



A History of Bombing

Sven Lindqvist, Linda Haverty Rugg (Translator)

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Continuously interesting, often fascinating.

A History of Bombing Details

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From Reader Review A History of Bombing for online ebook

C.R. Miller says

I'm pretty sure I finished this book. Lindqvist's unique navigation system didn't work out so well for me; I often lost track of which section I was in when I last put the book down, making it difficult to find the way forward or back. That said, I think this should be required reading, if not for everyone, then at least all Americans and Brits. Ok, let's throw in the French and Italians, too. Before reading, though, I suggest my fellow countrymen well scrub from their brains all the "American History" imparted to them through schooling, the popular imagination, and the mainstream media over the years and decades. This is a powerful book, well researched and well reasoned, melding historical facts, a survey of futuristic fiction, and the author's own experiences. In fact it's tempting to say it's one of the best books I've ever read. OK, why not say it: this book is for those who are ready to read it, to face the reprehensible facts, for folks like us ... one of the best books I've ever read.

Gabriel says

Sven talks about bombing, the dates of special bombing inventions and events. It talks about the effects on bombing and how many people it involves. You don't know but bombing effects everyone! Even the bombers family! Imagine the guilt you would have if someone in your family bombed and injured someone let alone kill! The book tells the reader everyone from when the first bomb was made to when they were launched from air and everything inbetween.

I picked this book simply for one reason; the family and friends of the victims in the Boston Marathon Bombing. My heart goes out for everyone impacted by this terrible incident!

This book was somewhat boring but I still finished it. The reason? The victims on the Bombing because its our job as society to spread the word about bombing and its terrible side effects.

Who would i recommend this book to? EVERYONE. Was that a simple question! Everyone needs to know about bombing and the effects. By doing this, not only bombings would stop, shootings, robberies, terrorism etc. would all stop and the world would come together with peace and happiness.

This book is 110% successful! It brings it messages and thrives for a change.

Andrew says

Man's inhumanity to man is well documented in this unusually compiled book. Short sections are listed in chronological order, but you read the book in various strings of history that jump around the book. This is information that the blissfully ignorant probably couldn't handle.

Patrick Bella Gone says

History of Bombing is in many ways a history of bullying, a history of how the white supremacist ethos and fear of the other has led to 'justified' destruction and a systematic devaluation of non-Western life. Amongst these historical accounts, Lindqvist intersperses plot summaries of sci-fi and historical fiction texts that predict, or bring about, future atrocities, a litany of white male heroes saving the world from people of color. The book details numerous atrocities bankrolled by the West, including Great Britain's continual denial of how many civilian Germans they unnecessarily slaughtered with air raids, the unnecessary Korean War, and European nations developing bombing technology in order to 'police' their 'territories,' quelling rebellions by obliterating their own colonies, people with no air force or comparable method of recourse. An essential read that provides the breath of colonial hypocrisy over one hundred years.

Eric Randolph says

A work of true genius: it's unique labyrinthine structure is gimmicky but fun, while the mix of memoir, literature review and history is fascinating, ironic, furious and infuriating -- providing a balanced but terrifying overview of the horror inflicted by man, while tearing apart the moral self-righteousness in which the West has always basked.

Alarra says

Very idiosyncratic, original 'history' book, tracking the use of racism and colonialism to oppress minority cultures through warfare. It's chronologically laid out in sections, but you're asked to read following the pathway set out by the author as he builds his argument in a very detailed, esoteric way.

Julian says

Amazing nonlinear military history

George Moody says

A morally serious, thoughtful, but ultimately frustrating book.

I read the bulk of this on a camping holiday about a year ago. I enjoyed it, but didn't pick it up again when I got home. I think by that time the frustrating faults – mainly due to its structure – had sapped much of the pleasure and interest out of it for me. (I only picked it up again, and finished it, earlier this week.)

Lindqvist has used an unusual structure in the book, fragmenting each of his narratives into small paragraph or two long sections, and then distributing them through the book in a chronological order, so the narratives physically interweave. So for example, the narrative on 'Living with the Superweapon' runs through

fragments 15, 246-248, 251, 254-255, 262-266, which you follow through like a linear 'choose your own adventure' book.

Initially I found this effective. One can feel the different narratives moving through the same periods of time in this way, and sense more of their temporal relation to one another. It also has a disorienting effect – one doesn't know how far through the book one is for example – and gives the book a labyrinthine feel: both of which suit the subject matter and are intended by Lindqvist (in his 'How to Read This Book' introduction he calls it a 'labyrinth' and a 'horrifying puzzle').

