



Mercenaries, Pirates, Bandits, and Empires: Private Violence in Historical Context (Columbia/Hurst)

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Incidents of private violence were once dismissed as relics of a less evolved world, yet the activities of terrorists, insurgents, private military companies, and pirates have returned the phenomenon to global prominence. Academics now scrutinize "nonstate" or private violence with more sensitivity, hoping to get a better handle on the implications for international security.

Interpreting these acts in their historical contexts, this collection traces the development of private violence across history, comparatively analyzing its growth among different geographies. Nine comprehensive chapters recount the making of pirates, privateers, mercenaries, warlords, bandits, and smugglers—groups that sustain themselves through violence committed outside and on the borders of state authority. Contributors draw on political anthropology and economics, historical sociology, and international relations, underscoring the way in which private violence threatens existing social orders while empowering established political authorities. They denaturalize the idea that national states are the true, dominant actors in the global sphere, examining the contradictory yet complex interactions among nonstate violence, authority, and political mobilization. Their work ultimately shows that private violence has existed throughout history, though it has transformed our world very specifically.

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