Very Short Introductions online

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5. The present
Robert Eaglestone

‘The present’ argues that, whether or not a novel chooses to focus on something in the present, it will inescapably be in some way about the time of its writing. The novel is an indispensable marker of what it is to be alive and human today. It can point out, enact, and make intelligible the significance of our lives. However, the novel form looks weak in comparison to the weight of power, suffering, exploitation, and destruction in the world. A recurring theme in contemporary fiction is that the novel can no longer compete with politics on political terms, leading to a new humility about what it can do.

1. The origins of Spain's civil war
Helen Graham

‘The origins of Spain's civil war’ examines what exactly led Spain to a state of civil war. Many forces, both internal and external, were crucial to how events panned out. It started out as a military coup that aimed to stop the mass political democracy set in motion by the effects of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, accelerated in the two decades following the First World War by the economic, social, and cultural changes in Spain and the rest of Europe. Historians have tried to explore where the violence came from and how it related to the pre-war domestic environment.

3. Lived experience
Richard English

People's experience of war varies greatly according to the background and assumptions of the person retelling their experience, and the cultural and historical location against which they have the experience. ‘Lived experience’ considers the heterogeneous nature
of the experience of war by looking at four aspects: horror, boredom, exhilaration, and opportunity. There can be no uniform accounting for the experience of modern war. If modern war can be described as terrorizing, horrific, and painful, it can also be described as very boring. On the other hand, it can be exhilarating. The experience of war involves different levels: the individual, the small group, the regional, and the national. The experience can be complex and varied.

2. Law and African American slavery
G. Edward White

‘Law and African American slavery’ illustrates how the colonial heritage of slavery in America helped foster the population growth, expansion of the labour force, extraction of abundant agricultural resources, and commercial prosperity that seemed to make the United States a singularly favoured nation in the first half of the nineteenth century. African American slavery, however, was also the root cause of the breakup of that nation in 1860 and the civil war that accompanied it. A civil war was necessary to end slavery in America and forcibly restore a union of northern and southern states, but the legacy of slavery would survive in the form of pervasive discrimination against African Americans.

3. Yan'an
Delia Davin

‘Yan'an’ charts Mao's time in Yan'an. During the civil war, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were anxious to build an alliance with the Guomindang against Japan. Soon after the civil war ended, the Japanese invaded. Yan'an was far from the fighting, allowing Mao to engage in academic study. Mao became leader of the CCP, and used the Rectification Movement to consolidate his authority. He strengthened his hold on power by becoming chairman of the Politburo. After Japan's surrender another civil war ensued. The CCP had the support of the peasants, and Mao formed the People's Republic of China.

2. Civil war and the foundation of the Bolshevik regime
S. A. Smith

The October revolution was viewed as a chance for justice and equality to prevail over the old regime of arbitrariness and exploitation. The Bolsheviks hoped that revolution
would break out in the more developed countries of Europe, and for a time this looked likely. ‘Civil war and the foundation of the Bolshevik regime’ considers the chain of events that lead to the start of Soviet power and details the extremely troubled years 1918–1922. Overall, the civil war strengthened national identities within Russia yet deepened divisions inside nationalist movements. Gradually, the party was transformed into the backbone of the new state as it acquired more functions and its apparatus proliferated.

6. The institutional peace
Oliver P. Richmond

‘The institutional peace’ introduces a form of peace that has been influential in the modern era, one that relies on international institutions and law to support the consolidation of a constitutional peace. This type of peace developed as the constitutional version of peace was becoming prominent during the Enlightenment. Institutional peace aims to anchor states within a specific set of values and shared legal context through which they agree on the way to behave. They also agree to police and enforce that behaviour. International law has been crucial for the institutional peace framework to produce a stable international order.

Introduction
G. Edward White

The ‘Introduction’ explains that a review of American Legal History must confront the defining issues in the development of American civilization and culture. The law is connected to, has reacted to, and has helped to shape America's geographic isolation, economic abundance, transatlantic settlement, the relations between European settlers and indigenous tribes, African American slavery, the importance of agricultural householding, the growth of industrial enterprise and urbanization, and the emergence of the United States as a world power. The focus of this VSI is on the topics and issues that are connected to central themes in American history.

1. The legal history of Indian tribes
G. Edward White

‘The legal history of Indian tribes’ considers the most fundamental theme of American legal history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – the interaction of European settlers
with the aboriginal tribes who inhabited the North American continent. The history of the legal treatment of American Indian tribes can be divided into distinct phases of settler-tribal accommodation. In all but the last phase, the interaction between tribes and settlers disadvantaged the tribes. The contact phase, postcontact phases, and the changing legal relationships between the settlers and the Amerindian tribes are described as well as the restoration of the rights and interests of the American Indian tribes in the twenty-first century.

6. Independent Ireland
Senia Pašeta

‘Independent Ireland’ studies Ireland after the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The refusal of dissidents to acknowledge the Anglo-Irish Treaty led to a brutal Civil War. After this conflict, the government’s priorities were stability and order. The Irish government refused to acknowledge the state of Northern Ireland, although reunification was highly unlikely. Fianna Fáil’s entry into government changed Ireland's freedom of action, allowing them to dictate their own policy during World War II. The Irish economy, however, remained closely linked to Britain’s. Education was seen as a vital tool for reorganizing the nation. Although the Roman Catholic Church was not the state church, it heavily influenced policy.

