Reviews


This book offers a double treat. First, it convincingly organizes wide-ranging materials in world history to demonstrate that only unusual and largely undesirable circumstances serve to reduce income inequalities in complex societies—a generalization as true in the past century as it was for the Romans or Mayans or dynastic Chinese. Second, it organizes data and argument in ways designed to attract a wide audience, interested in social science and policy, toward serious (if admittedly unusually ambitious) historical analysis, juxtaposing various regions and time periods in the exploration of key topics rather than laying out a conventional chronology. Both the findings and the presentation warrant serious attention in an interdisciplinary context. Depressing as his findings are, Scheidel invites careful consideration of their implications both for contemporary political action and for historical evaluations.

The first quarter of the book charts the rise of inequality as societies moved past the hunting and gathering phase—an admirable summary in itself. The role of the state in abetting inequality will surprise no Marxist, but it is well handled. Primary focus, in this section and throughout, rests on the gap between the supremely rich and the rest of the population, not on gradations beneath the top group—potentially an important topic for further treatment.

The account turns next to the four kinds of upheaval that alone can significantly reduce inequality. It starts with the mobilizations associated with the big wars of the twentieth century, before addressing the more modest (or nonexistent) effects of earlier wars—the U.S. Civil War, the Warring States period in China, and so on. Next come particularly violent revolutions, primarily again in the twentieth century. Then Scheidel turns to the results of collapsed states, at one point enticingly juxtaposing ancient Egypt with contemporary Somalia but also examining Rome, the Mayans, and other cases. Finally, plagues take the stage, most obviously the Black Death, the Columbian Exchange, and the “Justinian” plague of the sixth century; interestingly, mere famine did not have the same results.

A challenging section probes other possibilities—land reform, democracy, economic development, and abolitions of slavery—that Scheidel finds to have little impact on inequality unless associated with all-out war or steep revolutionary violence. He does not systematically entertain the potentially significant, though elusive, possibility that some of these developments might have retarded further inequality.

Scheidel notes a few exceptional cases, for instance, fifth-century Athens, which combined direct democracy with war mobilization in ways that had some brief positive effect. He dismisses as “feeble” the more recent decline of inequality in Latin America (perhaps too hastily). Mamluk and Ottoman policies of confiscation garner his attention to some extent, though ultimately rising inequality prevailed in these instances as well.
Seizure of wealth from one group by another occurs more frequently, as in the dynastic transitions in China or the Norman invasion of Britain, but these shifts involved personnel, not the basic social dynamic.

Scheidel backs his generalizations with data drawn from many studies and many types of sources, recognizing full well that European examples are particularly robust and that modern patterns are easier to assess than those in earlier periods. Scholars might dispute some of his claims; because the focus rests mainly on disruptions of inequality, havens that complicate the generalizations might have existed. Just for the record, India’s presence is surprisingly rare in the treatment, and Scheidel makes no real effort to explain why some societies become more unequal than others, even if virtually all of them illustrate the overall patterns of persistence.

Scheidel carefully notes that he is not dealing with other types of inequality for which historical findings might be more encouraging—inequalities under the law, gender, and regional economic differences. Nor does he offer any thorough assessment of whether inequality has predictable results on ordinary life, say, for the poor, except to note that too much inequality can provoke violence.

The final section charts the rapid rise of inequality in most regions since the end of the revolution/total war combination that carried into the 1950s (abetted in some cases by some additional, albeit transitory, supports, like unionization). Scheidel muses over the possibility that some dramatic new policy might reverse the historical pattern, but he also offers hope that the old disrupters (plague and total war) are less likely to solidify inequality going forward. The concluding section also grants, sadly, that rabid reformers might try to ignore history.

The findings raise at least two related questions: For historians, they invite a follow-up inquiry into whether certain systems of inequality (buffered, say, by Confucian reciprocity, religious solace and charity, or a welfare-state floor) generate less harmful results than others; disrupting them would seem to involve immense suffering. What we can do to promote greater justice if forced to admit that economic inequality, in itself, may be a futile target?

Peter N. Stearns
George Mason University


This book seeks to answer the question, What is the history of thinking about how to study the past through things? To respond, Miller has written a historiography concerned with analyzing historical predecessors to modern material-culture studies. Succinctly, the book is “an outline theory of how people have thought about objects as evidence” (10). It is also an intriguingly personal book in which scholarly inquiry is structured
around human experiences, some of which are events from Miller’s life, such as pondering Hermanus Posthumus’s painting *Landscape with Roman Ruins* (1536) while taking a train from Bern to Berlin. Others are more purely intellectual experiences, such as Miller’s detailed engagement with thinkers like Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (about whom Miller authored an important book), Johann Christoph Gatterer, Karl Gotthard Lamprecht, or Gustav Friedrich Klemm. Miller’s grounding claim is that the current interest in material culture emerged from a long historical process traceable to early modern antiquarianism. Miller seeks an alternative history of history in which the panoramic cultural analyses of Edward Gibbon and Jacob Burckhardt are exceptions and object-centered histories the norm.

Miller opens with an analysis of objects in twentieth-century conceptions of history. His text varies widely to include not only prominent philosophers of culture (Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, Amaldo Momigliano, et al.) but also the painter Giorgio de Chirico, the art historian Francis Haskell, and others. Miller’s frequent forays into the world of literature are striking: Rainer Maria Rilke and Virginia Woolf appear as theorists of material culture. The book’s middle chapters treat a series of historical engagements with objects, discussions of Lamprecht, early modern antiquarianism, the University of Göttingen’s late eighteenth-century curriculum, early archaeology, the concept of *Kulturwissenschaft* (culture studies), and the founding of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in 1852. Nineteenth-century Germany looms large in his choice of examples. The book concludes with the observation that “our histories are deeply connected to objects” (200), but, once again, Miller presents it through a personal recollection—this time, cleaning out his deceased father’s closet. He then remarks that “because we can hold them [objects] in our hands or lay our hands on them, because we can sometimes actually feel the past, the connection between learning and person endures” (210). Objects force us into an empathetic relationship with the subjects that we study. Closing with a quote from Nietzsche, Miller figures antiquarianism as a way to ennoble human experience.

No one will argue with the main point of this distinctive and unusual book—that antiquarianism and modern material-culture studies share some sort of common intellectual terrain. Nor would anyone contest that material-culture studies’ recent prominence has something to do with the desire for an experiential, tangible history. But whether the book reveals that history or is simply one scholar’s highly individual engagement with it, as filtered through thinkers that he admires, is another question. Miller is a perspicacious reader of philosophy, literature, and history, but that trait is also his curse. Some of the book’s internal analyses fit uncomfortably into its larger structure, and some of its key concepts remain undertheorized. For example, at several points Miller refers to material culture’s role in creating knowledge haptically, but the haptic is much less straightforward.

---

1 Miller, *Peiresc’s Europe: Learning and Virtue in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, 2000).
than his references to it allow. Important writings by Prown and Candlin might have helped to refine the idea that touching the past really makes it come alive.\(^2\) This book is best approached as a scholarly memoir that documents one person’s search for the deep history of material-culture studies.

Michael Yonan  
University of Missouri


This book deals, in panoramic fashion, with the history of tea as a consumer product, an international trade item, and a source of taxation. Rappaport’s ability to disentangle multiple factors and their dynamics over two centuries and across Asia, Europe, Africa, Australasia, and North America is truly remarkable.

The dense text has three parts. Part I, by far the best part of the book, has four chapters that trace the origin of tea production and consumption in East Asia, as well as the spread of the plant and the taste for it in Asia and beyond. Rappaport hints that although tea was exotic, it filled a gap in the human diet as a portable, less perishable, and always-ready drink that could also serve as a nontoxic stimulant with some advantages that other beverages, such as beer (less portable) and coffee (less ready), did not have. The demand for tea thus took the world by storm. From the supply side, however, European colonial authorities also had strong incentives to carry out policies for “import substitution” that led to the proliferation of tea plantations in colonial Asia to replace tea imports from the Far East. Meanwhile, the imperial taxmen managed to rack in huge fiscal revenues in Britain and its colonies; their tea-cum-rent-seeking activities resulted in the rebellious “Tea Party Movement” as the first step toward independence in America. In addition, there were decided attempts to give Chinese tea bad press in order to boost South Asian tea (“good tea”) sales despite the fact that tea produced in South Asia had a different taste. Rappaport’s findings clearly show that the colonial state played a crucial role in stifling tea trade with China to promote the new type of tea produced inside the European colonies. Imperial China and colonial Asia were caught in a zero-sum game; trade did not necessarily benefit all parties.

Part II traces the patterns of tea consumption in Britain and across the British Empire along two distinct dimensions: (1) by the upper classes as a social drink (typically the English “high tea”); and (2) by the masses as a symbol of commonwealth or shared identity within the Empire. Remarkably,

---

\(^2\) See, for example, Jules David Prown, \textit{American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture} (East Lansing, 2000); Fiona Candlin, \textit{The Object Reader (In Sight: Visual Culture)} (New York, 2009).
market operators were able to mix the two dimensions harmoniously without causing a Marxian class struggle. In such a context, tea transcended social classes and ethnic differences, acting as an efficient cultural bond. Drinking tea became a (if not the) subtle icon of British “soft power” in the world. Tea largely lost its link to China and Chinese exoticism. Instead, it began to carry a unique message of “Britishness.”

Part III is a short and open-ended reflection on the decline of tea consumption after World War II, when other beverages, such as coffee and Coca Cola, came to the fore. It suggests that tea became the victim of another zero-sum game. The advantageous influence of mass consumption was weaker than one might think.

Overall, this reader-friendly volume unveils a history of consumer, producer, and imperial behavior in which each party was intent to maximize its own interests. Its qualitative and quantitative information will appeal to economic historians, and its extensive use of visual aids—old photographs and newspaper clippings—will also resonate with cultural historians. The main message is that modern taste is subject to top-down manipulation by the visible hand of the state. The role of the market is secondary. If true, this book provides considerable ammunition against the “Washington Consensus,” which views the market as a complete, endogenously independent determinant of resource allocation, as well as growth and change. There was no such consensus in the history of tea in the British Empire behind the façade of rapid expansion of global trade.

The only weakness of the book is its relative silence about technology and technological change (in areas such as production, transport, management, finance, and taxation). For example, modern packaging and modern shipping have contributed considerably to the availability and affordability of coffee and soft drinks, as have the monopoly and/or oligopoly of multinational firms behind these two commodities. Nonetheless, this book will certainly interest students of world/global history.

Kent Deng
London School of Economics


This book explores the role that parliamentary legislation played in shaping the British economy from the Restoration to the onset of the Industrial Revolution. Although legislation on economic affairs began to increase from the middle of the seventeenth century, not until the Glorious Revolution of 1688/9 and the subsequent establishment of political stability and parliamentary sovereignty did the floodgates open. Between 1689 and 1800, Parliament passed 7,545 economic acts, which was more than half of its total legislative output; it also considered a
further 3,365 bills that failed. Whereas prior to 1714, fewer than 30 percent of all acts were economic, after 1760, the figure was 64 percent. Few, if any, other European states were so prolific.

Adam Smith, in his *Wealth of Nations*, famously styled this form of economic regulation the “mercantile system.” Later economic historians called it “mercantilism.” Yet as Hoppit shows, there was no system here. Britain had different political economies, regionally and nationally, throughout the period under consideration. Economic policy was neither consistent nor coherent. The state paid little attention to some areas of the economy (notably manufacturing, labor relations, or mining), and there was a lack of coordination in law making. Rather than shape its own policy, the central government often responded to pressures from private interest groups and passed acts intended to address problems or deficiencies with previous legislation. Moreover, the state lacked the resources to enforce its legislative initiatives consistently.

Hoppit divides his study into two parts. Part I provides an overview of the legislative dimensions of Britain’s economy, documenting, in turn, the revolution in economic legislation, the types of legislation enacted (regarding local, national, and imperial affairs), the groups that were pushing for certain types of legislation (whether via petitioning or through the media), and the ways in which interest politics played itself out. Part II moves from prescription to practice, offering a series of case studies about the political economies of the fens, of wool, of bounties (payments to incentivize certain types of economic behavior), and of public finance. Many revealing conclusions emerge, all pointing toward variety and heterogeneity—and, indeed, a lack of coherence—in the government’s economic policy. In the fens, for instance, Hoppit finds that proposed legislation relating to roads and enclosure was much more likely to be successful than that involving water. The ban on the export of wool throughout the period, normally seen as “a cornerstone of the mercantile system,” in fact highlights the “experimental or aspirational nature” of that supposed system; “the complexity and costs of effectively enforcing the ban” were often “too great” for the government, “in monetary, administrative, and political terms” (216–217). Bounties, which grew in scope over the eighteenth century, were more important than usually recognized, although they were sometimes directed at noneconomic ends. London bore the brunt of public finance, whereas Scotland, by contrast, experienced relatively light taxation.

