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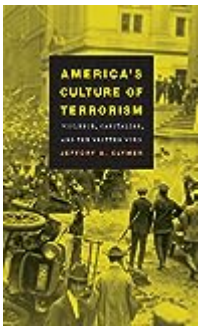

Jeffory Clymer. *America's Culture of Terrorism: Violence, Capitalism, and the Written Word.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. xii + 296 pp. ISBN 978-0-8078-2792-5; ISBN 978-0-8078-5460-0.

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Terrorism's Ugly Past

In *America's Culture of Terrorism*, Jeffory Clymer, Assistant Professor of English at St. Louis University, examines the historical and literary discourse of terrorism in American society at the end of the nineteenth century and proves that the United States has an ugly relationship with terrorism and that the terrorist events of September 11 were neither new nor unique. In fact, the United States has seen terrorist violence for quite some time and it has not been limited to rural areas of the Midwest. Clymer's approach focuses on the different ways in which terrorism was portrayed in works of fiction, created around the turn of the twentieth century, rather than simply providing a non-fiction political study. As such, the approach makes good use of the author's background in English Literature, since Clymer obviously feels that the relationship between popular culture, specifically popular works of fiction, and terrorism have not been addressed to a satisfactory degree anywhere else.

Clymer's introduction creates the backdrop for the rest of the text. He introduces terrorism, as we have come to understand it in the contemporary period, as political vengeance; provides a thorough philosophical discussion; and provides a synopsis of each forthcoming chapter and the ways in which he will approach terrorism. Oddly enough, Clymer abandons any discussion of present terrorism after the introduction until he reaches the epilogue, where he superficially discusses modern terrorism but does not connect it adequately to the terrorism covered in this book. Had he made an effort to tie in the topics he covered with the present-day terrorism, he would have made his work more meaningful and more appealing to a wider audience.

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 focus on literary treatments of terrorism. The Haymarket bombing in 1886 led to widespread panic, confusion, finger-pointing, and general uneasiness, as is pointed out by Clymer. He explores newspaper and journal accounts of the bombing and reveals that neither the bomber nor the motive for the bombing were ever uncovered, which provides the main impetus for panic among Chicagoans. From there, Clymer moves to Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) wherein the title character herself is willing to commit acts of terror although the stage for her acts is considerably different from James's primary inspira-

tion of 1885, namely the tension between England and Ireland. Hyacinth, the Princess, uses a pistol instead of the feared dynamite and Russian, French, and German terrorists replace the Irish and Irish Americans. Clymer quotes Eileen Sypher, in explaining the importance of James's novel. Sypher posits that the novel answers "who becomes a terrorist and why" and adequately illustrates the cost of that commitment, both to the individual and to the larger society (p. 73). Clymer then moves to explore, in tandem, Thomas Dixon and Ida B. Wells, stating that he chooses to combine them because both personalities claimed to have written of actual events, based on documented evidence, in the American South during the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century. Both Dixon and Wells have written works, according to Clymer, that were insightfully indicative of the nation's fervor surrounding racial tensions and that led to terrorist violence in the South. Clymer uses Dixon's trilogy of fictional works based on the Ku Klux Klan (*The Leopard's Spots* [1902], *The Clansman* [1905], and *The Traitor* [1907]), in conjunction with Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), to illustrate popular sentiment among whites that blacks were destined to become unfixable, unsolvable, perpetual criminals. Chesnutt's novel features a fictional General Belmont who reads aloud an advertisement for a skin-whitening tonic guaranteed to lighten the skin of a black person to the point where he or she will be indistinguishable to the average white man. Wells's *Southern Horrors* (1892), *A Red Record* (1895), and editorial in *Free Speech* (1892), document lynchings of both African-American men and women. Clymer posits that Wells's writings explain that the American people, who were against the rhetoric and reasoning of violence in Chicago, were actually in favor of a race- or class-based anarchy that separated whites and blacks in the South. Further, Wells combined race and economics to explain that the South had lost the economic benefits of slavery and "used the mythology of rape to regain control over the bodies of black men" (p. 131). Therefore, Clymer points out that the only anarchy Wells saw in the South was the anarchy created by whites desperately trying to regain control.

Jack London's literary works, including *The Assassination Bureau* (1964) and other fictional works, are explored in chapter 4, which Clymer explains were based on then-current events. The assassination of Idaho Governor Frank Steunenberg for his prosecution of the Western Federation of Miners provided the backdrop for London's *The Iron Heel* (1907), which, Clymer contends, ties together terrorism, socialist violence, and corporate America to a degree that it fictionalizes the concern with which he wrote the non-fiction journalist article "Something's Rotten in Idaho" (1906) after learning of the Governor's murder. It is also revealed that London's novel was entirely calculated to capitalize on the popular market created by the Idaho trial. *The Assassination Bureau* built on previous works such as "The Minions of Midas" (1900), in which a group of economically sensible men retaliate against the trusts and corporations, they feel have held them from economic safety, with violence, threatening letters, dynamite, and assassinations. By joining capitalism to terrorism, Clymer provides the reader with an altogether different perspective that makes this text useful to the casual reader and academic alike as a supplement to any political study of terrorism.

Sabotage is the main focus of chapter 5. Clymer uses the 1910 *Los Angeles Times* bombing; discussions of sabotage linked to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW); and the poetry of Covington Hall, a labor activist associated with the IWW, to construct a dialogue proving that worker violence lived on long after the infamous strikes of the 1870s and 1880s, and even after the 1886 Haymarket bombing. The culture of terrorism grew from the uncertainty and failure to locate the Haymarket bomber and the motive, which provided a strong impetus for the *Los Angeles Times* bombing. Sabotage was so important to the men known as "Wobblies" or the "I Won't Work[s]," because they realized the power that lay within their hands. Every time they struck, they wreaked economic havoc, not through the use of dynamite, although direct forms of violence were not abhorred or forbidden, but through the stoppage and destruction of company machinery. Covington Hall, a member of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers, is examined in light of his flowing and elegant rhetoric and poetry in support of the IWW and sabotage, including a poem featured in the IWW newsletter *Industrial Worker* concerning the Merryville, Louisiana Brotherhood of Timber Workers (BTW) strike. The poem all but suggested that BTW workers needed to take active steps of violence to be heard and to be taken seriously. The text of the poem read: "Scabs! / Attention / Brotherhood of Timber Workers / On strike at Merryville, La / Take warning! / American Lumber Co. / Going crazy / Everybody's doin' it! / Doin' what? Nathan' " (p. 205). The poem spells out the word "sabotage" when vertically aligned, warns scabs of impending violence, and seeks to raise the ire of striking BTW members to commit acts of violence against the company and its non-striking employees.

In the epilogue, Clymer contends that the aftermath

of September 11 has led news commentators and leaders to deal in "abstractions and absolutist rhetoric" (p. 218). Clymer then explains philosophically that terrorism represents an abstraction because it is "a form of violence that enacts physical harm upon innocent but symbolically rich victims in order to exact a psychological blow upon others" (p. 218). In sum, *America's Culture of Violence* is an above-average cultural examination of turn-of-the-century America and its fear relating to racial and class tensions exacerbated by the use of dynamite, sabotage, and inciting poetry. Clymer's analysis of literary works excellently supplements any political study, but readers must keep in mind that the majority of works covered here are works of fiction, no matter how realistic they may be or how closely they may have been patterned upon then-current events.