

Meditations on Violence: A Comparison of Martial Arts Training & Real World Violence

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This exceptional book opens with a black and white photograph of a bathroom with a swirl of sticky-looking muck on the floor and a few droplets splattered across the side of the toilet. Since there is no color, it takes a moment to realize what you are looking at, but this mess is clearly human blood, a LOT of human blood. You don't know what happened, but it was obviously something awful. A slowly drying pool of blood is not what one might expect to find at the beginning of a typical martial arts book, but then again real-life violence is not a subject that martial artists typically understand or write about.

Like a pool of blood, violence is a very sobering subject, one that must be treated seriously in order to do any good. *Meditations on Violence* certainly fits that bill. It is a refreshingly frank, honest, and in-depth assessment that teaches readers how to think critically about the subject, determine how to evaluate sources of knowledge, and understand how to identify strategies and select tactics to deal with violence effectively.

As a corrections officer and tactical team leader, Miller regularly tangles with hard-core predators. He describes his job this way: "I beat people up for a living. I can pretty the phrase up a lot, but in the end I get paid (and paid well) to go into a situation, usually alone and usually outnumbered by sixty or more criminals, and maintain order."

This is a guy who routinely survives brutal encounters that would leave the average person physically and emotionally shattered. Unlike most martial arts instructors, he has first-hand experience that separates longstanding myths and heroic fantasies from merciless reality. Using interesting personal vignettes backed by solid research and indisputable logic, he conveys this hard-earned wisdom in a highly effective manner. His insights on how to make self-defense work and overcome subconscious resistance to meeting violence with violence could very well save a reader's life one day.

While the author's no-nonsense tone can be a bit "street" and his examples a bit graphic at times, his psychology degree shines throughout the writing as well. This combination makes for a fascinating read. One of the book's best features is an informative matrix that addresses various types of violence, demonstrating how they differ from each other and how the lessons from one type may not apply to the needs of another. Other important topics include the dynamics of violence, predator mindset, adapting training to the realities of violence, making physical defense work, and the after-effects a sudden assault or long-term exposure to a violent environment.

Miller's book is extraordinarily well-written. Packed with interesting, informative and, most importantly, useful information, *Meditations on Violence* should be required reading for all serious martial artists, law enforcement officers, security professionals, and anyone else who might have to deal with violence in some capacity. It is illuminating and very likely lifesaving as well.

LAWRENCE KANE (June 16, 2008)

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