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Michael A. Bellesiles, ed. *Lethal Imagination: Violence and Brutality in American History.* New York: New York University Press, 1999. vii + 453 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-1295-5.

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Gender and Race in the Study of Violence

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Violence may be as American as cherry pie. But did the Moms who baked the real cherry pies participate in violence? Most studies of violence to date have focused on male violence. But violence comes in a variety of shapes and forms. There is group violence and there is individual violence. Violence also cuts across different social boundaries, including gender and racial lines. This book offers many different views of violence, but reflecting the newest trends in the study of violence most of the essays concentrate on gender and race.

In recent decades domestic violence has often appeared in the headlines. It should come as no surprise then, that historians have begun to look at domestic violence in the past. Ann Little uses New Haven colony court records to discuss the relationship between local government and family relations. She notes that the court almost never reacted when a man physically abused a wife. She implies from this fact that men were allowed to use violence in chastising a spouse. If a woman, however, used force against a man, the action threatened the masculine identity of the husband and the Godly order of the community, and therefore local officials might well step in to reassert the patriarchal social order. If courts could be repressive and strive to maintain the status quo, they also could be used to compel social change.

In the post Civil War South, Laura Edwards argues that poor and African American women sought to challenge the patriarchal authority of their husbands by bringing charges of domestic violence against them. The courts seemed to encourage this, but ironically not because they wanted to change society. Instead, it was a way for judges to replace the patriarchy lost with the end of slavery by asserting control over poor whites and African Americans through judicial action. Uche Egemonye's study of southern courts seems to support Edwards by arguing that black women could successfully turn to courts in the late nineteenth century as long as they projected middle class values.

One theme emerging from these three essays is that women should not be seen simply as victims. Instead, they should be viewed as actors either challenging the social system or working within it to achieve their own goals. In keeping with the refusal to see women as victims, three other essays tell the stories of women murderers. These essays focus more on the gender expectations of society in reaction to the murders, than on the sensationalism of the crime. Catherine Ross Nickerson argues that Lizzie Borden, perhaps America's most famous murderess, was acquitted by a Fall River jury because its members could not possibly imagine that a proper middle class woman could be guilty of the horrid crime of whacking her parents with an axe. Similarly Paula Hinton tells the story of "The Unspeakable Mrs. Guiness" who murdered a series of suitors and husbands for their money. Again the crime was unthinkable to many because of gender expectations. When all was said and done, there were some in her small Illinois community who insisted that she was really a man in disguise.

In an earlier case discussed by Lee Chambers-Schiller, Mary Harris was found not guilty by reason of insanity after being tried for murdering her fiancee (who had jilted her). The defense portrayed Harris as a true woman driven to distraction in a period of social flux after the Civil War by the betrayal of a philandering fiancee. The strength of these women to take such drastic action should not come as a surprise to a reader of Laura McCall's essay. McCall offers a content analysis of 104 best selling novels and 304 female characters from the mid nineteenth century. In this literature McCall finds not weak passive women, but strong assertive women capable of violence. Strong women protected their honor and virtue and ran counter to the image of the cult of true womanhood which saw women as dependent and obedient.

Two essays in the book do center more on the vic-

timization of women in society. Andrea Tone sees the introduction of IUDs as a birth control device as an act of violence against women that was part of a world that strove to keep women passive. Mary Odem examines the cultural representations and social contexts of rape early in the twentieth century. By using court records she demonstrates that rape was not as racially motivated as the popular press had indicated at the time. Instead most rapes were committed by men from the same race as the victim and who knew the victim from work, her family, or as a friend. The author clearly has more recent connections in mind, with date rape and sexual harassment potent late twentieth and early twenty-first century issues. She also suggests that the lesson to be learned here "should alert us to the potential dangers and distortions in dominant conceptions in our own time" (p. 367).

Two other essays examine violence as it relates to male identity. John L. Pettegrew offers an exploration of "homosociability" in a theoretical piece examining the sanction of male heterosexual aggression. Bruce Baird's study of dueling is more grounded in historical analysis. He argues that dueling became prominent after the American Revolution because of the rise of democracy and the breakdown of hierarchy. Those on the top of society used the duel as a vehicle to demonstrate that they were men and not cowards, while simultaneously setting themselves off from the common man.

If gender is an important analytical tool in over half of the essays in this collections, race is central to many of the other essays. (Two deal with both race and gender). Evan Haefeli views the conflict between Native Americans and Euro Americans as a clash between two different cultures of violence. Failure to understand each other's use of those cultures only escalated violence and led to increased fatalities. Sally Hadden studies slave patrol records from the eighteenth century to reconstruct the activity of this crucial weapon of racial repression during slavery. Junius Rodriguez offers a brief examination of a supposed slave plot in 1837 for which the evidence remains scanty.

Of more substance is Christopher Waldrep's sweeping discussion of the changing language of lynching from the early nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century. In this essay Waldrep shows how the term lynching changed meaning (reflecting shifts in the political and social context). Jeffrey Adler argues that blacks arriving in Chicago during the great migration did not bring a culture of violence with them. Instead, the intensified homicide rate among Chicago blacks at the turn of the twentieth century was a result of the urban conditions that greeted blacks when they arrived. Craig Pascue holds that radicals like Robert Williams, who advocated armed protection of blacks during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, were an important part of that movement and demonstrated that active civil disobedience was a viable alternative to passive civil disobedience.

Only three essays can not be categorized as gender or racially oriented. Robert Dykstra argues that the Dodge City of the "Wild West" was not so wild. While its murder rate was high on a per capita basis, it was relatively low in absolute numbers. Nicole Hutchinson writes an insightful essay on vigilantism in mid nineteenth-century Illinois, demonstrating that close study often makes it difficult to determine the good guys from the bad guys. Finally, Arthur Kellerman and Philip Cook present a highly politicized argument for gun control by demonstrating how dangerous it is to have guns in the home.

The coverage in the book is obviously broad, but it is not comprehensive. Several areas of violence, especially collective violence in riots, do not get much discussion. The chronological organization of the essays also makes for some difficulties. Many of the essays speak to each other by implication, but are often separated by a hundred pages of text. I think that Bellesiles would have been better off arranging the essays topically rather than chronologically. Such organization would provide better cohesion to the entire volume. The essays are also somewhat uneven in quality and length. Waldrep's essay on lynching, for example, is excellent. The last essay on gun control is not particularly historical and much too polemical. Many of the essays suffer from having too evident of a political agenda, rather than a careful analysis of how violence has been used in the past.

Overall, however, this is a fascinating collection of essays. There may be few people whose interests are diverse enough to sustain reading the book cover to cover. But as a report on some of the new areas of research in violence this volume is first rate.

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