Joshua A. Sanborn. *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. 287. Hardcover $49.99.

Joshua Sanborn, Professor of History at Lafayette College, argues that the decolonization of the Russian Empire during World War I ultimately led to its collapse and allowed the Bolsheviks to seize power in the country. Drawing on archival sources from the United States, Russia, and the former Soviet Union, as well as newspapers, state documents, and military manuscripts, Sanborn traces Russia's participation in World War I as domestic issues bred hostility in the Russian metropole. Increasing nationalism from ethnic Russians and peripheral parts of the empire led to decolonization. With a weakened autocracy, tolls of war affecting Russian society, and a divergence between nationalism and anti-imperialism, the population developed anti-colonial ideologies and peripheral communities sought independence beginning in 1914.

Sanborn's argument relies on what he calls four basic stages of decolonization. Beginning with "imperial challenge," colonized communities undermine and question the legitimacy of those in power. During "state failure," government authority falters and begins to corrode internally. When the state fails to provide, "social disaster" occurs and parts of society act differently than when the state was in power. Lastly, colonized communities resort to "state building" in response to a failed state, advocating for their independence, rather than being subject to a state that is unable to support their livelihood. These stages do not necessarily happen independently of one another, as they can overlap each other by several years, especially in the "state failure" and "social disaster" stages. Within this framework, Sanborn illustrates a fairly linear narrative, emphasizing that Russia's participation in World War I and years of state failure led to Imperial Russia's collapse.

The book is largely chronological, beginning with an overview of the actors in World War I, Russia's influence, and general success in the first six months of the war. By September 1915, Russia had to withdraw from Galicia and Poland. Though this was a major military retreat, it did not significantly impact

soldier morale. The social impact of the war echoed beyond the front lines, as unrest erupted from shortages of food and other goods. This coincided with the third stage, "social disaster," however, as the government's choice to support military campaigns over average citizens led to violent mobs destroying property in protest. Two years passed without any significant Russian victories or losses and left young enlisted men unsure of what they were fighting for. In response to this disillusionment, Russia attempted to remobilize and reinvigorate the military and society. The failures of the state begot social violence, unrest, and upheaval that toppled the autocracy and established the Provisional Government in 1917. Colonized communities called for their independence; rather than be ruled by a weakened Russia, they found strength in their ability to rule and form federations.

Sanborn's analysis of Russia's role in World War I and the fallout from internal failures of the state to maintain its power is unique. The four-stage formation of analysis is interesting, as it provides a framework to clearly indicate what was occurring and how that led to further developments. As Nicholas II's abdication and the Bolshevik seizure of power typically overshadow Russia's participation in World War I, this is an important contribution to scholarship. Sanborn insists that it is because of World War I that the Russian state became weak enough to lose control of its peripheral territories and a centuries-long autocracy.

Sanborn has presented an important piece of scholarship that analyzes Russia's history of the Great War and why the empire ultimately failed. Though it mostly examines 1914–1917, it does address issues dating back to as early as the nineteenth century, especially since 1905, when nationalism and political dissidence became more prominent. Undergraduates to specialists interested in military, imperial, Russian, and early Bolshevik history will enjoy this book's alternative viewing angle to the Revolution.

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