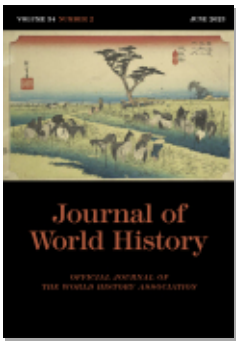
Gender: A World History by Susan Kingsley Kent, and: *Gender Rules: Identity and Empire in Historical Perspective* by Karen Phoenix (review)



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Book Reviews

Gender: A World History. The New Oxford World History. By SUSAN KINGSLEY KENT. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. x + 168 pp. $99.00 (hardcover); $24.95 (paper).

Gender Rules: Identity and Empire in Historical Perspective. Roots of Contemporary Issues. By KAREN PHOENIX. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. xxv + 160 pp. $24.99 (paper).

As historian Merry Wiesner-Hanks notes in her 2007 *Journal of World History* article "World History and the History of Women, Gender, and Sexuality," more could be done to integrate the fields of world history and gender.[1] Though fifteen years have passed since the article's publication, and definite strides have been made, this argument still stands true. Two recent books aim to bridge the world history/gender history divide, Susan Kingsley Kent's *Gender: A World History* and Karen Phoenix's *Gender Rules: Identity and Empire in Historical Perspective*.

Both of these volumes embrace the "new" world history model, consciously striving to move beyond an emphasis on Europe and the United States or a "great civilizations" approach, and instead focusing on connections, interactions, and comparisons. Both aim to center specifically gender in world history, telling not solely a history of women, but one where masculinity is also a subject of study. Both

[1] Merry Wiesner-Hanks, "World History and the History of Women, Gender, and Sexuality," *Journal of World History* 18, no. 1 (2007): 53–67.

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authors recognize the power dynamics that come along with gendered categories. And both acknowledge the importance of addressing imperialism when discussing gender in world history. Phoenix devotes her entire book to the subject while Kent opens her narrative and dedicates a later chapter to colonial encounters. Finally, both are writing with the world history classroom in mind, producing books that are intended for student use.

Susan Kingsley Kent is no novice when it comes to writing about gender in world history. And with this book she takes on an ambitious project, discussing gender across the globe from 3000 B.C.E. to the present in approximately 150 pages. As she points out, an approach centering gender entails discussing not solely the history of women, but also men as gendered beings. And in order for the specific examples regarding gender to make sense to readers, Kent strives to provide the broader historical context surrounding the periods under study. With all this to take into consideration, Kent has a lot of ground to cover. To support her synthesis and analysis, Kent draws on a wide array of secondary sources.

While this is intellectual space that has been tread before, for instance by Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks' *Gender in History: Global Perspectives* and Peter Stearns' *Gender in World History*, Kent's volume adds a different point of view to the conversation. Wiesner-Hanks' narrative was originally organized thematically—this changed with the current, third edition just released in 2022. Stearns' book, also released as a new edition in 2022, focuses on moments of interregional contact as a way to explore gender in the global past. Kent's chronological argument, on the other hand, is interested in the relationship between gender and power.[2]

In her introduction, Kent points out that the majority of human societies that we know of have organized themselves according to gender, and that "we conventionally think of gender as the cultural or social qualities attached to a sexed body" (p. 3). She asserts that gender is a constructed category that changes over time, culture, and place, and that gender is "one of the most fundamental and vivid ways through which relations of power can be articulated and mobilized." (p. 5). Ideas about gender are used not just to differentiate between men and women, but to explain all sorts of relationships, like between imperial powers and their colonies, or monarchs and subjects.

[2] Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender in World History: Global Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2022); Peter H. Stearns, *Gender in World History*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2022).

In her chapters, Kent speaks in broad terms about gender roles in chosen times and places, as well as offers examples of specific people, usually women, to illustrate her points. For instance, Kent begins her romp through history with King Hatshepsut, the woman king of Egypt, as an example of how gender categories could be manipulated in the ancient world. In this chapter Kent looks in part at law codes as sources to shed light on gender roles between 3000 and 300 B.C.E. She roots patriarchy in the growth of settled agricultural communities and the ownership of property by individual families, with the concomitant desire to pass that property to heirs within the family. The chapter draws on examples from Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Athens, Sparta, and China. In this first chapter, the specific examples trend towards elite, wealthy women—most likely a constraint of the available sources. Later in the book, Kent features women from more modest backgrounds, including Jamaican Maroon Queen Nanny, cross-dressing American Deborah Sampson, and Elizabeth Gachika, a freedom fighter with the Mau Mau movement in Kenya.

Other historical topics Kent's book addresses include the spread of religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, enslavement, both in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and in Muslim empires, liberal revolutions, imperialism, the consumer revolution, and the ideology of separate spheres. The final chapter alone touches on fascism, communism, anticolonialism, and the feminist movements of the twentieth century. She points out how gender norms are working, being revealed, and possibly changing in these moments. One of the themes apparent across chapters is the power of militarism and later nationalism in defining masculinity. In her third chapter, Kent argues that between 1000 and 1500, "war became the arena in which notions and ideals of gender were most prominently expressed" (p. 47). According to Kent, those who fought, whether European knights, Japanese samurai, or Iroquois warriors, helped to define masculine ideals in their societies.

This book is a great place to start for teachers looking to insert discussions of women and gender into their survey courses, or for use as a central text for courses specifically focused on gender in world history. The chronology provided at the end of the book, the further readings list, and the digital resources are also concise though useful accompaniments for those wanting to learn more. An aspect of the book that is both admirable and perhaps makes the volume less useful for general surveys is the ambitious scope when it comes to time. Many teachers may shy away from requiring a text for a standard World History Survey Since 1500 when only half of the book falls within the

timeframe of the course, though it would be interesting to see how a focus on gender might unsettle these conventions of periodization. Are there different historical trends that are brought to the forefront when gender is being used as the primary category of analysis?