Assessing the overall impact of Britain’s economic legislation is not easy. Although Britain’s economic performance in the eighteenth century was “internationally exceptional,” this success may have been a coincidence. Yet the sheer volume of economic legislation testifies to how much contemporaries valued it. Parliament “was highly responsive to economic needs, large and small” and “played an important role in the generation, debate, and promulgation of views about ways of improving the economic life,” even though it might “not always have generated effective laws as a consequence” (320).
Hoppit’s study is interdisciplinary in the sense that it deals with the intersection of politics, ideas, and economics. Yet it is really a history of legislation, and involves a great deal of counting and breaking down into types. It is not quite economic history, though the book has many interesting things to say about economic regulation in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. Nor is it classic political history: It offers little insight into the machinations of parliamentary politics at the time, though the loss of the relevant parliamentary papers in the fire of 1834 makes it impossible to reconstruct the committee debates about the bills that Parliament considered. The work also falls short as a history of ideas. Hoppit prefers to quantify the economic literature of the time rather than discuss what was in it. He does not mention the lively pamphlet debate regarding the potential for improvement in Scotland at the time of the Union negotiations of 1706/7: For instance, Daniel Defoe, who worked as a government propagandist at the time, wrote much about how Union might enhance Scotland’s political economy. Hoppit also has relatively little to say about empire. Yet these observations perhaps simply reflect the challenges involved in writing such a broadly conceived interdisciplinary study. Although the writing style is dry—even when not counting legislation, Hoppit has a tendency to enumerate his points—Britain’s Political Economies will fundamentally alter the way we think about the nature of Britain’s state-regulated economy before the Industrial Revolution.

Tim Harris
Brown University


This wonderful book is a weighty 350 pages of always interesting text that draws from several generations of scholarship by historians and historical geographers, with a twenty-seven-page map bibliography linked to a stunning web compilation (http://mapscholar.org/empire). Some of the maps are detailed, large-scale surveys of fortifications, towns, or plantations; others are linear surveys of extensive river valleys or portrayals of vast regions. Coverage stretches from Newfoundland and the maritime northeast, a land of fish and fur, to Caribbean islands where further sugar plantations were anticipated. Edelson gives particular attention to the tricky issue of the frontier, including in his scope the Indian territories west of the Alleghany Mountains and the surveys to assess the plantation potential of the former Spanish lands in Florida. The map collection is the foundation for seven well-argued chapters.

These maps were the basis from which London’s Lords of Trade and Plantation, or the Board of Trade in its later labeling, considered the best scenarios for managing the American colonies from the end
of the French and Indian Wars (1763) to the War of Independence. They regarded the earlier royal and proprietary colonies as messy and often corrupt, concocting plans for the better management of colonial settlement in newly acquired territories through direct control. New lands needed detailed surveys, and the promotion of plantations and settlements benefited from new high-resolution maps. Not surprisingly, many lands proved to be less desirable than surveyors had imagined.

The Board of Trade also sought to limit the western expansion of American settlers by delineating Indian-controlled lands west of the Allegheny Mountains. These lands were later incorporated into an enlarged Quebec for governance. Edelson considers each map as evidence of a metropolitan vision of American space. A contemporary rendering of London, however, situating the Treasury Building in Whitehall with its four rooms for the Plantation Office, where all these maps, atlases, and reports were collected and consulted, would have further enriched the text.

Rather than quibble with the depth of coverage for certain regions, or the treatment of particular cartographers and surveyors, in such a magisterial effort, some vital enabling factors should be noted. This book can stand as a model for how the digital humanities can foster individual scholarly excellence. Thanks to the fellowships and grants that made this book possible, future researchers are spared from having to visit dozens of scattered archival and map depositories; the maps now exist on one stunning web platform.

Edelson’s chapters offer a compelling argument about what led American colonists to resist an imagined imperial geography. American settlers, who struggled for generations to make their respective colonies home, erased the lines on the maps that sought to bind them to a British commercial realm. Canadian readers aware of ongoing Indian claims to their part of Turtle Island, however, might bristle at the author’s use of the term settler colonialism, but that is a topic for another book!

Deryck W. Holdsworth
Pennsylvania State University


As an exciting experiment in merging the genre of the mystery novel with a work of historiography, Hilliard’s *The Littlehampton Libels* succeeds in crafting an engaging, pacey, and intellectually stimulating account of an unusual criminal case in 1920s England. Oriented around a series of libels sent to the close-knit inhabitants of the seaside town of Littlehampton, ranging from imputations about prostitution, extramarital affairs, thefts, and other neighborly grievances, the monograph keeps its readers guessing
about the culprit until the final chapters. Part of Hilliard’s brilliance lies in demonstrating how these libels signified more than “petty” grievances to their recipients, for whom issues of reputation still had economic consequences. Among those whose employment was often precarious, and who depended on credit and neighborly assistance for survival during periods of hardship, the libels imperiled crucial relationships that were already fraught due to the proximity of their living arrangements.

Hilliard’s painstaking examinations of “the textures of writing and speech” (177), as recorded in police interviews with suspects and witnesses, courtroom testimony, contemporary letters, and the libels themselves, fleshed out how increasing levels of literacy in this era profoundly impacted the ability of the poor to express their individuality. Indeed, the writing style—both penmanship and literary coherence—of one suspect, who displayed the ability to modify her letters to become “proficient in the language of official correspondence” (139), serves as a fascinating example of the kinds of agency that literacy afforded, creating a means to interact across social classes and institutions. Herein lies the significance of sometimes derided “microhistories” and the case-study approach. As Hilliard writes, *The Littlehampton Libels* offers “an attempt to push my earlier exercises in intellectual or literary history ‘from below’ further, and treat vocabularies and handwriting styles as sites of individuality and ambition” (177).

This work is interdisciplinary in format rather than methodology. It inhabits the style of a novel successfully, but is unmistakably an academic text, informed by exhaustive research into the lives of its protagonists as well as the local and institutional structures that they encountered. Hilliard also explores broader themes of poverty, gender, class, and notions of respectability at intervals that enhance the development of the main “story” without jarring shifts in tone. As such, *The Littlehampton Libels* is an outstanding work of social history, but it also deploys cultural history’s emphasis on conflicting narratives of the past in a manner doubly effective because the case actually hinged on these concerns. Playing with historians’ abilities to act as “detectives” when confronted by testimonies that deliberately sought to obscure the truth, Hilliard’s book creates a new template for exposing the methodological and intellectual challenges of claiming to “know” the past in a way both elegant and engaging.

Chapter 9 (133–144), following the revelation of the culprit’s identity, marks a change to a more conventional style of academic writing. Hilliard discusses the etymology of the “bad language” used in the libels and its resonance in the period and place under study. This change in tone would be problematical in a history that sought exclusively to appeal to a “popular” audience, but this chapter and its successor bridges the gap between academic and popular histories by summarizing the key arguments succinctly. It recalls Summerscale’s excellent *The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher*, albeit with a more explicit social-historical emphasis.¹

The Littlehampton Libels is an engaging and ambitious work that scholars in the fields and sub-disciplines of history and English will mutually enjoy, particularly for its suggestive insights into working-class agency through literacy.

Eloise Moss
University of Manchester


The first half of this compelling but disconcerting book tells the totally unedifying story of a botched jewel robbery at the Hyde Park Hotel in London in December 1937. Four upper middle-class “playboys” short of the cash necessary to sustain their high style of living invited Cartier’s London manager to come to a hotel room with jewelry for sale, violently attacked him, and absconded with the jewels. They were easily caught. Their trial at the Old Bailey was of both national and international interest—a crowded social event attended by the likes of the Duke of Rutland and Margot Asquith. McLaren provides a detailed account of the previous and subsequent lives of the four defendants, all well born and well educated at reputable public schools (Radley, Harrow, Wellington, and Oundle).

The defendants went to jail. The flogging with cat o’ nine tails that two of them endured caused a debate about the legitimacy of such brutal punishment, with the unattractive subtext of whether it was appropriate for the well-born. McLaren is legitimately fascinated with the social aspect of the crime and its punishment. At times, his text is almost like a social column; when first introduced, most of his many characters are given their full names, their parents’ names and residences, and their fathers’ professions. Given that McLaren is writing a social history, all of this information is relevant.

At the conclusion of the story about these deeply unattractive young men, one wonders how it can be significant. The remainder of this short study is devoted to showing how it illuminates the shaping of English society in the 1930s and beyond. McLaren uses an impressive range of sources, both primary and secondary, to plunge deeply into the world of Mayfair men not only in the 1930s but also in the postwar world. In a sense, they were the successors of the flappers and the Bright Young Things of the 1920s. But the shortage of cash that the Depression caused made their life of minimum work and maximum pleasure difficult to maintain. Their doings, as reported by the popular press, were the subject of continual fascination to the public, providing the double pleasure of titillation and disapproval. The public schools that the four attended were supposed to have given them the high character needed to rule
an Empire that was about to disappear. Rather, their backgrounds and education endowed them with a sense of entitlement to a life of self-indulgence—dining and drinking and a fair amount of womanizing (ironically, the hotel employees who observed them commented on their effeminacy). In order to acquire cash, they resorted to various schemes that were almost always unsuccessful and frequently, as most dramatically exemplified in the case of this robbery, fraught with legal consequences. They had even attempted to sell weapons to Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War.

What was the role that entitled young men were to play in the 1930s? How new was the problem? Upper-class scoundrels had existed in earlier periods. But as McLaren makes clear in the chapters named for the categories in his subtitle, their style was different in the 1930s. The misbehavior of the upper classes, because of the press, became far more accessible to the public. The playboy, addicted to pleasure, was a new category arising out of the 1930s. As a life style, however, it was not as ineffective as McLaren seems to suggest. Although most of his examples are of hopeless individuals, at its best, his narrative might well be a triumph of English understatement and insouciance hiding an inner toughness. Beneath his charm, Noel Coward exhibited a firm belief in the need of the upper classes to justify their positions of privilege, as in his play *Cavalcade* (1932) and his script for the film *In Which We Serve* (1942). Beneath his stylized manner, Leslie Howard was the Scarlet Pimpernel in the film of the same name (1934). There was also something to be said in favor of the idea that life should be pleasurable rather than nothing but hard work and stern values. Moreover, playboys were hard to construe as serious threats to society. McLaren makes the point, however, that being seen as a playboy undermined the appeal of Sir Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists, given his affection for strutting about in uniform (mocked by P. G. Wodehouse) and his not so English proclivity to violence. McLaren is persuasive that these raffish and unattractive figures played important roles in shaping our contemporary ideas about sexuality and consumerism. Why not try to live for pleasure? In his case study, the search is perverted and goes horribly wrong. But is it necessarily a completely unworthy goal?

Peter Stansky
Stanford University

*Age Norms and Intercultural Interactions in Colonial North America*. By Jason Eden and Naomi Eden (Lanham, Md., Lexington Books, 2017) 224 pp. $95.00 cloth $90.00 e-book

Historians of the colonial era who are predominantly interested in social history, especially those who study the lives of children, set themselves a difficult task. With a thin trail of traditional historical documentation at
hand, they must reach for alternative sources, such as the literature of captivity narratives, or tricky methodologies, including the history of emotions. Jason Eden, a historian, and Naomi Eden, a gerontologist and marriage and family therapist, suggest that psychology, and, in particular, insights about the human life course, can shed light on the colonial past. Theirs may well be a fruitful avenue of interdisciplinary research, but unfortunately, the Edens’ monograph does little to move the conversation forward.

Age Norms and Intercultural Interactions in Colonial North America is largely an overview of secondary scholarship about the life course as experienced by Europeans, African slaves, and Native Americans in the colonial period. Although the Edens incorporate some historical primary sources into their text, they offer little evidence of the interdisciplinary perspective suggested by their diverse backgrounds. They divided their work into six relatively short chapters that examine age norms in Native American communities, both before and after European contact, and the age norms of enslaved African Americans. Three other chapters review European age norms in the southern, middle, and New England colonies.

In Chapter 1, the Edens paint a portrait of a protected Native American childhood growing into a respected old age—an understanding of the life course that clashes with the less sympathetic understandings of many Europeans in Chapter 5. The text’s middle chapters attempt to detail the similarities and differences between European colonists regarding their understanding of the life course. The chapter about New England is arguably the most successful of the three, integrating a richer diversity of sources than the others. In contrast, the middle-colonies chapter relies heavily on the diary of Elizabeth Drinker, a well-known and oft-cited text. Yet even in the New England chapter, the Edens’ aspirations—“Perhaps a careful consideration of age-related paradoxes in human history will lead us to a deeper understanding of age-related contradictions in our own time”—outpace what they deliver (74).

