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Eric Weitz. *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation States.*

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INTRODUCTION BY SARAH B. SNYDER, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Three questions drive Eric Weitz's impressive new book, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation States*: "Who has access to rights? What do we mean by human rights? And how do we obtain rights?" (1). In a larger sense, Weitz investigates how the history of the nation-state connects to the history of human rights. What he details is a simultaneous process of extending rights to some while excluding others from enjoying those same rights.

This book explores the impact on human rights as empires transitioned into nation-states, and Weitz eloquently demonstrates a process by which population transfers became normalized, despite the terrible human costs, as these transformations took place. Weitz asks whether human rights can be preserved only in homogeneous states. His answer seems to be yes unless support can be secured from a great power for the protection of minority rights. What he shows is that the "right to have rights" was possible only for some (198). One conclusion from *A World Divided* is that those who make rights claims always need powerful external allies to achieve success. Put another way, great power recognition is necessary for rights to be protected.

Norman Naimark praises *A World Divided* as "a crowning achievement in human rights scholarship." Among the book's many strengths, it is expertly written; Naimark attests to the book's "sparkling, accessible prose." There are many examples of Weitz's beautiful phrasing; to offer just one, he writes, "Soviet history does, though, add many new angles and panes to the multistoried, fragile glass house of human rights" (283).

Beyond its style, the book is fascinating in terms of content. The reviewers characterize it as "an impressive tale," "researched in depth," and a useful synthesis. They further assess it as a "sweeping narrative" of chronological and geographic breadth. In Petra Goedde's view, Weitz takes readers on "a whirlwind tour across the globe and across time." Weitz analyzes Greece's fight for independence in the 1820s; the removal of Native Americans in Minnesota in the 1860s; Brazil before the abolition of slavery; the position of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire beginning in the 1890s and culminating with the Armenian Genocide; abuses of Jews in Eastern Europe in the same years; the genocide against the Herero and Nama in Namibia in the early twentieth century; human rights violations in South Korea during the Cold War; human rights conditions in the Soviet Union in the late Cold War; the rights of those who wished to make their home in Palestine and later Israel; and post-independence violence in Burundi and Rwanda.

The narrative that emerges from these diverse chapters is a novel history of the "dark side of nation-state building," as Jan Eckel puts it. Weitz maintains that "Nation-states and human rights developed together," although perhaps a more accurate description would be that rights developed in spite of the nation-state. (86)

The reviewers also praise Weitz's efforts to forge connections between national and international developments. Although not touted as such, Weitz's book conveys a transnational story, both with his emphasis on the impact of migration on human rights and in the consequences of the spread of the ideas of the French Revolution. The movement of people and ideas, in his telling, challenged empires and facilitated the rise of what he calls a "global public sphere," an essential element in the upsurge of much of the human rights activism he details (45).

Alongside the considerable praise for *A World Divided* from all of the reviewers, Eckel and Goedde nonetheless identify several weaknesses. The first is what Eckel terms a lack of "analytical rigor." In Eckel's assessment, the book does not sufficiently engage with the "nuances of human rights concepts and conflicts." This is a characterization with which Weitz, unsurprisingly, disagrees. For Goedde, Weitz's reluctance to define human rights weakens his account. In his introduction, Weitz writes that he will offer "no definitive answer to the ultimate question—the meaning of rights" (6). In his response below, he asserts that he does "not believe it is possible to do so." Yet, some of the contours of the rights that are of interest to Weitz can be discerned. First, many of his chapters have a strong emphasis on the right to property. In addition, he pays

deep attention to race, religion, and ethnicity. Less discussion is devoted to gender, and Goedde criticizes the lack of a chapter on women's rights as "a major omission."

Weitz responds in his conclusion that "Every chapter of this book has shown the partiality of human rights advances when they have been built around national citizenship" (425). In his reluctance to define human rights, Weitz may leave readers wondering about the distinction between civil and human rights. Similarly, the universality of the rights claims outlined by Weitz is not always clear. For example, in the case of the Rwandan genocide, does acting out of a "fear that violence would consume all of them" show "a commitment to the values that characterize human rights"? (400). In many instances, Weitz's actors do not seem to be fighting for universal rights, and instead seem to be interested only in their own. Finally, as a scholar of genocide, Weitz might have said more about the connection between genocide and human rights.¹

Goedde criticizes Weitz for the marginality of some of his case studies. One does wonder, for example, why Namibia is the genocide he chose to highlight. Weitz notes that "The brutalities exercised by Belgians in the Congo perhaps surpassed even those Germans implemented in Namibia." More could have been said about the decision to privilege Namibia over the Congo given that he emphasizes that Namibia is "not unique, but notable" (225). In his response, Weitz argues that with his selection, he intended to demonstrate the global scale of these dynamics, but also the variety of systems in which they operated. He also makes a strong case for focusing on smaller states, which often "exercise outside influence" on the global stage, in his view.

On the other hand, in Eckel's view the chapters are "very well chosen," but he argues that they do not reveal enough that was new to the reader. He does, however, assess as "all the more fascinating" the sections that were "less familiar." Similarly, Eckel notes a lack of surprise in Weitz's findings, which he sees as too generalized. A further criticism raised in the reviews is a lack of distinction, which Eckel terms "sameness." For Weitz, who points out that he sought to convey variety in cases as well as change over time, this is an unfair charge: "There is no 'sameness' here," he declares.

