



# **A Brief History of Misogyny: The World's Oldest Prejudice**

*Jack Holland*

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## **A Brief History of Misogyny: The World's Oldest Prejudice** Jack Holland

In this compelling, powerful book, the late Irish journalist and essayist Jack Holland set out to answer a daunting question: how do you explain the oppression and brutalization of half the world's population by the other half, throughout history? The result is an eye-opening journey through centuries, continents and civilizations as it looks at both historical and contemporary attitudes to women. Misogyny encompasses the Church, witch hunts, sexual theory, Nazism, pro-life campaigners, and finally, today's developing world, where women are increasingly and disproportionately at risk because of radicalized religious beliefs, famine, war, and disease. Extensively researched, highly readable and provocative, this book chronicles an ancient, pervasive and enduring injustice. The questions it poses deal with the fundamentals of human existence — sex, love, violence — that have shaped the lives of humans throughout history, and ultimately limn an abuse of human rights on a nearly unthinkable scale.

## **A Brief History of Misogyny: The World's Oldest Prejudice Details**

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# From Reader Review A Brief History of Misogyny: The World's Oldest Prejudice for online ebook

## Marija says

Can a history of misogyny ever be brief? This book is in some way a well-articulated examination of characteristics of Western civilisation, its culture and heritage. Jack Holland is travelling through time and states that “the sense of woman as ‘the Other’, the antithesis of man, emerges powerfully from the dramas.” While “Greek misogyny is based on fears of what women might do if they were free to do it”, he compares it with the Romans, who “inherited the Greek preoccupation with female virtue, and linked it to the honour of the family and the welfare of the state.”

The book is addressing the dilemma of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ girl, which seems to arouse lust and therefore shape different cultural paradigms. “Genesis is now central to the belief of two billion Christians in 260 countries – that is, one-third of the world’s population have inherited a myth that blames women for the ills and sufferings of mankind.” The moral universe of Judaism has deeply affected the development of misogyny among Christians too. “It was dominated by a sense of sin, a concept unknown to the neighbouring Greeks and Romans. Along with sin came a sense of shame of the human body, something completely alien to the world of the Greeks and Romans.”

Some of the main questions and topics that regard misogyny are Christian hostility to sex, disparagement of the married state and obsession with virginity. “As a role model for women, Mary set contradictory (if not downright impossible) standards for them to meet – representing as she did the apotheosis of passivity, obedience, motherhood and virginity. She served as a constant reminder that women were inadequate because of their own, very human, nature. Her sexlessness was a rebuke to their sexuality, her obedience an encouragement to believe that the norms of social relationships had divine sanction, her virgin motherhood a miraculous state beyond the reach of merely human females.”

Without any doubt, the witch-hunt craze shaped further intellectual, moral and social changes. This was the utter sexual obsession about women, which served as a tool and concern with finding the evidence that the demons actually existed.

As modern time redefined the relationship between men, their governments and society, the status of woman was also affected. “Misogynists deploy anti-make-up propaganda in every age, with more or less the same tedious lament...The National Socialist line followed the same theme of ‘Kinder, Küche, Kirche’ – ‘children, kitchen, and Church’ – that the other conservative parties extolled. The true German woman rejected lipstick, high heels, and nail varnish in favour of becoming a sort of primordial milkmaid, according to the ideal of party experts.”

The author is portraying a number of examples that illustrate how women have been dehumanized “through restrictive definitions of what their ‘true’ role supposedly is and in making sure they are confined to it.” He is concluding that “in a sense all misogynists, from Plato and Aristotle, to Tertullian and St Thomas Aquinas, to Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Hitler, have in one way or another sought to prove that it is possible for man to reassert the uniqueness of his relationship to God or to the cosmos – or however he chooses to describe the ultimate truth he identifies with his destiny.”

Great book! Everyone should find time to read it.

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## Barbara (The Bibliophage) says

I listened to this as an audio book, which had both advantages and disadvantages. I was able to read a

maddening subject in small bites, and yet there were many passages I needed to rewind and replay a few times to truly grasp. The narrator's upper crust British accent made the highly descriptive language seem a tad less upsetting.

The author covers centuries of misogynistic behaviors and beliefs in a relatively short book, which is amazing since misogyny exists in practically every culture throughout history. That fact alone is wildly depressing.

Listening to the sexual and feminist issues of Ancient Rome and Greece is one thing. But when the book reached Victorian times or the discussion of misogyny around the time of Hitler (including his own) it becomes utterly chilling.