Readers of this journal may well come away from this book with the sense of a missed opportunity. Except for a few footnotes—about depictions of unruly teens in popular culture, generational effects of trauma, and the pitfalls of modernization theory—the Edens make no sustained efforts toward interdisciplinary analysis in this work. This failure is all the more disappointing given the intellectual groundwork for such an endeavor laid by Field and Syrett in their edited volume, Age in America.1 Field and Syrett draw attention to the “arbitrary but necessary” category of age as a force that shaped, and continues to shape, human experience. The “necessary” aspect is straightforward; for administrative ease and political equality, governments must attach a specific age to suffrage, draft eligibility, and other civic obligations and rights. “Arbitrary,” however, opens the analytical door to complex discussions about unequal

power among diverse groups of people. Unequal ages of consent, for example, have roots in the vagaries of gender politics as well as shifting understandings of presumed childhood innocence. Ages attached to apprenticeship and the gradual manumission of slaves help to sketch out the borders of class mobility and racial prejudice in colonial America. Current scholarship in the psychology of aging and development would reveal how arbitrary age limits were delineated in the colonial period, but the text’s tentative conclusions about the “various ways” that beliefs about age shaped policy and behavior are not satisfying.

The Edens are, however, correct that age as a category of historical analysis does not yet command the same attention as does historians’ familiar triumvirate of race, class, and gender. But even though the authors make occasional efforts to illuminate how “contemporary knowledge about human development can promote a deeper comprehension of historical events and human interactions,” their worthy goal is more aspirational than realized in this book (182).

Susan A. Miller
Rutgers University, Camden


Thomas Hartshorne once declared it “a commonplace that Americans are more concerned with their national identity and spend more time trying to explain themselves to themselves” than do most other people. ¹ In _American Niceness_, Bramen joins company with Potter, Boorstin, Slotkin, and myriad others to explain us to us. ² For Bramen, “niceness” serves as a significant framing lens for detecting American identity. She contends that in the 1770s, even as Diderot and d’Alembert’s _Encyclopédie_ (Paris, 1751–1772) was noting proverbial descriptions of nationalities—“carefree as a Frenchman, jealous as an Italian, serious as a Spaniard, wicked as an Englishman, proud as a Scotsman, drunk as a German, lazy as an Irishman, duplicitous as a Greek”—Americans adopted niceness as a defining characteristic.³ The Declaration of Independence provides a first and important example, one in which the Founding Fathers decided that conditions had

---

deteriorated so badly that, almost regretfully, it had “become necessary and proper” to separate from Great Britain. Throughout the nineteenth century, Americans cultivated and complicated a smiling, affable pleasantness not only blandly to accommodate an increasingly diverse population but also to smooth and enable the manifold violence associated with expansion across the continent.

Bramen’s approach bears some resemblance to that of Michael Kammen, whose *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization* (Ithaca, 1990) offers the curiously useful term *syzygy* to explain ways in which a national characteristic can hold in tension the opposing qualities necessary to create a whole. *American Niceness* directs our attention to the seemingly benign use of *niceness* but expressly draws from Voloshinov’s idea of multi-accentuality, a theory positing that different groups assign different accents to the same linguistic signs, thereby allowing multiple meanings for a word. *American Niceness* directs our attention to the seemingly benign use of *niceness* but expressly draws from Voloshinov’s idea of multi-accentuality, a theory positing that different groups assign different accents to the same linguistic signs, thereby allowing multiple meanings for a word. By examining an impressive collection of novels, sermons, memoirs, plays, and other written remnants of nineteenth-century life, Bramen parses the signs of American niceness, showing its own doubled edges, wherein an agreeable surface masks as well as endorses “not niceness.”

Bramen develops her thesis systematically. She begins with “manifest cheerfulness”—according to Bramen, a hospitality modeled on Native American behavior but mirrored in a fragmented, selective way, ultimately to be deployed against indigenous claims and lives. She then explores southern hospitality and the enigmatic smile of the enslaved (29). For example, Captain Delano in Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno* (1855) “sees in the black smile confirmation of his own [white] amiability,” which enables him to remain blind to the two-facedness embodied in Babo’s loyalty (141). Chapters about Christology and feminine niceness lead more deeply into an analysis of the mixed signs of domination and resistance, further complicating our understanding of American geniality. Jesus’ transformation into a loving friend allowed for a humanized deity destined “to love us, to teach us, to save us,” as Stowe wrote (152). It was a move that facilitated the democratization of religion as it demoted the authority of the Calvinists’ mighty God. Yet, as Wells discovered, asserting equality in a democracy proved difficult for African Americans and women. Despite her first-class ticket and ladylike demeanor, in a violently revealing episode, a railroad employee refused Wells a seat because of her color (242–248).

In the final chapter, “The Likeable Empire,” Bramen argues more generally that the nation’s exceptionalist mythos of democratic innocence continues to obfuscate the all-too-demonstrably violent strains

---

6 See, for example, Ida B. Wells (ed. Miriam Decosta-Willis), *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells* (Boston, 1995), 59, 73, 88, 188.
of American life. Although it reaches conclusions that are not in themselves shockingly novel, *American Niceness* offers a coherent, nuanced, and richly textured reading of the power of words to discipline the traumas and misuses of power in nineteenth-century America. In doing so, Bramen considers more carefully the asynchronous accents in works as varied as those of Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), Melville, the Beechers, Frederick Douglass, and Horace Bushnell—to name a few of many. Bramen has thus repositioned *niceness*, a term of banal virtue, as an important key to explicating the elusive meaning(s) of American identity. As we would say in the South, bless her little heart!

Penne Restad
University of Texas, Austin

*Outside In: The Transnational Circuitry of US History*. Edited by Andrew Preston and Doug Rossinow (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017) 296 pp. $105.00 cloth $24.95 paper

For at least a quarter of a century, American historians have sought to recast the history of the United States in a transnational frame. It is unprofitable, the argument goes, perhaps even impossible, to understand U.S. history without considering connections, comparisons, and contexts that go beyond its borders.¹ Thus, diplomatic history has become the history of the “U.S. in the world,” a change designed to highlight concern with interactions that go well beyond the realm of diplomacy. Immigration history has moved past its early focus on the experiences of immigrants within U.S. borders to view migration through transnational and even global lenses. New fields, such as Atlantic history or borderlands history, have emerged, dedicated to reframing American history in ways that transcend the nation’s borders.

This shift in the study of U.S. history reflects a “transnational turn” in the historical profession as a whole. Once split up into national or regional specializations, many historians have sought to discard methodological nationalism in favor of more capacious approaches. But making sense of how these new approaches fit together remains a challenge. Terms like *international history*, *world history*, *global history*, or (as in the title of this volume) *transnational history* are often invoked without a clear definition of what they mean.² Are these terms essentially synonyms to be used interchangeably, or do they represent entirely distinct approaches? Or do they partially overlap, in something like a Venn diagram?

¹ See, especially, Thomas Bender (ed.), *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley, 2002).
² See, for example, the “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *American History Review*, CXI (2006), 1441–1464, which opens with a participant stating, “In general, I think that the distinctions between world, global, and transnational history have never adequately been explained.”
Beyond the issue of definitions, there is also the question of purpose: What is the ultimate goal of eschewing “methodological nationalism” in writing the history of the United States? Is it simply to unsettle the received narrative of U.S. history, expose its lacunae and its inadequacies, and leave it at that? Or is the ultimate goal the construction of an entirely new narrative of U.S. history, this time from a fully transnational perspective? The implications of this question are concrete (as I was recently reminded when finding little evidence of a transnational perspective in a high-school-history textbook). Thus far, efforts to produce new, fully transnational narratives of the expanse of U.S. history have served to highlight both the benefits and the difficulties of such an enterprise.  

In the volume under review, the editors’ goal is more modest—not to recast U.S. history but simply to show how international and transnational approaches can enrich it. Their introduction, among other things, usefully distinguishes international history, which “privileges relations among states,” from transnational history, which focuses on non-state actors (3). These approaches, though distinct, are complementary and intertwined. Many historical topics call for careful attention to both state and non-state actors; the book does not privilege one over the other. The eleven chapters that follow offer a rich sampling of recent work in this vein, covering themes ranging from foreign policy and political economy to gender, race, religion, and migration. One intriguing chapter traces the connections between oil, politics, and faith across the U.S.–Canada border in the mid-twentieth century; another, perhaps the most methodologically interesting, uses the career of Luther Hodges—textile executive, Rotarian, southern governor, and secretary of commerce—to trace the “transatlantic circuitry” of the New South. Notably, with a few exceptions, the transnational circuitry traced in this volume largely runs within the Anglophone world. Surely, the history of the United States is more connected with Asia, the Middle East, or Latin America than the scope of this volume seems to suggest, but it remains to others to explore precisely how.

Erez Manela
Harvard University

*Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century.*
By Tera W. Hunter (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2017) 404 pp. $29.95

The refusal of states to recognize the marriages of enslaved people legally was among slavery’s most significant cruelties, mocking deep ties of
affection among the enslaved as pretenses unworthy of acknowledgement by white people or the law. As Hunter demonstrates in *Bound in Wedlock*, however, the lack of legal sanction for slave marriages was, in important ways, the fundamental precondition for maintaining chattel slavery as an inheritable and permanent condition in the United States. Marriage was a legitimate contract; allowing slaves to enter into it and make legally sustainable claims to their families was incompatible with the prerogatives of slaveholding, especially regarding the reproductive capacities of enslaved women. Slaveholders destroyed one in every three first marriages among enslaved people. Marriages between enslaved people and free people of color, which Hunter refers to as "mixed-status marriages," were equally at the mercy of white people and the vagaries of the law. Hunter shows how even antebellum free black marriages existed in a constant state of uncertainty.

*Bound in Wedlock* focuses, in part, on delineating the wide range of partnerships and intimate relationships created by black people in the nineteenth century. Hunter describes the vulnerabilities and contingencies of those relationships, the adaptability and flexibility often required of them for survival and mutual support, and how they changed over the course of time and the transition from slavery to freedom. The book’s most significant contribution is showing that not even gaining the right to marry legally guaranteed equality or even respect for black couples and their children. On the contrary, black marriages recognized by the state gave white landowners, judges, and government officials a new tool for racial oppression and new opportunities to pathologize black families.

The pattern was evident during the Civil War. At military facilities, the federal government offered “marriage under the flag” that sanctioned black unions. But it also failed to account for the complexity of relationships under slavery, imagining instead that black marriages would serve as the foundation for a new male-dominated agricultural regime comprising nuclear-family labor units. Moreover, military officials in contraband camps established systems of work and compensation that made the self-sufficiency desired by newly married people nearly impossible to achieve, and they then laid the blame for the failures on black people’s immorality or irresponsibility.

When the war ended, black people across the slave states had to renegotiate the terms of their intimate relations, sorting through the challenges, separations, traumas, and informalities that carried over from the era of slavery. Many jumped at the chance to be married formally, envisioning that it would bring economic, legal, and cultural advantages, not to mention public avowal of their love. But white attempts to use marriage to control the behavior of black people worsened after the Civil War. Freedman’s Bureau officials commonly tried to coerce black people into monogamous marriages that conformed with middle-class gender roles and Christian behavioral standards. Southern whites used restrictive labor contracts signed by male heads of households to dominate black workers, and law-enforcement officials deployed racially
disproportionate prosecutions for such “moral” crimes as adultery, fornication, and bigamy that let them interfere with black families. Hunter makes clear that the restrictions against, and judgments of, black marriages did not always originate from the outside. Black churches wanted former slaves to cleave to a bourgeois marriage model as a path toward respectability and racial progress. Near the end of the nineteenth century, black intellectuals such as W. E. B. DuBois advocated black self-help for families and marriages that they considered pathological, sexually licentious, and uncivilized. But in Hunter’s view, these critics failed to see the structural constraints on black lives that grew out of slavery and emancipation: “No amount of Victorian emulation could save black people from this lasting legacy of bondage” (263).

Hunter notes that although unknown statistically at the time, black people at the turn of the twentieth century married at higher rates than white people did, despite the challenges of racism and dire economic circumstances. Such exigencies made the adoption of flexible marriage and family formations, like those crafted in response to slavery, imperative for survival. Black people in the United States never escaped being blamed for their own history, but they responded to their predicament by sharing its burdens and findings joys in spite of it.

