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Judith Rowbotham, Kim Stevenson and Samantha Pegg, *Crime News in Modern Britain: Press Reporting and Responsibility, 1820-2010* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) Hardback, £55, ISBN: 978-0-230-30359-1

With the recent grant of the Royal Charter for the Self-Regulation of the Press and the ongoing debate around its ascendancy and potential effect, Judith Rowbotham, Kim Stevenson and Samantha Pegg deliver a compelling and timely work. *Crime News in Modern Britain: Press Reporting and Responsibility, 1820-2010* examines the historical roots of crime reporting, while making an interesting contribution to the contemporaneous enquiry into the ethics, regulation and responsibility of the press. These prolific researchers draw upon historical approaches already used in their prior research at the intersection between Legal History, Crime and the Press, to present a truly enjoyable and stimulating account of crime reportage throughout the growth and establishment of the press as an institution in British society. *Crime News in Modern Britain: Press Reporting and Responsibility* delivers an informative and thought-provoking perspective on the influence that crime reporting and legal intelligence has had on the construction of public perceptions of crime and the legal process. This book draws upon notable cause célèbres and popular crime stories throughout the period, examines how these stories came to public prominence and outlines new approaches in questioning the power of the press in influencing public opinion. Finally, this work clearly contributes to the informed debate around what constitutes journalistic responsibility, with the goal of ensuring that the public are better informed of criminal law and criminal procedure.

As the title would suggest, this monograph is a chronological examination and evaluation of crime reporting and legal intelligence from the ‘beginning of crime

intelligence' through to the modern landscape of 'online and offline' news reporting. This approach is both well considered and beneficial to the historiography of the subject and allows the authors to trace the rise and success of crime reporting through the nineteenth century, its continued success through the twentieth century, while also taking into account the continuing development of new technologies to deliver media content.

The key objectives outlined *Crime News in Modern Britain* include presenting a history of journalism's relationship with the criminal justice process and the subsequent effect that this has had on the development of journalism and investigative reporting. This work also seeks to consider the influence crime reporting has had on public perceptions of crime and criminal legal process, and attempts to inform the ongoing reassessment of journalistic responsibility and the role of crime reporting in twenty-first century Britain. Rowbotham, Stevenson and Pegg explore these objectives in a well-considered and thoughtful manner, while presenting important arguments and discussions around the present debates of the power of the press in contemporary Britain. The authors argue that during the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century the influence of the legal profession in news reporting made crime intelligence and law reports a valuable resource for "conveying information and ideas' but even as lawyers moved away from reporting, the in-depth publication of criminal reports in daily newspapers did not wane due to the public desire for such reports. This desire for crime stories, naturally led to a move away from factual news reporting to more sensationalist journalism, often concerned with "pre-trial excitements" and the enduring relationship between the investigative press and the police. Despite the move away from the representation of legal and procedural nuances in crime news, the authors conclude that the press remains a mouthpiece,

informing the public and shaping the public image of criminal process. Nevertheless, it is the postscript that provides the most interesting, thought-provoking and prevalent arguments in this work. The postscript questions the veracity of twenty-first century crime reporting and questions the nature through which details of crime are being “regurgitated from single and unchecked sources,” including social media and the internet. Finally, *Crime News in Modern Britain* suggests that in the post-Levenson world, the press “must look to the production of interesting but also accurate journalism” and contend that this can only be achieved through better relationships between all “organs of the press,” the legal profession and the police. This is a well-reasoned conclusion clearly supported by the themes and evidence that are raised throughout this entire monograph. Furthermore, this work has the scope to be a valuable and informative addition to the current scholarship centered on the development and history of the press, especially in the nineteenth century, but will be of great value to a wide range of subject specialisms due to its novel interdisciplinary approach towards press analysis.

Due to the clear expertise of its authors, this work draws upon an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, most poignantly legal history, the history of crime and studies of the press. However, this monograph also draws upon theories and concepts from sociology, criminology and media studies. This is to be expected from a work that examines such a substantial timeframe and a subject matter that is so fundamental to the social zeitgeist. The press, by its very nature, has a clear influence across many spheres of society and societal institutions; therefore a broad theoretical framework is beneficial to the development of the subject of the press in academic research. For a number of years, the examination of the history of the press has been undertaken by historians, the press influence on public opinion by sociologists and

specific content analysis by researchers in media studies, but with the ever increasing focus on interdisciplinary and collaborative research in academic scholarship, this book contributes significantly to the study of the press through its demonstration of a cogent and considered interdisciplinary methodology. *Crime News in Modern Britain* provides a clear framework for future historical works on the press and a distinct interdisciplinary approach for future research to follow.

To summarise, *Crime News in Modern Britain* is certainly an excellent history of crime reporting in the modern press, but its broad interdisciplinary approach and consideration of contemporaneous themes, make this work a valuable addition to the scholarship of the press and the ongoing exploration of issues around press regulation and responsibility. This work clearly defines the power of the press in shaping public perceptions of crime and criminal procedure, but this raises more substantial questions around the power of the press as a leader of public opinion and the responsibility of the media in conscientious, accurate reporting. It is made clear from this work that

‘...there are various factors of public opinion, but the one power beside which all others are of little account...is the newspaper press, the growth of which within the last 50 years is one of the wonders of the epoch.’¹

The public of the nineteenth century understood this, it is important to ensure that the press of the twenty-first century also understands this. *Crime News in Modern Britain* demonstrates the importance of this message transcending generational boundaries.

¹ Macaulay, Victoria R.I. *Her Life and Reign* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1887) pp. 261-262

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