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## Book Reviews

Elizabeth Heger Boyle, Editor

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*First in Violence, Deepest in Dirt: Homicide in Chicago, 1875–1920.*

By Jeffrey S. Adler. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006. Pp. 384. \$35.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Lawrence M. Friedman, Stanford University

This is an excellent book, and a valuable addition to the literature on the history of homicide in the United States. It supplements, for Chicago, the work of Roger Lane (Philadelphia) and Eric Monkkonen (New York). Adler pieced his story together, using police records, newspapers, court records, coroners' inquests, and anything else he could find; the result is a rich, detailed, and illuminating picture of murders in Chicago during this period—5,645 cases of homicide, to be exact. This includes as close as one can get to *all* the homicides reported to the police (even, presumably, those that remain unsolved). This book is about these homicides. It is, naturally, a pretty depressing story: every murder was after all a tragic event, and usually a double tragedy, ending one life and ruining at least one more. There are no happy endings.

Murder has always been (fortunately) a fairly unusual crime, even in the most violent times and places. Think of how many more rapes, burglaries, and armed robberies must have occurred in Chicago during this 45-year period. Murder is, however, easier to count than other serious crimes. Nobody has any idea how many women were raped in 1890 in Chicago, for a variety of reasons. A dead body, on the other hand, is hard to ignore, and rarely goes unreported. Homicide figures are by far the most accurate figures there are for any crime. And what we *call* homicide has a fairly stable definition—as a rule. But not always. When, in the twentieth century, drivers of cars started killing people, police or coroners asked for indictments for manslaughter or murder in about 12 percent of these incidents, usually involving drunks or joyriders (p. 214). Deaths after illegal abortions are also homicide only if you define them that way; the number of these cases that were prosecuted grew greatly in the twentieth century (see p. 219). The “dark figure” for homicides is much smaller than the “dark figure” for other crimes; but there are considerable numbers of deaths that *might* be called accidental, or otherwise not reported as a

“homicide.” There is good reason to think—and Adler pretty much demonstrates as much—that these definitions did change a good deal over this time period.

Adler writes well and gracefully. He tells a story that is interesting in itself; but it also sheds considerable light on social history. What one might call fashions in homicide are socially determined, like everything else. In the late nineteenth century, for example, a great many homicides came out of drunken brawls in taverns. In this setting, the “rules of engagement,” the local “brand of manly honor,” put a premium on macho brutality. These killers were young men who engaged in what Adler calls “plebeian violence.” But the saloon culture declined in the twentieth century, and these killings became less common. The overall number of homicides, and the rate of homicides, did not decline, however. By 1900, the leading cause of homicide was domestic violence. This was mostly husbands killing wives—what a newspaper called “divorce by bullets” (p. 46). What lay behind this increase in wife-murder? Adler feels the rise of companionate marriage lay behind these incidents. Men killed wives and children “in skyrocketing numbers even as they became more emotionally committed to family life” (p. 80). In some pathological cases, men killed out of jealousy, or possessiveness, or because their families did not meet the “rising expectations” of marriage in this period. “[S]uicide notes, deathbed declarations, court transcripts and interviews with police investigators and crime-beat reporters” were all suffused with the “language and sentiments of companionate marriage and masculine domesticity” (p. 83). Women, on the other hand, killed in response to male abuse. Most women who killed, killed men, not other women; and 77 percent of their homicides occurred in the home (p. 93).

Chicago was never as violent as its reputation, but the homicide rate did rise substantially in the first decades of the twentieth century, and Chicago *was* more violent than many other American cities. In the new century, new aspects of homicide came to the public attention: homicides by the Mafia, for example (though Italian gangsters killed each other, and rarely anybody else), and homicides during robberies, which rose substantially in those two decades and were a great source of public fear and horror.

The cardinal sin of reviewers is to criticize an author for not writing a different book. I will try to resist the temptation. I do have to say, though, that I wish Adler had told us more about what happened to the men and women who killed. We get hints and snatches—Harry Summers, who killed his wife, committed suicide, for example (pp. 78–9). But what about the rest? How many were put on trial? How many were convicted? How many went to prison, how many were executed?

This would be, of course, another study; and it would shift the focus from the social roots of homicide to the behavior of the legal system. In any event, I am grateful enough to Adler for what we have. I enjoyed this book, and I learned a great deal from its pages.

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*Language of the Gun: Youth Crime and Public Policy.* By Bernard Harcourt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. Pp. 264. \$55.00 cloth; \$25.00 paper.

Reviewed by Michael Massoglia, Pennsylvania State University

Harcourt undertakes an ambitious examination of the meaning of guns through a series of interviews with youth detained in a juvenile correctional facility—the Catalina Mountain School in Arizona. The book is divided into three distinct parts. The first section focuses on the youth interviews, the second deals with methodological considerations in interpreting the language from the interviews, and in the final section, Harcourt deals with the public policy implications of his work.

Immediately apparent is the methodological care Harcourt uses in both constructing the sample for interviews and carrying out the interviews. This care produces interviews rich with information on the meaning of guns. In some respects, the interviews confirm accounts found in other places. For instance, Harcourt finds that youth associate guns with protection and self-defense. In other cases, the meaning youth attach to guns is less expected and perhaps even contradictory. Even among those who use guns, some youth attach negative meanings such as “dislike.” Along similar lines, while one dominant meaning youth attach to guns is “power,” a number of youth see the use of guns as a sign of weakness—as those who need guns are too weak to engage in traditional forms of fighting using fists or bats.

These differing views help illuminate the complexity in the meaning of guns. To decipher and bring together these differing meanings, Harcourt uses correspondence analysis to identify three primary clusters of meanings—action/protection, commodity/dislike, and recreation/respect. What is perhaps most clear and striking from the interview data is the remarkable attraction that the youth have to guns. Harcourt does a masterful job of conveying the seduction of guns and the fascination these youth have with guns. The clusters are informative—even if daunting for policy makers hoping to minimize the number of guns on the street—as