Joshua D. Rothman
University of Alabama


This book opens with an episode in 2005, when New Yorkers panicked following the sudden and overpowering advent of a maple-syrup scent. No, Canadians had not invaded the United States, the source turned out to be far more innocuous. But according to Kiechle, the public’s responses to scent on such occasions connect us with an age when aromas announced the arrival of epidemics and sickness. Discussions in nineteenth-century newspapers similarly reveal the anxieties of local “smell detectives” and demonstrate why sensory scholars continue to take scent seriously. In particular, Kiechle’s study explores the way in which Americans experienced their world and attempted to explain it through olfaction throughout a century that witnessed the rise of germ theory, but apparently not a decline in the importance of smelling.

The book considers three types of smell detective. The first is the physician, such as John Hoskins Griscom, whose career as chief medical officer in New York (1842/3) Kiechle considers in her opening chapter, alongside Griscom’s medical colleagues in polluted Providence and swampy New Orleans, who undertook sanitary surveys to map their cities’ filthiest and freshest districts, especially during epidemics. While
water supplies gradually improved, pure air grew ever scarcer, according to medical professionals who gathered vital statistics and identified pestiferous zones during this era. It fact, many seemed to be fighting a losing battle, as sickness saturated the air that urban inhabitants breathed.

The second chapter deals with these citizens, who daily shielded their fragile health with nosegays, handkerchiefs, and cigars, among other essences. Influential citizens regularly identified and confronted nuisances, occasionally unleashing the full authority of government on the worst offenders. Where battles seemed futile, as they did in the largest conurbations, those who could afford to abscond to the cleaner air of the countryside did so. Chapter 3, which examines the olfactory warfare that ordinary citizens waged against stenches in the domestic sphere, deals with those who could not escape. In particular, it charts the way in which homes were purified, most often by women determined to protect families from familiar “hazards” and emerging dangers.

Although germ theory might seem to be the pivot around which this story rotates, the Civil War, which disrupted communities for years and amplified stenches to “frightening intensities” actually assumes that role (107), convincing Americans that odors were both dangerous and required regulation. Army camps were described as mobile cities, and, accordingly, more soldiers died of disease than battle wounds. Lessons about how to keep camps clean were subsequently transferred to cities in peacetime. Yet, industrial growth further contaminated urban environments, many towns seemingly manufacturing more miasma than merchandise, thus encouraging a rural ideal and sometimes the establishment of boards of health to tackle the impact of uncontrolled economic growth. The professional chemists who often guided these committees appeared better able to follow scents to their source than did untrained noses—but not always. As Keichle demonstrates using a case study from 1860s Chicago, chemists, like other officials of urban government, would have to battle for authority and occasionally even defer to the power of the public nose.

Chapter 6 returns to the American home, where members of the public—again, largely women—adopted methods of deodorization and reconceptualized miasma in ways that anticipated germ theory to some extent. In Chapter 7, Kiechle enters courtrooms where chemical evidence sometimes won victories for reformers, but visual evidence usually scored the most decisive points. Public reactions against smell were now substantiated by chemical reactions, such as that which turned the walls of homes in East Cambridge, Mass., black in 1873. The book’s strongest chapter argues that the power of such visual evidence was reinforced through the production of smell maps, animated odors reappearing in the pages of the illustrated press. Descriptions of smells became unnecessary once they could be seen. Nevertheless, novel ways of articulating smell did not necessarily aid reformers in cleansing industrial districts; they merely created “ecological wastelands,” left abandoned and unseen.
Chapter 8 begins to question the place of smell in American communities after visual tests began to dictate public-health initiatives. Though not directly tied to epidemics, smell remained relevant, and many Americans continued to trust their noses. Usually, however, these smell tests often led inhabitants to laborers, not offending industrialists. Many people who continued to ponder the question of smell pollution tended to reconceptualize it as a problem of poverty and immigration, a response often reflecting class and racial prejudices. If considered comprehensively in an earlier chapter, race might have become more central to this study. How did black families purify their homes in industrial cities? Fresh Air Funds allowed the poorest children some respite from the eternal onslaught of urban air, but such charities likely failed inner-city children a century later.

New professionals, including engineers, entered subsequent debates about urban pollution. That said, many individuals would continue to follow their noses. Historians should similarly follow the lead of innovative sense scholars, such as Kiechle, into new, and sometimes familiar, territories, challenging us to rethink urban, medical, and environmental history, to name only the fields most relevant to this pungent period in America’s past.

Jonathan Reinarz
University of Birmingham


This well-written, accessible book is a broadly conventional survey of schooling in the nineteenth-century United States, focusing on common schools and the campaigns waged to improve them. Drawing upon a range of sources, it covers much of the ground plowed by Kaestle and other scholars during the past half-century. Although hardly interdisciplinary and cautious conceptually, it contributes a few additional wrinkles to the familiar origin story of public education.

The disciplinary diversity in this account is best represented by intellectual, political, and social history. The intellectual component is the sturdiest, featured in two opening chapters that describe the various moral, spiritual, and political rationales for creating and supporting public schools. Citing figures such as Channing, Mansfield, and Westlake, Neem paints a vivid picture of the arguments in favor of universal education.

But much of the account dwells on the usual suspects in this story, including Horace Mann, William H. McGuffey, Francis Wayland, and the Beecher family.3

The chapter about politics is the most ambitious conceptually, but it is also slightly confusing. Neem employs a basic, community-level definition of social capital to suggest that local initiative was especially critical in the formation and development of public schooling. However, he never formally tests it. Rather, it becomes an explanatory framework for describing why certain reform regimes succeeded, but the evidence is hardly consistent. For instance, Neem notes that Mann’s centralizing initiatives survived due to legislative politics in Massachusetts, whereas Henry Barnard’s failure in neighboring Connecticut reflected a sudden shift in partisanship. Likewise, some Southern states are said to have favored localism in school policy, though others did not. But social capital supposedly existed across the region, at least judging from American Bible Society chapters, and education remained a fairly low priority, despite scattered enthusiasm and evidence of an uptick in the 1850s. Clearly, there was more at play in the success of public schools than the interchange of social capital and localism, as Neem’s own published work suggests.4

The chapter about teachers and students offers an engaging discussion of the women, men, and children involved in schools across the nineteenth century. Neem describes the varied circumstances of instruction and learning in considerable detail, along with the efforts of reformers to improve them. He gives relatively little attention, however, to perhaps the most important single component of change—longer school terms. A brief appendix offers limited additional evidence about the scale and pace of transformation in schooling.

The book represents a substantial improvement over earlier accounts in its treatment of conflict about inequity in the provision of public schooling. Neem highlights the violence directed at schools for Catholic immigrants and African Americans in the context of rising tensions about economic uncertainty, ethnic diversity, slavery, and other issues that roiled the public. Much of this material is familiar, but it is well organized and presented effectively in a single chapter. Special attention is devoted to the African-American quest for improved education. The prominence given to David Walker and Frederick Douglas in this account is unusual for a book about schooling but appropriate given


their own experiences. These points naturally cast doubt on the democratic rhetoric highlighted in the book’s opening chapters, producing a tension that Neem addresses in the conclusion.

This generally clear and ample account of the origins of public education draws upon the latest research and a good deal of primary-source material. Neem’s adept treatment of the many conflicts evident at the time, along with the extravagant rhetoric that often accompanied reform, makes this book an attractive option for illuminating this period in American history. Although some of the questions that it raises may require additional exploration, its broad coverage of reform sets the stage for both productive discussion and additional research. Despite its limitations, Democracy’s Schools documents the advance in our understanding of early schooling in the United States, and points to directions for further exploration.

John L. Rury
University of Kansas


Contemporary Harlem, with its multimillion-dollar townhouses and majority non-black population, may seem to have little connection to the area’s twentieth-century history as a racially segregated yet culturally pre-eminent black Mecca. James Weldon Johnson, celebrating the community’s initial renaissance in the 1920s, was able to imagine a hypothetical moment when its blocks might be wrested away from African Americans but only in the far-distant future. However, re-development conflicts from the intervening decades remain vitally relevant to any deeper understanding of Harlem’s community politics today. As Goldstein demonstrates in his compelling study, even oppositional moments in the area’s political history, such as the radical “community control” mobilizations of the 1960s, furnished important (if sometimes unintentional) conditions for the gentrification of black America’s most iconic urban center.

The Roots of Urban Renaissance provides a well-researched reconstruction of the late twentieth-century struggles over the future of Harlem. The book’s most striking contribution is the seemingly paradoxical claim that Harlem’s advocacy-planning insurgency, influenced

5 David Walker, Walker’s Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829, available at http://docsouth.unc.edu/nch/walker/walker.html; Frederick Douglas, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas (Boston, 1845).

by Black Power notions of community self-determination, bequeathed political claims and organizational vehicles that strongly influenced the area’s subsequent development—from new middle-class housing to the chain retail stores that now line 125th Street. Goldstein begins with a thorough examination of the activist planners who fought slum-clearance urban renewal and created several of the community development corporations (CDCs) that succeeded it. He traces the creative and complex tensions—between African-American leadership and institutional alliance building, market entrepreneurialism and tactical confrontation, and government support and community control—that refocused community visions from the housing and social-service needs of Harlem’s poor majority to “mixed-income” and “market-rate” re-development. For Goldstein, a historian of architecture and urban design, the ambiguities inherent in “community development” offered not only new opportunities for creative planning, participation, and leadership but also an ever-changing succession of community actors to shape these development projects.

Recent historical work about urban development and gentrification in the twentieth-century American city has been marked by interdisciplinary engagements across the fields of architecture and design, cultural studies, urban political economy, and American Studies. Goldstein’s early chapters are particularly good at examining the design elements and social implications of competing community visions within a single optic, and the book’s extensive array of archival sources—including federal and state planning documents, church records, organizational archives, and the private papers of key urban planners—makes for a highly textured and nuanced account. An unusually generous assortment of illustrations, including maps, photographs, and reproductions of key planning documents, further contributes to the quality of the work.

This detailed study is less interested in mounting a critique than in recognizing contributions, explicating processes, and taking note of historical ironies. Placing community activists and entrepreneurs at the center of this story, however, leads Goldstein at times to underestimate the influence of such external powerbrokers as mayors, governors, and financiers. Moreover, Goldstein never fully elucidates whether the shrinking presence of low-income African Americans within the Harlem community ultimately represents a triumph for neoliberal gentrification or the emergence of some sort of mixed-income “third way” (a recurring, murky term). Yet The Roots of Urban Renaissance is a deeply researched

and well-written account that makes a significant contribution to historical understandings of race, conflict, and community change.

William Sites
University of Chicago


Bindas’ new book explores the meaning and context of modernity in the 1930s—a period in American history when the Great Depression challenged the role of government and the capitalist economic system, along with almost every other aspect of society. Accepted notions and concepts, such as the very idea of modernity, also came under question during this period.Bindas argues that “the times demanded a new language, new solutions, and new meanings for terms that reflected back on America’s religious traditions” (2). More generally, the book seeks to examine how “the abstract idea of modernism became manifest, replicated, accepted, celebrated, and even worshiped in American society during the Depression era” (8).

The first chapter analyzes the thread of religion as a constitutive element—a mantle or an anathema to the 1930s understanding of modernity—describing how theologians, ministers, and other religious activists and intellectuals interpreted modernity. It demonstrates that words such as modernism and modernity assumed many meanings. A debate stressing the unity of science and faith in the mid-1930s shifted to more secular themes in the decade’s second half. Although in this first chapter, Bindas’ criteria for the selection of his sources (including newspaper and journal articles, books, and other contemporary publications) are unclear, as are the relationships between such terms as modernity, modernism, and modernization, he offers interesting insights into the changing meaning of these central concepts for understanding the 1930s.

Unfortunately, the following chapters do not capitalize on this interest with an intellectual or conceptual history. Chapter 2 offers a summary of the institutional history of two New Deal agencies, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the National Youth Administration (NYA). Building mainly on the existing literature, this section hardly breaks new ground, instead celebrating the New Deal’s achievements that “guided the nation’s youth to identify and internalize the modern core values and ideals of social commitment and service” (81). Glossing over the major differences in the institutional structures, educational philosophies and practices, and general notions of modernity within the CCC and the NYA, the chapter offers only a superficial understanding of how modernity was perceived and negotiated at the time.

Similar criticisms apply to the book’s other three main chapters, dealing with expositions and world fairs, interior decoration, and the
role of music. The rationale for selecting these case studies remains implicit and, even more fundamentally, the book’s notion of modernity is ambiguous throughout. Whereas certain chapters highlight how contemporaries defined and re-defined modernity, other parts of the book use modernity and modernization as heuristic concepts—for instance, in Bindas’ description of young CCC and the NYA members as “in many ways the new model army of modernity” (81).