In Eckel and Goedde's views, Weitz's account harkens back to more traditional approaches to human rights history, in the vein of Paul Gordon Lauren, Lynn Hunt, and Micheline R. Ishay, putting him, as Goedde puts it, "on a collision course with recent scholarship" by Samuel Moyn, Barbara Keys, and Eckel.² Finally, Goedde raises questions about the book's intended audience and the imagined readership of the account. In his response, Weitz explains that he wanted to reach multiple audiences from varied disciplines – activists, academics, and general readers.

Naimark commends Weitz for his "moral passion;" indeed, the author acknowledges at the outset that he "most definitely" supports human rights (1). His hopeful outlook aligns *A World Divided* more with Kathryn Sikkink's recent work, *Evidence for Hope* than Stephen Hopgood's *The Endtimes of Human Rights* or Eric Posner's *The Twilight of Human Rights Law*.³

¹ Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

² Paul Gordon Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia, 2003); Lynn Hunt, *The Invention of Human Rights* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007); Micheline R. Ishay, *The History of Human Rights. From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Jan Eckel, *Die Ambivalenz des Guten: Menschenrechte in der Internationalen Politik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014); Barbara Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

³ Kathryn Sikkink, *Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21st Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Stephen Hopgood, *The Endtimes of Human Rights* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); and Eric A. Posner, *The Twilight of Human Rights Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Yet, in his response, Weitz laments the ways in which COVID-19 and climate change “have displaced human rights from the political agenda,” perhaps leaving us all with fewer reasons for hope.

As Goedde points out, Weitz frames his book as “an ode to the nation state’s potential to be a force for good in the world.” Yet she sees it more as revealing the many ways in which nation states served instead as “an obstacle to the advances of human rights.” Similarly, in his conclusion, Weitz argues that “Human Rights, once the preserve of propertied white men, are now owned by everyone” (419). His book, however, largely tells the story of the rights of propertied, white men. *A World Divided* illuminates limits of liberalism and can be read therefore as a story of rights more denied than secured.

Participants:

Eric D. Weitz is Distinguished Professor of History at City College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Trained in modern German and European history, Weitz also works in international and global history. His most recent book is *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States* (Princeton University Press, 2019). Weitz also edits a book series for Princeton, *Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity*. He has published essays and opinion pieces in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Armenian Weekly*, *tabletmag.com*, *PublicBooks.com*, and others. Weitz lectures widely in public and academic settings on the history of human rights and genocides and on Weimar Germany.

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Petra Goedde is Associate Professor of History at Temple University and co-editor of *Diplomatic History*. Her most recent book is *The Politics of Peace: A Global Cold War History* (Oxford University Press, 2019). Among her other publications are *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945-1949* (Yale University Press, 2003), *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 2013), *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (Oxford University Press, 2012), and numerous articles and book chapters on gender, foreign relations, and cultural globalization.

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REVIEW BY JAN ECKEL, UNIVERSITY OF TÜBINGEN

A World Divided is an impressive tale with a wide-ranging reflection on the entanglement of two forces that have profoundly shaped the history of the past two hundred and fifty years: the nation-state and human rights. To explore this complex interrelationship, Eric Weitz crafts a sweeping narrative that takes us from the early nineteenth-century Balkans to late-twentieth century East Africa, proceeding via North America, South America and East Asia. Along the way, the author strikingly reveals the dark side of nation-state building. On countless occasions, notions of national or ethnic homogeneity, which were increasingly radicalized by scientific racism from the late nineteenth century onward, proved devastating to people who were defined as alien, leaving a depressing trail of massacres, expulsions, death marches, and mass killings. Persuasively, human rights do not enter this picture as the irresistible force of light that would enable the world community to overcome the ravages of extreme nationalism. Instead, Weitz attempts to unravel the multiple connections that developed between the two. Persecuted groups often set their hopes on the nation-state guaranteeing certain rights, as it was inclined to lend basic protection to its citizens. Those not counted among the national community, however, found themselves defenseless or needed special, and always fragile, safeguards as ‘minorities.’ Diverse coalitions of actors emerged who strove to stop the mass violence that accompanied the construction of new nations, pursuing a wide range of different motives—among them states that were often mainly concerned with their self-interest.

In ten chapters, Weitz surveys an amazingly broad set of historical situations in which this intricate story played out. They range from settler colonialism in the United States and slavery in Brazil to genocide in German South West Africa and repressive dictatorship in the Soviet Union. To be sure, while these episodes are very well chosen, most of them are also well known. The struggle for Greek independence (ch. 2) has been of particular interest to scholars studying the history of humanitarian intervention. The extermination of the Herero and Nama (ch. 6) has sparked a far-flung debate about the question of genocide, as have the mass killings of Ottoman Armenians (ch. 3). Historians have thoroughly examined the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (ch. 9) and illuminated both Soviet human rights diplomacy and the activism of Soviet dissidents (ch. 8).¹ *A World Divided* does not rely on new archival findings but rather provides a synopsis drawn from a vast body of literature.

