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Dennis C. Rousey. *Policing the Southern City: New Orleans 1805-1889.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996. xii + 226 pp. $48.75 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2046-0.

Reviewed by Joseph Logsdon (University of New Orleans)

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Southern City Cops: A Mirror of the American Urban Future?

Any study of the police of a major American city will reveal the civic wars that disrupted urban life in the United States, particularly during the nineteenth century. To take on New Orleans, however, is a particularly daunting task, for it contained one of the most diverse, unruly, and violence-prone populations in North America. Students of the Crescent City also have little guidance in secondary literature, because American urban historians have largely ignored New Orleans. It still lacks any comprehensive account of its development. In view of these extraordinary challenges, Dennis C. Rousey, professor of history at Arkansas State University, has fashioned an excellent story of law and order in one of America's most troublesome towns.

Rousey notes that fear of a large Franco-African slave population filled with Haitian refugees led to the creation of the first organized police force in New Orleans in 1805. City leaders initially followed a general military organization (*gendarmerie*) that Rousey traces to Charleston, South Carolina. It is here that Rousey should have looked more broadly at the context of New Orleans's early history in the French-speaking world, since most of the form that he traces, in part, to Charleston, may have come from Saint Domingue, the origin of much of the former French city's early nineteenth century population and leadership. In tracing the police force, Rousey is forced to untangle a very complicated ethnic clash between the city's French-speaking Creoles and its English-speaking Americans. To add to the social and political stew, Rousey observes that New Orleans, by 1860, contained as high a percentage of immigrants as New York City. In addition, he had to follow the evolution of three different police departments from 1836 to 1852, when New Orleans maintained a federalized governmental structure like the arrondisements of Paris. As soon as the city re-consolidated itself, the Irish dominated police became central to the bloodiest Know-Nothing clash in the country.

Just as that ethnic clash diminished, the city became a major battle ground of the Civil War and the center stage of the most advanced social and political reconstruction in the nation. Rousey makes the Reconstruction era the major pivot of his story and race the major theme of his account about maintaining order in the city. Unfortunately, just before he opens the Civil War and Reconstruction chapters, Rousey loses sight of the centrality of race in the ante-bellum period. He overlooks the critical reordering of the police by John Monroe just on the eve of the Civil War. Monroe not only revamped the department but built a new political coalition that subdued ethnic feuds among whites by cracking down severely on the city's black population. Without that key racially charged development, it is difficult to see the continuity of politics and policy that led to the horrendous Riot of 1866 that the re-elected Monroe instigated.

Rousey makes his best contribution in laying out the first comprehensive account of the extraordinary experiment of the Metropolitan Police during Reconstruction. It was the first integrated police force in the South and–he might have added–in the Atlantic World. Black officers not only matched the percentage of the black population of the city but also held high office and full authority. In addition, it was the best police force of nineteenth century New Orleans and a model for the nation's best police reforms. Despite its good record, the Metropolitan Police never received the consent of conservative whites who eventually turned against it in a massive, but only temporarily successful, revolt in 1874. When national Re-

publican leaders refused to back its legitimacy in 1877, Redeemers in Louisiana not only disbanded the remarkable experiment but also allowed the city police force to deteriorate until it became by the end of his period one of the most corrupt, violent, and disgraceful departments in the nation. In a bargain to keep taxes low and the black population downtrodden, city authorities allowed the police to ally themselves with organized crime and brutal oppressors of African Americans. In 1900, with one of their usual overreactions, New Orleans police officers ignited the Robert Charles Riot that heralded the twentieth century's succession of massive race riots.

Such a work unquestionably helps to understand the twentieth century's travesties of law and order in the Queen City of the South that are still exposed periodically in the local and national media. But it does more. It can provoke us to think about other cities in the United States. The American tragedy began in neither the 1860s or the 1960s. New Orleans had the nineteenth century's oldest, often largest, and most aggressive black population. As a result, it provides a poignant preview of the contemporary American urban crisis. Its nineteenth century experience is much closer to the current central city experience than the early twentieth century immigrant-experience of America's great industrial cities. Rousey's work shows again that the history of New Orleans deserves more attention from urban scholars than it has hitherto received.

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