

Culture



Elliott LEYTON, William O'GRADY and James OVERTON, *Violence and Public Anxiety: A Canadian Case*, St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1992, 335 pages, \$24.95 (paper)

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we normally set in anthropological practice on seeing First Nations peoples and on hearing their voices. Now that it is done for chiefs and elders, I hope the artist will do it for common people.

Elliott LEYTON, William O'GRADY and James OVERTON, *Violence and Public Anxiety: A Canadian Case*, St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1992, 335 pages, \$24.95 (paper).

By D. Kim Rossmo

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Violence plays a role on a variety of social stages. From Hollywood films to professional sports, from nightly news to mean streets, violence disquiets many lives. Leyton, O'Grady and Overton examine the issue of public anxiety and violence within the province of Newfoundland in an attempt to answer important and central questions: what is the nature and pattern of criminal violence? Is it increasing? What is the relationship between violence, fear, and danger?

The subject area is topical, the discussions interesting, the styles engaging. The book is divided into three separately written parts loosely tied together through the theme of violence. O'Grady examines the production, nature, and problems of official crime statistics. Leyton analyzes the role of mass media in the communication and popular imagery of violent events. And Overton discusses elements of violence in social reaction to state policy during the 1930s.

O'Grady demonstrates the problematic nature of police statistics in *Criminal Statistics and Stereotypes: The Social Construction of Violence in Newfoundland*. He explains how their production can be influenced by a variety of sources, concluding that they should not be taken as a *prima facie* measure of the "real" level of crime in society. Such influences include changes in legal definitions, differing levels of policing, variations in public attitudes, victim reporting rates (the "dark figure" of crime), the impact of police discretion, and police record keeping practices. Cautioning against such simplistic explanations for crime as "unemployment" and "family breakdown", he concludes that there is clearly no evidence for an increase in violence in Newfoundland.

Unfortunately this chapter, perhaps the most important for the book's thesis, presents its conclusions much too strongly. It seems that the process of raising valid questions about certain conventional wisdoms has been equated with the establishment of scientific proof that such wisdoms are incorrect. While the difficulties associated with official statistics are correct (and have been known for years), consistent increases in uniform crime rates have been documented in most industrialized countries, including the former USSR, and have been supported by alternative measures of crime. Whether such an increase has occurred in Newfoundland is difficult to say as there are no proper tests conducted with the data. Instead there are *post hoc* explanations and more than a few leaps of logic.

For example, O'Grady talks about a doubling of policing levels in the province from 1962 to 1984, but confuses absolute numbers with per capita rates (pp. 36-37). He later states he can demonstrate that changes in sexual assault rates were likely related to the opening of a rape crisis centre - yet never does so (p. 70). He may well be correct in many of his conclusions, but in making his case he uses too many suspect examples.

In *The Theatre of Public Crisis*, Leyton conducts a content analysis of crime news for the province's major newspaper, and then examines the sources of "crime wave" announcements (social agencies, special interest groups, the criminal justice system, etc.). He suggests that such moral panics are rarely the product of conspiracies organized by the ruling elite, but rather are more the result of "a loose and disorganized, often conflicting and contradictory, 'coalition' of groups, professionals, government agencies, politicians, and ideologues" advancing their own particular agendas (p. 111).

Leyton illustrates his case by admitting that he was guilty in the early 1980s of "unjustified speculation" and "unwarranted claims" concerning Newfoundland's violent crime rate (pp. 120-123). He suggests that such fusions of political position with scientific judgement can artificially produce "crime waves", more so when the trend is picked up by other special interest groups for their own particular purposes.

Overton, in *Riots, Raids and Relief, Police, Prisons and Parsimony: The Political Economy of Public Order in Newfoundland in the 1930s*, notes that violent acts embedded in a social, economic, and political context

that must be understood in any effort to interpret violence. He does a thorough job of this for the period of the Great Depression, documenting the effects of state policy on certain collective behaviours. His essay is most interesting, providing insights to an important time in Canadian history.

Yet Overton's essay on public order in the 1930s does not deal with the question of past levels of violence in Newfoundland. To liken criminal victimization to Depression-era collective unrest is as problematic as equating it with the war deaths of the 1940s. The violence in these different historical periods have markedly different characters, effects, and origins.

The difficulty with this book is its lack of common focus. Despite their expressed aim to examine recent changes in patterns of violent behaviour, the authors have forayed into the separate areas of criminal violence, public fear, and political unrest. There is no clear definition of their subject, and despite Overton's recognition that crime is not a "social fact" (p. 201). There is little discussion of the problems inherent in such a research agenda. Different groups experience varying levels and types of violence in our society, and to avoid an ecological fallacy, it is necessary to examine the question from that perspective. It is possible that some of these problems are attributable to the changing focus of the research project, the background of which is discussed in the book's preface.

While the verdict is probably just, the authors have sometimes travelled an uneven road in the effort to reach their conclusions. And while they raise important questions, they do not, as Leyton suggests, "effectively demolish" the myths of a "crime-free past" and a "crime-ridden present" (p. 121). In addition to being too cavalier in its findings, the other major difficulty with the book is its lack of integration, a problem inherent in the confluence of three very different essays (though some may legitimately see this as a strength). Still, this is an interesting and well-written work that adds to the understanding of one of society's most common concerns.

William W. ELMENDORF, *Twana Narratives: Native Historical Accounts of a Coast Salish Culture*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993, 416 pages, \$49.95 (hardcover).

By Bruce G. Miller

University of British Columbia

In 1934 William Elmendorf, an undergraduate student, began a long-term collaboration with Henry Allen, a Twana born in 1865. The two established a relationship appropriate to a Twana elder and a young person, that of teacher and student, and Allen began the long process of narrating his version of Twana culture and history. In 1938, Elmendorf, by then a student of Kroeber at Berkeley, met Frank Allen, born in 1858 and the elder brother of Henry. Although Frank Allen disliked whites for the profoundly disturbing post-contact changes in his home area of western Washington state, he too agreed to work with Elmendorf. Frank Allen chose the topics and Elmendorf listened carefully, interrupting as little as possible. *Twana Narratives*, one of the products of Elmendorf's collaborations with the Allen brothers, is an invaluable and exciting contribution to the study of Northwest Coast societies, and more specifically, the Coast Salish. It is a rare, book-length narration by First Nations people about life in the middle and late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The volume is equally gripping in the accounts of the so-called "Indian Wars" of the 1850s, graphic in the details of Secret Society initiations, and humorous in describing the problems the interior Yakima people encountered canoeing on saltwater. *Twana Narratives* provides perhaps the richest view of Coast Salish life published to date. Elmendorf provides an introduction to his methods, and indexes place names, individuals, and topics.

There are many reasons why this volume might not have succeeded and why it does not conform to some versions of present-day theoretical and methodological requirements. The work was done before the day of the tape recorder and Elmendorf transcribed the conversations (predominantly in English) by hand; Elmendorf's interests were not in the then-current Twana society, but rather, in salvage ethnography; Elmendorf assumed that members of a society are culture bearers, and subsequently the work is not aimed at reflecting the diverse viewpoints of men and women of different backgrounds; there