
This recent book by Nicholas Rogers is a gem. In essence it is a collection of essays, though only three of the chapters have been published before (those on the anti-impressment agitation of mid-Georgian England, the Gordon Riots of 1780 and Queen Caroline’s crowds of 1820–1), whilst the other five (which deal with popular Jacobitism, the anti-grain and anti-militia riots of 1756–7, the trial of Admiral Keppel, crowds and revolution 1788–95 and crowds and gender) appear here for the first time. An introduction sets the broader context by tracing the changing problematic of the crowd, from the work of the early pioneers of collective psychology to more recent scholarship by sociologists and historians, and a brief conclusion reviews some of the general findings and highlights key transformations that occurred over the time period 1714–1821. The book is elegantly written and rich in insights, and will be essential reading not only for students of the crowd but for all who possess any interest in Britain’s long eighteenth century.

Rogers is in no doubt about the crowd’s importance in eighteenth-century politics: the very ‘legitimacy of political regimes’, he insists, ‘was intimately bound up with the way in which crowds intervened in public space, and how those interventions were represented in contemporary discourse’ (p. 14). Such interventions could take various forms: people might engage in collective agitation to voice their grievances or defend their rights; they might also be invited by those in power to take to the streets to express their support for the existing regime. Some interventions were orchestrated from above, though this did not necessarily mean they were any less genuinely popular. However, crowds did not always reflect an homogeneous bloc or a popular consensus. Thus a particular cause célèbre, such as the trial of Admiral Keppel or the Queen Caroline affair, might
provide the focus for the public articulation (through demonstrations of support for the alleged victim) of a variety of different viewpoints (conservative, Whig, radical) by variously constituted crowds. Nor can the activities of crowds be taken as a straightforward barometer of public opinion. In the 1790s loyalists might have commanded festive space through a careful mobilization of popular passions around royal anniversaries and national victories, but ‘they did not necessarily command the loyalties of the “people”’ (p. 214). Yet loyalist festival could create an illusion of public confidence in the government, which is why the way crowd interventions came to be represented by the press was such an important issue. The most compelling chapter of the book is that on crowds and gender, where Rogers shows that women were engaged more actively in politics than we used to think; their apparent absence from political crowds is in part an illusion created by the sources and in part a reflection of the fact that female activism tended to take different forms from that of men.

Throughout, Rogers handles the vexed issue of continuity and change in crowd politics with great sensitivity. He does, however, see a significant shift over time from the topsy-turvy crowd interventions of the Jacobite era to the more disciplined parades of the early nineteenth century, a transformation that was shaped by the effects of war, revolution and the expansion of the state and the market. Yet some of the supposedly new developments seem rather familiar to someone who works on crowd politics in the later seventeenth century. It might have been the case that by the end of Rogers’s period ‘rival newspapers would vigorously squabble over who had the more reliable narrative over what actually took place’ (p. 275) in street demonstrations and public celebrations, but the same was true in the early 1680s. Although Rogers believes the anti-Catholicism of the Gordon rioters was ‘altogether more secular and political’ (p. 173) than that of a century earlier, one might retort that the ‘no popery’ of the Exclusion Crisis was fuelled more by fears of arbitrary government and a potential loss of political liberties than hatred of Catholics per se, and that even the anti-Catholic rioting of 1688 was in the main a protest against violations of the rule of law by James II and those servants of the crown who had advised or supported the king’s illegal initiatives. Likewise, nationalist and libertarian rhetoric was not totally new to loyalism in the 1790s; we see traces of it in the Tory stance of the 1680s. Nevertheless, superficial similarities must not blind us to the reality of change over time, and one of the many virtues of this excellent book is that it makes a serious effort to grapple with what those changes may or may not have been, even though there might be room to dispute some of the generalized conclusions.

