



Geneva, Zurich, Basel: History, Culture, and National Identity (Princeton Legacy Library)

Nicolas Bouvier, Gordon A. Craig, Lionel Gossman

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Recognized by historians and politicians as a model for European unity, Switzerland is nonetheless a difficult country to understand as a whole. Whereas individual Swiss cities have strong identities in the international political, cultural, and economic arenas, the country itself seems to be less than the sum of its parts. To capture the elusive spirit of Switzerland, four eminent writers explore the roots of its political unity and cultural diversity in a series of urban portraits. Their observations make for both good storytelling and insightful social commentary.

Nicolas Bouvier offers a quick-paced history of Geneva--the city John Calvin had envisioned as a radiating center of godliness, international in its scope and legal in its methods--the home of the Red Cross and the League of Nations and, since 1945, the location of numerous disarmament and diplomatic conferences. Gordon Craig examines Zurich, the city of the militant religious reformer Huldrych Zwingli, whose centralizing political zeal was harnessed by subsequent generations of Zurichers to lead Switzerland in its modernization. Today's economically powerful Zurich is analyzed in terms of its liberal past as a refuge for political activists and artists, and in terms of its current generational divisions on moral and cultural questions. Finally, Lionel Gossman explores the conciliatory Basel of Erasmus, showing how vigorous independence, resourcefulness, and remembrance of its humanist traditions shaped the city's culture and economy. Tying together important themes in the histories of these cities, Carl Schorske focuses his introduction on how Switzerland has capitalized on their cultural differences and refined the art of political negotiation to serve a wide range of civic interests.

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