

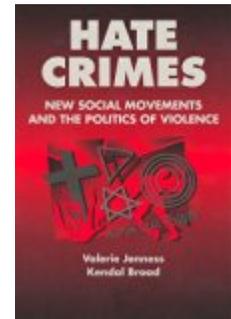
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Valerie Jenness, Kendal Broad. *Hate Crimes: New Social Movements and the Politics of Violence*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997. xi + 215 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-202-30602-5; \$45.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-202-30601-8.

Reviewed by Catherine McNichol Stock (Connecticut College)
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When Matthew Shepard was brutally murdered in Laramie, Wyoming, late last year and thousands of activists held vigils to protest violence against gays and lesbians, most Americans wondered how such a terrible thing could have happened. They asked themselves how two men could have hated homosexuals so much that they allegedly lured Shepard to a bar, tortured and killed him, and left his body tied to a fence on the edge of town. In newspaper editorials, college classrooms, and family kitchens, Americans worried aloud that the United States—a country founded on ideals of democracy, tolerance, and freedom—also seemed to be a land capable of producing people who would perform acts of unabashed and sometimes unpunished cruelty.

Motivated by a desire to free America from bigotry and violence, Valerie Jenness and Kendal Broad, co-authors of *Hate Crimes: New Social Movements and the Politics of Violence* from the Social Problems and Social Issues series of Aldine de Gruyter, Inc., ask questions about the organizations formed to fight crimes like the one committed against Matthew Shepard, thousands of other gay men, and countless numbers of gay and straight women each year. They explore how such organizations—a complete list of which they provide in the appendix—arise, how they define their missions and communicate it to others, how they form coalitions with other groups, and how their success is influenced by historical and political cultures. They do not quibble over whether violence occurs in our society (it does), nor whether any particular crime should or should not be classified as a “hate crime.” Instead, they accept the fact that violence occurs and will likely continue to occur in America and ask why some violent acts and not others are now being defined as hate crimes by new social move-

ments. By using a “social constructionist approach to victimization,” the authors instruct the reader to see the “focus on processes of recognition, identification, and labeling through which some types of people get social recognition as victims” (pp. 6-7).

From my vantage point as an historian, one of the most valuable contributions of the volume is the clear historical context the authors provide for today’s social movements. Few members of the crime victims movement of the 1980s, which some scholars have associated with a turn to the right in American politics and society, would see links between their organizations and the civil rights organizations of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet Jenness and Broad clearly demonstrate the legacy of activism as well as the creation of a political culture that crossed partisan lines to promote and support diverse kinds of anti-violence projects.

While the authors have accomplished two important goals in the book—they have applied a social constructionist approach to hate crimes and a collective action framework to anti-violence projects, while also detailing specific strategies of several main organizations—I find the book strangely devoid of the passion that surely must have motivated the authors to write it in the first place. The book is titled *Hate Crimes*. Yet the authors tell of very few, if any, specific hate crimes that occurred in specific times and places and that impassioned specific people. In other words, this book is akin to one written about the movement to inform citizens when a known “sexual predator” moves into their neighborhood, without telling about the rape and murder of Megan Kanka for whom most new “Megan’s laws” are at least informally named. Or it might be akin to a book written at some

future time about the new organizations galvanized to stop violence against gays and lesbians after the death of Matthew Shepard without mentioning Matthew Shepard. Such books would not only be devoid of their passion; they might not even get the story right. Surely there are galvanizing, yes likely horrifying, crimes that brought together the people and groups listed and examined in this book. What are they? What could be a better way to

remember their victims than by telling their stories?

This review was commissioned for H-Pol by Lex Renda <renlex@uwm.edu>

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