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Barry Latzer. ***The Rise and Fall of Violent Crime in America.*** New York: Encounter Books, 2016. 424 pp. $27.99, cloth, ISBN 978-1-59403-835-8.

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In his speech before the Republican National Committee on July 21, 2016, Donald Trump boasted, "The crime and violence that today afflicts our nation will soon come to an end. Beginning on January 20th, 2017, safety will be restored." Thanks to this type of rhetoric and sensationalized news reports, in the minds of many Americans, crime and violence are spiraling out of control. The fact that over the last few decades violent crimes have fallen to some of their lowest levels in recent history is lost on many. Barry Latzer's new book, ***The Rise and Fall of Violent Crime in America***, could not be more timely. The author emphasizes two main trends. Beginning with the post-World War II era, Latzer traces the spike in violent crimes, defined as criminal homicide, robbery, rape, and assaults, that began in the late 1960s and continued through the 1980s, and the subsequent drop in violent crimes in the following decades. Second, the author attempts to explain why victimization and offending rates for African Americans are so much higher than for white Americans. What accounts for these trends? Scholars tend to fall into one of two camps: those who emphasize structural inequalities, and those who emphasize cultural links to crime. Latzer falls into the latter group and argues, "Cultural influences may be more important than social deficits in explaining high or low levels of violence" (p. xii). To support this claim, Latzer relies on regression analysis of statistics culled from various criminal justice agencies, including the FBI and the Department of Justice, and secondary literature to trace the trends in violent crime in the second half of the twentieth century.

In the 1940s and 1950s, rates of violent crime in the United States were in what scholars have deemed a crime trough. For Latzer, this crime trough is best understood as a result of World War II. The removal of young men, the group most likely to engage in criminal activity, from the country's cities and rural areas for military service is one of the more obvious connections between the war effort and a decline in crime rates. The subsequent postwar economic boom, the rise of the middle class and suburbanization, and increased rates of marriage and child birth all contributed to the "crime ebb" that lasted into the early 1960s.

According to Latzer, World War II also set the stage for the crime rise in the 1960s. The number of southern African Americans migrating to northern cities, which began in the early twentieth century, exploded during the 1940s as rural blacks moved to the urban North in search of factory jobs. These migrants, the author contends, "would bring high levels of black-on-black interpersonal violence to the cities of the North and

West" (p. 3). Although rates of black intraracial crime remained low in the 1950s, the migration, segregation, lack of jobs, and poor housing helped lay "the groundwork for the massive black urban-crime problem" (p. 55).

The spike in crime that began in the 1960s and continued into the 1980s is the main focus of the book. The increase in crime, according to Latzer, was largely the result of three trends: the coming of age of the baby boomers, the failure of the criminal justice system to respond to criminal activity, and black migration to urban areas, which "brought a culture of violence to the urban landscape" (p. 152). The third point is, as Latzer readily admits, the most controversial. The subculture of violence theory has been around for decades, and sparked heated debate among scholars.[1] The author dismisses claims that economic inequality promoted violence in minority communities, stating, "Despite enormous economic gains accompanied by marked declines in white race prejudice, black rates of violence skyrocketed" (p. 165). Instead, persistently high rates of black offending and victimization were the result of "the African American subculture, or, more narrowly, the lower-class African American subculture" (p. 167). In other words, as structural inequality declined, at least according to the author, African American violent crimes rose. Cultural, as opposed to structural, explanations of violence, then, are the best way to account for this disjuncture.[2]

Although Latzer places the burden for the rise in violent crime at the feet of African American culture, he credits the "reinvigoration of the criminal justice system" with the subsequent decline in the 1990s and 2000s. Although he points out that the aging out of the baby boomers and the decline in cocaine use contributed to the reversal in crime trends, more aggressive policing and increased imprisonment "proved the big gun in the crime-reduction arsenal" (p. 256). At a very basic level, the author reminds us, policing and imprisonment removed individuals who were likely to commit crimes from the streets. While Latzer does not delve into the ways in which the black subculture that created the crime surge was affected by this new policing, he does note that the mass incarceration and aggressive policing "positively affected African Americans and their communities much more than they did white communities" (p. 233). While a reduction in rates of African American victimization certainly benefited the black community, Latzer dismisses the negative consequences of aggressive policing and mass incarceration of minorities that have garnered so much attention in recent decades.[3]

The Rise and Fall of Violent Crime in America is a timely, yet polemical book. Latzer knows his arguments were controversial, and repeatedly says as much. Critiques of the subculture of violence theory are well documented, and continue to spark lively and important debates. While it is not the goal of this review to delve into the specifics of those disputes, it appears that some of Latzer's arguments against economic and structural theories needed to be more effectively presented. Most glaringly, his explanations of the opportunities available for African Americans in the urban North seem oversimplified. He claims that following the successes of the civil rights movement, urban areas outside of the South offered African Americans "enormous economic gains accompanied by marked declines in white race prejudice" (p. 165). While the urban North certainly presented African Americans with new opportunities, several historians have pointed out the limits of economic opportunity, the persistence of segregation, and white animosity towards minorities outside of the South.[4] A more nuanced understanding of black urban life in America's cities complicates the simple notion that in the wake of the civil rights movement, racism and structural barriers impeding African American advancement ended.

