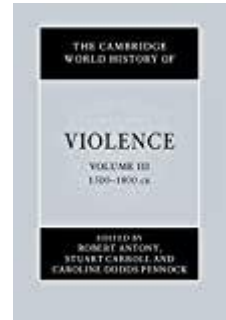
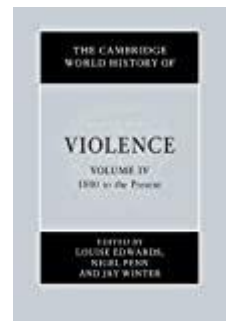


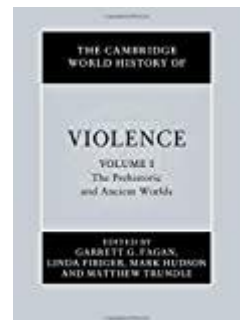
Robert Antony, Stuart Carroll, Caroline Dodds Pennock, eds. *The Cambridge World History of Violence (Volume 3)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. xv + 716 pp. \$147.25, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-11911-6.



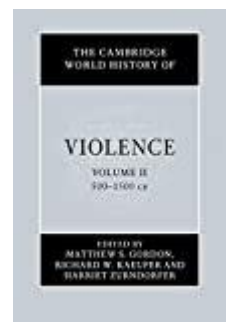
Louise Edwards, Nigel Penn, Jay Winter, eds. *The Cambridge World History of Violence (Volume 4)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. xiv + 680 pp. \$147.25, cloth, ISBN 978-1-316-60614-8.



Garrett G. Fagan, Linda Fibiger, Mark Hudson, Matthew Trundle, eds. *The Cambridge World History of Violence (Volume 1)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. xvii + 739 pp. \$155.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-12012-9.



Matthew Gordon, Richard Kaeuper, Harriet Zurndorfer, eds. *The Cambridge World History of Violence (Volume 2)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. xiv + 708 pp. \$155.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-15638-8.



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Commissioned by Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth (Red Deer Polytechnic)

Whether or not history was just “one damned thing after another,” it was certainly awash in violence. In this global survey of unprecedented scope and scale, a small army of historians takes stock of our bloody past. Their findings fill 2,905 pages in 127 chapters across four volumes that cover progressively shorter periods of world history: from human beginnings to 500 CE, from 500 to 1500, from 1500 to 1800, and from 1800 to the present.

Each of the volumes adopts a similar template: following an editorial introduction, most of the chapters are grouped into five principal thematic sections: warfare (by states or gangs), interpersonal violence (against women, children, ethnic groups, victims of crime, etc.), state-sponsored violence (from punishment to rulers’ harems, concentration camps, and genocide), religious and ritualized violence (from human sacrifice to religious persecution and combat sports), and representations of violence (in literature, art, and modern media). Each of these clusters accounts for a similar share (between 14 and 18 percent) of the chapters, and together they add up to more than four-fifths of total content. Individual volumes feature special additions that take account of the idiosyncrasies of particular periods: the prehistoric beginnings of human violence in volume 1, early modern slavery, race, and rebellion in volume 3, and more recent racial, colonial, and nationalist violence in volume 4.

This project is global in nature inasmuch as the individual chapters add up to a global survey, even as few of them are themselves genuinely global in scope (perhaps eight of them are, mostly concerned with prehistory or modernity). Most contributions focus on specific societies or parts of one or more continents. Even though any assessment of the geographical split of the contributions must remain an approximation (due to overlaps and the need for some double counting), there is

no doubt that Europe and Asia come out on top: each continent attracts close to fifty chapters. The Americas (with circa sixteen chapters, all but three of them post-1492) and Africa (circa ten chapters, several of them devoted to the “Islamic world”) lag far behind, while the Pacific region or Oceania rates only a single dedicated chapter.

Thus, Eurasia captures close to four-fifths of the chapters, a prominence that is consistent across all periods: only for 1500-1800 do the (colonial) Americas rise to a comparable position. To be sure, this is a feature familiar from other global history projects, as the combined heft of evidence from and modern scholarship on Europe and Asia (the latter predominantly represented by the Middle East, India, China, and Japan) invites and sustains detailed contributions on a wide variety of aspects. For the most part, it is European colonization that brings the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa into view. While that might seem sadly appropriate for a collection on the history of violence, this segmentation reveals a nontrivial imbalance that might have been mitigated by a more sustained effort to draw on archaeological material. In practice, however, even that could take us only so far: the study of world history rarely operates on a level playfield.