He also includes a detailed explanation of misogyny in the Middle East and Afghanistan, even as it relates to the radicalization of Islam. Again, deeply disturbing.

From the book:

"In this dualistic vision of the world, the hated group represents "the other" and the women of that group are usually seen as the most contemptible aspect of the perceived "otherness," that is its feminine form.

The history of the last hundred years is a depressing chronicle of atrocities carried out under the influence of this intoxicatingly simple view of the world as being divided into "us" and "them." From the rape of Nanking, then the capital of China, by the Japanese in 1937 to the Hindu nationalist massacre of Muslims in Western India in March 2002, vulnerable women have suffered from the misogyny that always accompanies the racial and religious hatred stirred up by nationalism."

This book isn't easy to stomach, but that's the point. So worth the effort!

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## **Kater Cheek says**

This book was really hard to listen to. As a feminist (feminist=person who believes that women are human beings entitled to full human rights) it was hard to listen to the litany of horrific abuses levied against women over the centuries, across all cultures and continents, to punish them for not being men.

The stories aren't just horrific, they're repetitious. Women are too close to nature, therefore they are evil, lock them up. Women are too pretty, punish them for wearing cosmetics or bright clothing. Women are weak-minded, therefore don't educate them. Women are the source of all evil, because they have insatiable sexual desire. Women are inhuman, because they lack all sexual desire. There was a brief blip in the Victorian times, when it was "women are better than men, more pure, more virtuous, the repository of all good" followed by "therefore don't educate them, let them have any power or freedom, and stringently refuse to protect their rights as if they were full humans."

Women have consistently been blamed for not just their own actions, but the actions of men. It's as if men collectively over human history decided "I want to have sex with women, and this sexual desire is bad, therefore women are bad for making me feel this way." And the worst of it is that some of the main

proponents of this backward way of thinking are considered very respectable sources of knowledge, such as Aristotle, Plato, the Bible and the Koran. As the author says, misogyny is so deeply entrenched in the human psyche that it's not even considered a distasteful prejudice but as commonly held knowledge. Not only are people not ashamed of it, they don't even recognize they have it..

Listening to this book was almost like listening to a James Patterson novel, where the detail and loving attention paid to the horrific (and socially sanctioned) crimes against women were outlined so extensively that it was almost as if the author expected the reader (or in my case, listener) to happily jerk off to the torture descriptions. It gave me despair over the human race. It's not just men being terrified of sex and independent women, which is horrible enough, it's that misogyny runs so broadly and so deeply that even women (especially those unfortunate enough to have brains steeped in the sewage of religious teachings) accept this as the natural order.

You can take a despicable famous leader, known for outspoken racism against a religious minority, who doesn't just openly hate women (though he will tolerate a few who are sweet and stupid and under complete male control) but whose chosen allies also think that women should be placid breeders and nothing more, a leader who not only openly supports anti-choice, but claims that women have a patriotic duty to give up any job except wife and mother--and yet women will still vote for him. Apparently, these German women even wrote love letters to Hitler. That doesn't make it right, it just makes it sad. And don't tell me that makes it okay. Women supporting misogynists doesn't make misogyny acceptable any more than men committing suicide makes it acceptable to kill men.

The reasons given for hurting, imprisoning, mistreating, torturing or killing women fall into two categories. The first is the same type of nonsense that's also been instituted against races. "It's okay to kill/punish/torture/steal from/persecute X group because they're inferior. Here's the religious doctrine/custom/"science" to prove it. The second reason is almost always sex related. Lose the war? It's because immoral makeup-wearing women brought about the fall of society. Earthquake? God punished the nation because women left the house without their head covered. It's all about women, and it's all about this supposed SEX SEX SEX women supposedly imbue into everything. From Plato to Hanna-Barbara cartoons, it's always the same old same old. Women=sex. When men talk about morality, it's about truth and integrity and not murdering people who trust you. When they talk about women's morality, it's centered on the uterus and vagina, and how well a woman guards what the men see as property belonging to society. At its heart, that's what feminism is: promoting the idea that a woman's body belongs to herself, and is not public property. There are still thousands of people, some of whom my countrymen even foolishly elected, who firmly believe that while it's justified and in fact noble to kill a man trying to come into your living room at night to steal your TV, for a woman to kill a few cells in her own body who are literally sucking blood and energy out of her and endangering her life is the worst sort of murder. A man owns his house more than a woman owns her body, according to these thugs. We can put a man on the moon, but we still live in a world where people will be ten times as upset about a man beating his dog as they will about a man beating his wife. (Funny, no one ever asks why the dog doesn't just leave him, or insinuates that the dog probably deserved it.)

