

promote or inhibit violent behavior," neurobiologic markers, medications that reduce violence, sexual violence, and violence by custodians against wards. The final recommendation is for a large-scale, multicommunity cohort study "to improve both causal understanding and preventive interventions at the biological, individual, and social levels."

The book's eight chapters are divided into three parts. The first, "Violent Human Behavior," provides a wealth of descriptive data on various areas of violence. The panel makes a compelling case for collecting more accurate and thorough data through sources other than the criminal-justice system. The second part, "Understanding Violence," details the current criminal-justice and public health approaches to violence prevention. This generally thoughtful and well-documented section describes the link between violence and alcohol and drugs, explores family violence, and discusses guns and violence. The book's third part, "Harnessing Understanding to Improve Control," presents a complex overview of the factors that make up a violent act. This section accurately assesses the difficulties that arise in identifying risk factors and applying interventions to curb violence:

A major problem in *understanding* violence is to describe the probability distributions of predisposing factors, situational elements, and triggering events at the biological, psychosocial, microsocial, and macrosocial levels. The problem in *controlling* violence is to choose among possible interventions.

Although it offers valuable information from several disciplines, *Understanding and Preventing Violence* is weak in its theoretical framework. Discussions of various public agencies and institutions fail to mention the importance of collaborations with other potential players, such as the departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services. A multidisciplinary approach to the problem of violence demands partnerships involving a multitude of institutions and communities. The policy and resource recommendations offered in this book should be considered with the caveat that the bias of the authors is toward criminal-justice strategies.

Reiss applauds the diversity in the professional backgrounds of the panel members. Chaired by a sociologist, the panel consisted of seven criminologists, three psychologists, three physicians (two of whom are psychiatrists), a political scientist, a human-services professional, a geneticist, an economist, and a community activist. Women and ethnic minorities were not well represented, however, with 17 men, 2 of whom are African Americans, and 2 women. The dominant perspective was that of criminal justice, with an emphasis on biologic and biobehavioral research.

The book suffers from a glaring lack of attention to the impact of racism on violent behavior and a notable absence of any critique of the writings of such prominent African and African American scholars as Kawanza Kunjufu, A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., Ronald L. Braithwaite, Cornel West, Ron Walters, and Gloria Johnson Powell. Theories based on an understanding of violence as learned behavior are given minimal attention. The book also lacks a consideration of violence as a social and cultural problem. Instead, the authors embrace a more traditional and limited view of violence — that there are violent criminals who exist because of genetic, biobehavioral, or psychological disorders and who ought to be identified and controlled early. Reluctant to confront traditional institutional barriers to social change, the authors give only lip service to promising strategies for the control of violence that require a shift in public attitudes. For instance, in the discussion

of weapons control, strategies to sway public opinion and promote a change in public policy are neglected.

Despite its slant toward traditional approaches to the study of violence, this is a valuable book. It is a useful reference for those devoted to the science and practice of violence prevention.

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POINT BLANK: GUNS AND VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

By Gary Kleck. 512 pp. New York, Aldine de Gruyter, 1991. \$59.95. ISBN 0-202-30419-1.

This comprehensive assessment of the evidence concerning causal links between firearms and violence is organized according to the principal issues in the debate over gun control and has something of a surprise ending. Professor Kleck is a sociologist who presents himself as an impartial scientist without ties to any of the advocacy organizations: "The scholar's faith is that knowledge matters, and that there exists an open-minded audience ready to consider seriously the full range of pertinent ideas and evidence bearing on an issue. It is to this audience that this book is directed." As it turns out, his inquiry leads him to the conclusion that the widespread ownership and ready availability of guns in our society has little effect on rates of violent crime or the rate of mortality from homicide, suicide, and gun accidents.

Kleck is encyclopedic in covering the relevant literature, noting the shortcomings of others' research and providing careful explanations of his own original contributions. Over the years he has gained notoriety for his comments on two issues that are central to the gun-control debate: the usefulness of guns in self-defense and the consequences of regulating handguns more tightly than rifles and shotguns. On the matter of self-defense, he estimates that there are 700,000 to 800,000 instances a year in which guns are used by crime victims. In making this estimate he relies on two rather obscure private surveys and explicitly rejects contrary evidence from the government's National Crime Survey (NCS), conducted annually by the Bureau of the Census. I have shown elsewhere that the NCS data imply an annual total of 80,000 instances of the use of guns in self-defense, an order of magnitude less than Kleck's estimate. Kleck is persuasive in pointing out the problems of definition, sample bias, and response bias in working with any survey data on this subject. But although he gives us reasons to doubt the NCS data, his confidence in his own estimates, based on questionable inferences from surveys that have far less of a claim to reliability than the NCS, seems misplaced.