The contributors overwhelmingly focus on physical violence, and mostly on intentional harm people inflicted on the bodies of others, even as suicide and blood sports make cameo appearances. While accidents and harmful actions devoid of malicious intent are left aside, emotional violence, a protean force that would have left its mark on countless lives, comes to the fore primarily as an organic complement to the threat or experience of physical trauma.

As the general editors explain at the beginning, the project is committed to a humanities perspective of the history of violence, eschewing formally social-scientific approaches. Their skepti-

cism about long-term trends—such as the popular notion of a secular decline in violence from the Paleolithic to the present—also shapes the final product, which is marked by the absence of broader arguments or conclusions beyond the introductions to each volume that outline central themes and developments. The overarching goal is to situate and appreciate different forms of violence in the context of a particular time and place and to explore how different cultures understood violence. Given the challenge of distilling this wealth of information into a more synthetic evolutionary account of global patterns and long-term change, this is of course an eminently sensible approach. At the same time, these volumes lay a solid foundation for anyone inclined to take on that formidable challenge.

Even so, the contributions do give us an idea of some general trends, such as the emergence of organized violence at the end of the Paleolithic or the creation of warrior ideologies when the earliest states formed, concurrent developments that enmeshed political elites, state institutions, and religion in a complex bundle that proved extraordinarily durable for millennia. Some features stand out as widespread, from human sacrifice in different parts of the world to the staging of violent punishment as spectacle. Public manifestations of violence coexisted with more domestic, private, interpersonal forms. Commonly taken for granted, the authorities could not until quite recently hope to suppress them. Yet even as the modernizing state more effectively asserted its prerogatives in that sphere, it also raised the capacity for collective violent action to new heights, whether against external competitors or against its own people.

Both public and private modes of violence embraced what has been called a “moral hierarchy of violence” that determined who was in a position to be violent against whom. At different levels from states to groups and individuals, violence was routinely employed as a means of social con-

trol and as a strategy for expressing and sustaining authority. Yet the inverse was also true, as subalterns resorted to violence in challenging and subverting that authority.

The premise that violence reflects both norms and the transgression of such norms receives ample support throughout the volumes. A global perspective is vital in illuminating change. For instance, the meaning of sexual violence has changed enormously over time, as have conceptions of honor and its defense. This perspective also makes it clear that violence has been valued in very different ways: tolerance was high in chivalric cultures, lower in bureaucratized China. Certain types of violent behavior were temporally and spatially circumscribed, such as religious persecutions or holy war, and sometimes they went out of fashion, such as duels. Western colonial settlers were violent even as they claimed to suppress violence among their victims. Both the valuation and the acceptance of violent behavior have varied over space and time, and the chapters allow us to track this variation in considerable detail.

Above all, by scouring the globe over thousands of years, these volumes show just how pervasive violence has been. State-managed, state-resisting, personal, and even recreational versions turned violence into a common experience for all sexes, ages, and classes. The same was true of the—empirically less well traceable—threat and fear of violence. If anything important is missing from this exhaustive—and exhausting—survey, it is the vast and systemic violence humans have long visited upon domesticated animals by turning them into means of propulsion and sources of meat, wool, feathers, and hides.

Yet it would be churlish to ask for even more. As it is, it is already impossible in this limited space to give a proper taste of the richness of this work. The scope and depth of coverage are extraordinary. Never before has so much material on this vital topic been assembled by a single col-

laborative project. The balance between different types of violence, even as they bled into one another, is carefully maintained throughout. While state-sponsored violence—in war, punishment, and ritual—necessarily occupies a prominent position, it does so without overshadowing the rest, especially more domestic versions that always accounted for so much of human suffering and subordination. A truly pioneering achievement, this tetralogy puts the global study of violence on a new footing. It will serve as the first port of call for anyone interested in the manifold manifestations of violence in history, whether for accessible and eye-opening surveys or for up-to-date bibliography to support further investigation. An essential if unsettling reminder of the darker side of our species, this collection is a signal achievement.

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