I was hoping that the author would have some kind of feel-good takeaway, or explanation of this sad state of affairs, but alas no. He briefly touches on feminist theory, but doesn't spend as much time on it as he did describing how witches were thrown down a well and stoned, or how women in North Korean prisons are

forced to smother their own babies, or how the famous brilliant scholar Hypatia was skinned alive with oyster shells and then thrown still-twitching on a fire for the crime of being female and educated. That was the worst thing about this book. I wanted knowledge, not sadistic titillation. I wanted to understand. I still want to understand. I want to understand and I want hope for the future that this will not always be so.

I have my own theory as to why misogyny is so prevalent. I call it the Westworld theory, based on the recent show in which rich people pay a lot of money to rape and murder cowboy robots. A lot of people, myself not included, deeply desire to control and hurt other people. It might even be a basic human trait. Owning people is as old as time, hurting people is as old as time. But sometimes you feel bad when you hurt someone. So in Westworld you create a robot who looks like a person and acts like a person, but you convince yourself the robot not a person so that you can do whatever you want and not feel bad. If you can't do that, you just convince yourself that women (or Jews, or Slavs, or Irish, or imported Africans) aren't real people and you can do what you want to them without feeling bad. It helps if your people invented an evil god who condones this and then pretend he's the only god in town so you can threaten people with eternal torture if they don't play along..

Also there's the slavery aspect. Men talking about how women are "more fulfilled" when they are merely domestic servants without any rights remind me of Scarlett O'Hara complaining that the world would not be right again until black hands picked the cotton instead of white, that black people are really happier as slaves, conveniently eliding how much better her own life is when she profits from the labor of others. It's as if mankind said to itself "let's torture and imprison half the world so that we don't have to do our own chores." Once these lazy sadists wrote a few well-regarded pieces of crap and based virulently contagious religions based around them, the disease set in. And it's such a fast-spreading disease too. Societies in which women are nothing more than breeders and beasts of burden outbreed societies in which women are actually people. Sure, they're backwards and barbaric, but there's a reason why the world has more rats and roaches than pandas and tigers.

Personally, I think it's no accident that the poorest, least progressive, unhappiest of countries are the ones in which women have no rights. I think there's a good reason why the countries under the yoke of centuries-old religious traditions also have a standard of living closer to the iron age than the modern one. There's a reason you don't have as many great thinkers, artists, musicians, scientists, poets or geniuses of any type when you eliminate 50%+ of the population from even playing the game.

And there's the personal happiness too, not just for women (who DO ACTUALLY MATTER) but for men who are missing out on fulfilling intimate relationships with women as equals. Most deep misogyny seems to come from fear. I see this in the sordid depths of the alt-right trolls online. They are so terribly lonely, so terribly desperate for affection and yet so afraid of trusting the gender they see as the keeper of this treasure that they lash out with hatred and blame her for all the pain their cowardice has brought them. Women are different from men. Women are for these trolls, as with the trolls of ancient Greece, THE OTHER. And small-minded trolls have always feared women they could not control. Historically whenever the old ways got challenged, the trolls in power dusted off that hoary god-sanctioned bullshit about it being the women's fault. U.S. propping up the Shah? Must be because women weren't following this narrow interpretation of the Koran. Let's lock them up and take their rights away. Church under threat from Protestants? Must be dem witches. Let's go hang or burn a few thousand innocent women. That will clear things up. Because of course a powerful man is a god or a wizard to be worshipped and appeased, but a powerful woman is always

an evil witch who must be destroyed. And seriously, why were the witches always women? The author points out that of all the subsets demonized by western culture, only Jews were blamed as often as witches for blighting cows, curdling milk, cursing villages, or making men's penises fall off. I guess making babies and inspiring lust was as awesome and fearful a power as being literate in Hebrew. Imagine if you had someone both Jewish and female. According to the histrionic Renaissance and Medieval stereotypes, a Jewish woman could probably blow up Alderaan just by touching it with a menstrual rag.