Kent is striving for wide coverage over space and time, at points touching on examples from Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Still, there is little mention of Australia or the Pacific, and more on sub-Saharan Africa, South America, and the modern Middle East would be welcome additions. It is perhaps too early to reflect, but a discussion about the impacts the #MeToo movement had on gender relationships around the globe may also be of interest to readers. That said, while the book is accessible for a student audience, it is possible that learners may feel a bit overwhelmed by all of the examples covered in each chapter. Embracing a slightly less condensed narrative overall may have given the author more space to expand on her arguments and analysis.

In her book *Gender Rules: Identity and Empire in Historical Perspective*, historian Karen Phoenix sets out to write about the intersection of gender and imperialism on the global stage. Phoenix argues that imperialism offers an especially fruitful window for viewing gender systems because it provides a circumstance in which two cultures meet, exposing the norms each society takes for granted. They are then forced to confront, sometimes rationalize, and possibly reject these standards. Ultimately, Phoenix hopes that after engaging with the book, readers will better understand the ways people have constructed gender in the past and become more conscious of the ways gender functions in their own lives today. The book keeps students clearly in mind as the primary audience. The volume is part of the "Roots of Contemporary Issues" series, which takes the stance that in order to better comprehend current controversies and make informed decisions to shape the future, students must look back to the historical factors that shaped our present. Phoenix's text could be assigned in a general World History Since 1500 survey, or it could be used in courses more specifically engaged with global histories of gender and/or empire.

To undertake her exploration of the intersection of gender and imperialism, Phoenix chooses five different periods and geographical locations to use as examples. These include the Spanish in the Americas in the 1500s, commerce and the trans-Atlantic slave trade between Great Britain, West Africa, and the Caribbean in the 1700s, and French settler colonialism in Algeria and Indochina in the mid-1800s to early 1900s. Next, she goes on to discuss how some Indians and Egyptians used clothing as a way to resist British imperialist policies in

the late 1800s and 1900s, including discussions of home-produced cloth in India and the fez. Lastly, the book ends with the American exportation of the Western film genre during the Cold War and a comparison of Westerns in East and West Germany. This final chapter illustrates how imperialism itself changes over time, with the switch from formal colonialism to a more "soft power" approach after the post-World War II anticolonial movements.

Phoenix strives to paint a history of European and American imperialism that not only includes Western voices, but also the perspectives of the colonized, though the available sources do not always make this a simple endeavor. She aims to feature the tension between the "top-down" attempts of imperial powers to rule as they saw fit, and the "bottom-up" pressure from colonized peoples pushing back against imperial dictates. She also recognizes the way other categories such as race, class, and sexuality intersect with gender, as all of these elements work in tandem during colonial encounters.

One of the strengths of the book, and a feature of the series, is the way Phoenix pulls back the curtain at points to give insight into the ways historians search for and evaluate sources. For instance, in the introduction she talks about the process she used to search for materials to write her book (p. 10). She is also explicit about the fact that historians sometimes disagree, and at points do not have the necessary sources to answer certain fundamental historical question. One example is when she discusses the gender disparity of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the fact that more men than women were sold into slavery in this market. She points out that historians disagree about why such an imbalance existed. Was it an issue of supply on the African side, with certain West Africans preferring to hold on to women workers? Or was the imbalance driven by European demand specifically for men to undertake hard labor? Either way, both possible answers shed light on ideas about gender and work. Another strength is that in her chapters, Phoenix includes examples that are more standard fare for World History surveys and might be recognizable to students, such as Malintzin, an enslaved indigenous woman and translator for conquistador Hernán Cortés. But she also brings in the lives of perhaps less well-known historical figures such as Isabel Montezuma, the principal heir to the Aztec empire and another of Cortés' sexual partners.

In terms of space for improvement, like Kent, Phoenix gives Australia and the Pacific short shrift. It would have been interesting to see the inclusion of Japan as an example of a non-European imperial power and a way of pushing beyond Western case studies. In the section

on colonial Latin America the book could have expanded more on the ties between gender and honor. And with the section on Western films, a discussion of who went to see these films would be welcome—they seemed to have a wide audience in Europe, but was this audience mostly men? Mostly middle class? Do we know what the consumers of these films thought about them? Though both Kent's and Phoenix's books do touch on issues of sexuality, a more systematic exploration in both books would be a welcome addition.

Overall, it is wonderful to see both of these books on gender in world history designed for classroom use published this past year, in tandem with the release of new editions of previous works like Wiesner-Hanks' and Stearns'. These publications and others, such as Candice Goucher's four-volume reference work *Women Who Changed the World*, also released in 2022, offer educators more options to look to when commencing the process of integrating gender or women's experiences into existing world history courses. These resources also provide a broader springboard for faculty teaching courses focused specifically on women or gender in a global perspective. Hopefully this burst of literature is marking an expanding recognition and interest from world historians to further integrate these pivotal fields, and a growing commitment to bring the challenge of studying gender on a global level to the classroom.[3]

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A History of Jeddah: The Gate to Mecca in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. By ULRIKE FREITAG. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 391 pp. ISBN-10: 978-1108478793. $44.99 (hardcover); $36.00 (e-book).

Although Jeddah has endured for nearly fourteen centuries and boasts four million modern inhabitants, surprisingly little has heretofore been published in English on this important Arabian city. In the past, readers seeking historical information about Arabia's second-largest metropolis had nothing to go on other than a couple of coffee-table picture books produced in the 1980s and tangential references to

[3] Candice Goucher, ed., *Women Who Changed the World: Their Lives, Challenges and Accomplishments through History* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2022).