Fairly quickly however I found this structure frustrating on two levels. Firstly, practically, it was easy to get lost (mistake a page number for a fragment or vice versa, or misread one without keeping your previous place) and one then has to retrace one's steps. I found myself engaged in a similar irritating process whenever I picked up the book after stopping reading. Having been intrigued by it, I was bored and irritated by the structure on this simple practical level by the fourth narrative.

The structure of parallel narratives and its fragmentary presentation also seem to damage Lindqvist's ability to sustain focus and coherence. Lots of interesting themes and areas are passed over, but the consideration quickly moves on. For example when he talks about area bombing (fragment 345) he notes that in this approach: 'The risk is passed off to the people on the ground. The pilot and the crew save their own skins', and he occasionally returns to approach the ethical elements of this risk transfer character of bombing – noting in the Allied bombing of Germany, for example, that many cities were reasonably well defended, so they weren't simply bombing helpless targets (in comparison to the targets of the Nazi genocide). But he only ever approaches the issue, and his structure prevents, or allows him to escape, sustained thought on what this actually means. Is there somehow an obligation for warfare to be in some sense 'fair'? At what point does warfare degenerate towards slaughter and even genocide? How does bombing (and even more so, drone bombing) factor into this? Interesting and important questions that Lindqvist does not seem to want to answer. (I found myself thinking about Martin Shaw's work on risk transfer war, and war and genocide, quite a bit while reading it).

This is a continual problem for the book. Lindqvist covers interesting material and the combination of different genres of thought on bombing can be stimulating - there is a lot on fiction themed around bombing and genocide, and especially race, considered here. However all of this is very much Lindqvist's take on these histories, and I increasingly found him a shallow commentator: maybe even naively pacific, and too callously horrified by the nature of bombing to get effectively beyond his own feelings and outrage to deal with the questions he provokes.

The point where this crystallised for me was his consideration of Allied bombing in the Second World War. As mentioned above, he considers how far it is comparable to the Nazi genocide. During this consideration, one section stuck out, where he suggests as a great failing that Churchill and Roosevelt 'never considered an offer to stop bombing German cities in exchange for the lives of the Jews' (fragment 207). His support in the end notes for this as a serious central consideration is his own reflection on a comment in George Quester's *Deterrence before Hiroshima*. Quester writes that a transition to precision bombing could have been used 'to deter other obnoxious practices in Nazi Germany', and Lindqvist continues: 'Does Quester mean to imply that a halt in the bombing of German civilians would have been a possible way to rescue Jews?' This discussion felt entirely inadequate to me, reflecting a queasy even-handedness, that to me at least, reminded me that I was being given a very Swedish view on the war.

Many aspects of the Allied bombing campaign are certainly questionable and Lindqvist does a good job bringing these out in an engaging way, and in highlighting that how it is characterised and its clear

differentiation from the Holocaust in Western discourse can be obfuscatory. However, that is as far as the structure of his book (or his thinking) will allow him to go – bringing up issues and highlighting problematic discourses and their history. This is not without merit, but I found myself wanting him to engage more deeply with the issues he identified.

The final paragraph of the last narrative sums up the problem. Certainly all the relationships he asserts are worth considering, and it is powerfully written, but it begs all kind of questions. The book has been building up to this, but throughout he has largely described his own assumptions about all of this:

‘Out of this violence, both that which has already been committed and that which is still dormant, the century’s dreams of genocide emerge. The injustice we defend forces us to hold on to genocidal weapons, with which our fantasies can be realized whenever we like. Global violence is the hard core of our existence.’

Lindqvist has produced a sophisticated and interesting howl of moral outrage against bombing. He gives a provocative impressionistic tour of the troubling links to racism and genocide of both the practice of bombing and the mental structures and patterns that support it. If this is not an area you have read much on before it could unsettle you in a useful way – just don’t expect too many answers to the questions it provokes.

Mark says

Another amazing Lindqvist book that tells the tale of aerial bombing and its moral effect on civilization. The structure is wild and experimental, kind of like a nonfiction choose your own adventure, with the author's usual melange of memories, dreams, history and literary criticism. Lindqvist does a great job of demonstrating how the greater technology of modern warfare has actually increased our collective barbarism. This is cultural history with a passionate moral compass.

Margaret Sankey says

Using a literary technique akin to a maze-recalling adult choose your own adventure story, Lindqvist poses provocative questions about the history, ethical implications and repercussions of aerial bombing and total war, which the reader can follow in threads and themes, or, since I am a diabolical person, pose to students after making them draw a number out of a hat.