So I found this book very depressing. I think it focused too much on the horror, and not enough on hope. Is there hope? Every time I see some kool-aid drinking woman at an anti-choice rally who un-ironically petitions the state to take her rights away, I think maybe not. Every time I read some story about a man who murders a woman's family because she broke up with him, I think not. Every time I read about a so-called reputable news organization who honestly posits that it's acceptable for a man to do whatever he wants with another human's vagina as long as his swim times are fast enough, I think not. And when our president elect brags about treating women as disposable sub-humans and the country just shrugs as if it's not even distasteful, I think that the history of misogyny will not be brief, but will be with us as long as cancer and leprosy and rabies and all the other diseases which have plagued humankind forever.

I can't say I recommend this book. Alt-right trolls might find the litany of abuse fun to jerk-off to, but anyone who gives a rat's ass about human rights will find it depressing. I had to take it in chunks to not sink into a mire of despair. Fortunately, I have a Brene Brown audiobook already queued, and I'm willing to do a Marianne Williamson marathon if that's what it takes to get back the hope that with enough brave, decent men by our side, we can someday overthrow the tyranny of the world's oldest prejudice and somehow leave this filth behind us.

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### **Zareena says**

I really liked this book, and found it pretty easy to read. I thought that it was pretty lame that it said it was giving a history of misogyny, and then focused almost entirely on western cultures-- particularly British and American. It certainly could have gone into more depth about the taliban, arab countries, and even southeast asia. The author places a lot of blame for the origins of misogyny on the whole tree of knowledge bit from the Bible. I suppose it makes sense, but I am in denial, because the prospect of one little story leading to the brutalization and subjugation of so many people is terrifying.

It really opened my eyes to a lot of things, and has made me more aware of other people's misogynistic views, as well as some of the ones that have been unconsciously force fed to everyone in our society...including myself.

This is definitely worth a read.

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### **Rachel says**

**\*\*Warning--this is a LONG review but I wanted to remember some of the important parts of this book that**

had meaning to me, so I explain and quote in detail here.\*\*

Although I feel the writing in this book could use a bit more editing and refining (according to the intro, the author died and his family worked to get this published, so that may be why it is a little rough), I found the topic to be fascinating. This book really is a "brief" history of misogyny--and yet, although I know the author *could* have gone into so much more detail, there are still so many examples of misogyny packed into this little book it could make your head spin.

Holland begins his history with the ancient Greeks. He doesn't just arbitrarily choose this period to begin with, though--he affirmatively argues that this is the right beginning of misogyny. I don't know if I buy that--and I know other reviewers have taken issue with the Western bias as well. But I let it pass because, as I mentioned earlier, this is a "brief" history and I don't take it to be a complete treatise on the matter and because Western history is most relevant to my own heritage.

Let me point out just a few things that struck me about the book. For one, and this was probably naïve, but I was shocked by the severe misogyny of the long extolled Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle. I was angry that we learn about these "great thinkers" in school, with no mention of the more pernicious side. (This is nothing unique, of course--school children are notoriously taught a gilded version of history).

For example, Aristotle taught that semen carried the human soul, and women played a merely nutritive role in the human creation process. Furthermore, "the full potential of the child is reached only if it is born male; if the 'cold constitution' of the female predominates, through an excess of menstrual fluid in the womb, then the child will fail to reach its full human potential and the result is female. 'For the female is, as it were, a mutilated male,' Aristotle concludes." This irritates me because he just pulls this conclusion out of thin air, and yet it goes on to dominate thought for nearly 2,000 years, greatly influencing social behaviors and Christianity along the way.

So, I found myself struggling on how to feel about these men, and many, many others throughout history who are famous or "great" for one reason or another, but who carried and/or perpetuated horrible views about women (or Jews, or blacks, or what have you). Take Washington and Jefferson--great founding fathers, but both slave owners; or King--great civil rights leader, but a philanderer. I guess you just have to acknowledge people as being merely human--no one is perfect, and perhaps we ought to look at each person in the context of their time in history (because we are all victims to our time). It is a question of gradation--there is a line to be drawn, somewhere, when a person has gone too far to any longer be held up as admirable. Maybe we ought to just reserve our severe judgment for those whose views have not only been merely a reflection of their time, but have harmfully promoted and furthered those views. I don't really know the answer.

Back to the book. The next thing that struck me was learning a little more about the history of Christianity, in terms of its misogyny. It all begins, for some reason, with a train of thought perpetuated by the likes of St. Paul, early Christian writer Tertullian, and St. Augustine (all perhaps influenced by early classical thinkers), rejecting the body--its needs and desires--as inherently evil and a hindrance to greater knowledge of God and to salvation (one of Christianity's newly created ideas).