This makes the less familiar parts of Weitz’s account all the more fascinating. The author does not shift his focus away once the violent logic of nation-state building has run its course but examines if and how newly erected nation (or revamped colonial) states integrated formerly persecuted groups. From this perspective, he provides a gripping description of the apartheid system that the Germans established to keep Herero and Nama under control after they had suppressed the rebellion. Moreover, Weitz devotes a chapter to the place of divided Korea in the human rights history of the Cold War era, which may not fit seamlessly into the book’s overall framework but nevertheless highlights an important and understudied region (ch. 7). Finally, the author zooms in on early eruptions of inter-group violence between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and Burundi between the late 1950s and early 1970s (ch. 10).

Weitz paints his vast historical canvas with broad brushstrokes. He does not disentangle arguments over the meaning of human rights, reconstruct the channels through which human rights ideas spread, study in depth the motivations behind the attempt to protect the lives of ‘others,’ scrutinize the details of decision-making, elucidate the dynamics of human rights mobilizations, or delve into the inner workings of international organizations. Perhaps most importantly, he employs a very

¹ Cf. Gary J. Bass, *Freedom’s Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: Knopf, 2008); Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (eds.), *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Der Kolonialkrieg (1904-1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2003); Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide. Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); David W. Lesch, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Benjamin Nathans, “The Disenchantment of Socialism: Soviet Dissidents, Human Rights, and the New Global Morality,” in: Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn (eds.), *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 33-48.

broad understanding of human rights. The author does not distinguish between rights guaranteed by national constitutions (commonly referred to as basic or fundamental rights) and those stipulated in international treaties that transcend the national realm. Sometimes human rights even gain a metaphorical sense in the book, when they are used to describe the sheer struggle against oppression, independently of how contemporaneous actors framed it. While the book offers many instructive episodes, it does not display analytical rigor in dissecting the nuances of human rights concepts and conflicts.

The book's central revelations lie elsewhere: in the deep structures and the *forces profondes* that have so consequentially shaped the interlinked histories of nation-states and human rights over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The core message that *A World Divided* conveys does not concern historical distinction and the processes of change but is one about sameness, laying bare the persistent logic of the nation-state and the kindred historical challenges to which it gave rise. Nation-state building, the book argues, always proved violently intolerant toward groups that were perceived as foreign, in mid-nineteenth century North America, in the late nineteenth-century Balkans, in colonial South West Africa, and in postcolonial Rwanda and Burundi. Likewise, rebellions against the destructive force of nationalist exclusion tended to take similar forms, making such ostensibly different figures as Dakota chief Little Crow and Herero leader Samuel Maharero appear as brothers in spirit (217). Endangered national groups repeatedly considered creating their own nation-state as the only viable solution; this was true, according to the book, in much the same way for Greeks in the 1820s, Armenians at the end of the First World War and Jews after 1945. Finally, in what the author portrays as a near-universal law of international relations, states never intervened to protect human rights out of empathy but always for the sake of stability. This motive spurred Great Britain to meddle in the Ottoman Empire as much as it animated the stance of the United States vis-à-vis South Korea and the Soviet Union. However varied the chapters may be in terms of geographical location and political constellations, they are basically conceived to exemplify uniform historical mechanisms. The history of the past two centuries thus emerges as an almost timeless universe of parallels and analogies, of repetition and recurrence, the same policies applied and re-applied, the same protection sought over and over again. Human rights is human rights is human rights.

This approach clearly goes against the tide of recent research in the field. In the past decade or so, historians have made an effort to examine distinct human rights moments, campaigns or groups of actors, highlighting their specific features and gauging their relative importance.² In fact, *A World Divided* is in some ways reminiscent of the earlier wave of human rights literature in the late 1990s and early 2000s.³ In an attempt to determine the boundaries of human rights history, these studies concentrated on long-term continuities and combined all human rights struggles into one unceasing fight for freedom and physical integrity. Weitz avoids the obvious pitfalls that this earlier endeavor entailed. His account is richly contextualized, he is careful in determining the power of individual actors, and his perspective is anything but teleological. Moreover, he evades the rather fruitless discussion about which decade witnessed the real birth of human rights (the crucial moment unfailingly occurring in the years that the respective author happens to be working on). His wide historical angle wisely prevents him from adding to the list of possible breakthroughs.

Yet the book leaves unaddressed a number of issues that seem indispensable for understanding the precise dynamics of human rights developments, and some of which the author would have been particularly apt to comment upon. Who used

² Cf. as a small selection Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (ed.), *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Sarah Snyder, *International Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War. A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue. The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Steven Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights. The 1960s, Decolonization, and the Reconstruction of Global Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Patrick J. Kelly, *Sovereign Emergencies. Latin America and the Making of Global Human Rights Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

³ Cf. Paul Gordon Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Micheline R. Ishay, *The History of Human Rights. From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

the term of human rights, what did they understand by it, and did invoking the idea make a difference? In what ways did ethnic killing in colonial situations differ from multi-sided inter-group struggles like the ones that unfolded in the Balkans? Why did some instances of ethnic violence find strong international resonance while others did not? In what ways did the proliferation of international organizations influence the chances of providing help? That the book does not provide clear answers to these questions might be regarded as the price to be paid for choosing such a broad narrative framework. The same is true for the fairly general nature of its main conclusions. “Exclusion as well as inclusion, human rights and their violations,” Weitz affirms, “lie in the nature of the beast, the nation-state” (425). All interventions on behalf of threatened groups resulted from a complex “confluence” of forces (124, 410). Consequently, no linear historical trajectory emerges. Without exception, these are convincing lines of interpretation. Yet they are also perhaps not surprising, particularly in view of everything that we have learned from the recent surge of studies about human rights history.

