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Abstract: Originally published in Contemporary Psychology: APA Review of Books, 1989, Vol 34(5), 500-501. Reviews the book, Hunting Humans by Elliott Leyton (1988). Several clear and unrelenting themes repeatedly surface throughout this book. The first is an oddly passionate disparagement of psychiatry. Which leads us to the second major theme of this book--the specialness of the author. Indeed, this specialness seems to emanate from his self-attributed ability to explain accurately that which psychiatry has failed so miserably to explain. The third dominant theme of this book is that multiple murderers "can only be accurately and objectively perceived as prime embodiment of their civilization, not twisted derangement." (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2012 APA, all rights reserved)

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Multiple Murder as Social Protest?

Review By: Joel A. Dvoskin

Review of: *Hunting Humans*

By: Elliott Leyton, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988. \$4.50 paperback

Several clear and unrelenting themes repeatedly surface throughout this book. The first is an oddly passionate disparagement of psychiatry. As we will see, psychiatry's sin, according to Leyton, is its attempt to make some sense out of what seems inherently unexplainable; that is, the apparently nonpsychotic commission of multiple murder. Unfortunately, it will also become clear that Leyton goes on to commit the same sin, exacerbated by what can only be called arrogance.

Which leads us to the second major theme of this book—the specialness of the author. Indeed, this specialness seems to emanate from his self-attributed ability to explain accurately that which psychiatry has failed so miserably to explain:

Now when the telephone rings at home, it is less likely to be a Dean...than it is to be a police officer from somewhere around the world enquiring if I might run off a social profile of his own troublesome case. Such activities lend a delicious touch of excitement to the dullness of middle age, doubly so since I do not have the moral reservations—which plague so many social scientists—about "helping the power structure," even when it is to stop the massacre of innocents. (p. 12)

The third dominant theme of this book is that multiple murderers "can only be accurately and objectively perceived as prime embodiment of their civilization, not twisted derangement" (p. 16). Leyton goes to extraordinary and painful lengths in this book to twist every piece of information toward his theory that multiple murder is "an extended campaign of vengeance" against "the class that has rejected [the multiple murderer]" (p. 23). Over and over again, Leyton describes these killings as "a kind of sub-political and conservative protest which nets the killer a substantial social profit of revenge, celebrity, identity, and sexual relief" (p. 26), and "a kind of primitive rebellion against the social order which has become an increasingly fashionable form of social art" (p. 27). He sees these acts as a "rebellion" that is "a protest against their perceived exclusion from society" (p. 27).

Early in this book, Leyton unintentionally lampoons himself with piercing irony: "I have never placed too much trust in the judgement of intellectuals, for too often they love their logical systems more than gritty reality" (p. 33). Unfortunately, this quote would serve as an excellent review of his own book.

Ultimately, there is an inherent weakness in any attempt to explain crime (or, for that matter, any human behavior) by prior experience; that is, how is it that so many other people with similar experiences have managed to avoid choosing a similar path? The answer, it seems to me, is that human beings are very complicated and that there is never one answer for anything. Thus, any

attempt at a unidi-mensional explanation of human behavior, including crime, is doomed to failure. Leyton's criticisms of such attempts are certainly justifiable. What I can't understand is how he can perceive himself as doing anything different.

Biographical Information for Authors: Elliott Leyton, an anthropologist at Memorial University (St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada), is author of *Dying Hard: The Ravages of Industrial Carnage*.

Joel A. Dvoskin is associate commissioner of the New York State Office of Mental Health (Albany) and assistant clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the New York University Medical School. He contributed the chapter "The Palm Beach County, Florida Forensic Mental Health Services Program: A Comprehensive Community-Based System" to H. J. Steadman, D. W. McCarty, and J. P. Morrissey (Eds.) *The Mentally Ill in Local Jails: Planning for Essential Services*.

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