Marriage was seen as a necessary evil to at least reign in bodily (sexual) desires, but "sanctity was identified more and more with virginity." These views worked themselves especially harshly on women--"women was bound to suffer because of our nasty habit of blaming that which we desire for making us desire it." (And of course it didn't help that it was *woman* that caused the original downfall of man in the first place, according to Genesis). So as just one resulting example, women must dress modestly to avoid tempting men who can't help themselves. (Gosh, does this sound like a familiar idea even today?)



So this actually brings me to the point I found most interesting--the exaltation of Mary (at least within what would eventually become the Catholic church). It was just really fascinating to me to see how this actually came about--it was really such a snowball effect. This is just to summarize: after Jesus dies, people are left to sit and think about it all and men inevitably begin coming up with explanations for everything. First they argue and decide that Jesus was both man *and* God (something Jesus never really said outright). So, if Jesus is God, that means Mary has to be the mother of God. The Gospels mention Mary being a virgin at Jesus' birth, but because of the nasty feelings about sex going around, it seemed unfitting that the Mother of God had defiled herself ever in such a way--so it was determined that Mary was always a virgin. Also, they decided it was unsuitable that Mary should have suffered a fate as human and base a death, so they decided that she ascended into heaven, body and soul, instead of dying. Later, people decided it would be unbefitting of the Mother of God to have been born with original sin like the rest of us shmoees, so it was decided that Mary was the only human being (other than Jesus) to have been born without original sin (the Immaculate Conception).

It took hundreds of years after Jesus' death to come to all of these conclusions--most of which have no basis in Jesus' teachings or the Bible. (In fact, the author calls Jesus' views on women "revolutionary," and of course in many ways the status of women did improve somewhat with Christianity). In the end, the glorifying of Mary created quite a problem for real women, though. How is anyone supposed to live up to that standard of perfection? It is impossible, and women are continued to be seen as evil, sexual impediments to Godly salvation. The best a woman could do was to remain a virgin (and these thoughts remain today to a large extent), thus denying women one important aspect of their being--their sexuality.

Skipping far ahead to the end of the book, I just wanted to point out that I liked Holland's conclusions on the subject. He quotes Steven Pinker in saying that there is "no incompatibility between the principles of feminism and the possibility that men and women are not psychologically identical." Holland explores in the book the fact that trying to argue that men and women are exactly the same, which many feminists have done in the past, can be just as harmful to women and is really just another form of misogyny in that it denies women their unique traits.

He continues in his quote in saying that "equality is not the empirical claim that all groups of human beings are interchangeable; it is the moral principle that individuals should not be judged or constrained by the average properties of their group." Example: just because women, as a whole, are not as physically strong as men does not mean that those who are qualified should be denied a place in the military, if they so desire. (As my own personal side note--I think it is also important, of course, not to give credence to inaccurate "average properties" such as that women are less intelligent than men.)

Continuing with this idea, we shouldn't denigrate things that are considered "female"--"the solution is not to reject beauty, but to reject misogyny," as the author puts it.

One final conclusion that I liked was Holland's argument that "the women's right to choose is not only central to their own integrity, but to the very roots of what makes us human and distinguishes us from other primates." Think of how much better things are when women are allowed to choose their partner, be allowed to control when they have sex (the right to say NO!), to control their own property, and to vote.

My final comment is that one thing I found lacking with the book was an explanation of why there is misogyny in the first place. This book is really just a collection of examples. Perhaps it is too difficult to really get at the root of why or how this began, and that still baffles me. I know humans are always suspicious of the "other"--such as other races, religions, nationalities, etc. But with women being half the world's population, why is gender discrimination historically so one-sided? Was it really just because men

are physically more dominant and began asserting their control and their will (and their supposed superiority) at the most early phases? Who knows.

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### **Lord Beardsley says**

The last work of Jack Holland's life is this masterpiece: a complete and utter take-down of the fallacy of Misogyny and the ravages it has caused human kind. Passionate, sincere, incredibly well-researched and told with an engaging and approachable tone I can't recommend this enough. This work is a credit to humanity and I am also very happy to see that a male feminist ally in the fight to end gender discrimination wrote it. I could not admire this book enough. It's an essential work of feminist/humanitarian thought.