The overall judgement of the book, then, will depend on how readers assess Weitz’s big picture-approach. In any case, the imposing panorama that he unveils is in itself no small achievement. The many strands that he manages to weave into his powerful story, among them a brilliant account of the emergence of the concept of ‘minorities,’ make for compelling reading. As to his own stand on human rights, the author leaves no doubt. Weitz regards them as “a triumph of the human spirit and intellect” and, with a modicum of monumentalist history, praises every step in the direction of human rights protection as an historic “advance” (2 f.). One could argue that the crucial test for this position would have been to confront the darker side not only of the nation-state but also of human rights politics themselves—those occasions when human rights advocates imposed standards on people abroad who did not share them or when states made conflicts worse by intervening. Nonetheless, Weitz’s belief in the empowering nature of human rights is in itself an important facet of the book. *A World Divided* reminds us of what is at stake. Unlike critical accounts that have accentuated the failures of human rights mobilizations and the damage done in their name, Weitz does not see human rights as the problem, which, for him, involves violent fantasies of ethnic homogeneity and racial purity. In principle, he tells us, human rights ought to be seen as part of the solution. This solution may sometimes be seriously flawed, and about these flaws the author could have reflected more explicitly. Yet Weitz cautions us to remember that for many, they still remain the best hope.

REVIEW BY PETRA GOEDDE, TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

To have or not to have, that is the question. Human Rights, that is. Even though they have been designated as a universal concept enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights since 1948, and even though they are officially supported by all 198 member states of the United Nations, human rights are still being denied to too many people around the world. Worse still, there is a growing sense among human rights advocates that support for human rights is in decline. Even states which in the past could be counted on to defend human rights globally have backtracked and in some cases joined the ranks of human rights violators, as in the United States' waterboarding controversy in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

To have or not to have human rights is also the question at the heart of Eric Weitz's wide-ranging monograph, which takes us chronologically from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century and ranges geographically from Greece to Minnesota, Brazil, Korea, Rwanda and many places in between. As a guide to readers, Weitz formulates three variations on the above question: "Who has access to rights? What do we mean by human rights? And how do we obtain rights?" (1). He acknowledges early on that he does not have a definitive answer to the second question, which is understandable considering the contested nature of the concept and its malleability over time. He answers the other two questions by way of a whirlwind tour around the globe and across time.

In a monograph as rich as this one, there is a lot of food for thought, and too much to cover in a single review. I will thus focus my comments on two issues that I believe are central to understanding the book's contribution to the larger human rights discourse. The first concerns placing Weitz's approach within the context of current debates in the field of human rights history. His main focus is on the nation state, and his central argument is that "the history of nation-states *is* the history of human rights, and vice versa" (5). In some ways this book is an ode to the nation state's potential to be a force for good in the world. And in its positive thinking about the promise of the nation state, it offers a somewhat traditional, maybe even conservative, approach of the history of human rights. But at the same time Weitz summons many examples in which the nation state functioned as an obstacle to the advances of human rights, as in the case of Native American rights in Minnesota, or the displacement of Palestinians in the wake of the creation of the state of Israel. In case study after case study he emphasizes the role of the nation state as a vehicle for the protection of the rights of its citizens, as well as an authority that excludes large sectors of the population—racial, ethnic, and religious minorities—from gaining access to these rights. Weitz acknowledges the paradox (3), but does not attempt to explain, much less solve it. If the nation state both advances and limits access to human rights, what then should we make of the relationship between the nation state and human rights? Is it causal? Contextual? Co-incidental? Contingent? After reading through Weitz's case studies, I am left with the impression that the relationship could at best be called co-incidental. The rise of human rights emerged at roughly the same time as the rise of the nation state, but the "human" part of human rights—meaning its universalist aspirations—emerged only in the era of global governance at precisely the moment when nation state sovereignty was being called into question.

Weitz's positioning of the nation state at the heart of the history of human rights also puts him on a collision course with recent scholarship. Samuel Moyn, Barbara Keys, Jan Eckel, and others apply a much narrower definition of human rights, allowing them to deliver a much more critical assessment of the extent and shortcomings of the modern human rights regime.¹ He alludes to this methodological disagreement briefly in the introduction without engaging much with it in the remainder of the book (more on that later). Weitz's idea of human rights encompasses the collective rights of citizens within the state, the rights of states to self-determination, as well as the rights of individuals above and beyond the state. His broad conceptualization of human rights allows him to affix the history of the advancement of human rights to the history of the nation state. This interpretation aligns well with that of Lynn Hunt, first articulated over a decade ago, which linked human rights to the emergence of enlightenment ideas about empathy and individuality, though Hunt has little to say about the

¹ Jan Eckel, *Die Ambivalenz des Guten: Menschenrechte in der Internationalen Politik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014); Barbara Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

centrality of the nation state.² Weitz also draws on Benedict Anderson, whose work on the foundations of the modern nation state has transformed the field, though Anderson has little to say about human rights.³ Those who employ a narrower definition of human rights point to the fissures between the rights of individuals and the rights of nation states and other collectives, arguing—rightly so—that they often undermine each other. The right to self-determination and sovereignty of the latter can limit the rights to life and liberty of the former, as is aptly demonstrated in several of Weitz’s case studies.

