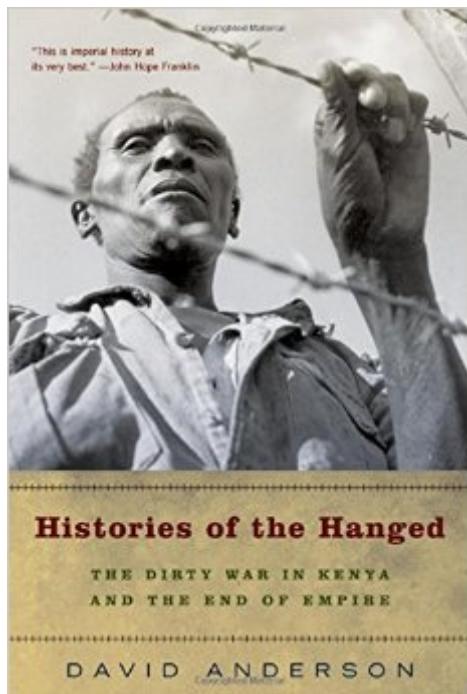


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Histories Of The Hanged: The Dirty War In Kenya And The End Of Empire



Synopsis

"A remarkable account of Britain's last stand in Kenya. This is imperial history at its very best."--John Hope Franklin In "a gripping narrative that is all but impossible to put down" (Joseph C. Miller), Histories of the Hanged exposes the long-hidden colonial crimes of the British in Kenya. This groundbreaking work tells how the brutal war between the colonial government and the insurrectionist Mau Mau between 1952 and 1960 dominated the final bloody decade of imperialism in East Africa. Using extraordinary new evidence, David Anderson puts the colonial government on trial with eyewitness testimony from over 800 court cases and previously unseen archives. His research exonerates the Kikuyu rebels; hardly the terrorists they were thought to be; and reveals the British to be brutal aggressors in a "dirty war" that involved leaders at the highest ranks of the British government. This astonishing piece of scholarship portrays a teetering colonial empire in its final phase; employing whatever military and propaganda methods it could to preserve an order that could no longer hold. 18 photographs, 2 maps

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The most striking aspect of this book for me, was that despite the author's appropriately neutral narration, the savagery of Mau MAu still shines like an evil beacon. Anderson makes it perfectly clear that Mau Mau violence was primarily directed against the people of its own Kikuyu tribe, whom it butchered, man woman and child with absolutely no mercy. Infants and mothers, elders and babies, all fell to the bloodied panga of Mau Mau. This was as shocking to Africans as it was to Europeans - and this, Europeans failed to understand. It is this lack of comprehension that makes

this book an excellent study of the cultural shock and misunderstanding that arose at the interface between colonist and colonizer. Mau Mau represented not just rebellion against the injustice inflicted by British colonials, but against traditional African leadership and culture. The question I am left with is why the extreme brutality of Mau Mau arose? The absence of an explanation for this reflects perhaps that although Anderson recounts the history superbly, he really does not succeed in analyzing the mental frameworks of either the settlers or Mau Mau. He never gets to grips adequately with the internalized fears of settlers in Africa or the cultural dislocation arising between Mau Mau and the rest of the Kikuyu tribe. What we are left with is a narration of evil that has sound historical underpinning but an almost non-existent cultural and psychological framework that would permit us to understand the actions of the protagonists at an emotional level. But the murderous actions of all parties remain clear and remain instructive to us in the current age.

As a professional legal historian with an interest in both social history (I was nurtured in "Warwick school" historiography) and in colonial legal histories I have a strong professional interest in the subject matter of David Anderson's account of the Mau Mau period in Kenya. The book is first-rate in all respects. It is more than this however. Thoughtful and learned, it nonetheless reads beautifully. The book resonated with my own family history however - as it will for many readers around the world. Born into the British Empire of the 1950's, I was raised in a British settler society (Canada), saluted the Union Jack in school each day, and heard stories of Dominion and Empire as I grew up. The British Empire was the best of all possible Empires and its treatment of subjects more humane than others (the USA "Indian Wars" provided particularly strong contrast for one raised in the prairie west). Part of an Irish diaspora family, my cousins lived and live in the old country but also in Canada, Australia, the United States, and New Zealand. One uncle lived out his days in India and one black sheep dedicated herself to a communist liberation of Ireland (another served Scotland Yard arresting suspected IRA terrorists: I think they never met). Anderson's account of Mau Mau is disturbing, not just for explaining the violence on all sides and the state excesses conducted in the cause of "security" in times of "terror", but for its account of settler society in a colony where the "native" was in the numerical majority. Ever-smug, Canadians are too prone to celebrate our country's commitment to civil liberties, human rights, and anti-racism.

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