The book’s methodological basis is ambivalent, and its understanding of modernity elusive. Its deliberations are not based on the ideas of such thinkers as Foucault, Bauman, and Scott, which might have helped to create a clearer analytical focus.1 Instead, Bindas refers mainly to Singal, according to whom modernity reflects “a ‘pattern of beliefs and values’ and ‘comprises a culture’” (4).2 As used by Bindas, this definition proves too vague to guide the analysis. A deeper interdisciplinary scrutiny of the literature about modernity and a more precise methodology would have been helpful.

Many books have already been written about the decade of the Great Depression and the way in which Americans came to embrace and reject, to project and negotiate, modernity at the time. Although Bindas’ stated intention at the book’s beginning—to assess the role of religion in this context—has also found a certain degree of coverage already, it could have become the topic of a fascinating monograph. Bindas provides ideas for such a project, but unfortunately, that book remains to be written.

Kiran Klaus Patel
Maastricht University


Following a brief introduction, The Vanishing Middle Class divides into three sections of four chapters each, a fourth section with two

chapters, and a tidy appendix contrasting Temin and Piketty on inequality models. All chapters are bite-sized, the arguments illuminated by simple figures or telling anecdotes drawn from today’s headlines.

The first section (“An American Dual Economy”) sets forth Temin’s organizing principle. The original dual-economy model posits a traditional, rural sector with a highly elastic labor supply and a modern, urban one that draws workers from the rural sector. Wages are higher in the urban sector because of migration costs (including “waiting time” to employment) and because of capital augmenting labor productivity in the modern sector. Temin’s version re-labels the rural sector as “low wage” and the modern as “FTE” (finance, technology, and electronics), with higher education as the transition path. He lays out the basics in Chapter 1, which the remaining chapters in Section I flesh out. Chapter 2 details the FTE sector, representing 20 percent of the labor force; Chapter 3, the low-wage sector, the other 80 percent; and Chapter 4, the transition process, increasingly costly and quixotic.

Section II is about politics. Chapter 5 introduces the concept of racecraft, which the FTE sector uses to divide and conquer the low-wage sector. Chapter 6 champions an “investment theory of politics” in which the very rich spend (exorbitant amounts of) money to influence legislation and regulation. Chapter 7 argues that the preferences of the very rich are much different from yours and mine. Chapter 8 asserts that the United States has never been a true democracy and that today it is much closer to oligarchy and even at risk of stumbling into autocracy.

Section III focuses on government programs. Chapter 9 depicts the War on Drugs and the ensuing “mass incarceration” as FTE-sector tactics to keep African Americans down and out. Starving public education (Chapter 10) and refusing to invest in crumbling urban infrastructure (Chapter 11) affect a broad swath of the low-wage sector. Private and national (public) debt is the subject of Chapter 12. The low-wage sector is mired in it (private), and the rich use the national debt as an excuse to hold back government spending that would aid the low-wage sector.

Chapter 13, the first of two chapters in Section IV, notes that globalization has allowed uncounted millions of people around the world to escape abject poverty while enabling the dual economy back home in the United States. Chapter 14 summarizes and also makes policy recommendations—spending more on public education, ending mass incarceration, repairing aging infrastructure, expanding voting rights, and embracing diversity.

Temin’s long list of articles and books in economic history, many of which are rightly considered classics in the field, fall squarely within mainstream economics. But The Vanishing Class is far more polemic and social commentary than social science. The dual-economy metaphor is of uncertain value, and many passages may leave readers cold. That said, Temin is tackling a social problem of first-order importance, and he is well aware that his modal reader may be startled (and even offended) by the angry, argumentative tone of the book. Regardless of
whether readers are in agreement with his message, however, Temin’s moral courage for taking that step is admirable.

Robert Margo
Boston University


The Laguna region of arid central-northern Mexico has fascinated generations of historians and social scientists. Two major rivers empty into a desert plain, a dramatic combination of environmental opulence and austerity. Just as dramatic are the human efforts to control and benefit from that environment. Even before the western United States was converted into an irrigated emporium of capitalist agriculture, settlers in the Laguna engineered a complicated system of works to channel floodwaters over extensive plains where cotton, the quintessential industrial cash crop, dominated the landscape. The social formation constituted by this industrial agriculture was unstable and volatile, contributing many soldiers to the armies of the Mexican Revolution. After the Revolution, the Laguna became a centerpiece of the state’s developmentalist response to instability—an epic experiment of agrarian reform, studied extensively by anthropologists and sociologists, that included the nationalization of lands and the creation of collective farms.

Wolfe’s book is a worthy heir to this literature. With patient prose, he develops an “envirotechnical” approach to understanding the role of water and engineering in this political-economic and social history. Previous work about the Laguna tended to focus on cotton—the crop that defined economy and society—or on the revolutionary movements and agrarian reforms that dominated the headlines during the twentieth century. Using rich national and regional archives in new ways, Wolfe describes the fundamental but unrecognized role played by water and hydraulic engineering in events that have been debated until this point principally in terms of politics and economics. In his telling of the Laguna’s history, Wolfe ably incorporates earlier discussions of, for example, the “peasant” or “proletarian” character of the agricultural workers in the region, and the socialist nature of President Lazaro Cardenas’ agrarian reform. His engagement with existing literature is reflected in his framing of Mexican water history explicitly in terms of the social and legal dynamics of the Mexican Revolution—“the water of the Revolution”—affirming the centrality of this dominant conceptual architecture for environmental and technological history.

The focus on water and engineering also allows Wolfe to identify long-term human–environment dynamics that transcend this framework. One of these is the key contradiction between conservation and
development enshrined in Mexican law and policy. Although both concepts exist in the law, the expansion of agricultural water use through the implementation of technologies, such as dams of concrete and steel and deep wells with centrifugal pumps, enabled temporary socioeconomic prosperity, and political stability, but at the cost of depleting aquifers. But as Wolfe shows through a careful telling of the history of the Palmito high dam on the Nazas River, the lines of struggle were not those identified by earlier writing about Mexican politics or by those studying environmental destruction. Politicians, businesses, and even peasant farmers and itinerant workers all chose development over conservation.

*Watering the Revolution* is one of the first books to make groundwater a protagonist. Monumental and photogenic public works such as dams and canals attract much attention from historians, but Wolfe argues that in the Laguna, they could only symbolize the triumph of revolutionary water because of the unsustainable subsidy paid by the region’s unseen, and unseeable, aquifers. Groundwater is the perfect topic for Wolfe’s “envirotech” approach; it challenges the categories of nature and culture and the boundary between them: Aquifers can be known only remotely through science and technology; they are actively managed as infrastructure through strategies and tools of recharge and extraction.

*Watering the Revolution* is theoretically informed, but it is still squarely located in the disciplinary customs of history, privileging documentary detail over theoretical reflection. The book thus encourages interdisciplinary historians to push further analytically. The concept *infrastructure*, for example, has generated a rich discussion in anthropology, and the vast discussion of *nature/culture or socionature* (analogs of “envirotech”) crosses the social sciences and humanities. Wolfe or other scholars could explore these cultural issues and related ones further in later works, inspired by this smart, well-crafted book.

Casey Walsh
University of California, Santa Barbara

*Redeeming the Revolution: The State and Organized Labor in Post-Tlatelolco Mexico.* By Joseph U. Lenti (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2017) 355 pp. $70.00 cloth $35.00 paper

In late August 1968, students in Mexico City organized a 400,000–person march through the city’s busiest thoroughfares. They occupied the Zócalo and raised the red-and-black flag—the international symbol of proletarian militancy and solidarity officially adopted by Mexican labor unions in the 1930s. Days later, after state forces attacked and dislodged the students, a scene took place that microcosmically illustrates an issue that is central to *Redeeming the Revolution*: Federal District workers lowered the “seditious” and “communist” flag while heckled as “acarreados” and “sheep” by a small group of remaining protestors (29). Positing the subsequent massacre of
students in Tlatelolco on October 2 as crucial in shaping state-organized labor relations after 1968, Lenti argues that unions allied with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) crucially helped the ruling party both to survive a severe political crisis and to refurbish its revolutionary credentials. Focusing on the 1970s—in particular, the sexenio of President Luis Echeverría (1970–1976) and his populist efforts to “redeem” the radical legacies of the Mexican Revolution—this history traces how PRI political officials sought to preemptively win organized workers’ loyalty and support. In turn, such officials expected “wild, ‘spontaneous’ shows of mass politics percolating from below” within a reciprocal framework that Lenti describes as “collaborationism” (21).

In a sense, the PRI bought off workers like those charged with lowering their “own” red-and-black flag with new labor-friendly legislation (like the 1970 Federal Labor Law), expanded social services, radical class-based rhetoric (as espoused by Echeverría and other political leaders), wage increases, and political positions for corrupt union bosses. Using newspapers—including the workers’ press—declassified intelligence records, labor suits, and collective contract disputes, Lenti reveals a complex process of political bargaining between organized labor and state, which recalcitrant bosses watched warily in the background. Accessibly written chapters about the actual application of the 1970 law and the challenges posed by independent electrical workers show how workers continually tested the willingness of PRI leaders to turn radical rhetoric into reality. The fascinating chapter about “hegemonic” and “counterhegemonic” female unionism—the latter manifested in the 1972 textile strike at the Rivetex factory in Morelos—deserves more attention than Lenti gives to it.

This is not necessarily a new story. In his definitive study about the Mexican labor movement, Middlebrook outlined the benefits gained by organized labor from its alliance with the postrevolutionary state. As far back as the early 1960s, Revueltas severely criticized the non-existence of unions’ autonomy (political and ideological) from the PRI—as did numerous independent union movements during the 1970s, some of which are covered in this study. Walker’s insistence on the primacy of the urban middle classes in receiving state material and political support also qualifies the importance of organized labor in the political calculus of the PRI post-1968. What Lenti does present in original fashion is an insistence on the political ramifications of radical language, mass politics, and “ritualized public spectacle” that reveals the PRI’s allegiance to organized workers as more style than substance, facing resistance from bosses, business leaders, and foreign investors by the end of Echeverría’s presidency (23). Yet, Lenti’s broader thesis, which problematically hinges on the significance of a single event—the Tlatelolco massacre—remains unconvincing.

1 Kevin Middlebrook, The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico (Baltimore, 1995).
2 José Revueltas, Ensayo sobre un proletariado sin cabeza (Mexico City, 1962).
3 Louise Walker, Waking from the Dream: Mexico’s Middle Classes after 1968 (Stanford, 2013).
Why would the PRI so earnestly seek the loyalty of a group not directly targeted in the state violence of 1968? Contextualizing organized labor during the 1970s within a longer history of union insurgency (back to 1958/9 in particular) would have strengthened the case—in conjunction with Lenti’s use of political-science theories of “preemptive reform” (276)—that the Mexican Revolution was “rescued after 1968 by demonstrating to organized workers how much it had done for them and how much more it could deliver” (3). Such critiques notwithstanding, Lenti’s study makes important contributions to labor studies and post-1940 Mexican history in anticipation of the fiftieth anniversary of the Tlatelolco massacre.

Alexander Aviña
Arizona State University


cuba’s revolutionary world. by jonathan c. brown (cambridge, mass., harvard university press, 2017) 600 pp. $35.00

During two meetings with President John F. Kennedy in 1961, Argentine President Arturo Frondizi beseeched the U.S. leader to cease his campaign to remove Cuba from the Organization of American States (OAS). Though Frondizi was viewed as the young American president’s best friend among Latin American leaders, Kennedy pursued his obsession by pressuring a two-thirds majority to suspend Cuba’s OAS membership in January 1962. Shortly afterward, Argentine generals deposed Frondizi in a coup.

Brown engagingly recounts this story, and others like it, to develop the central theme of Cuba’s Revolutionary World. He argues that the Cuban Revolution played an outsized role in shaping the politics of the region during the Cold War. From 1959 to 1965, he asserts, Cuba served as both an example and provocateur; its impact on Latin America was akin to the French Revolution’s impact on European politics.

A careful and thorough scholar, Brown’s study fits well with a new wave of research about Latin America that provides an important corrective to earlier works in which U.S. dominance was the primary factor in the internal and external behaviors of the region’s countries. In contrast, he gives agency to the “Latin Americans themselves” (14).

However, Cuba’s Revolutionary World overcompensates in its effort to set the record straight. By attempting to make its framework accommodate all of his findings, Brown misinterprets some data, attributes too much influence to Cuba, and discounts the importance of the United States in several instances.

