

SUSAN WARE. *American Women's History: A Very Short Introduction*. (Very Short Introductions.) New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 141. Paper \$11.95.

It is no mean feat to narrate all of American women's history in 118 pages of a volume smaller than a five-by-eight index card. That is just what Susan Ware has done as part of Oxford University Press's Very Short Introductions series, which covers a very wide range of topics, from "accounting" to "writing and script." According to the publisher, the idea is that experts provide "trenchant and provocative—but always balanced" discussions of the central issues of any topic. And that, too, is just what Susan Ware has done, with perhaps more emphasis on the trenchant and balanced than the provocative. But then "provocative" is in the eye of the beholder.

The overarching frame of the analysis comes from three pioneers of women's history: Mary Ritter Beard, Gerda Lerner, and Linda Gordon. Beard's concept of "woman as force in history" gives us women as active agents, not just passive victims (2). Gerda Lerner's insistence on paying attention to what women were doing while men did what mainstream history tells us was important, along with Linda Gordon's image of repainting the picture of the past, assures that Ware is not just adding women and stirring but rethinking what history looks like with an emphasis on women's lives. Throughout Ware shows how gender was central to all the structural changes that shaped the country's history, attending to the effect of economic forces on political, social, and cultural developments. The intersections of gender with race, ethnicity, and class emerge in the contrast of Native American and European ideas about gendered work, the effect of gender on enslaved women and men, the experiences of Mexican Americans and Asian Americans in the West, the variation in gendered patterns of immigration, and so much more as the text moves into the twentieth century.

For women's historians, it is a familiar story well told. Ware begins, as she should, with Native Ameri-

can societies, specifically with Matoaka, a.k.a. Pocahontas, and the interaction of cultures when the European invaders arrived. The dividing lines are not the traditional wars or political eras, but rather 1750, 1848, and 1920. The mid-eighteenth century marks the flowering of commercial capitalism and a mercantile economy, increased class stratification, a flourishing transatlantic print culture, and new ideas about gender, which increased differentiation between women and men and served as a source of "sisterhood" among white elite women. The dates of 1848 and 1920 clearly reference the Seneca Falls convention and the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, substituting women's political history for the Civil War and First World War as traditional demarcations. But those chapters cover much more than the fight for suffrage, incorporating the story of slavery and its aftermath, Native American removal, working-class and immigrant lives, Japanese internment during World War II, and Chicana activism, to name some of the topics that capture the diversity of women's experiences. Yet the arc of the story holds to a progress narrative, ending with Hillary Rodham Clinton's embrace of women's rights as human rights at the Fourth International Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995.

To return to the question of the Very Short Introductions as provocative, Ware does not take on interpretive debates in the field. One cannot expect her to cover everything, so it is perhaps unfair to say I would have liked to have seen more on sexuality. I imagine that a reader new to U.S. women's history would come away from this book with a sense of the ways in which race, ethnicity, and class intersect with gender and the forces that have shaped women's lives from the past into the present. And that is the intent of the volume.

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ANDREW PRESTON. *American Foreign Relations: A Very Short Introduction*. (Very Short Introductions.) New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xvi, 143. Paper \$11.95.

With only 123 pages of text and printed as a booklet that might fit in one's pocket, this overview of the history of American foreign relations is enticingly small. Yet this Very Short Introduction is also fluidly written, remarkably comprehensive, and accessible to those unfamiliar with United States history. The slim book

begins with a rationale for its inclusion in the series and for a wide readership. As Andrew Preston argues, "Understanding the history of American foreign relations is therefore key to understanding the world we all live in." He asserts that the contemporary world has been shaped by "American values, systems, technolo-

gies, and power” and that as U.S. power has ascended, it has “affected the history of virtually every other country in the world” (1).

To give just one example of its concision, this fast-paced narrative details the acquisition of the Oregon territory, Mexico’s northern provinces, and Alaska all in a single paragraph. Despite its brevity, there still are new insights to be gained, particularly Preston’s discussion of the Declaration of Independence as an instrument of foreign policy; his assertion that we should consider the United States an empire-state spread across North America; and his conceptualization of the Civil War and wars against Native Americans, in parallel, as wars for “national consolidation and integration” (41).

Preston begins by outlining the seven themes he regards as most significant in the history of U.S. foreign relations: American exceptionalism; a commitment to expansion and progress; the influence of racial, religious, and gender identity; the centrality of warfare; the importance of geography; the isolationist myth; and the role of domestic politics. The subsequent chapters are organized to reveal the evolution of U.S. power across its history, with chapter titles such as “Global America,” “American Century,” “Superpower,” and “Hyperpower and Its Discontents.”

In his discussion of American exceptionalism, Preston emphasizes that the United States was not guided just by ideology in its foreign relations, as many countries are, but instead by morality—for example, in its settlement of the continent and opposition to Soviet communism. In Preston’s telling, this moralism has meant that disagreements with U.S. foreign policy, whether regarding Mexico or Vietnam, have often been framed as a criticism of the country’s leaders for straying from the country’s ideals. Preston notes that for U.S. policymakers, racism and their understanding of national interests could prove more influential than the country’s purported ideals—the brutal conquest of the Philippines is a prime example.

In line with his emphasis on the influence of ideas, Preston suggests we might reconceptualize Jacksonian America as the “age of O’Sullivan,” for the journalist John L. O’Sullivan, who used the term “manifest destiny” to justify American expansion. Such a formula-

tion responds to the ideology driving American citizens and their leaders in those years, but it may downplay the unrelenting violence, which Preston documents, that accompanied the belief that U.S. expansion was foreordained by God. In refuting the myth of isolationism, Preston repeatedly urges readers to understand U.S. foreign relations as driven instead by a unilateralist impulse, beginning with John Adams’s 1776 Model Treaty and running beyond Woodrow Wilson’s notable conduct in World War I.

More often than might be expected in a book touted as a Very Short Introduction, Preston makes gentle interventions in historiographical debates by revealing how we should characterize Wilsonianism; by debunking the supposed isolationism and deglobalization of the interwar years; by identifying the beginning of a national security revolution in the 1930s; by demonstrating the effect of the Korean War on the Cold War; by revealing the degree to which the United States also experienced decolonization; by identifying John F. Kennedy’s role as the architect of détente; by framing the Cold War as cycles of crisis and peace; and by asserting the significance of liberal democratic capitalism to U.S. policy since the end of the nineteenth century.

Preston’s account is clearly influenced by the most recent literature in the field, and he is attentive to the importance of nonstate actors, technology, and immigration in shaping this history. Preston’s narrative also eschews exceptionalism, recognizing the effect of “racial supremacy,” the country’s “illiberal methods” of expansion, and the varied ways in which the United States was unprepared to act militarily or diplomatically on the world stage in the nineteenth century (30).

Finally, the volume is contemporarily minded, dropping in “America First” as a chapter subheading in connection with the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, grappling with China’s recent rise, and acknowledging the current uncertainty surrounding the United States’ place in the world as well as the future of the liberal international order.

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CRAIG JEFFREY. *Modern India: A Very Short Introduction*. (Very Short Introductions.) New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. 129. Paper \$11.95.

It is a feat to condense the history of India into a snappy pocket-size book. Craig Jeffrey’s vividly and lucidly written *Modern India: A Very Short Introduction* accomplishes that goal. Drawing upon a wide body of texts ranging from history and anthropology to sociol-

ogy and political science, Jeffrey’s book offers a tour de force reading of three hundred years of India’s political and social history in an attempt to answer the question of why India is so poor, yet so full of hope.

The book opens with four vignettes of “ordinary” In-