If we treat states’ rights as separate from human rights, we can create space for supra- and non-national entities that serve as guardians of human rights. Since the late nineteenth century, several such institutions have worked to protect and defend the human rights of individuals vis-à-vis the power of the state.⁴ It was this uncoupling of human rights from the rights of sovereign nation states that allowed the noted African American civil rights activist, sociologist, and historian W.E.B. Du Bois and the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (NAACP) to bring a claim of human rights abuses against the United States before the United Nations in the aftermath of World War II.⁵ Du Bois’s petition made clear that even a liberal democratic state founded on the principles of equality, liberty, and individual rights, did not necessarily conform to a universal standard of human rights. The petition also posed a challenge to the sovereignty of nation states. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights offered the potential, albeit one which was unfulfilled, to bypass the state and to create a supranational entity that could safeguard individual human rights regardless of citizenship status. Seen from the perspective of the state, however, it was a threat to state sovereignty, and thus U.S. officials greeted Du Bois’s petition with uniform disapproval. Conceptually separating the rights of states from the rights of individuals helps explain the conflicted relationship of the nation state to the transnational human rights regime.

The second issue is the question of the intended audience for this book. Did Weitz write for the general public, or is he aiming to engage with the growing academic field of human rights history? If it is the former, then the case studies presented here are strangely marginal. Why place slavery in Brazil, rather than in the United States or the Caribbean? Why is there no chapter on women’s rights, a major omission regardless of whether the book is for generalists or specialists? Why offer Greece and not the French revolution as an example of the founding of the nation state? In other words, when writing for a general audience, one would expect to see the major human rights milestones reflected in the narrative, told in an engaging and fresh way, more so than academics usually do. If it is the latter, then we would expect a more direct and extensive engagement with the academic literature in the field. Apart from a very brief foray into the historiographical debate (embedded in footnotes 4 and 17 of the introduction), there is little discussion of the differentiation among civic, political, economic, human, and states’ rights; no elaboration on how the processes of colonialism, decolonization, post-colonialism, and nationalism affected the rise (and fall?) of human rights; and no critical examination of the concept of national self-determination.⁶

² Lynn Hunt, *The Invention of Human Rights* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007).

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983, rev. ed. 1991).

⁴ See for instance the founding of the International Red Cross in 1863. For more detail see Caroline Moorhead, *Dunant’s Dream: War, Switzerland, and the History of the Red Cross* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1999).

⁵ For more on the petition see Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), particularly ch. 2.

⁶ For the relationship between human rights and decolonization see Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Moyn, “Imperialism, Self-Determination, and the Rise of Human Rights,” in Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde, William I. Hitchcock, eds., *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); 159-178.

And yet, this book will certainly take its place among the most influential treatments of human rights in historical perspective. By arguing for the prominence of the nation state in human rights history, Weitz forces us to rethink established notions regarding the rise of human rights in modern history. No scholar has brought the nation state into the discussion on human rights in the modern world the way Weitz has. His argument will surely enrich the debate within the field, possibly generating a host of new studies examining and testing his thesis, something we should all look forward to.

REVIEW BY NORMAN M. NAIMARK, STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Buttressed by well-chosen illustrations, striking portraits of historical characters, and splendid maps, Eric Weitz's *A World Divided* explores a series of important episodes in the evolution of human rights from the Enlightenment to the present. Each of these episodes—the Greek Revolution, the Indian removal in Minnesota, the emancipation of the Brazilian slaves, the genocide of the Herero and Nama, the prehistory of the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide, the creation of modern Israel, the emergence of two Koreas, the Soviet dissident movement, and the Rwandan genocide—is researched in depth, provides important new perspectives on the events, and is rendered in sparkling, accessible prose. The moral passion behind the historical analysis is unambiguous: human rights are at the core of the development of the modern world and serve as a legitimate objective of human strivings. Every human being is deserving of these fundamental rights and it is just and appropriate that modern societies place human rights at the center of their hopes for the present and future.

With this said, Weitz is no Utopian. His recounting of the zig-zag development of human rights focuses on their dependence on the emergence of the nation state in the post-Napoleonic era. “Nation states and human rights,” he writes, “developed together” (86). The conundrum that results from this observation is central to his analysis: the objective of forming the nation state frees dominant ethno-national groups from oppression and limitations on their rights but almost always takes place at the expense of minority nations. The emancipation of some peoples from the stranglehold of empires over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries frequently meant discrimination and violence against others. The emergence of race thinking at the end of the nineteenth century made this dynamic all the more insidious, especially when involving what Weitz calls “the imperial nation state” (210). Germany’s colony of Southwest Africa, which was to have been settled by peaceful German farmers and miners, turned into the site of genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples between 1903 and 1907, carried out by German troops led by imperial General Lothar von Trotha. The genocidal “*Schrecklichkeit*” (terror) order of von Trotha was matched in kind by General Henry Hastings Sibley, first governor of the state of Minnesota, who, in 1862, promised to eliminate the Dakota tribe as “devils in human shape.... I will sweep them with the besom of death” (101).

