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The field of terrorism studies has grown significantly since 2001. Scholars have analyzed the origins, radicalization, tactics, and networks of terrorists mainly from a practical perspective; their goal has been to develop counterterrorism practices that work to prevent further violence. This book runs at an angle to such historiography because it is a book about problematizing, not problem solving. Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson, an associate professor of philosophy at Syracuse University, aims to unearth the complex ways societies have addressed four well-known terrorism crises. Her goal is to trace how distinct concepts of terrorism and related counterterrorism practices served specific goals for each set of historical actors. These concepts and practices overlapped, transformed, and adapted to changing circumstances. But, as Erlenbusch-Anderson shows, each of these concepts left its mark on contemporary policymakers and researchers. This monograph delivers a nuanced and complex dive into the origins of modern understandings of terrorism.

*Genealogies of Terrorism* is a strong contribution to the growing body of critical terrorism studies, whose works emphasize that “terrorism” is a historically contingent term that has changed over time. Erlenbusch-Anderson analyzes four key eras in which terrorism shaped society and gained novel associations: the French Revolution, Russian revolutionary terrorism in the late nineteenth century, French colonialism and the Algerian War, and the post-9/11 Global War on Terror. In each period, Erlenbusch-Anderson argues, a specific set of understandings and interrelated practices concerning terrorism developed. Even though some terrorist attacks in these eras were outwardly similar, the underlying justifications for these attacks and counterterrorism machinations differed significantly. For example, during the French Revolution, “terror” was initially associated with the person of Maximilien Robespierre and systems of governance that relied on this violence to exercise their power. Then, during the Thermidorian reaction, “terrorism” shifted to describe non-state actors who adopted it as a political philosophy and...
even a political identity. In contrast, Russian revolutionaries saw terrorism as a specific tactic of class war from the 1860s on and took a far more martial approach to the issue.

The book lays out complex theories in clear language. Erlenbusch-Anderson strongly relies on the genealogical approach of renowned scholar Michel Foucault to trace the development of different “modes of understanding” concerning terrorism over time (p. 3). She also makes the strong argument that in each era, counterterrorist specialists deployed “terrorism” as a means of social defense. They justified pursuing and killing ostensible terrorists as a means of protecting a distinct group of humans. Who was included in this group worth protecting depended on the time and place. While French counterinsurgency specialists in Algeria aimed to guard the French nation, for example, modern US counterterrorism experts seek to shield humanity as a whole, so long as humanity includes those around the world who adhere to US liberal values.

Detailed primary sources support these arguments. Erlenbusch-Anderson draws on the writings of renowned thinkers, terrorists, and counterterrorism practitioners from each era to demonstrate their distinct views about terrorism. Substantial quotations accompany all claims. The reader hears from era-defining writers, such as Robespierre, Alexis de Tocqueville, Vladimir Lenin, and Franz Fanon. Accused terrorists, such as François-Noël Babeuf, the executive committee of the People’s Will, Zohra Drif, and Saadi Yacef, explain themselves. And security officials, such as Konstantin Pobyedonostseff and Jacques Massu, clarify the goals and justifications for their counterterrorism practices. In particular, the chapters on the French Revolution, Russia, and Algeria greatly benefit from the strong quotations.

While the chapters on historical instances of terrorism are a key strength of the book, Erlenbusch-Anderson also provides a thought-provoking analysis of how we conceptualize terrorism today. She emphasizes that we have a plurality of ways we can think about terrorism, from an act associated with a specific individual like Osama bin Laden, to a political identity, a criminal activity, or a specific form of warfare (just to name a few examples). This pluralistic understanding can be easily adapted to fit new perceived threats as they appear. Erlenbusch-Anderson makes it clear in her last chapters that she is not looking to solve the problem of terrorism or recommend counterterrorism best practices. However, all modern ways of conceptualizing terrorism are rooted in specific historical cases. By highlighting these origins, Erlenbusch-Anderson pushes the reader to be more reflective about what terrorists and counterterrorism practitioners were aiming to achieve in the past in order to shape more precise and nuanced policies today.

This book is a complex evaluation of the motives and justifications surrounding terrorism in the past. By analyzing why historical actors made the choices that they did, *Genealogies of Terrorism* offers scholars, students, and policymakers alike a lot to think about.
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