2008 and a sad coda or long list of bankrupt companies and other business failures. In spite of this urgent inclusion, the work is outstanding as a tool for students, journalists and those interested in contemporary history and above all for those of us who are faced daily with a series of conflicts presented by the media- just as if they had appeared out of the blue.