Race thinking kept Brazilian slaves in bondage for much longer than slavery was acceptable in the international system or was economically viable. Yet, along with periodic slave resistance and uprisings and a significant abolitionist movement, the opprobrium of the international system and the inefficiency of slavery finally brought Brazilian slavery to an end in May of 1888, “an extraordinary human rights advance” (150). Race thinking in a toxic mix with the development of nation states in the post-colonial period in Africa produced the unimaginably brutal Rwandan genocide of 1994, which was only a further stage of the Tutsi-Hutu conflict that was inherited from the early history of Burundi and Rwanda under the Belgian colonial authorities.

Weitz astutely points out the important intersections of the struggle for human rights with the demands of the international system. The Greeks could not have achieved sovereignty in their wars for independence against the Ottoman Empire between 1821 and 1830 without the support of the French, British, and Russians, who—whatever their sympathies for the Greeks—were more interested in stabilizing their spheres of influence in the region than in Greek human rights. Still, it was crucial, as Weitz points out in this case and others, that the political and economic elites themselves took the initiative to achieve their own liberation, using whatever rhetorical, financial, and military means were available. The active struggle for sovereignty of the Greeks against the Ottoman rulers ended up costing the lives of indigenous Turks, Vlachs, Albanians, Jews, and others. “Freedom for some, annihilation for others,” states Weitz, “-- that is the paradox that accompanied the foundation of Greece” (82).

A similar story could be told of the Zionists, who fought hard to get the international system to pay attention to their strivings for an independent Jewish state in Palestine, or of the Armenians, who sought protection from the violence of the Ottoman Empire at the Congress of Berlin (1878) and then again through the Armenian Reform Package on the eve of World War I. The interplay of the struggle of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) with the

international system eventually brought down the apartheid government in Pretoria. Despite the mixed record of the involvement of the international system, Weitz correctly notes that Serbian war criminals would never have been tried and convicted for their heinous acts during the 1990s in former Yugoslavia without Western intervention.

As Weitz observes, international powers act primarily in their own interests in adjudicating human rights disputes, even if arbitration, intervention, or interdiction are accompanied by high-flown rhetoric of self-determination, freedom, and justice. Still, the rhetoric of human rights does make a difference and takes on a constructive historical life of its own, seeping inexorably into other crises and conflicts around the world. But the policies of the international community frequently undermine the very principles it claims to be supporting. The history of population exchange, which is explored in the book in various contexts, attests to that problem. Take the Treaty of Lausanne (1922-23), which more than any other single international agreement encouraged the great powers to use forced population exchange as an instrument for the building of mono-ethnic national states in the twentieth century. Lausanne itself was intended to bring conflicts between Greeks and Turks to an end by forcibly exchanging the remaining Greek (actually Greek Orthodox) population in the new Turkish Republic with the remaining Turks (Muslims) in Greece. Given the violence built into the 'exchange' itself and the subsequent history of Greco-Turkish relations, one can question whether population exchanges can serve such positive purposes. The question could also be asked about the forcible deportation of millions of Germans from East Central Europe after World War II, which was promoted by a decision of the Great Powers at Potsdam (July-August 1945). Ostensibly, this population transfer was to be 'orderly and humane,' but turned out to constitute a violent upheaval with long-term negative consequences for German-East European relations. The case that Weitz explores in detail is the Nakba, 'Catastrophe,' the 1948-49 expulsion of Palestinians from their villages and domiciles during the Israeli 'war of independence.' Over 700,000 Arabs fled or were expelled. With considerable empathy for both sides, Weitz homes in on the way the powers of the international system—in particular the British—provided the Zionist perpetrators with the supposedly positive example of the Lausanne solution to deal with Arab residents. Israelis and Palestinians live today with the tragic results of the fearsome ethnic cleansing that was part and parcel of the making of the Israeli state.

Weitz is intrigued by architecture and writes with great flourish about the work of the Brazilian Oscar Niemeyer, who designed many of the buildings for the new capital of Brasilia, and collaborated with Swiss-French architectural modernist Le Corbusier on the UN building in New York, "an icon of mid-twentieth-century modernism" (154). Weitz also thinks about human rights in architectural terms as "a multi-storied glass house," to be sure a fragile and vulnerable one (160). The "complex of human rights covenants" can be thought of as "one girder in the house of human rights," but there are others as well, including popular movements and, more recently, the work of human rights NGOs (423).