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The editors emphasize at the outset the need to view women's agency within the context of gender differences in both criminal actions and official responses, and the authors successfully fulfil the requirement in their twelve studies. Several reflect critically on prosecution rates and judicial reactions. Stephen Frank's work suggests that in pre-revolutionary Russia, not surprisingly, the lower the court, the higher the proportion of female accused. But obsessions with criminological views of the 'dangerous classes' led Russian contemporaries to ignore the substantial role of women. Peter King investigates English criminal courts' responses to crime and criminals, concluding from early-nineteenth-century evidence that they were indeed heavily gendered, as indicated in both the conviction rates and the relatively lenient sentencing of women. Parallels with earlier records lead him to speculate that this may have been a longstanding feature of early modern England (though not in the eighteenth-century North East as regards conviction rates). (See Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton, *Rogues, thieves and the rule of law: the problem of law enforcement in North-East England, 1718–1800*, London: UCL Press, 1998.) Barry Godfrey, by contrast, argues that the low rates of prosecution of nineteenth-century women for workplace theft were not entirely chivalrous. Informal, sometimes violent, methods of control operated in factories to punish the perceived misbehaviour of young and vulnerable women.

Heather Shore explores the early-nineteenth-century ideologies of juvenile crime in England, noting that the boy-thief, girl-prostitute stereotypes were well established before the Victorian period. This was echoed in sexual-abuse cases later in the century, studied by Louise Jackson: the sexually abused girl, corrupted by adult men, could be defined in court as either innocent victim or deviant 'minx'. The evidence of boys, though, particularly after the age of about 14, was discounted as dishonest. The dichotomous Victorian language of innocence and experience, ambivalent about young victims and criminals, is reflected in these legal discourses.

Two essays reflect on the contrasts between British and Continental attitudes to male power and women's rights. Bertrand Taithe suggests that French 'realistic' reactions to venereal diseases and prostitution, given patterns of late male marriage, prevented any development of a critique of male sexuality (as happened in British campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts). Yet each learnt from the other, the British abolitionist movement establishing an audience in France, while the French experience stressed the importance of rescue work among prostitutes. Lynn Abrams establishes that, as Germany was unified under Prussian laws, sentimentality about marriage produced campaigns only for mothers' rights, rather than a defence of wives against their husbands. In fact, after 1875, there were growing restrictions on divorce, in contrast to Britain. German tolerance for men behaving badly was also partly reflected in both male and female admiration of duellists, as Ute Frevert demonstrates. Notions of honour, both male and female, pervaded late-nineteenth-century Germany, and confined criticism of
patriarchal behaviour to the extremes rather than focusing on the norms of gender relations.

Other characteristic reactions to female deviance were international. Ann-Louise Shapiro shows that female criminals, particularly the upper-class adulteresses, kleptomaniacs and murderers, aroused apocalyptic fears in fin-de-siècle France. Similarly, Willem de Blécourt’s study of the prosecution of unlicensed midwives in the Netherlands points to the rise of professional control and state regulation. The Netherlands was far from exceptional in this regard, with doctors’ commercial jealousy of the midwives’ success providing one factor behind their prosecution (though the delightfully named Dutch Society for the Repression of Quackery seems to have taken little interest).

Two chapters establish the uniqueness of extreme situations. Nazi abortion policies, as Gabriele Czarnowski shows, imposed compulsory termination on the racially ‘unfit’, while criminalizing abortion for German women. It became a crime against the state. The Sicilian mafia of the post-World War II period restricted women to domestic roles, allowing them no part in criminal organization. Valeria Pizzini-Gambetta, using interviews with informers such as Tommaso Buscetta, stresses that this unique feature of Sicilian organized crime is part of a much wider culture of masculine avoidance (of prostitution, for example). The mafia maintained its honour through idealized notions of femininity and, above all, faithful marriage.

This can only be a brief sketch of what is undoubtedly a rich collection containing much of interest in the detailed studies as well as in the common scope of the book. The authors demonstrate convincingly that no historical analysis of crime and its social and legal constructions can avoid the central issue of gender, in both the actions of those prosecuted and the reactions of the official authorities.

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