6. West and East
Stephen Lovell

‘West and East’ reviews the ambivalent Soviet relationship with the wider world. In 1918, Bolshevik revolutionaries hoped for a pan-European revolution and the collapse of capitalism. They set up the Comintern to facilitate this. At the same time, they pragmatically borrowed from and cooperated with the West, in order to catch up with it. ‘Socialism in one country’ marked a more isolationist path, but anti-fascism and later Nazi aggression led to an uneasy wartime alliance. Post-war, the Soviet Union lurch between repulsion from and fascination with Western culture. It was unable to stop measuring itself by American standards. Eventually Gorbachev adopted many Western ideas, but the East/West fault line remains.

Epilogue: new agendas for peace
Oliver P. Richmond

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‘Epilogue: new agendas for peace’ looks at the future for peacebuilding, outlines possible new agendas for peacebuilders, and gives a history of how peacebuilding has developed. New forms of peace that have emerged over recent years are complex and need to sustain everyday life in line with local level socio-historical norms, institutions, and laws as well as international architectures of peace. The international community will need to support local patterns of peace. The joining together of an advanced notion of peace is a recognition that humanity generally prefers and works towards a culture of peace.

9. Hybrid forms of peace

Oliver P. Richmond

‘Hybrid forms of peace’ describes types of peace which lie beyond liberal peace frameworks. These are emerging in diverse locations around the world today and are neither strictly liberal nor local. They are hybrids, formed through political contestation involving a range of actors, their preferences, and security interests. These forms of peace can be either negative or positive. The issues that those aiming at peacebuilding and statebuilding face raise the question of how contributions to peace from a range of informal local actors may be understood and externally supported.

5. The changing nature of armed conflict

Christopher S. Browning

Traditionally, war has been understood as involving states pitted against each other in armed combat over conflicting interests, with the state's resort to violence generally viewed as legitimate and legal, in contrast to the violence of other groups often regarded as illegitimate and criminal. ‘The changing nature of armed conflict’ explains how, since the Cold War's end, this view of warfare and its conduct has been challenged by three notable developments: the apparent decline in the prevalence of inter-state warfare in comparison to the proliferation of intra-state conflicts; the impact of technological developments on Western approaches to warfare; and the increasing reliance on private security companies in military campaigns.

Modern War: A Very Short Introduction

Richard English
Modern War: A Very Short Introduction draws on a variety of areas including history, political science, economics, theology, and psychology, explores the assumptions we make about modern warfare and considers them against the backdrop of their historical reality. Warfare is the most dangerous threat faced by modern humanity. It is also one of the key influences that has shaped the politics, economics, and society of the modern period. But what do we mean by modern war? What causes modern wars to begin? Why do people fight in them, why do they end, and what have they achieved?

The Soviet Union: A Very Short Introduction
Stephen Lovell
Print Publication Year: 2009 Published Online: Sep 2013
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/actrade/9780199238484.001.0001

The Soviet Union: A Very Short Introduction blends political history with an investigation into the society and culture of the time. This VSI takes a thematic approach to the history of the Soviet Union. It covers the workings of Soviet society and its political system from 1917–91, emphasizing the contradictions and paradoxes of this large and complex state. The Soviet Union's impact and legacy are also considered, alongside aspects of patriotism, political violence, poverty, and ideology, and answers are offered to some of the big questions about the Soviet experience.

8. Peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and statebuilding
Oliver P. Richmond
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DOI: 10.1093/actrade/9780199656004.003.0009

‘Peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and statebuilding’ examines four generational approaches to peace which are aimed at consolidating the liberal peace system and international, state, and civil architecture. These are: a first generational approach aimed at a negative peace; a second generational approach focused on social reconciliation and a social peace; a third generational approach focused on building liberal peace through various measures such as democratization, creating a rule of law and a code of human rights, statebuilding, peacebuilding, civil society, and capitalism; and a fourth generational approach focused on recognizing local and contextual peace traditions.

2. Government and Law
John Morrill
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DOI: 10.1093/actrade/9780192854001.003.0002
‘Government and Law’ shows how, despite the government's limited financial resources, fiscal innovations — particularly in indirect taxation — allowed them to balance the budget by the end of the century, and finance wars. Only after the Civil War was there a standing army. Prior to that, the government had to rely on militias and lacked coercive powers. Lack of an effective bureaucracy meant that the government lacked information and depended on unpaid voluntary officials to govern the provinces. An oligarchy of gentry families controlled and staffed county government. Although government relied on the cooperation of local elites, the monarchy was generally successful in moulding belief and opinion.

2. Expansionism

Andrew Preston

Over the course of nearly three hundred years, the people who inhabited what came to be called the United States enlarged their territorial holdings. As they did so, their belief that expansion wasn’t just inevitable but righteous took hold: progress was good, the United States represented progress, and so many started believing that the best thing for all concerned was to stretch US borders as far as possible. ‘Expansionism’ explains how the period between the War of 1812 and the Civil War unleashed these restless impulses and their violent effects across a continent, and set the ideological template for even greater expansions to follow.

6. War to end war?

Michael S. Neiberg

The world that the Treaty of Versailles left behind looked anything but peaceful. Even as the ceremonies at Versailles were taking place, the Russian Civil War was threatening to engulf Europe in a war of ideologies. “War to end war?” considers the place of the Treaty of Versailles in the history of peacemaking, the numerous problems of enforcing the terms of the treaty, and the many repercussions of the document, including the war between the Soviet Union and Poland, the failure of Germany to make reparation payments, and the American Senate’s rejection of the League of Nations. Ultimately, the treaty failed to reflect or take into account the massive changes that the war had unleashed.