When Weitz examines the history of the Soviet Union, for example, he notes that its imbrication in the human rights story adds "many new angles and panes" to the already multi-dimensional glass structure that he has constructed (283). He astutely observes that the social and economic dimensions of what constitutes human rights in Soviet thinking had a profound effect on the way these rights were perceived around the world. This impact was particularly powerful in the immediate post-World War II period, when the Soviets influenced international law through their active participation in the Nuremberg Tribunal (1945-46), in the making of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), and in the promulgation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (1948). But Soviet law also propelled the domestic human rights movement in the homeland of socialism. The first Soviet "dissidents" of the 1960s and early 1970s used Soviet constitutional law and "socialist legality," which emphasized the social and economic dimensions of human rights, to provide breathing space for the individual conscience of Soviet citizens, which meant, in human rights activist Vladimir Bukovsky's words, "in effect, inner freedom" (306). But when confronted with the power of the state, the activists soon became "prisoners of conscience," which led subsequent generations of Soviet human rights activists to the more directly political opposition, as exemplified in the writings of Andrei Sakharov and Yelena Bonner.

Although Weitz is upbeat at the end of this human rights story, which includes some inspirational portraits of activists like Ralph Bunche, Nelson Mandela, and Bertha Lutz, he understands that even after two decades of the twenty-first century has passed, we are far removed from the guarantees of human needs—social, economic, and political—that were promised to everyone by the crucial United Nations' documents of the late 1940s. The drastic plight of more than sixty million refugees

around the globe—Syrian, Rohingya, Central American, and many others—underlines the inability of the international system to guarantee fundamental rights to the world’s population. Weitz reminds us of Hannah Arendt’s observation that, in his words, “we are literally nothing without a state structure around us. Statelessness... is just short of physical annihilation” (427). Rights also continue to be denied to those who live within nation states, whether Roma in parts of southeastern Europe, Kurds in Turkey, or Uighurs in China. With the recent ascendance of populist and nationalist movements and parties, minority status within many states is fraught with danger and sometimes raw desperation. Yet, as Weitz insists, “human rights provide a powerful affirmation of the human spirit” (430). This statement is an invocation for his own work, as evidenced in his invaluable editorship of the Princeton University Press series on Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity, his earlier work on ethnic conflict and genocide, and this new book, a crowning achievement in human rights scholarship.

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Writing the Global History of Human Rights

It is indeed an honor to have my book, *A World Divided*, read so seriously by scholars from whom I have learned so much. Our approach to human rights history sometimes differs, of course, but each of the reviewers offers excellent summaries of the book and incisive critical comments. I would also like to thank Sarah Snyder for bringing together such important scholars and giving me the opportunity to respond.

A World Divided was a long time in the making. While I began researching and writing my earlier book, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation*, I also began teaching a comparative genocides course at the University of Minnesota.¹ By itself, that course proved to be intellectually not robust, and it was draining on me and the students. It had the feeling of ‘one damn atrocity after another.’ At Minnesota I had wonderful colleagues in Law, Political Science, Sociology, Public Health, and History who were engaged with human rights. I learned an immense amount from them. So I added a human rights dimension to the course, and did the same with a book series, “Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity,” that I initiated with Princeton University Press. At around the same time, human rights, which had long been the preserve of scholars in Law and Political Science, emerged as a vibrant field of historical research. The pioneering books by Lynn Hunt, Samuel Moyn, and, in Germany, Jan Eckel, stoked the field and my own thinking, as did my participation in a research group run by Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann at the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung (Center for Contemporary Historical Research) in Potsdam.²

I was moving toward some way of combining the history of atrocities and the history of human rights because it seemed to me they turned on the same essential political category: the definition of populations by nation and race. In a 2008 article, “From the Vienna to the Paris System,” I tracked the transformation over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century from the central concern with dynastic legitimacy and territorial boundaries (Vienna) to population politics (Paris), especially the entwined policies of minority protection and ethnic cleansing.³ The nation-state, the ultimate definer of populations by nationality and race, became the predominant political model at the post-World War I Paris Peace Conference and then over the course of the twentieth century. Human rights also rose to become one of the dominant forms of politics over the same period.

Both human rights and the nation-state have obvious global dimensions. As I was developing the ideas for *A World Divided*, global history had emerged as a vibrant field of historical research. Two masterworks were published: C.A. Bayly’s *The Birth of the Modern World* (2004) and Jürgen Osterhammel’s *The Transformation of the World* (2009). Both books helped crystalize my thinking and determination to write a book that is, at one and the same time, a history of human rights and a

¹ Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

² Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); and Jan Eckel, *Die Ambivalenz des Guten: Menschenrechte in der internationalen Politik seit den 1949ern* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

³ Weitz, “From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions,” *American Historical Review* 113:5 (2008): 1313-1343.

global history.⁴ The hardest part was getting the balance right, in each of the chapters, between human rights advances and the exclusions and atrocities that so often accompanied them. A number of workshops with colleagues who graciously read the book in manuscript proved enormously helpful in this regard.

Petra Goedde finds it odd, then, that I chose some apparently out-of-the-way cases instead of focusing on the big ones, like the French Revolution. My choice of cases was quite deliberate. I did, indeed, want to show the *global* dimensions and problems of the entwining of the nation-state and human rights, and I thought that this could best be shown by writing the histories of some lesser known cases alongside other big ones, like Brazil, for example, which was every bit as much a slave society as the United States. I also wanted to capture the variety of modern political and economic systems, from republic to empire, slavery to socialism, colonialism to communism. In a very different way, the Soviet Union is also a ‘big’ case.

