

Genocide in the Age of the Nation State, Vol. II: The Rise of the West and the Coming of Genocide. Mark Levene. London: I.B. Tauris, 2005. ISBN: 9781845110574

In *The Rise of the West and the Coming of Genocide* historian Mark Levene explores connections between the rise of the West and origins of genocide. Following the first volume titled *The Meaning of Genocide*, Levene focuses again on larger historical trends within European history and its global context. As he reflects on his website regarding this overall project, “I’ve committed what for many historians are two cardinal sins - eschewing both the path of primary research and specialization in a specific area study. The justification is that I’m trying to see the wood for the trees, or put more pedantically, a broader overview of historical development through the prism of a particularly disturbing but persistent by-product.” In this volume Levene ultimately tells several stories noting, “the arrival of what we understand as the specific phenomenon of genocide is here treated as a sub-plot of a more general historical development whose origins lie in Europe” (1). *The Rise of the West and the Coming of Genocide* thus underlines that genocide is not merely a phenomenon of the twentieth-century.

The author divides his volume into three main parts, acknowledging, however, that “there is no one single historical point of departure” (1). Part I “considers the initial great surge of Western expansion, conquest and settlement across the oceans to the Americas and antipodes, and its impact on native peoples in these regions, from the late fifteenth century and for the next 400 years” (2). Levene thus highlights the impact of disease, policy, and other factors shaping an ever-connected world. He also references much of the historiography along the way. For instance, he introduces debates surrounding pre-Columbian populations and uses such as a starting point for his discussion of genocide (8). Part II then “takes the destruction of the Vendée as its fulcrum, in order to both work backwards and forward from its moment to consider the West’s striving for people-homogeneity” (3). Part III finally focuses on European imperialism and the author gives the destruction of the Herero people in former German Southwest Africa a center role (233f). Levene ends rather suddenly with “the general global cataclysm of 1914” (3) and concludes, “the 1914-18 catastrophe, of the West’s ultimate making, was also about to give a new, entirely more potent urge to genocide” (336). Two subsequent volumes are planned to delve into post-1918 discussions.

Levene’s efforts to capture larger trends have advantages and limitations. On the one hand, the author highlights key themes and skillfully engages the reader around complicated questions. Historical patterns regarding European ideas, concepts, and realities emerge, allowing Levene to demonstrate his astonishing ability to make connections across time and space. In that sense, he truly provides an excellent ‘semi big history,’ as he has titled his approach. Moreover, the author shares a plethora of information around the importance of expansion, nationalism, and modernity – to just name three broader themes. This aspect makes *The Rise of the West and the Coming of Genocide* a good reference for instructors and teachers at several academic levels yet in particular for those teaching a European history survey course. On the other hand, Levene’s world-systems approach rarely accommodates the desire to go beyond the surface. For instance, scope and objectives of this volume prevent Levene from fully engaging with the complexities of the German genocide in Southwest Africa. A brief conclusion aligning this study with the first volume and answering the ‘so-what?’

question would have been useful to counter such limitations; such an addition would have also helped his audience make sense of the overwhelming amount of information, the potential importance of commonalities and differences, and larger patterns regarding genocide.

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