Brown examines the years from 1959 to 1965 as if it were one period; he would have been on firmer ground by treating it as two periods—1959 to 1962 and 1963 to 1965. In the first, Cuba was more a model regime than a direct instigator. Indeed, U.S. officials perceived Cuba to be a threat not because it was a communist country—it was
not—but because it dared to challenge the self-proclaimed U.S. right to dictate how other countries should behave. In addition, the revolutionary government was popular in Latin America because of its early achievements, such as increasing the rate of literacy from 65 to 98 percent. However, to be consistent with his thesis that Cuba was intent on creating revolutionary turmoil, Brown inaccurately denigrates the 1961 Literacy Campaign as merely an effort “to prepare the peasants for their revolutionary roles” (137).

The United States was most aggressive in trying to isolate and overthrow the revolutionary government in the first of the two periods. Yet the book skims over the United States’ irrational reaction to Cuba’s reasonable demands for independence, which led to increased U.S. military aid for the region and ultimately to military coups. Hence, Brown dismisses a 1961 encounter between Che Guevara and Richard Goodwin by asserting, “Nothing came of the meeting” (242). In fact, as Brown notes seven pages earlier, Goodwin interpreted Guevara’s offer of a modus vivendi as weakness. His report to Kennedy led to a major CIA program, Operation Mongoose, designed to impose a new regime on Cuba. But Brown gives it almost no attention.

After the 1962 missile crisis, the United States turned its focus to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, Cuban leaders felt both abandoned by the Soviet Union and still threatened by the United States. Cuba changed course, actively supporting guerrilla warfare in Africa and Latin America. But Cuban support did not lend force to Brazil’s landless peasant movement, as Brown suggests. That movement emerged from the conditions in Brazil’s northeast and courageous Brazilian grassroots leaders.

Despite Brown’s flawed thesis, Cuba’s Revolutionary World laudably provides readers interested in understanding the Cold War in Latin America with enough useful material to probe the subject with a new perspective.

Philip Brenner
American University


In Ambassadors of the Working Class, Semán uncovers a little-known chapter in the history of Juan Domingo Perón’s government and its labor supporters—the labor attaché program that assigned union activists to Argentina’s embassies. Using a transnational framework, Semán recounts the story of union men (only a handful of women participated in the program and none in the original cohort) recruited to serve in Argentina’s diplomatic corps, long a preserve of the country’s aristocratic families. The attachés were charged in the early, heady days of the program with propagandizing in favor of Perón’s Third Position and contesting American
hegemony in Latin America, in an attempt to promote an alternative to U.S. liberal democracy. They established numerous international connections, especially in Latin America. They even garnered a degree of influence with certain Latin American labor groups that saw in Perón’s economic nationalism and social and labor reforms a possible model for unions seeking greater social equality and political rights while confronting entrenched oligarchies and regimes hostile to popular movements.

Semán’s book presents the Peronism that might have been—a nationalist, working-class populism serving as a counterweight to the United States and American labor’s anti-communist obsessions—rather than the Peronism that it became, with its own anti-communist priorities, increasingly authoritarian and covetous of business support. Semán’s rosy account of the populist content of Peronism never mentions Perón’s courting of the business sector and his attempts to enlist its support for his government. Only in the first few years of Perón’s government did Peronism as an ideology and a movement represent anything particularly nettlesome, much less threatening to the U.S. government. In the face of China having just fallen to the Communists, the Korean War raging, and rumors of Soviet probing in Mossadegh’s oil rich Iran, among other crises, popular nationalism in a distant South American country barely registered as a concern to U.S. policymakers (regardless of what American academics found distressing in the phenomenon of Peronism). Moreover, in the book’s final chapters, Semán notes Perón’s abrupt jettisoning of his popular nationalism and ambitious aspirations for the labor-attaché program, and his rightward turn, as Peronism lost whatever was novel and dangerous and settled into a more conventional Latin American, Cold War personalist regime. At the same time, many of the labor attachés remained true to Peronism’s original anti-imperialist and social-democratic promise, putting them on a collision course with Perón.

The approach in Ambassadors of the Working Class is not really interdisciplinary in the sense that most readers of this journal would accept. The book is a largely a political and diplomatic history using the diplomatic dispatches from various archival sources and personal interviews as its evidentiary base. It does, however, offer a paradigm—the transnational perspective—that gives it a theoretical angle that would be absent in a straightforward narrative. Semán defines transnationalism as “the point of contact between the local and the external as something different than the perpetual and active impact of a foreign force (usually U.S. foreign policy) on a rather static domestic political fabric” (164); it is, instead, a set of historical contingencies in a shifting dialectic with one another. The identity and actions of the labor attachés are inexplicable without reference to transnational politics in domestic developments.

Semán generally gets the U.S. side of the story right, though he makes a few slips, such as the statement that before the Civil War, “most economic activity in the United States relied on slave labor” (74). Although cotton was the country’s leading export, northern and midwestern free (wage) workers always outnumbered the southern slave-labor force in
antebellum America. But in the most important context for his trans-national focus—the immediate postwar political and labor climate in the United States—he has a solid command of the internal dynamics needed to make his transnational claims credible. He has an even better grounding in the Latin American situation, deftly examining the history of such crucial and complicated events as Bolivia’s revolution of the 1950s. Transnationalism in this regard means both the international influences shaping the labor attachés’ interpretation of Peronism and their efforts to spread their doctrine in a turbulent Latin America adjusting to the postwar economic challenges and the spread of the Cold War to the region. The interplay of national domestic politics, trends in the global trade-union movement, and Cold War influences are tightly woven in Semán’s book, giving it a gravitas that the subject studied alone would not have had.

James P. Brennan
University of California, Riverside


In this groundbreaking study, Turner builds upon the current historiography about enslaved women by using the body as the basis for her theoretical framework. She not only explores the changing nature of how abolitionists, planters, and the enslaved perceived and represented women’s bodies, and how those perceptions and representations extended and legitimized colonial rule, but also how those ideas created tension and conflict between abolitionists and planters during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Although scholars have traditionally argued that planters imposed ameliorative reforms only when abolitionists succeeded in ending the trans-Atlantic trade, Turner shows that planter efforts at fostering higher birth rates on their estates began much earlier. Turner makes clear from the start that his book is more than just a history of the changing nature of reproductive practices imposed by the state. Contested Bodies is a deeply intellectual history, but Turner’s arguments have roots that reach far into methodological models and theories from anthropology, material feminism, and gender studies. As a result, she succeeds in producing a highly interdisciplinary work that contributes to an already prolific historiography about enslaved women in the colonial Caribbean and relates to today’s current discourses concerning reproductive health. At its core, however, Contested Bodies is also a history of the ideas that reinforced and manipulated stereotypes, misconceptions, and preconceived gender roles. Turner deftly presents her arguments and research to show how the growing tensions between abolitionists, planters, and the state incorporated and co-opted enslaved women’s bodies as a tool for their various agendas. In the end, she shows that enslaved women’s
reproductive potential, as well as their maternal practices and their very role as mothers, became subject to political manipulation.

Concurrently, Turner examines how enslaved women negotiated their own space during this period through specific maternal resistance efforts. Enslaved mothers rejected the restrictions placed upon their lactation and child-rearing practices, and they delayed reporting the birth of their children to have more time for bonding with them. They fought for home births and the presence of midwives and lay healers to protect and preserve community childbearing practices and continued to perform traditional bathing and cleansing rituals whenever possible. Enslaved women even employed time-honored methods of birth control and breastfeeding in an effort to maintain control over their bodies. Furthermore, Turner highlights the complexities of kinship networks within the enslaved community, calling attention to adoption and grandmother-headed households, as well as the continued presence of friends and family in the birthing room and home after birth. Neonatal care also became a battleground to protect traditional holistic practices and secure the health and material needs of newborns and children. Therefore, although much of the book focuses on the struggle between abolitionists and planters over enslaved women’s bodies, Turner is adamant to raise enslaved women’s voices to convey an idea of their agency.

*Contested Bodies* succeeds in bringing together a number of competing historiographical trends. As a result, it offers a comprehensive picture of enslaved women’s experiences. That said, the book is not just another monograph about Jamaican slavery or abolitionism. Instead, Turner presents a profound dialogue about the conflicting role that women’s bodies played in the various agendas of the period. Her arguments find compelling support in impressive, carefully detailed archival research conducted in the libraries of four different countries, making *Contested Bodies* an authoritative analysis that reframes the field.

Colleen A. Vasconcellos
University of West Georgia

*Medical Imperialism in French North Africa: Regenerating the Jewish Community of Colonial Tunis.* By Richard C. Parks (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2017) 196 pp. $55.00

How did the medical and scientific discourse about “regeneration” transform Jews in colonial Tunis? How did such a population adapt to, and even reframe, the French and Jewish elites’ attempts to regenerate, to “civilize” this North African community, and even to save their bodies? Parks’ book looks at three specific examples of colonial transformations and Jewish adaptations: the separation of races, religions, and classes and, more precisely, the reconfiguration of Jewish neighborhoods (or *hara*) in the main city of Tunis through a health and hygienist policy (Chapters 2
and 3); the divide among young Jews who supported Zionism and those close to the French and the assimilationist Alliance Israëlite Universelle (Chapter 4); and finally the control of Jewish women’s health (Chapter 5).

By framing such questions, Parks’ book rests on Foucault’s assumption that medical and scientific paradigms (biological determinism and social positivism) shaped state policies, including the policies implemented within the colonial world.1 Parks is one of the many scholars who interestingly writes a history of science embedded in a sociopolitical context. But was this concept of “regeneration” the only or even the main impetus for the transformation of Tunisian Jewish communities during the colonial period? What about other messianic religious and political (even Marxist and revolutionary) discourses of hope and change that were still influential among Jews in North Africa at that time?

Parks goes from broad arguments about science and politics to specific case studies among Jews in colonial Tunis. He argues for a reliance on “local microhistory” to study social constraints and the agency of individual actors at the same time. However, his own definition of microhistory (building on local case studies) does not align with the microhistory of Italian scholars, such as Cerutti or Torre.2 Theirs focused not only on specific cases but also saw in local cases opportunities to interpret primary sources intensively, showing that reading primary sources cautiously and paying strong attention to the conditions of their writing would help historians to recover a specific social context made of conflicts and specific interactions. Moreover, in most of the cases studied in this book, Parks, though presenting state policies in detail, does not really focus on the local Jewish agencies except in the last and fascinating chapter in which he convincingly shows how Jewish women combined their own practices with colonial medicine and how “French-acculturated Jewish women preached the ‘gospel of germs’” to “working-class ‘Arab’ Jews” (119).

From the first case study about Tunis, Parks infers major changes between the “pre-colonial” period and the colonial era. He states, for instance, that “Tunis was radically transformed from a diverse city in which residents of various identity groups freely and, for the most part, peacefully shared space in a city that was Balkanized into ethnic, religious, and class-based enclaves” (29). However, the Jewish neighborhood existed long before the French conquest of Tunis in 1881. Throughout the nineteenth century, Tunisian authorities were concerned with European migrants moving to Tunis. Local officials invited these migrants to live outside the old city (or madina).3 Social and cultural distinctions were

---

therefore already there before French colonial domination. They have only been redefined.

Beyond its various case studies, the book argues that a “modern” Tunisian Jewish identity emerged during the colonial period. Parks also admits that this identity was highly diverse, made of tensions. He sees mainly the creation of this modern identity through the lens of French colonial sources. But what would other sources not used in this book (such as rabbinical sources in Hebrew and newspapers published in Judeo-Arabic or even in Arabic) reveal about the changes and diversity of Jewish identity in Tunis and the neighboring lands, knowing that Jewish communities were connected throughout the Mediterranean?

By stressing the fact that among the Arab population, the Jews were the ones clearly targeted by French policies of “regeneration,” the book claims that the Muslim population was mainly ignored or excluded from such interference. Nevertheless, what we learn from colonial studies is that imperial policies in the Muslim world, such as the French ones in North Africa, were precisely designed to “civilize” the Muslims, to awake them from their so-called “decay,” and to save the “submitted” Muslim women from Arab masculine domination.

M’hamed Oualdi
Princeton University

*Promise and Despair: The First Struggle for a Non-Racial South Africa.* By Martin Plaut (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2017) 272 pp, $79.95 cloth $29.95 paper

Accessible and engaging, this book makes three important contributions to the historiography of modern South Africa. Despite its somewhat misleading subtitle, the first three-fifths of the book is essentially about how British governments after the Anglo-Boer War failed miserably to prevent millions of Africans, Coloureds, and Indians from losing their already limited colonial franchises when the Union of South Africa was constructed by and for whites in the years from 1906 to 1910.

After defeat by British and Dominion troops in 1902, Afrikaners won the peace by compelling a guilt-ridden Britain to let them create a Union from two former Afrikaner states and two British colonies. Britain was also exceedingly anxious about German’s race to build battleships, and impending war.

