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David Grimsted. *American Mobbing 1828-1861: Toward the Civil War.* New York and Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998. xviii + 372 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-511707-3.

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I have waited a long time for this book. When I began studying riots as a graduate student in the 1970s, David Grimsted's brilliant essay "Rioting in Its Jacksonian Setting," *American Historical Review* (1972, v. 77, pp. 361-97) stood as a beacon, guiding the novice historian through the treacherous waters of presentism and political correctness. Grimsted unabashedly used the term mob. He placed rioters at the heart of Jacksonian America, viewing them as a window onto a peculiar and democratic national character. It was reassuring to know that while I struggled to find riots in the early republic, Grimsted was working to illuminate the decades that came after. The promise implicit in that essay has been a long time in coming.

American Mobbing, however, only partially fulfills that promise. No one knows more about Jacksonian rioting than David Grimsted. He has scoured the countryside visiting archive after archive, uncovering hundreds of popular disturbances. He has read countless newspapers and books published from the era. And he has put together a file of 1,218 riots (p. viii). (By comparison, my own file contains somewhere between 400 and 500 riots for the same years). The research is prodigious and Grimsted's command of knowledge is impressive. Yet I was disappointed in this book.

First, after waiting twenty-five years, maybe anything Grimsted wrote would have fallen short of the promise of 1972. But, by his own admission, Grimsted has written only half of his story here. The Introduction asserts that this volume considers only the collective violence somehow associated with the origins of the Civil War and excludes the other half of rioting covering economic, racial, ethnic, religious, and youth tensions. Grimsted, however, promises at least one more book on the subject. The second book will cover the material skipped in this first book. There may even be a third book considering theories of rioting. (I am not sure if he has promised another tome or if he will include the material in the second book.)

Second, and it pains me to highlight this point in a review, I had problems with the writing style in the book. In terms of simple sentence structure, Grimsted has a penchant for adding a clause or two too many. A few examples should be cited: "The sphinx of violence has a human face but an animal's body, which often distinguishes poorly whether saints or sinners, the oppressing or the oppressed, come within its arena and its maw" (p. viii); "The greatness of the debates between Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln owed most to these candidates' ability and to the depth of the questions and tensions involved but owed something as well to the fact that women and families listened in numbers sufficient to discourage the abusive sportingness of wholly male rituals" (p. 187); and "As Weld had predicted, and as Stephen Douglas understood so sharply in the debate as throughout his career, the Democracy could no longer soothe every Southern outburst and demand without driving away crucial support in the North, mostly of people who neither much cared nor cared to think about slavery" (p. 269). I found such sentences a mouthful to read and to comprehend.

Third, there are other stylistic problems. Grimsted writes a bit too flippantly about serious issues like slavery. It is clear that he has no love for the South or slavery. But it struck me as inappropriate to joke that "one does lose count" while quoting the range of 400 to 1,000 lashes given a thirteen-year-old girl (p. 163). At times, words seem to have been left out: "In this way, the abolitionists less developed than were handed the issues that assured progress for their movement" (p. ix). Grimsted also has a few inside jokes that the average reader will not even begin to fathom. In the Introduction he asserts "My research has proved, as much as anything, that people who love old documents and their fresh use are more dependably good than those who take the easy way out and like dogs and children" (p. xvi). I was equally baffled by the one word paragraph that ended the book: "Useless?" (p. 281).

Finally, this book is not really about rioting. Instead it is about the origins of the Civil War and the differences between Northern and Southern culture concerning popular violence. There is little effort to place the rioting in this period within a context of social change, nor is the focus, as it was in the essay of twenty-five years ago, on what Jacksonian riots mean within the story of American history.

On this last point, perhaps it is unfair to criticize Grimsted for not writing a book that I would have liked him to write. So I will devote the remainder of the review to what the author has offered us. Grimsted argues that the North and the South developed two different social systems of violence. Southerners were murderous, even sadistic. Northerners destroyed property, and shunned attacks on people. Southerners felt justified in every mob action–they believed that they acted almost in the name of the law. Northerners ran into resistance with the development of police forces. Southern mobs inflicted casualties; in northern riots the mob more often than not sustained casualties in the face of law and order. Southerners seized upon the slightest whisper of a conspiracy among slaves to inflict gruesome murder on an impressive scale. Northerners threw stones and hollered at abolitionists, broke presses, and occasionally assaulted a black.

The bulk of the book, then, is on the South. There is a chapter on anti-abolitionism in the North and there is some discussion of northern political rioting. But the subtext is always in the comparison with the South. The analysis on political rioting, moreover, quickly focuses on the Know Nothing disturbances of the 1850s, the most violent of which occurred in slave state cities like Baltimore, Louisville, St. Louis, and New Orleans.

Therefore, Grimsted has presented us with the most comprehensive portrait of southern antebellum mob violence to date. I wish I had access to this book when I was writing *Rioting in America* (Indiana University Press, 1996). In that book I underestimated the extent and extra-legal nature of popular violence against slaves in the South. Grimsted has shown that there may have been more continuity–something I emphasized nationally–before and after the Civil War in the South in rioting. Implicit in Grimsted's analysis is a direct link between the white terror of reconstruction and the late nineteenth-century lynching South, and the extra-legal violence against supposed abolitionists and in reaction to feared slave conspiracies.

Grimsted also argues that the Southerners did not view their collective violence as extraordinary or out of the bounds of acceptable behavior. He explores southern attitudes toward violence in general, finding Southerners all too willing to attack each other in the name of honor. The same ethos explains their willingness to maim and to kill when in a crowd. Oddly, Southerners saw their extra-legal activity as so legitimate that they looked disparagingly to the North as a land of riot and mayhem.

This book, then, is something less than a study of mobbing in the years before the Civil War, as implied in the title. Instead, it is an effort to use rioting as another method of delineating the cultural chasm that separated North and South when the guns first fired on Fort Sumter. There is little doubt that Grimsted makes a case for the greater violence in southern riots in this period. But I remain unconvinced that northern riots were dramatically less bellicose in their behavior. Certainly anti-abolitionist mobs tended to use less violent means in the North. But when compared with the popular disorder that occurred before the Jacksonian era, both northern and southern riots were violent. The most violent southern riots occurred during the slave scares shortly before the Civil War. Grimsted only briefly mentions the most violent northern riots–race riots that occurred throughout the Jacksonian period. Any consideration of those northern race riots, moreover, should not end with the beginnings of the Civil War–they should also include the race riots that occurred during the Civil War when Northerners cruelly tortured and executed African Americans. In the final, analysis David Grimsted offers us an introduction to the wonderful research that he has carried on for decades. I anxiously await the additional volume or volumes.

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