

black ignorance, and ignored black leaders' arguments for housing reform. During the twentieth century, the friction between black and white leaders over housing issues increased, despite some progress and cooperation in public-health education efforts. Eventually, Baltimore politicians and public-health officials realized that segregation would not work and that it impacted the city's public health. They finally began demolishing poor neighbourhoods in 1929, with more demolitions to follow. Yet it was 1940 before the city began building replacement low-rent housing. Meanwhile, throughout this entire period, those who suffered from tuberculosis, as either victims, relatives or neighbours, constantly and quietly adjusted their lives to cope with the effects of the disease.

Complete with illustrations, figures, maps and tables, Roberts's well-researched monograph provides a solid contribution to research on health disparities. It provides another chapter in the story of racial politics and health alongside Keith Wiloo's *Dying in the City of the Blues: Sickle Cell Anemia and the Politics of Race and Health*. While some readers might find the numerous statistical descriptions of racial differences within Baltimore hard going, and, indeed, tables might have strengthened the statistical analysis, Roberts tells an important story. Furthermore, he highlights how the historical roots of health disparities need further investigation as past narratives could benefit future public-health policy.

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Scott Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War* (New York: New York University Press, 2009, \$45.00). Pp. 336. ISBN 978 0 8147 9550 7.

This may be the first retro academic book on American gun culture. Containing variants of virtually every 1970s cliché about guns, gun owners and gun rights organizations, it sets the study of America's thriving gun culture back forty years to when national antigun groups dominated America's informational sociology.

Scott Melzer's thesis is that the National Rifle Association promotes a "frontier masculinity," a "mythologized dominant version of manhood from America's frontier past" (16), that privileges a group of conservative, old, antifeminist, paranoid, politically extreme white men who advance a reactionary conservative agenda of individual rights instead of the good collective rights of oppressed peoples.

Melzer, assistant professor of sociology at Albion College in Michigan, is by no means the first person to investigate the NRA while carrying a hypothesis on his shoulder, or to interpret sundry bits of evidence to support preconceptions. He armors these findings with a "grounded-theory" methodology that connects dots of data obtained in interviews of small nonrepresentative samples of NRA members, apparent *naïfs*, and textual analyses of select publications and fundraising media. Overall the approach is a fairly standard graduate school production, brand X critical theory loosely applied, and rehearses the postmodern catechism: hegemonic masculinity, identity, gendering, queer theory, privileging and thought crimes such as "essentialism." Moral indictment overburdens analysis: the NRA has not gotten aboard the progressive train of dialectical history.

Retro clichés include: (1) the NRA as a controlling, “top-down” (261) cultural monolith, oblivious to the reality of American gun culture as large, diffuse and horizontally organized into numerous autonomous local interpretive communities; (2) gun owners as the embodiment of a paranoid defective masculinity that compensates, *à la* Freud, via the gun; (3) the intrinsic male chauvinism of gun culture despite two recent women NRA presidents, numerous women elected board members, and increases in the numbers of women gun owners and holders of permits to carry concealed weapons; (4) dismissal of genuine threats to American gun rights – thereby reducing NRA “gun crusaders” to Chicken Little status; (5) a concurrent acceptance of the public-relations tactic of “reasonable common-sense” gun controls used by antigun organizations to mask an incrementalist policy designed to hinder gun ownership in any way possible; and (6) the alleged extremism of the NRA’s leaders for not reflecting more moderate views of the membership, despite the obvious facts of democratic election and overwhelming financial support by members.

Melzer pummels a straw man to set the mood, a popular technique in antigun books and news, where despite the availability of articulate spokespersons, reporters somehow manage to interview the kook in the coonskin cap in the back parking lot. At the Reno 2002 NRA annual meeting, Melzer finds “Floyd” (25), a gauche man clumsily patronizing women at a seminar. Melzer also notices people at the Reno meeting wearing western-style garb, affirming frontier masculinity. But many Nevadans wear cowboy hats and boots every day. Similar lack of sensible comparison haunts the book; properties attributed to NRA members are well distributed across the general population, too. One expects qualitative method to yield thick description, but said description need not be thickheaded.

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Robert H. Churchill, *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant's Face: Libertarian Political Violence and the Origins of the Militia Movement* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009, \$35.00). Pp. 370. ISBN 978 0 472 11682 9.

Much sensationalist attention has been devoted to the militia movement since the fateful events at Ruby Ridge, Idaho and Waco, Texas in 1992 and 1993. In this groundbreaking study, Robert Churchill provides the most comprehensive, erudite and scholarly refutation of the conventional wisdom about the militias yet published. Using a combination of archival research and extensive interviews with their members, Churchill demonstrates how the militias’ remarkable growth in the 1990s relied upon a combination of political influences (the end of the Cold War, the Clinton administration’s push for new gun-control laws, and the paramilitarization of police units) and technological developments (the rise of faxes, email, and the Internet) that facilitated the emergence of a loose coalition of groups with a shared interest in firearms and martial training. Central to the rise of the militias, however, was the recovery of a libertarian understanding of the American Revolution. The conviction that civilians had not only a right but also a duty to take up arms against what they perceived as the wanton exercise of unconstitutional power by the federal government