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Women's Studies

Women and Guns: Politics and the Culture of Firearms in America
M.E. Sharpe
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Using the personal anecdotes and stories told by American women from all over the country about their relationships to guns, Homsher demolishes the high walls that divide the polarized anti-gun, pro-gun national debates, revealing a fascinating complexity. She writes, “now and again their own experiences proved to be too complex or contradictory to match the gauge prescribed by agendas that had been forged for political combat. When this happened, when women began telling personal stories…that defied the established categories, I felt that I came closest to watching a citizen at work.”

In this deftly written and scrupulously researched book readers hear from women whose contact with guns is recreational, accidental, tragic, and empowering. They are women who live on farms, in suburban communities, and congested cities. Some are attendees at anti- or pro-gun rallies, others are victims of spousal abuse, many use guns for hunting and play, and others carry them and own them for self-defense. These aren’t the voices heard in national media, and their relationships to guns complicate our notions of the stereotypical pro- or anti-gunner.

Homsher grounds her interviews in the context of American pioneering history and the subsequent introduction of guns into the lives of Native Americans, chronicling the less obvious history of how guns figured in the lives of both pioneer and Native women. She then traces the enduring social impact of the romanticized Daniel Boone-type figure in American cultural history and how female gun owners have turned that icon on its head. The result is a book that is both eminently readable and intellectually satisfying.

Combining compelling narrative with balanced reporting, Homsher uses her examination of women’s varied relationships to guns as a way of defining what it means to be a citizen in the constitutional democracy of our United States, this first year of the new millennium. At a time when crime and violence, both national and international, loom large on TV and film screens, Women and Guns invites one to explore the rich cultural tapestry and complex points of view beneath the deceptive simplicity of our “shoot ‘em up” mythology. The ensuing discussions

prompted by this exploration can only add to collective wisdom.

Bronwyn Jones