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### **Ray Campbell says**

Holland begins with abuse of women in the classical world. While Plato set the stage for even the scholarship of Christian saints, he justified the abuse of women which carries over into main stream European culture. Holland could have easily just recounted centuries of abuse, but he takes a scholarly tact and explains how great philosophers, scientists and theologians rationalize the marginalization and abuse of women.

Holland is truly a historian and covers the issue of the abuse of woman in a chronological way. Thus, we travel through the classical era into witchcraft in the medieval period into the writings of enlightened era philosophers and the Victorian age. He does spend a chapter on how Eastern attitudes are similar with the large exception of India where female sexuality is celebrated.

In the 20th century, as some women gain rights and civil equality in modern industrial nations both communist and democratic, misogyny may actually have reached it's height. Nazi Germany, Afghanistan under the Taliban, Red China and other modern totalitarian regimes have institutionalized the subjugation and abuse of women in the most horrible ways yet. As we in "The West" reach for the stars and celebrates human rights, it is terrible to recognize that some of the worst abuse of women has come in recent memory.

Well written, interesting and alarming. Well worth reading and knowing!

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### **'Auli'i says**

This book was a fairly interesting run-through about the hatred of women though I found it lacking in historical scope. The notion that misogyny originates in Greece is rather ridiculous. I tire of histories that travel up the Fertile Crescent, to Greece, to the Dark Ages of Europe, to England, and finally to America while presenting the rest of the world (Muslims, Buddhists, Taoists, et cetera) as though they exist in this ahistorical vacuum in which nothing ever changes. Where did their misogyny come from? Are there any people in the Southern Hemisphere? Brought up some important points but missed so much by taking such a parochial view of the world.

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## **Tina says**

A clear, well-researched, erudite history. I found myself nodding and agreeing with Mr Holland's conclusions, and thanking whichever deity happened to be listening that he had written this book. If anyone doubts that misogyny exists, or that worldwide political, social, economic, religious and cultural groups are inherently sexist, they should read this and think again. How is it possible that the oppression of women is still allowed to continue? Why do women collude with this oppression? It is obvious why men do, they are privileged by the sexism, but why do women? This book can help one understand the reasons, give one hope for change, and is a clarion call to equality for all. I personally include all intersecting oppressed groups in that equality, as does Mr Holland. This should be a set text for schoolchildren...

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## **Book says**

Misogyny: The World's Oldest Prejudice by Jack Holland

"Misogyny" is a powerful and riveting book about the cruel and crude history of misogyny. The late Jack Holland delivers an important book, an eye-opening book that at times is very uncomfortable to read but the knowledge is appreciated. This 320-page book is composed of the following nine chapters: 1. Pandora's Daughters, 2. Women at the Gates: Misogyny in Ancient Rome, 3. Divine Intervention: Misogyny and the Rise of Christianity, 4. From Queen of Heaven to Devil Woman, 5. O Brave New World: Literature, Misogyny and the Rise of Modernity, 6. Victorians' Secrets, 7. Misogyny in the Age of Supermen, 8. Body Politics, and 9. In Conclusion: Making Sense of Misogyny.

Positives:

1. Passionate prose. The late Mr. Holland pulls no punches.
2. Well-written and well researched.
3. The fascinating topic of misogyny in the hands of a master.
4. Takes you on a ride that covers the globe and time.
5. A heartfelt introduction from author's daughter.
6. The book grabs and doesn't let you go. At times jaw-dropping, at times horrifying but never boring.
7. How the rise of Greece and Rome laid the foundation for misogyny.
8. A recurring theme, how woman's supposed weakness is responsible for all subsequent human suffering, misery and death. The Fall of Man...
9. The similarities and differences between slavery and misogyny.
10. So much interesting history packed into three-hundred pages.
11. The influence of Plato...the Theory of Forms as the basis for the Christian doctrine of Original Sin.
12. Aristotle as one of the most ferocious misogynists of all time.
13. Some of the most amusing anecdotes you will ever read. Aristotle once stated that women had fewer teeth than men, Bertrand Russell's comment, "Aristotle would never have made this mistake if he had allowed his wife to open her mouth once in a while".
14. Some ancient customs (and current ones for that matter) will blow your mind. The custom of allowing male babies to live over female. WT??
15. The history of some prominent Roman women.
16. Cleopatra...always a riveting read.

