

## Book Review

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Luz E. Huertas, Bonnie A. Lucero, and Gregory J. Swedberg, eds. 2016. *Voices of Crime: Constructing and Contesting Social Control in Modern Latin America*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.

The history of criminality in Latin America is often structured in a familiar model that contextualizes case studies alongside transnational discourses on crime to help understand larger processes of nation-building. This formula has produced many valuable studies that contribute to our understanding of criminality as a shifting process shaped by powerful groups and individuals who order societies. *Voices of Crime* spotlights new trajectories in research on the history of crime and justice in modern Latin America.

Luz E. Huertas, Bonnie A. Lucero, and Gregory J. Swedberg have produced an important book that provides a more holistic understanding of how crime is constructed, defined, contested, and shaped by both state and non-state actors. The book offers readers a broad range of case studies that collectively work to push the boundaries of scholarship on crime in a variety of new ways. It expands historiography geographically by exploring criminality in countries that were previously understudied (Chile, Uruguay, Cuba), and in rural and provincial spaces beyond the big city. The authors in this book also utilized a number of different methodological approaches to help analyze criminal subjects while building on recent histories of gender and crime in Latin America.

*Voices of Crime* opens with a concise introduction that provides a useful overview of the historiography and establishes the editors' main objective, namely to interrogate the different ways criminality works to "reinforce certain historically and culturally specific notions of race, class, nationality, and gender (p. 4)." They propose that the contributions in this volume offer a more critical analysis of crime by examining both the "official" perceptions by the state and the "unofficial" ways people negotiated criminality in their own lives.

The book is divided into two parts and follows a chronological order that spans roughly from the 1890s-1960s. Each section includes four case studies. The first section, "Constructing Criminality," includes chapters by Diego Galeano on "traveling criminals" and the collaborative

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policing techniques developed across the national borders of Argentina and Brazil in the beginning of the twentieth century; Luz Huertas on Peruvian intellectuals and the competing theories of criminality that were dissected and used to link criminal traits to specific racial groups; Marcos Fernández Labbé's chapter on the Chilean police's construction of criminality based on social representations linking foreign workers to drug users and trafficking; and Sönke Hansen's analysis of the sensationalized crime cases depicted in Lima's low-priced newspapers that became fictionalized over time in order to attract readership.

Collectively, these four case studies demonstrate that discourses on criminality were shaped by powerful institutions and individual actors who imposed policies that criminalized certain groups of people along class and racial lines. They also link changing perceptions of crime along with the development of other large-scale cultural and social transformations in the region. For example, Galeano shows that the idea of the international criminal developed as a result of the massive shift in demography caused by modern improvements in transportation networks along trans-Atlantic migratory routes. Huertas provides a strong argument that international discourses on criminality were used to enhance regional power by racially criminalizing subjects based on their geographic location. Both studies by Fernández Labbé and Huertas demonstrate how Chinese migrants were considered dangerous foreigners standing in the way of national progress.

The second section, "Navigating Criminalization," bundles together four chapters that document the negotiation between subjective groups and state institutions, revealing some of the competing visions on crime and punishment. Bonnie A. Lucero's "Order in the Occupied City" is perhaps the most interesting essay in the book. She focuses on politically transitioning and U.S. occupied Cienfuegos, Cuba, in 1899. Lucero examines the link between the transformation of the police, state violence, and the limits of political negotiation by centering on the assassination of black General Dionisio Gil by a white policeman. Here she argues that criminality helped cement racial order, and that the process of transformation in the police force was coupled with a rise in state violence directed against the urban working-class and in particular black men (p. 117).

Other chapters include Juandrea Bates's case study on the competing perceptions of crime between the citizenry and police administrators in Buenos Aires. Bates reveals that an unequal access to state modernizing projects created distrust among citizens and the police that worked to undermine their legitimacy and ability to fight crime (p. 156). Gregory Swedberg's chapter focuses on state policies, sexual violence, and working-class women in postrevolutionary Veracruz. Here he examines penal law codes and the ways officials interpreted these laws in specific sexual abuse cases, arguing that the postrevolutionary period shared continuity with colonial and republican views on virginity and honor (p. 165). Less effective is Gema Santamaría's part historical, part sociological comparison of "official" representations of episodes of lynchings that targeted teachers in rural Mexico in the 1930s and a recent 2004 lynching of three policemen in Tláhuac, Mexico City. She argues that these accounts were represented in the press as being driven by tradition and religious backwardness and contributed to a "racialized understanding of lynching and its perpetrators" (p. 190). Though Santamaría presents an interesting argument, the choice of

comparison and lack of historical contextualization limits the strength of her findings. Her ideas, however, are significant and deserve a larger study.

Overall, *Voices of Crime* is a significant contribution to the history of crime in Latin America. The case studies collectively expand the scholarship on crime in an exciting new direction by incorporating what Bonnie Lucero calls an “intersectional approach to the history of crime” that places a larger emphasis on race, class, and gender (p. 212). These essays will challenge future historians to think more critically about the ways in which they engage crime in their narratives. *Voices of crime* is well edited and provides experts and general readers alike with easily digestible chapters that would be ideal for classroom reading assignments at both the undergraduate and graduate level.