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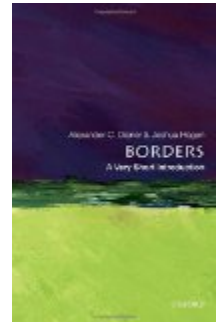


Alexander C. Diener, Joshua Hagen. *Borders: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 152 pp. \$11.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-973150-3.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



This book is indeed a very short introduction to border studies. Alexander Diener and Joshua Hagen explain the various topics of the field and use well-known and contemporaneous anecdotes to illustrate the issues. *Borders* would work well as an introductory text in a military history class so students could come to understand why wars were fought and why they were fought the way they were fought.

The first chapter, “A Very Bordered World” lets the reader begin to see those borders which might have been transparent before: neighborhoods, workspaces, etc., and demonstrates how borders can be bridges as well as barriers. The most obvious borders are those delineating territories and controlling areas of sovereignty but everyone is surrounded by different types of borders all the time. There is a short history lesson on the evolution of the idea of control over territory. This chapter ends with a section on the creation of the field of border studies and its necessity to understanding world events.

Chapter 2, “Borders and Territory in the Ancient World,” is an extended depiction of how various groups, from hunter-gatherers and nomadic groups to empires, marked their areas of control and exerted sovereignty over those territories. Chapter 3, “The Modern State System,” carries this narrative forward, looking at the origins of modern nations and their borders. The obvious example here is Poland, with its shifting borders and enduring sense of nationalism. This chapter includes a discussion of colonialism and various methods of exerting sovereignty over colonial possessions and an examination of substate borders. Some of these are states, counties, and cities within the United States down to gated communities and ethnic neighborhoods,

With chapter 4, “The Practice of Bordering,” the focus shifts from history to modern theory and practice. “Border” here is used as a verb as well as a noun. What does it take for a nation to redraw its borders? What type of sovereignty can a state legitimately exert over its territories? How does the current trend toward globalization affect borders? Today’s borders are both a symbol of security and a permeable filter, keeping out the unwanted and allowing desirable travelers and immigrants. The idea of sovereignty is in constant flux and “contingent sovereignty” has been used as an excuse to invade countries that are not abiding by international law. Indigenous peoples’ ability to control their own destinies runs up against the desire of the state to control all of its inhabitants. Minorities in many places are confined to enclaves or otherwise subjugated in the name of national sovereignty. Transnational corporations and Special Economic Zones can blur state sovereignty as can extraterritorial jurisdictions like Guantanamo Bay. International waters are seen as a new field for border studies because of their tremendous military and economic importance. The chapter concludes with a discussion of space as the final frontier of state sovereignty.

“Border Crossers and Border Crossings” contrasts the experiences of different people who cross different borders. Those with diplomatic immunity have an experience very different from that of illegal migrants. Tourists usually find border crossings easy while refugees often languish at border posts, awaiting permission to enter the country. Economic and ethnic issues can complicate procedures. Transnational social fields, where a person owes allegiance to more than one state, are common today. From Irish Americans to Turkish guest workers in Germany to ethnic diasporas, transborder people

raise important questions about sovereignty and nationalism. Terrorists and insurgents do not abide by the regular rules of war. Al-Qaeda recruits people of many nationalities to do violence in countries other than their own. Criminals do not bow to any state's power while police efforts usually have to stop at a border. Arms trafficking, drug and human smuggling, and offshore money laundering are all examples of people crossing borders in ways that defy state control. Internet hackers and pirates who steal both intellectual and personal property are all subjects within the field of border studies. Tourists are welcome border-crossers who often seek out the borders themselves as destinations. From Hadrian's Wall, the Great Wall of China, and the Berlin Wall to Iguazu Falls, Victoria Falls, and Niagara Falls, physical borders fascinate many people.

Chapter 6, "Cross-border Institutions and Systems," illustrates how borders affect the human experience and how humans affect the border experience. Borders are no barrier to ideas or information except in rare cases like North Korea. While the Internet has made this exchange faster, ideas have always crossed borders with ease. Satellite receivers mean that people in the most remote places can keep abreast of current event around the world. Modern communications played an important role in the Arab Spring uprisings. Modern ideas from other places can clash with traditional notions of race, class, and gender. Borders can restrain the new ideas and keep the old ones in effect. Supranational organiza-

tions like the UN and WTO transcend state borders and attempt to constrain some state activities. The EU's successes and failures comprise a rich research field within border studies. Natural ecosystems do not stop at borders and environmental issues can become a concern. Health issues likewise can become a concern as borders do not stop the transmission of diseases but nations cannot agree on how to treat outbreaks. Ethical systems can be quite distinct on opposite sides of a border, human rights violations being the most obvious example.

Borders concludes with a look at the future of bordering. By this time the reader will begin to see borders that were invisible before and their importance in the lives of people around the world. There is a brief list of books and Web sites for further reading.

Because this book is a survey of the field of border studies, there are no footnotes and no bibliography. Bias is evident in a few places but it is obvious enough that analyzing it can be used as a critical thinking exercise. The wording does include some jargon and high-level language but the authors explain everything well enough that the book is suitable for undergraduates as well as graduate students. Overall this book does what it sets out to do. It gives a good summary of the field of border studies and shows the reader how to see the multitudes of borders that create boundaries and crossing spaces all around us. It would be a good first text in a military history class.

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