17. This book really does a good job of expressing the hang-ups of men throughout history.
18. The basis of Christian misogyny in its entire splendor.
19. I can't tell you how many jaw-dropping moments I had reading this book.
20. The history of Christian apologetics and misogyny: Tertullian, Aquinas, St. Paul, Origen, St. Augustine, etc...some of the philosophy of Tertullian is just utter ridiculous.
21. Hypatia...BTW, I highly recommend Agora, the movie about Hypatia played beautifully by Rachel Weisz.
22. The history of the Catholic Church and misogyny. Oh my G...
23. One of the most horrifying accounts of cruelty, witch hunts! Witchcraft and demonic sex.
24. The Enlightenment meets the Dark Ages.
25. The history of religious upheavals. Martin Luther makes his presence felt.
26. Great quotes. "If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?" Mary Astell.
27. In short, the basic attitude of Christianity towards sex was that it was a shameful act. Shame on them.
28. The Enlightenment and sex.
29. Eastern religions and sexuality.
30. Great wisdom, "Perhaps poverty doesn't create misogyny, but experience suggests that it tends to reinforce it". So true.
31. Evil is never be complete until Hitler is mentioned. Nazism and misogyny.
32. The cruelty of North Korea toward women. Appalling!
33. Many examples of nationalist, religious-based misogyny throughout book.
34. Rape as war crimes.
35. Women and abortions. Some of the best material on this sensitive topic. Great stuff!
36. What do Hitler, Stalin and Mao have in common? A woman's right to choose, a fundamental aspect of her autonomy, must be crushed in order to achieve what they have deemed a "higher" religious, moral or social goal". Wow.
37. Misogyny from the Taliban.
38. The eye-opening fact, "Women still own less than 1 percent of the world's property. Just wrong!
39. Great book suggestions. Comprehensive notes section.

#### Negatives:

1. Links did not work.
2. Some of the crude tortures illustrated in this book may be a bit much for some. Very troubling accounts.

In summary, "Misogyny" is a must read. All truth be known, I haven't read a lot about this topic and my newfound fascination for it may have biased my review. Be that as it may, I found the topic not only fascinating but also enlightening. I highly recommend this book.

Further recommendation: "The Blank Slate" by Steven Pinker, and "Man Made God" by Barbara G. Walker.

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### Natalie says

Excellent book about the history of the hatred of women, dating back to Greek and Roman times, continuing through the rise of Christianity and the Catholic Church, up to the witch craze of the Middle Ages, the stultifying and sexless Victorian era, Freud, and the anti-choice movement. I thought I would feel anger while reading it, but the author's style is such that I was just wrapped up in the story of the many injustices

perpetrated upon women for these thousands of years.

There were a few interesting and contradictory themes that I picked up on quickly. In ancient times and the Middle Ages, women were believed to be insatiable carnal creatures whose appetite for depraved sex could never be satisfied. That changed into the current belief that women have little interest in sex, and is also part of the time-honored virgin/whore dichotomy. Women were (and to an extent, still are) considered weak, stupid, feeble-minded childish persons, but at the same time are a "civilizing" influence on the beast that is man.

Perhaps my favorite - and this continues to this day in the form of veiling women in Islam, and the conservative Christian call for women's modesty - is the fact that when men are confronted with the sight of a woman, they lose all control and cannot be blamed for any of their ensuing actions (i.e. rape). This is still seen in the fact that rape victims are often put on trial themselves and asked what they were wearing/doing at the time of the attack. Women are a "civilizing" influence, but have been and still are blamed for men's viciousness to them.

By and large, religion has not been good to the world of women; Christianity, Catholicism, and Islam in particular. Very early Christianity (as in, when Jesus was still kicking up dust with his sandals) was actually the most liberated women had ever been at any point in male-dominated history at that time, as Jesus taught complete equality in the eyes of God. Most of his earliest followers were women who wanted a sort of sexual regime change. How his message was so distorted after his death and up to now, I have no clue.

In the author's conclusion, he mentioned that he encountered generally one reaction from other men when he disclosed that he was writing a history of misogyny: most of them nodded and winked, assuming he was writing a *defense* of it. That's very telling - this book was published in 2006. When confronted with people who asked why a man was writing such a book (and I admit I initially found it strange as well) he replied, "Why not? After all, men invented it."

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## Ben Babcock says

How many people have sat down one day and said, "Gee, I think I need to learn more about the history of misogyny!"? I did! I saw my coworker reading this and expressed interest in it. Unfortunately, I don't think the *brief* part of *A Brief History of* quite sank in at the time ... I was expecting something a bit more....