Shaun says

This was a consistently jarring book, but I couldn't put it away without finishing it. Lindqvist pulls equally from historical anecdotes on the birth of flight (quickly followed by the idea that things could be hurled from the sky) and the literary threads that helped shape public thought on aviation, advances in military technology, and power. Maybe more than anything, I kept putting the book down and feeling thankful that I could ride my bike to one of many part time gigs without worrying about daily carpet bombing, napalm, or

the blinding light of a nuclear explosion kicking off. Or could I? Putting the history of human violence and male power fantasies in perspective, this is one of the heaviest things I've read in the last year - like the author was continually laying bricks on my soul. Sorry if that sounds trite, it's just that it was a tricky book to work through without having to stop often and take a breath.

The structure of the book breaks things up along threads which criss-cross the chronology of the book as it would otherwise read front-to-back, which provides a somewhat innovative read (reminding me of Choose Your Own Adventure pulp) and at the same time tears your mind a couple steps further from the detached reading that might otherwise occur during the forced ingestion of so much that is horrifying and real.

Alec says

This book has a much wider range of sources and implications than the title would suggest. Lindqvist deftly maneuvers between science, philosophy, international law, history, and science fiction to explain how we reached this point. Though the narrative style takes some getting used to, it eventually becomes clear why each narrative is separated and how they interact with one another.

My big takeaway from the book comes from its title. It's not THE History, but rather A History of Bombing. Petty as that may seem, I think there's significance. When examining international law or science fiction, Lindqvist writes that throughout history many authors and policymakers viewed violence as justified and certain races as more intelligent or "civilized" than others (despite the fact that the "civilized" races tended to do more of the murdering). Still, there always was one critical voice who didn't buy into these racist and chauvinistic attitudes. In our case, Lindqvist is one of those minority (though morally correct) voices. So often, the narratives about bombing in WWII, Korea, and Iraq are presented as necessary, humane, and successful. They are THE history, according to so many. Lindqvist's is an alternative view more grounded in reality, if we choose to listen.

John Dorcey says

The information and resources provided by the author were outstanding.

The book's layout, or format, made it a challenge to enjoy reading. The book is best described as a series of short articles - some only a paragraph long, others several pages long - in a sporadic order. You then were expected to jump back and forth, from article to article to follow the author's preferred sequence.

Bastian Greshake Tzovaras says

In equal parts about bombing and how it changed warfare itself but also the history of European colonialism. The non-linear (choose-your-own-adventureesque) style is not too useful though. I just read the chapters in the order the author wanted me to read them in any case, so I just had to jump around for no good reason.

Brooks says

The book is divided into 399 sections, ordered mostly by chronology, and at the end of most of those is an arrow pointing you to the next suggested section. The path jumps around a fair bit through the timeline, but the overarching layout is still chronological (WWI to WWII to Korea to Vietnam...), which made me wonder whether this narrative method was merely a gimmick.

There were interesting ideas here about the way bombs have been used to divorce the actors from the action. Especially as the book was published in 2000, but has several sections that clearly point an arrow toward drone warfare, to my mind the biggest change in bombing since that time. There were a few sections that wandered and ended up being rants about the politics of war rather than tying into the general theme (the "chapter" concerning Korea in particular).

Eric says

We cannot change the hearts and minds of those people...but we can make war so terrible, make them so sick of war, that generations would pass away before they would again appeal to it. (General Sherman). That is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know...

A History of Bombing is a history of aerial bombardment--the most indiscriminate, politically punitive, and frankly terroristic style of fighting—in three hundred and ninety-nine vignettes. Lindqvist calls his book “a labyrinth with twenty-two entrances and no exit,” each entrance a narrative or an argument that concludes with a vision of humanity’s certain savagery, and probable doom. “Follow the threads,” he invites us, “put together the horrifying puzzle, and, once you have seen my century, build one of your own from other pieces.”

My favorite entrances are those on the newly-invented airplane as an instrument of colonial control, and as an inspirer of European fantasies of effortless global subjection and loftily sanitary extermination (like all such colonial fantasies, they would blow back on Europe). The airplane enters warfare as a colonial policeman. “Pilot as policeman, bomb as baton.” The legality of bombing civilians was discussed only insofar as it threatened to be practiced in Europe; for the savages, wholesale chastisement. The first air raid came in 1911, when an Italian flier leaned from his fragile contraption to toss a few hand grenades over a Libyan oasis thought to conceal a fractious tribe. After World War One, aerial bombing was a relatively cheap way for cash-strapped powers to put down native rebellions—or, to at least flatten the villages where Iraqi, Indian, Burmese or Yemeni insurgents might harbor. Sir Arthur Harris flew in the Afghan War of 1919, which ended after a single demoralizing airstrike (our dronemakers can only sigh); during World War Two, as head of RAF Bomber Command, Harris would burn down Hamburg, Dresden, and fifty-nine other German cities, confident at each take-off of Hitler’s imminent surrender.