The Union immediately subjected nearly 9 million Africans to a harsher form of white overlordship than Africans in the Cape Colony—even under Cecil Rhodes’ premiership—had ever experienced. Afrikaners from the Transvaal (now Gauteng Province) and the Orange Free State (now the Free State Province) refused to give way under any circumstances; British politicians (especially the Liberal Party then in charge) caved.
Much of this book is about Britain’s weak-kneed total abnegation of responsibility. British parliamentarians knew that by agreeing to a Union in which African rights would be subordinated to white avarice and racist prohibitions, they were behaving in a manner, according to Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, “unworthy of a civilized Power” (41).

Plaut takes readers through all phases of this pitiful story, including the sorry debates in Parliament that ratified the Union agreement, earlier developed in South Africa among white political leaders from the four components of the new Dominion. Britain, the imperial victor for which large parts of most world maps were painted red, failed to stand for African rights and Africans as voters, even on the basis of restricted property and income. They demanded less even than Rhodes, who in 1899 had finally agreed to the franchise for every “civilized” person—meaning every person with some education, property, and income, who “in fact is not a loafer” (26).

Plaut details the intricacies of the negotiations that resulted in Union and disfranchisement. But he is particularly thorough in narrating how African and white opponents of Union lobbied and entreated in London before the final Parliamentary acquiescence of the Liberals. The forlorn chief advocate of African rights was William Philip Schreiner—brother of novelist Olive and a former Prime Minister of the Cape Colony. He had support from the Africans who later created the African National Congress and from the noble South African and British women who had favored the underdog Afrikaner side during the Anglo-Boer War and were now trying to help Africans.

The second important theme of this book revolves around the white women—Alice Greene, Emily Hobhouse, and Betty Molteno—who had battled on behalf of Afrikaners during the war and had exposed the cruelties of British concentration camps. Because of their sympathies, they had become close to Jan Christiaan Smuts, the chief negotiator of the Union and subsequent prime minister. Their interventions were not helpful in avoiding Union, but they were influential with Smuts in arranging critical compromises when Mohandas K. Gandhi battled Smuts and Prime Minister Louis Botha about discrimination against Indians in the Transvaal on the eve of World War I.

Gandhi’s use of civil disobedience to agitate for the abolition of proscriptions against Indian immigration and other taints is the book’s third concern. Plaut discusses Gandhi’s tactical decision making and his refusal to ally his Indian movement with those of Africans and Coloureds. The Gandhian-led strikes and passive protesting closed mines and sugar plantations, resulting in a Hobhouse-brokered accommodation between Smuts and Gandhi that temporarily benefited Indians and enabled Gandhi to return to the larger and longer struggle in India.

This book is not really about indigenous politics, although Plaut mentions many of the early African protonationalist leaders and examines their roles. Nor is it interdisciplinary or based on much original
research. But it is a valuable addition to the existing literature about some of the decisive origins of apartheid.

R. I. R.


This work purports to fill a lacuna that Muslim scholars have not been able to fill (at least adequately, in Bowersock’s view) with regard to the origins of Islam. Bowersock utilizes a variety of sources. In nine chapters, plus a prologue, he spells out his thesis, looking at Islamic and non-Islamic sources, archeological findings, and inscriptions. The book can be divided into three, disparate, sections: Chapters 1 to 3 lay out, to borrow Wansbrough’s phrase, the “sectarian milieu” of sixth-century Arabia in a compelling manner.1 Chapters 6 to 8 (clearly not Bowersock’s area of expertise) purport to provide the early history of Islam. Chapters 5 and 9 (ostensibly containing the main point) examine Jerusalem under the Persians and the Muslims, respectively.

The book lacks cohesion; it reads like a series of disjointed essays/lectures (the majority of which are poor scholarship) hastily assembled. The reader is left constantly wondering where all the information is leading. The disappointing answer comes in the second-to-last page, in the form of the old and tired formula, “Islam is an intolerant religion,” unlike Christianity and Zoroastrianism, and the evidence is the Dome of the Rock: “‘Abd al-Malik’s Dome of the Rock arose on ground that was shared by the three great monotheisms, but it proclaimed only one of them and offered no path to coexistence with the other two” (158).

This poorly constructed conclusion comes as something of a surprise. According to Bowersock, his conclusion “does not depend upon any single methodology, but . . . invokes as often as possible critical reasoning in confrontation with whatever is transmitted, rightly or wrongly, as fact: ratio et res ipsa” (13). But the evidence that he advances for it, as given in the preceding eight chapters, hardly entails it. Had he confined himself to the first section (Chapters 1–3), the book would have been recommended as a necessary supplement to our knowledge about pre-Islamic Arabia, especially southern Arabia and its relationship with Ethiopia. Bowersock effectively shows the long history of commercial, political, and even religious ties across the Red Sea between Arabia and Ethiopia (the Kingdom of Axum). Unfortunately, he does not demonstrate the same rigor or insight in sections two or three.

Most, if not all, of Bowersock’s mistakes concern Islamic history, which clearly is not his forte. Nor can these mistakes be ignored; the

1 See John Wansbrough, The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History (Amherst, N.Y., 1978).
premise of his whole theory rests on understanding the origins of Islam. He repeatedly calls the Sasanian Empire’s capital “Baghdad,” which did not come into existence until more than 100 years after the fall of the Sassanians (75, 105, 108, 120, 129). He alludes to Sura 85 as commemorating the battle of the Trench (Khandaq), though it actually refers to another incident that, interestingly, he mentions extensively in earlier sections (113). His understanding of the development of Shi‘ism and Sunnism has no basis in history (126–127 and 135, respectively). At one point, he refers to “the short revival of Mecca as a capital” (136), but since Mecca was never a capital, no revival ever occurred. There are many more examples.

The book has its merits, but unfortunately, its problems not only overshadow them; they also call into question Bowersock’s authority regarding the subjects of late antique Ethiopia and Arabia.

Khaled M. G. Keshk
DePaul University


This beautiful book, lavishly illustrated with more than 400 color photographs, examines the architecture of Byzantine Cappadocia (in central Anatolia) between the fifth and thirteenth centuries A.D. in four long chapters. The first chapter is a valuable and well-illustrated catalog of both built and rock-cut churches in the region. The second chapter examines the painted decoration of the rock-cut churches, primarily during a shorter period, the ninth to the thirteenth centuries. The third chapter covers domestic architecture, including many of the courtyard elite centers once identified as monasteries and subterranean refuges (the “underground cities”), from the fourth to the thirteenth century. The fourth chapter covers monasteries and tombs, with a detailed analysis of Göreme, probably the most famous part of Cappadocia. This chapter, which is more analytical than the previous three, contains an excellent discussion of the relationship between refectories and churches, and of Göreme as first a funeral-monastic complex in the tenth and eleventh centuries and later as an agricultural village (415). Ousterhout concludes, “Cappadocia was probably neither more nor less monastic than any other region of the Byzantine Empire” (478). The mass of cataloged material, which can be nearly impenetrable, is considerably eased by Ousterhout’s clarity.

Methodologically, this book treats architecture, not archaeology. Ousterhout’s conclusion includes a plea for more building plans, not for ceramic studies, field surveys, or excavations. Although his brief introduction sets the region in historical context, he presents Cappadocia
as a land without history. However, the historical picture is not as bleak as Ousterhout suggests; detailed comparisons with other parts of Anatolia during this period, built on Ousterhout’s foundations, would have been fruitful, both architecturally and historically. However, Ousterhout makes good use of recent palynological research. He is sensitive to the way in which the modern touristic landscape is constructed and to both the relationship of built to rock-cut architecture and the parallels between the imperial capital and Cappadocia. This outstanding volume will be fundamental to all future work about this region.

Hugh Elton
Trent University

Identifying with Nationality: Europeans, Ottomans, and Egyptians in Alexandria.

Identifying with Nationality studies how the residents of Alexandria were affected by the new laws that redefined their national identities and regulated their interactions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hanley examines identity papers, the census, money, and marriage as the principal means through which more rigid and exclusive forms of (national) identity were gradually imposed on Alexandria during the nineteenth century. To be sure, these tools were not invented at this juncture. Not only had they been in existence for a long time; they had also supported the very cosmopolitanism that the national categories were now seeking to undermine. Hanley shows that as these tools acquired a new meaning and purpose, each one of them became a site of contention. Imperial subjects had to defend their status against an increasingly intrusive state intent on disrupting cosmopolitan flows and relationships.

In describing the conditions that made Alexandria an exceptionally open and dynamic port city during most of its history, Hanley uses the term vulgar cosmopolitanism, distinguishing his approach from the more common, elite-centered discussions of cosmopolitanism. Vernacular or everyday might have been a better choice of adjective, but the point is well taken. What made sites such as Alexandria special is the degree to which most of their population, not just the elites, had been intricately linked to the outside world, creating fluid lifestyles that combined aspects of different identities.

One of the consequences of imposing increasingly more precise and rigid definitions of national identity on cities like Alexandria was the disappearance of entire categories of people and the language used to describe them. Descriptors such as Ottomans, locals, foreigners, or protégés became increasingly irrelevant along with the actual communities that they reflected. Hanley’s description of how various people who belonged to these groups responded to the changes that surrounded and
consumed them are among the most original parts of his book. “National” identities prevailed in the end, but not before the wholesale marginalization and physical removal of entire categories of people following World War II. Until that point, the residents of Alexandria had defended, and had managed to preserve, aspects of their everyday “vulgar” cosmopolitanism, making this transition all the more fraught and complicated.

Identifying with Nationality is based on solid and comprehensive research in several archives in the region and in Europe. It also includes a thorough reading of the printed and secondary material about its complex subject matter. Hanley’s rich analysis and his insights make original contributions to several strands of literature, including the study of the transition from empire to nation-state in the Middle East and the broader issues of nationalism. Although previous works may have provided a clear sense of how nations and national identities were conceived and formalized on the level of states and international relations, they rarely lowered their sights to everyday relations and interactions to see what happens when such legal concepts are actually applied. With its close and textured descriptions and analysis, Hanley’s book also sheds important new light on the social history of an important port city.

The only flaw in this outstanding book is its failure to address sufficiently the contextual changes behind the developments that it traces. What exactly caused the shift toward an increasingly exclusive and rigid nationalism in the region during this period? Regardless, anybody who is interested in late Ottoman Egypt will find it impossible to ignore this book.

Resat Kasaba
University of Washington

A Military History of Afghanistan: From the Great Game to the Global War on Terror. By Ali Ahmad Jalali (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2017) $34.95

One cannot but succumb to a deep and depressing sense of déjà vu when reading Jalili’s encyclopedic history of two centuries of Afghanistan’s military history. Although the precise military nomenclature may change, there is a dispiriting commonality between the British dispatching heavily armed columns to mount a show of force in the three Anglo-Afghan Wars and twenty-first century talk of deploying a “surge” to bring a resolution to the ongoing conflict. This observation is not specific to the British and the Americans; the Soviets were also drawn to use ultimately futile strategies when dealing with Afghanistan (at the time of this writing, President Trump has just announced another surge). On two occasions in the nineteenth century, the British governors-general of India resorted to a similar strategy in reaction to the Afghan people’s failure to concede defeat and comply with what others assumed was in their best interests. Moreover, conflicts in and with Afghanistan, whether
in 1838, 1879, 1919, or 1978, were all too often the result of heavy-handed attempts at regime change. If history does not repeat itself, mistakes and misreadings certainly do.

Jalili offers a conventional, albeit highly detailed and thoughtful, chronology of the major military and political events throughout the course of the past two centuries. This work is based on the premise that “military history is virtually the history of Afghanistan” (xi). Hence, Jalili builds his narrative around the many ill-fated efforts at welding together a modern state along a major strategic fault line, whether these efforts emanated from indigenous, external, or mixed sources. He accomplishes this detailed reconstruction with a clear commitment to being as even-handed and as comprehensive as he can with regard to the principal actors. He carefully considers the decisions and underlying motives of key decision makers and offers fresh insights into the actions taken by Afghan rulers.

Jalili’s sources are mostly published primary accounts. Readers will be grateful for his inclusion of published works in languages other than English, such as Russian, Pashto, Farsi/Dari, and Urdu. But this reliance on published primary accounts is not without its dangers. For example, Jalali turns to Sita Ram’s memoir of life as a sepoy in the mid-nineteenth century British Indian Army to illustrate British experiences in the first Anglo-Afghan War, apparently unaware of the debates about the authenticity of this work. Moreover, although he seems to be familiar with much of the extant published scholarly accounts, his omissions are noteworthy, particularly for the British period. For example, there is nothing from Yapp or Norris.

