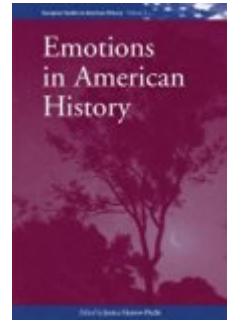


**Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht.** *Emotions in American History: An International Assessment.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2010. 290 S. \$90.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-84545-642-9.



**Reviewed by** Björn Klein

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Debates within and across all academic disciplines have shown that there is not even the slightest agreement on what an emotion even might be; the only thing safe to say is that emotions have been a *hot topic* not only for the last decades but for over two thousand years in scientific research as well as in everyday life. The volume “Emotions in American History – An International Assessment,” edited by Jessica C.E Gienow-Hecht, aims to provide a transatlantic look, that is European scholars’ views on the roles emotions played in American history between the eighteenth century and the present.

Peter Stearns together with Carol Stearns coined the term Emotionology, Peter N. Stearns / Carol Stearns, Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards, in: The American Historical Review 90,4 (1985), pp. 813-836. referring to the attitudes and standards of a society acquired by looking at the textualisation of emotions. In this vein an understanding of emotional standards of a society can be achieved by looking at popular advice manuals to find out for example how crying in public was perceived

or how anger was dealt with in marital disagreements. The Stearnsian concept of Emotionology has established a clear definition of how to approach attitudes and standards of a society towards basic emotions. In chapter one Peter Stearns argues that emotions history has to work with other disciplines and that it has to surpass the realm of a work that has focused “mainly on white, Protestant, middle-class formulations” (p. 19). Emotions history, Stearns concedes, has expanded “into looking at performative as well as normative features” (p. 21). The strife to “keep historical work on emotions honest, by avoiding unduly vague or loose references to what emotions are” (p. 18), reflects (as well as referring to basic emotions) that emotions are still perceived as having an universalistic substratum.

Focusing on the specific configurations of practices and expressions rather than on textualisations of emotions, Alf Lüdtke tries to overcome the “blind spots,” which refer to the notion of binary conceptualizations in historical studies like premodern/modern, emotional/rational by exploring the history of everyday life. He directly chal-

lenges Western master narratives such as the so-called civilizing process (Norbert Elias) in modern times and argues that these master narratives miss the infinitesimal transformations historical actors have gone through, which “might have changed their strivings to become ‘modern’ but did not erase their emotionality” (p. 42).

Bobbing to the admission of an interdisciplinary approach, psychologist Horst U.K. Gundelach concludes the volume. While it is not his “intention to delimit the subject matter of the history of emotions” (p. 266) he simultaneously states that historians of emotions discuss “foremost the nebulous and fluctuating concepts used in everyday conversation” (p. 266). In his historical sketch of psychological research on emotions he can recall an objective exploration of “this mysterious central interior” (the brain) (p. 255) in the second half of the twentieth century: hormonal chemistry, neurochemistry, brain psychopharmacology are examples for this research of emotions. However, his essay misses the fact that the maturation of evolutionary psychology not only led to “fruitful research hypotheses” (p. 255), but also to violent and crippling medical interventions toward human beings whose emotions were considered to be deviant from the standards of society (such as the lobotomization of gays and lesbians in the 1940s to 1960s). Not surprisingly, Gundelach concludes with a suspicion – that what historians of emotions scrutinize is what social psychologists call attitude, that is the psychological dispositions.

These are the three texts framing three other sections. The second section deals with what the editor perceives as the most prominent field that recently emerged in the area of emotions history and contains three articles dealing with Emotions and War. Andreas Etges’ “Hanoi Jane, Vietnam Memory, and Emotions” surpasses the Emotionology approach, focusing on a marginal note of American history: Jane Fonda’s brief visit in North Vietnam in July 1972. The article shows how the memories of ‘Hanoi Jane’ were created and diver-

sified by photos, film clips, her radio transmissions and how it functions as a marker that still can trigger reactions like hate and anger. Etges’ approach reveals much of the possibilities of what a history of emotions could be like; it highlights how small incidents can alter the memories of what might be considered as “a watershed in American history” (p. 102) – the Vietnam War. Even if Andreas Etges’ article only touches on some of the topics, it issues categories of betrayal and guilt, class, ideology, and gender and connects psychological approaches with tools that cultural studies have provided, bridging two disciplines that are assumed to be hard to connect in a very productive fashion.

The third section on “Emotions, Art, and the Media” analyzes sources like cartoons, magazines, and nineteenth-century art. Adelheid von Saldern insists on the notion of prototypical emotions which need “a more thorough differentiation” (p. 140); a project that runs through 2,000 years of history hasn’t been solved yet. Skillfully she observes how ‘the Other’ fostered American national identity and the definition of the self, that is European cultural anti-Americanism in so called quality magazines of the 1920s.

Jürgen Martschukat’s elaboration on “Public Executions & the Emotional Spectator in the New Republic,” the first article in the fourth section issuing the role of emotions in social and political debates, is not interested in defining ‘real’ emotions. He is able to show how an ‘emotional human being’ was discursively shaped throughout the eighteenth century by taking a closer look at the transformations in the capital punishment discourse, whereby an important momentum is added to the history of the self and modern society.

Michael Hochgeschwender’s article is as well based on the notion of discursive representation of emotions, focusing on Anne Koedt’s “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm” (1970) as one of the most influential articles of the women’s liberation

movement and how it has shaped American discourses on sexuality ever since. Hochgeschwender, dissatisfied with Foucault's discourse analysis, proposes to "reintroduce" causal principles like socioeconomic analysis of modes of production and the experience of the individual into it, neglecting the inherent emancipatory potential of a Foucauldian discourse analysis that deals with taken for granted power relations as well as alternative actions.

While "Emotions in American History" keeps its promise in shedding some transnational light on emotional history it misses some recent trends in the field, namely an adaption of the history of the body to the history of emotions. Much could be done in reconsidering the body/mind dualism deeply anchored in Western thought by addressing to concepts of affect (understood as an intensity) Brian Massumi, *The Autonomy of Affect*, in: *Cultural Critique*, No. 31, *The Politics of Systems and Environments*, Part II (1995), pp. 83-109. in dissociation to an exploration of a socio-linguistic fixation of an emotion, which the history of emotions is part and parcel of.

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