With respect to the second issue, Kleck argues that regulating handguns more stringently than long guns (a characteristic of most state permit systems) is a grave mistake. He acknowledges that handguns are used by the perpetrators of the vast majority of assaults and robberies involving guns. But, he says, if violent criminals are deprived of handguns, some of them will switch to long guns, which are considerably more lethal when fired. If enough of them make this switch, the net result may be an increase in the number of murders caused by guns. This argument is persuasive up to a point: if someone decided to take a shot at me, I would rather it were with a revolver than with a shotgun. But if we somehow did restrict the availability of handguns, to what extent would predatory criminals begin carrying rifles and shotguns instead? On this point Kleck has little direct evidence. He succeeds in demonstrating the logical possibility that more stringent regulation of handguns could

have perverse effects, without persuading us that this is a likely consequence and one that should determine policy in this area.

Point Blank is valuable for its thorough, well-organized treatment of an important body of literature and data; the "full range of pertinent ideas and evidence relevant to this issue" is indeed here, or nearly so. But Professor Kleck's weighing of the evidence is perhaps not as evenhanded as he would have us believe. On one topic after another he reaches a conclusion, based on less-than-compelling evidence, that can and has been used by those who oppose gun control. Perhaps it is unnecessary to say that a number of other researchers also believe themselves to be open-minded seekers of truth in this area and yet have reached quite different conclusions (for example, see my review article titled "The Technology of Personal Violence" in *Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research*, volume 14, edited by Michael Tonry [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991]).

Professor Kleck ends his book with his recommendations for policy, and it is a surprise ending, indeed: rather than advocating the abolition of gun-control laws, which is what we are led to expect given the overall thrust of the previous chapters, he concludes by advocating a modest expansion of controls: the imposition of additional restrictions on who is eligible to possess a gun, together with a requirement that all transactions involving guns be conducted by federally licensed dealers and include a criminal-record check of the buyer. Despite these recommendations, the book is being cited far more often by the National Rifle Association than by Handgun Control, Inc.

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THE GUN CONTROL DEBATE: YOU DECIDE

(Contemporary Issues.) Edited by Lee Nisbet. 341 pp. New York, Prometheus Books, 1990. \$17.95. ISBN 0-87975-618-7.

As the title implies, this book frames the issue of gun control as a verbal duel between advocates with opposing

views. The editor has organized 24 diverse selections, mostly written in the 1980s, into 4 loosely connected sections: "A Culture in Conflict" (4 papers selected to illustrate the influence of values on policy preferences), "Controlling Crime and Violence" (10 papers on the relation between the availability of guns and patterns of violence), "Guns for Self-Defense: Protection or Menace?" (8 papers on the risks involved in the use of guns for self-protection), and "Interpreting the Second Amendment: Culture Conflict Revealed" (2 papers on the interpretation of the Second Amendment).

The organization of the book as a debate enhances its rhetorical flair but diminishes its value to a scientific audience. The rules of proper and fair debate require that both sides be represented, regardless of the quality of the material, and that advocates speak for themselves. The moderator should not get too involved. Consequently, the papers in the book are of uneven quality, and the editor does not become involved in clarifying important issues or evaluating the quality of the arguments. The book includes many solid presentations of the issues, such as "The Great American Gun War" by B. Bruce-Briggs, "Protection or Peril? An Analysis of Firearm-Related Deaths in the Home" by Arthur Kellermann and Donald Reay, "Crime Control Through the Private Use of Armed Force" by Gary Kleck, and "The Effect of Gun Availability on Violent Crime Patterns" by Philip Cook. Apparently in an attempt to balance the debate or to represent both sides, the editor also includes several weak, blatantly partisan, or dogmatic selections.

The quickening pace of research on guns and violence makes the book somewhat out of date. Since its publication in 1990, important works on both sides of the issue have been published. In spite of these defects, the book pulls together a variety of material from diverse sources, and many readers will find the book valuable precisely because it presents the gun-control debate in relatively full partisan form. It identifies points of controversy and conveys the shrill tone that is typical of participants in the gun-control debate.

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