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An Explanation of De Gaulle

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BOOKS

Aron, Robert. *An Explanation of De Gaulle*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966. 210 p.

Robert Aron is a Paris publishing house editor and writer of contemporary French history. His qualifications for writing this book are enhanced by his experiences as a member of the French Resistance and of De Gaulle's administrative staff. Robert Aron is also a great, and sometimes critical, admirer of Charles de Gaulle.

May 11, 1940, the day after the German Army took the offensive on the Western Front, Colonel Charles de Gaulle was named acting commander of the Fourth Armored Division, which existed only on paper. Commencing with the Colonel's counterattack with a pickup force of stragglers and late arrivals against the onrushing Wehrmacht in the vicinity of Laon, France, Robert Aron reviews the subsequent major events in the life of this obscure French Army Colonel as he went on "to save France from the dictatorships of Hitler and Stalin" and from the political and economic disasters of the Fourth Republic. Rather than a lucid explanation of Charles de Gaulle, this resembles an apology. He is described as a complicated man of paradoxes who almost defies diagnosis. "Since De Gaulle never moves in a straight line, one never knows what he is doing until what he is doing is finished." De Gaulle is characterized as a sensitive and humane person, but when the Vichy Minister of the Interior was tried for collaboration by a military tribunal with special powers, De Gaulle, who believed the accused "did his best to counter the Germans and surrender as little as possible," insisted on a precedent-setting execution for "reasons of state." This is a frequently used, unalterable De Gaulle rationale, although he abhors totalitarian governments whose primary principle is the subjection of everything to reasons of state. De Gaulle's solution for the Algerian problem was a sudden reversal of policy to embrace independence. This misuse and deceit of the French Algerian leadership left them in the impossible position of having to honor contrary commitments and resulted in rebellion and some of the blackest days in French history; the Army was ordered to fire on Frenchmen whose only crime was their determination to remain French. Aron apparently feels that De Gaulle still bears grudges against the United Kingdom and the United States for their lack of support for his proclaimed leadership in place of Pétain's during the war, and that twenty years later, the General sometimes acts accordingly.

An Explanation of De Gaulle does shed considerable light on such aspects as the conflict of his authoritarian background and nature with representative government under a multiparty system; the General's foreign policy strategy and his attitudes toward different classes of allies; the essential elements of Gaullism and the chances for its continuing influence after De Gaulle inevitably departs the French political scene. In view of the author's doubtful premise that the ideologies of the United States and Soviet Union are obsolete and must be replaced, France is charged with the responsibility of exercising intellectual and moral authority to develop a substitute system of government. There is some

discussion of De Gaulle's concept of a United Europe under French hegemony, operating as a third power between the United States and the Soviet Union. One conclusion offered is that De Gaulle, despite his arrogant, erratic, arbitrary, and sometimes intransigent ways, offers the West a chance to gain the initiative and to institute needed, healthy change. This volume will provide the serious student of contemporary French history with essential information. Furthermore, for those in sympathy with Charles de Gaulle, who feel that he is a misunderstood visionary, that NATO under American leadership is wrong, that capitalism is obsolete, and that equality is more important than the freedom and rights of the individual, this book is recommended as quite agreeable.

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Ferkiss, Victor C. *Africa's Search for Identity*. New York: Braziller, 1965. 346 p.

Africa's Search for Identity is basically a literate résumé of Africa's struggle from its release from the bonds of colonialism to freedom. The author expertly refines the setting of his literary endeavor by pointing out that the so-called "period of colonialism" was in fact applicable to but a few areas of the continent of Africa, while the larger areas were in essence occupied or dominated provinces. In these dominated territories the political authority was, for the most part, superimposed on the existing native society, and, in those instances where any degree of this authority was delegated, the ultimate responsibility was methodically retained by the metropolitan cliques or protectoral governors. As a consequence, this provincial and somewhat feudalistic approach to government has left the populace stranded in the mire of political conflict, sorely lacking the education and experience to govern with any extent of flexibility. In this same vein, those in political position do not possess the dimension necessary to react and politicize in order to resist, accept, or even compromise with the opposition as it emerges. Against this backdrop Dr. Ferkiss has impartially and effectively recreated the conglomerate Africa of today, a political arena saturated with volatile elements, reflecting the entire spectrum of economic and ethnological discord. Into this patchwork the author carefully weaves the threads of the pan-African movement and the cult of Negritude in the present surge of nationalism. Additionally, Ferkiss treats the urge for unity that was coincident with the rapid emergence of the free states. This urge is evidenced in the numerous abortive attempts—doomed to failure from the outset—by such uncertain groupings as Tanganyika and Zanzibar and the divergent and conflictive efforts of the Organization of African Unity and its French rival, the Organisation Commune Africaine et Malgache. The composite analytical model of the discourse includes a survey of the trouble spots of the Congo, the Portuguese colonies and Rhodesia, the United Nations and Chinese communism in Africa, and a substantial account of African-American relations.