The generals liked the efficiency of air raids, colonial ministers their cheapness—while the men of letters dreamt of airships, death rays, and the immolation of the coloreds. Lindqvist is distinctive in his knowledge of science fiction, and of the casually genocidal racism therein. Dreams of a purifying fire from above predate the first military use of aircraft. “[F]antasies of genocide lay in wait for the first airplane to arrive,” he writes. “The dream of solving all the problems of the world through mass destruction from the air was already in place before the first bomb was dropped.” Almost as a rule of the genre, airpower porn of early twentieth century science fiction features the complete extermination of the Chinese—“the yellow armies of Heathendom”—from on high. The feared swamping of the white man by dusky hordes? Pow! Zap! Solved! World War One, though, makes cracks in European confidence. In many of the bestselling novels of the interwar period London and Paris are “bombed back to barbarism,” are bombed—in Anderson Graham’s *The Collapse of the Homo Sapiens* (1923) and Desmond Shaw’s *Ragnorok* (1926)—by vengeful Asians and Africans who’ve learned Western technology at wrong-headedly inclusive liberal universities and who then turn Europe’s glittering boulevards into flashbacks of the traumatic trenches where giant rodents batten on heaps of dead.*

As distasteful as Lindqvist finds such writing, you can really hear the vomit rise in his throat as he describes the apocalyptic survivalist sci-fi produced by Americans during the Cold War. This sub-genre combines the traditional exterminations (America nukes Red Chai-nuh, and its own ghettos) with the joyous destruction of the West’s liberal society, from the wreckage of which lopes that fearsome and ridiculous creature, the Reinvigorated White Man. “As soon as the little wife has died in the blast, the husband is free to be Tarzan, hunting in the great luxuriant forests that soon grow up in the ruins of Manhattan.”

People between the wars had been afraid to be bombed back to barbarism—to filth, starvation, and the rats. But during the postwar period, especially for American men, barbarism began to look promising...Paradoxically, a military technology that had divorced destruction from every personal characteristic of the individual created dreams of a future where the courage, manliness, and physical strength of an already-vanished world were still decisive.

I wonder what Pynchon has to say about all this. Where I live, the season of torrential snows draws nigh, and I dream of withdrawal to a yet-more-northerly cabin, for a month, with an armful of assorted whiskies and *Gravity’s Rainbow*. The “tumultuous privacy of the storm” (need to read more fucking Emerson, too) is perfect for deep, hibernial reading.

* “Apart from the distraught behavior of the people themselves, the most striking change in the natural order of the cities during the weeks after a devastating raid was undoubtedly the sudden and alarming increase in the parasitical creatures thriving on the unburied bodies. The conspicuous sparsity of observations and comments on this phenomenon can be explained as the tacit imposition of a taboo, very understandable if one remembers that the Germans, who had proposed to cleanse and sanitize all Europe, now had to contend with a rising fear that they themselves were the rat people.” (W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*)

I assume Sebald wants us to recall the Jews-as-rats montage from the Nazi propaganda film *The Eternal Jew*.

How's that for irony!

Leo says

"Nyt sinä kuolit."

Lindqvist on kirjoissaan ainutlaatuisen hyvä kuvaamaan ihmisyyden pimeimpiä puolia ja etenkin länsimaiden, "kehittyneiden" kansojen ja valtioiden kaksinaismoralismia. History of bombingissa se on kaikkein kylmäävintä, kun kontekstina on ilmapommituksen kehitys aina Wrightin veljeksistä mannertenvälisiin ydinohjuksiin.

Palapelimäinen narratiivi vaikutti aluksi turhalta kikkailulta, mutta nopeasti huomasin olevani historian ja pelon labyrintissä, josta halusi löytää tiensä ulos - ja oppia samalla yhä enemmän.

Wes Pue says

A remarkable account that reminds us to be horrified by bombing. Well written and clear.

Henry says

This was the first Lindqvist book I read, and it simply knocked me out. It combines a playful "Choose Your Own Adventure" kind of structure and mixes history with cultural analysis and memoir in brief, arresting paragraphs. It is filled with pacifist outrage, but more importantly, it continues the author's journey into the dark underbelly of European and American culture, showing how the flip side of our technologies, philosophies and ideologies -- the achievements of our civilization, in other words -- are inextricably linked with a downright primitive racism, a talent for violence that borders on sadism, and ultimately, an astounding ability to rationalize brutality, often in the name of our achievements. An intellectually harrowing book, but also very entertainingly written.

Soopaseb says

A powerful review of the means and meanings of mass destruction for western civilization. Shocking sir !
