



Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire

By David Anderson



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"A remarkable account of Britain's last stand in Kenya. This is imperial history at its very best."--John Hope Franklin

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



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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Anderson's authoritative history of the last days of the British Empire in Kenya focuses on the colonial judicial system, which sent over 1,000 native Kenyans to the gallows between 1952 and 1959, during the state of emergency triggered by the Mau Mau insurrection. At the heart of the tale, along with blustering colonial ineptitude, is white settler ignorance of how its land grabs wreaked havoc on the Kikuyu tribe, Kenya's largest ethnic group and a people viciously targeted by the British, who were intent on rooting out Mau Mau activism at all costs. Anderson, a lecturer in African studies at Oxford, shows how paternalistic land reallocations and relocation of the Kenyan tribes to settlements fostered deep resentment, sewing the seeds of a bloody black-on-black massacre in 1952. Brilliantly analyzing the hierarchies and nuances of Kenyan society, Anderson traces how the Mau Mau hijacked the nationalist Kenya African Union, how the British scapegoated moderate leader Jomo Kenyatta and finally how the British herded virtually the entire Kikuyu population into horrific concentration camps, where thousands perished. Anderson's information-rich history vividly depicts the complex political and social dynamics of the Kenyan nationalist movement as it was confronted by the brutal waning British Empire. This is vital reading for any student of British colonial and African history. B&w photos not seen by PW; maps.

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From [Booklist](#)

Anderson's history of the violence in 1950s Kenya overlaps slightly with that depicted in Caroline Elkins' *Imperial Reckoning* [BKL N 15 04], which covered the detention-and-camp system established by the British colonial administration. In Anderson's effort, the entire Mau-Mau rebellion comes into view, including aspects of warfare and judicial punishment, particularly the application of the death penalty. Anderson's close analysis of capital trials supports his narrative of the origin of the anticolonial Mau-Mau movement, its perpetration of the gruesome murders of white settlers, and the state of emergency and military countermeasures that defeated the insurgency. Anderson weighs the evidence in concluding that these trials were an expedient means of retribution rather than models of legality. They also reflect the fact that it was a civil war within the Kikuyu community, exemplified in the war's "iconographic moment," a ghastly massacre and a subsequent revenge-massacre that convulsed the Kikuyu town of Lari. A dispassionate but disturbing account, Anderson's history will be vital to understanding Kenya's terrible endgame of colonialism. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

A brilliantly-written and powerfully-argued portrayal of the political use of the death penalty to crush rebellion. -- *Richard J. Evans, author of Rituals of Retribution*

Essential reading, not only for everyone interested in decolonisation, but also for people appalled by human rights abuses today -- *Joanna Bourke, author of An Intimate History of Killing*

Scholarly yet fascinating, unsettling in its revisionism yet readable in its macabre narrative. -- *Simon Sebag-Montefiore, author of Stalin: The Court of the Red Star*

Will transform our understanding of how the British Empire ended...and force a wide re-evaluation of Britain's modern history. -- *Stephen Howe, Oxford University*

[A] gripping narrative...a movingly balanced, even sympathetic, understated, and insightful narrative and analysis...all-but-impossible to put down. -- *Joseph C. Miller, author of the Herskovitz Prize-winning Way of Death*

[A] vivid account of that grim struggle....an important contribution to the history of colonial Africa. -- *Thomas Pakenham, author of Scramble for Africa*

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