Moreover, small countries often stand at the crux of major historical developments. The Greek rebellion against Ottoman rule ultimately drew in the European powers, which desperately sought stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. Their reluctant solution was the establishment of a Greek nation-state with some form of rights. China, Japan, the United States, and Russia/the Soviet Union all fought for influence on the Korean peninsula. They devastated the country *and* opened up paths for development, ultimately including two nation-state foundings and distinct understandings of rights. For seventy years, if not more, Palestine/Israel has been one of the flashpoints of global conflict. Small countries often exercise outsize influence, not least in the conundrum of nation-states and human rights.

Goedde also wonders about the audience for whom I wrote the book, and that too relates to my choice of cases. My preferred method of writing is to explore individual histories rather than to write an overarching, general history. I like to delve into the texture of a people, a time, and a place, which I hope is also a research and writing strategy that attracts a broader public that is interested in human rights, as well as activists and fellow academics.

But I do not think this means, as Jan Eckel writes and a point with which Goedde agrees, that the book lacks “analytical rigor.” In every case I write about, I argue that the relationship of the nation-state and human rights is not simply “co-incident,” as Goedde writes. They emerged together historically and they together define one another. Every nation-state erects citizenship boundaries, which determine who has access to rights. Every human rights claim focuses first on the nation-state, even though since 1945 there exist international treaties, international bodies, and countless non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that seek to enforce human rights and grant even stateless persons human rights. ‘Codetermined’ is perhaps a term I would prefer to use regarding the nation-state and human rights.

But that certainly does not mean that I venerate the nation-state. As I write numerous times in the book, the nation-state is both the major protector and the supreme violator of human rights. That is the paradox with which we live. It can only be mitigated, not resolved, by the ever increasing movement of human rights protections to the international level.

There is, then, a certain “sameness” to the historical process I explore in *A World Divided*, as Eckel writes. I might have chosen a different word, but he does write insightfully about the core argument of the book: the nation-state is, in its very essence, a contradictory political form. In the best of instances, it establishes and enforces human rights. But it also limits those who may enter the charmed circle of rights-bearing citizens, and that sometimes includes the most violent forms of population politics, like ethnic cleansings and genocides. While many historians these days write about the persistence of empires in the twentieth and even the twenty-first centuries, I argue that the more fundamental fact is the emergence of a world defined by the existence of 193 sovereign nation-states (give or take one, two, or three).

⁴ C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), and Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014 [2009]).

Yet I certainly do not argue that “human rights is human rights is human rights,” as Eckel also suggests. Instead, I use the varying cases to show the different meanings of human rights as they evolved over time. There is no “sameness” here. The concept of human rights is nothing if not dynamic. In the nineteenth century, it largely referred to political rights and was restricted to propertied white men. But already there were voices demanding what we now call social and economic rights and the expansion of rights-bearing citizenship to include slave rebels, women, workers, and many other marginalized people. Those demands became ever louder in the twentieth century. All along the way, the dilemma between individual and collective rights continued, as is shown perhaps most poignantly in my chapter on American Indians. I address social and economic rights primarily in the chapters on the Soviet Union and Korea. I argue that without political rights, social and economic rights are meaningless; the state merely provisions the population to keep it quiescent. But what the state gives, the state can also take away when people do not have the rights to protest and raise demands in the public sphere. In general, I prefer that the various meanings of human rights arise out of the distinct histories I write about.

It is true, as Goedde and Eckel argue, that I do not offer a precise definition of human rights. As I write in the introduction, I do not believe it is possible to do so, and if one does, the definition will rapidly appear outdated. In *A World Divided*, human rights provide an angle of orientation on the history of the last 250 years rather than a rigid definitional standpoint. And that is also why I engage only briefly with many of the raging historiographical debates on human rights. Moreover, perhaps in more than any other field, human rights scholarship is multidisciplinary. I want the book to be read by scholars in the various disciplines, not just by historians, as well as by activists and a broader public (as mentioned above). I would lose that opportunity immediately if I spent the first twenty-five pages writing about the historiographical debates. At the same time, readers who want more direction on the matter can find many leads in the footnotes.

I am very grateful to Norman Naimark for so deftly capturing the scope and meaning of *A World Divided*. For many years I have admired his scholarship on Russia and the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Germany, and genocides. The breadth and depth of his writing are qualities I aspire to follow. If I come close to that in my own book, it is also because his own scholarship has long been a model for me. I can only thank him for the accolades he offers.

As I write these lines, the COVID-19 virus is raging and the climate crisis threatens our very existence. The accounting with both seems to have displaced human rights from the political agenda. Yet a human rights perspective offers guidelines for individual behavior, state policies, and international action amid the gravest crises of our time. Human rights affirms the dignity and worth of each and every individual and their right to speak out and to lead a life beyond the bare minimum of existence. In concrete terms, it means equal rights to public health and to protections from the environmental destruction that threaten the very basic conditions of life on the planet. *A World Divided*, as an affirmative history of human rights that also recognizes the complexities and insufficiencies, the disasters and triumphs that so often occur together, can hopefully offer some historical perspective on the present. The comments of the three reviewers suggest that the discussion, on history as well as our present politics, is by no means closed and settled, and that is most certainly a good thing.