The Rise and Fall of Violent Crime in America is an interesting examination of post-World War II America. As the problems associated with crime, violence, and criminal justice capture the attention of politicians, reporters, and everyday Americans, it is essential to understand the history of those issues and avoid knee-jerk reactions to sensationalized accounts. One of the strengths of this book is the vast amount of data Latzer presents to the reader. He disaggregates rates of offending and victimization by type of crime, race, region, and time period. This is an important reminder that when discussing crime, violence, and criminal justice, sweeping claims and simple answers are often uninformed. While this book will certainly be met with criticism because of the controversial arguments put forth, it is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in understanding the current state of criminal justice in America.

Notes

[1]. The theory originated with Marvin E. Wolfgang and Franco Ferracuti, who argued that the marked differences in homicide rates were related to different cultural values among certain groups in society. In some subcultures, aggression represents a legitimate tool for attaining and maintaining status. See Wolfgang and Ferracuti, ***The Subculture of Violence: Towards an Integrated Theory in Criminology*** (London: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1967). Following Wolfgang and Ferracuti's lead, scholars explained regional differences in violence, and suggested that there was a southern subculture of violence. See, for example, Sheldon Hackney, "Southern Violence," ***American Historical Review*** 74, no. 3 (1969): 906-925; Raymond D. Gastil, "Homicide and a Regional Culture of Violence," ***American Sociological Review*** 36, no. 1 (1971): 412-427; Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., ***Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South*** (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, ***Southern Honor*** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). Clare V. McKanna Jr. made claims that support Latzer's argument and claimed that African Americans transported this subcultural acceptance of violence to northern cities during the Great Migration in the early twentieth century; see McKanna, "Seeds of Destruction: Homicide Race, and Justice in Omaha, 1880-1920," ***Journal of American Ethnic History*** 14, no. 1 (1994): 65-90. Elijah Anderson utilized the subculture theory in his examination of the black community in late-twentieth-century Philadelphia. African Americans fell into one of two distinct orientations, "street" and "decent"; see Anderson, ***Code of the Street: Decency, Violent, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*** (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999). William Lynwood Montell supported the idea of violent subculture, but argued that the acceptance of violence did not "travel" with migrants when they moved out of the region; see Montell, ***Killings: Folk Justice in the Upper South*** (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1986), 130-132. There are several studies that challenge the subculture of violence theory, critiquing the methodologies and suggesting that scholars employing this theory do not explain the source or boundaries of the subculture. For examples, see Colin Loftin and Robert H. Hill, "Regional Subculture and Homicide: An Examination of the Gastil-Hackney Thesis," ***American Sociological Review*** 39, no. 5 (1974): 714-724; Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, "Values and Violence: A Test of the Subculture of Violence Thesis," ***American Sociological Review*** 38, no. 6 (1973): 736-749; Darnell F. Hawkins, "Black and White Homicide Differentials," in ***Homicide among Black Americans***, ed. Darnell F. Hawkins (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 119-126; and Patricia L. McCall, Kenneth C. Land, and Lawrence E. Cohen, "Violent Criminal Behavior: Is There a General and Continuing Influence of the South?" ***Social Science Research*** 21, no. 3 (1992): 286-310.

[2]. There is a vast amount of literature supporting the notion that structural inequalities and discrimination affect rates of violence, specifically as it relates to racial differences. See, for example, Roger Lane, ***Roots of Violence in Black Philadel-***

phia (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Darnell F. Hawkins, ed., *Ethnicity, Race, and Crime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); and Edward S. Shihadeh and Darrell J. Steffensmeier, "Economic Inequality, Family Disruption, and Urban Black Violence," *Social Forces* 73, no. 2 (1994): 729-751.

[3]. There are a number of important books that examine the negative consequences of hyper-policing and mass incarceration on minority communities. For examples, see Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History," *The Journal of American History* 97, no. 3 (2010): 703-734; Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012); and Alice Goffman, *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[4]. For examples, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (1995; repr., Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1997); Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); and Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and The Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).