For anyone largely uninitiated into gender issues or the history of misogyny, I would recommend this book as a good read. Holland is a good writer, and he covers the subject comprehensively. However, the book was difficult to finish. It didn't pull me into the analysis of misogyny like I had hoped. This book suffers from several oversights or deficiencies that don't detract from the material *in* the book so much as they prevent the book from achieving its full potential.

Firstly, it should be called *A Brief Western History of Misogyny*. Jack Holland starts in ancient Greece and Rome and works his way up to Victorian Britain and 1960s America. Yes, he briefly detours into pre-colonial India and China, and toward the end he turns his gaze on Taliban Afghanistan and the Muslim

Middle East. Overall, however, his overview of misogyny is written from a Western perspective. It's understandable, since most of modern society can trace its roots to ancient Greece and Rome. However, I would have liked to hear in more detail about the other ancient cultures that contributed to modern society (mostly Eastern cultures), as well as a little expansion into tribal Africa.

Secondly, Holland's adherence to the historical pattern of development is often at odds with his tendency to draw parallels to the various contributing factors toward misogyny (his favourite appears to be dualism). This is why I had to force myself through some parts--they just felt very dry.

Finally, I think Holland over-extends his analysis a little too much. I do agree when he points out the misogynistic aspects of the Holocaust, of Nazism, of communism, etc. Sure, fine. However, these mentions feel more cursory than other areas of the book. I don't think he did these topics justice.

*A Brief History of Misogyny* is exactly as advertised. It's brief, and it's a history. It's comprehensive and informative. It's not an incredibly entertaining book, so if you're worried your non-fiction enthusiasm is waning, don't read this book right now. On the other hand, if you're like me and spontaneously develop a desire to learn more about misogyny, then this book will serve that purpose fine.

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## **Andrea says**

"Women's rights are human rights."

At the beginning of this book I promised myself that I wouldn't get angry no matter what. At the end of this book I wondered why I even bothered in fact I think something would've been really wrong with me if this book did not evoke the kind of anger it did in me. I finished this book and I just felt tired. Tired of everything after all I had read I wondered what was the point? If this book was anything to go by, the more things changed the more they remained the same.

This book combined two of my favorite things that is history and feminism. It gives a detailed account of misogyny from early civilization, from the Greeks to the Romans, through the rise of Christianity and Victorian times. Reading this book was more bearable because of the history, and let me tell you there are a lot of things in it that were unbearable. There were many things I wish I had not read, things I wish had not happened because no being deserves any of the things between these pages.

Reading this book was an emotional experience. At first it was bewildering, then the anger came, hot and consuming and finally I felt upset and resigned. The thing that got to me was that most of the things written here are still happening. Great strides have been made, people have gone to the moon and back, we have democracy and rights but still women are suffering from the same things others did 1000 years ago!!

Women still don't have access to education in some parts of the world. They have no rights apart from the ones the men in their lives see fit to allow. They go through FGM and are married off when they reach puberty to the first person who can give the required dowry. I wish this was a stretch, something I had to really imagine but it's not. It is a reality in some parts of my country. Misogyny is so internalized that even those who know better or ought to propagate it. Last year the president of a neighbouring country said that as long as he was around pregnant girls would not be allowed to go back to school and let's not forget the other

one who said the only place his wife belonged was in his kitchen and bedroom.

My point is this book ought to raise serious discussion once and for all as to why there is systematic oppression of half of the world's population and how it can be stopped. This review can not possibly give enough credit to this book and for the work done by the author so just go read it if you can.

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### **Rebecka says**

Very interesting and very accessible. This should be mandatory reading.

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### **Jean says**

I found this to be an interesting book. I had never thought of the history of prejudice before reading this. It would be great if this were expanded to include all types of prejudices. I am not sure a book about the history of prejudice would prevent or change a person's mind but would be interesting to understand more about prejudice.

Holland says he attempted to explain the oppression and brutalization of half the world's population by the other half, throughout history. I found Holland's explanation of the use of religion to suppress women most interesting. I had no idea how many women had been killed as witches over the course of history. Prior to reading this book I was aware that many cultures killed female babies at birth.

The book is well written and well researched. I found his analysis most interesting and agreed with him on equal rights. I just do not have great hopes that prejudice will disappear. I think this is a must read book for everyone. Should be discussed in high school or even sooner than that.

Cameron Stewart does a good job narrating the book. He is an award winning actor who also narrates audiobooks.

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