Jalili supplements the wide range of published sources with his own personal knowledge and experience derived from his extensive employment in the higher levels of the Afghan army and government. Currently Afghanistan’s ambassador to Germany, Jalili spent two decades as an officer in the Afghan army (1961–1981), and in the immediate post-Taliban period, he was appointed Interior Minister (2003–2005). His detailed familiarity with the region gives credence to his cautionary injunctions against much of what we have learned from Western officials and media reports. For example, concerning the Tora Bora cave complex to which Osama bin Laden retreated following the American invasion, he notes that most public accounts “overestimated the complexity of the caves, as though they were cavern castles built for the villain in a James Bond film” (479).

Jalili stresses the impact of geography throughout this work, repeatedly presenting Afghanistan as a nation in arms, wherein geography

1 James Lunt (ed.), From Sepoy to Subedar, Being the Life and Adventures of Subedar Sita Ram, a Native Officer of the Bengal Army, Written and Related by Himself (London, 1988).
2 See, for example, Malcolm Yapp, Strategies of British India; Britain, Iran and Afghanistan, 1798–1850 (New York, 1980); John A. Norris, The First Afghan War 1838–1842 (New York, 1967).
encourages and reinforces localized armed responses whenever central authority collapses. No single authority has successfully monopolized coercive power for long. Consequently, the history of Afghanistan has been marked by the co-existence of regular and irregular warfare, and by unresolved national and local tensions that created complex and ever-shifting situations in which external invaders could become easily mired. Jalili shows British failures in the first and second Anglo-Afghan War to have been the result of much more than mere British tactical incompetence, hostile geography, or primordial fanaticism on the part of the Afghan defenders. British invasions in the nineteenth century triggered widespread anti-British resistance that reflected an incipient nationalism, albeit one that was partially offset by tribal and ethnic allegiances that required constant negotiation.

Jalili carefully documents Afghan attempts at state building and military reform, as well as the challenges that beset such efforts. In particular, he carefully illuminates the care with which Afghan rulers had to juggle competing external influences and threats, principally from the British and Russians but also from the Americans, Pakistanis, and Iranians who came to play a larger role during the second half of the twentieth century. At the same time, no ruler could ignore the factions within Afghanistan. Jalili frames these rulers primarily in ethno-linguistic terms; he does not address such factors as socio-economic development in any depth.

*A Military History of Afghanistan* largely succeeds in its attempt to make sense of a complex history, and it does so thoughtfully and clearly. However, Jalili might have injected more of own voice into the book; his unique perspective, founded upon years of firsthand familiarity with the people and the issues, is what really distinguishes this work.

Douglas M. Peers
University of Waterloo

---

*Tax Law and Social Norms in Mandatory Palestine and Israel.* By Assaf Likhovski (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2017) 335 pp. $120.00

Tax collection is an intriguing area of activity in which power relations and other aspects of ideology and culture find expression. The protagonists of Likhovski’s comprehensive, insightful, and entertaining study are cabinet ministers, legislators, judges, officials, tax farmers, lawyers, accountants, economists, and taxpayers. Authors and illustrators, satirists, and even children also play a role. Employing both a top-down and a bottom-up methodology, the book focuses on income tax, a trademark of modernity, and discusses a long line of other excises and duties, including community levies. Such was the tax policy in Palestine/Israel during the first eight decades of the twentieth century, through three regimes—Ottoman, Mandate, and Israeli. In the process, the book depicts
the emergence and formation of the modern individual in this country, through the prism of state–taxpayer relations. It illuminates the path followed by the individual, community, and state in the twentieth century.

The study centers on an important discovery: During the second half of the twentieth century, law and jurisprudence became an important aspect of the relationship between taxpayers and the state. Nevertheless, the young state of Israel did not rely only on the law and its administrative apparatus to collect taxes. It also adopted practices of social enforcement. The state sought to foster a system whereby citizens paid taxes not because of laws that compelled them to do so but because of a sense of duty and loyalty to their community. The result, in Likhovski’s words, was “an intimate fiscal state” (8).

The British rulers (like their Israeli successors) maintained that the collection of income tax depended on the cooperation of taxpayers. They and the state were encouraged to see taxes as benefiting both parties, creating an emotional bond between them. As such, the British at first decided not to impose an income tax in Palestine. Following the outbreak of World War II, they changed their position, instituting an income tax law in 1941. In its wake, increasing numbers of tax cases came before the courts, and a handful of attorneys specialized in this field.

During the Mandate, the Palestinian Jewish community’s self-governing institutions also collected a voluntary levy to fund their functions, including security and self-defense. The community established a collection system based on norms rather than law. Most members of the Yishuv, the Jewish settlement in Israel, viewed this community tax as a moral obligation. As such, these levies helped to construct a common national identity.

In the fourth chapter, the book’s core, Likhovski addresses taxation in Israel during the state’s early years when tax policy reflected both legacies, the legal and the voluntary. Decision makers expected the citizenry to be delighted to pay taxes to the new state, but they were soon disappointed. The reasons that Likhovski enumerates for the reluctance to pay taxes include the change in the population’s demographic make-up. New immigrants did not view themselves as citizens. As part of an effort to constitute a new civil identity, the authorities sought to educate them about the virtues of taxation.

In 1954, the Mandate tax law was amended to expand criminal sanctions for tax evasion. Extra-legal methods developed in parallel, including improvements in the collection of information about the incomes of citizens and alleviation of friction between tax officials and taxpayers. The government also used public relations and mobilization strategies to inform the public, including the use of negative social sanctions.

Beginning in the 1960s, Israel underwent social and economic change, which accelerated after the right-wing Likud party came to power in 1977. The state no longer relied on an emotional bond, as exemplified by the rise
in the number of professionals—accountants, lawyers, and economists—who mediated between tax authorities and citizens who wanted to avoid paying taxes. At the end of the 1960s, the courts changed their approach; instead of generally standing on the side of debtors, they began to rule in favor of the state. A comprehensive tax reform enacted in 1975 made tax affairs a closed field, for experts alone.

Likhovski’s intimate fiscal state lasted only a short time because the relationship between the individual and the community was changing. After independence, the state sought to constitute a national society, but citizens increasingly came to view themselves as sovereign subjects. For a decade or so, state and society managed to preserve some semblance of an intimate community, founded on social ties that protected individuals and provided them with a sense of belonging while also constricting personal autonomy. In the new political climate that followed the change in economic regime, individuals gained more power, and the community lost authority.

Orit Rozin
Tel Aviv University

_A Singular Case: Debating China’s Political Economy in the European Enlightenment._ By Ashley Eva Millar (Montreal, McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2017), 263 pp. $110.00 cloth $34.95 paper

_A Singular Case_ is a solid piece of work. Interested in early modern European and Chinese economic history, Millar focuses on discussions of Chinese political economy in Europe (mostly France and Britain) in the eighteenth century (specifically, 1696 to 1776). A detailed description of China by Louis Le Comte provides the starting point, and the appearance of Adam Smith’s _Wealth of Nations_ (which discussed the Chinese economy, among others) marks the point of conclusion. Hers, she stresses, “is a study of the construction of knowledge on China’s political economy in eighteenth-century Britain and France”; it is a history of ideas related to economic history (7). Those curious about attitudes to China during the century of the Enlightenment will find in the book a wealth of information. So will students beginning to explore any of the eight influential thinkers of the period—six representing the French (François Quesnay, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, and Denis Diderot), and two, the Scottish, Enlightenment (David Hume and Smith). Most introductory texts do not focus on those authors’ views of China.

Millar places her work in the framework of the “Great Divergence” debate in economic history, specifically around the question of the economic ascendancy of Europe over China during the early modern period—a debate that has raged since 2000, though, sadly for interdisciplinarity, largely unnoticed outside, and even to some inside, the discipline of history. The recent re-emergence of China as an economic superpower
naturally raises doubts about the truth of such ascendancy, as well as about the validity of the theories that purported to explain it and failed to predict the return of Europe and China to their positions vis-à-vis each other prior to it. Indeed, writes Millar, “more recent scholarship highlights the ambivalence toward China throughout the eighteenth century. A Singular Case makes a similar argument.” But it also makes a distinct contribution: “Although this book builds on this rising body of literature, it also differs from many of these works, which in general follow a deep reading of a select number of important English texts. Instead, this book focuses on a circulation of ideas and knowledge among popular early modern thinkers and travelers in both France and England” (25).

Millar believes that “with the economic return of China beginning in the 1990s, and the concurrent renewed interest in its economic development, we can learn something from the more flexible theories of political economy during the Enlightenment” (32). But what could this something be? It certainly is not anything connected either to the economic return of China or to its economic development. To Millar, the value of her study lies in the importance of drawing attention—again—to the open attitude of the Enlightenment toward Chinese political economy: “It is indeed important to remember the nascent years of political economy, when observers and thinkers were less dogmatic about what constituted good policy and appreciated a unique Chinese path to increase the wealth of its nation” (32).

Why this openness is significant, however, remains a mystery. The only lesson is that today’s economic ideas are more dogmatic. Even so competent a work as Millar’s does not necessarily contribute to the understanding of important aspects of its subject. To advance understanding requires making new connections between phenomena (sometimes subjects of different disciplines). A Singular Case accurately describes European discussions of Chinese political economy during the century of the Enlightenment, but it makes no such connections.

Liah Greenfeld
Boston University


After 9/11, studies in the history of Indian anticolonialism began to examine the occurrence of political violence—construed by the British as terrorism—that accompanied nonviolent campaigns. _Gentlemanly Terrorists_ is the first major contribution in this recent wave of scholarship to focus on Bengal, described by the British as a “hotbed of terrorism” in India. Ghosh explores the rise of violent political protest in Bengal following World War I and British attempts to counter it with repressive legislation. She demonstrates that the slow process of political reform in India was shadowed by the gradual extension of repressive powers.
government aimed its policies at rewarding and punishing political energies, pushing them into “constitutional channels” of negotiation and concession seeking, and away from acts of subversion and violence. This dialectic produced a framework for “good” and “bad” citizenship, creating the perverse scenario “in which patriotism requires political agreement with the state” (245).

Existing studies of political violence in colonial India try to demonstrate how assassinations and bombing played into, and helped to deliver, independence; Ghosh’s contribution is to demonstrate how methods of repression adopted by the British shaped the postcolonial state. In making this larger argument, she exposes several fascinating narratives about under-researched elements of anticolonialism, providing details about the Chittagong Armory Raid and about protests conducted from prison, as well as examining ideas of what constituted suspicious behavior (including, but not limited to, riding bicycles and posing as a Muslim, 160).

Ghosh’s account is primarily a carefully researched archival history, drawing from recently declassified intelligence records, which were subject to restriction (some of her notes were redacted, and some of her files disappeared). She also draws from revolutionary autobiography for evidence of an alternative viewpoint. Early examples of autobiographies published in the 1920s and 1930s served as handbooks for future activism. Later accounts, published from the 1950s, met with resistance from the postcolonial state partly as a way to mute Bengal-centric narratives, but also to project the exceptionalism of nonviolence. Ghosh takes her cues from observations of postcolonial political culture and Bengali public histories, particularly grassroots activism by former revolutionaries. These activists were, in the 1970s, eventually given state recognition, in the form of statues and monuments, and the endowment of pensions and other benefits. Although men dominated the revolutionary movements in Bengal as elsewhere, the narratives of women feature prominently in Ghosh’s account.

In Bengal, political violence emerged from an educated middle class (bhadralok) that the British themselves had created but failed to incorporate effectively into systems of governance. The idea that bhadralok prisoners stood a good chance of rehabilitation formed the basis of a fascinating dynamic established between successive governments in Bengal and convicted political prisoners.

The other major contribution of this book is its attention to marginalized national activists like the detenus—political prisoners held on suspicion but without charge. The practice of preemptive detention was highly developed in colonial Bengal, with province-specific legislation crafted for the purpose. Importantly, the conditions in which detenus were held had to replicate their home environments, keeping their bhadralok status in mind. Ghosh describes the lengths to which successive British governments went to fulfill these demands, including the provision of appropriate foodstuffs and access to books, letters, and odd games of tennis—all within a liberal framework.
Gentlemanly Terrorists is an enthralling book that brings revolutionary anticolonialism and political violence to the center of the historiography of modern India. The interdisciplinarity of the book lies not so much in method per se but in the use of political theory to elaborate the illiberal nature of preventive detention and repressive legislation. These emergency provisions, which were always supposed to expire, were regularly extended, creating a perpetual state of exception in Bengal. As Ghosh pithily notes in the introduction, “The emergency seemed to never end” (18). The book concludes with a consideration of how India’s colonial history of repression fundamentally shaped the present of the world’s largest democracy.

Kama Maclean
University of New South Wales, Sydney