

# Intimate Partner Violence in New Orleans: Gender, Race, and Reform, 1840-1900

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## Review

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**Baggett, Ashley.** *Intimate Partner Violence in New Orleans: Gender, Race, and Reform, 1840-1900*. University Press of Mississippi, \$65.00 ISBN 9781496815217

In *Intimate Partner Violence in New Orleans: Gender, Race, and Reform, 1840-1900*, Ashley Baggett looks at criminal cases in New Orleans involving intimate partner violence from 1840 to 1865 and 1880 to 1900. In order to expand the overall scope of her work, Baggett also relies on various state supreme court rulings in the South as well as several divorce cases and newspapers outside of New Orleans. Beginning in the antebellum South, Baggett traces the connections between gender expectations and intimate partner violence through the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Ultimately Baggett is able to demonstrate that a change in gender expectations has a direct impact on intimate partner violence and therefore gender expectations at any given time had real implications for the female victims of such violence.

Aside from a few anthology chapters and journal articles, *Intimate Partner Violence in New Orleans* is the first monograph to analyze intimate partner violence in both the antebellum and postbellum South. It is a welcome addition to a very slender body of scholarship consisting mainly of the work of David Peterson del Mar and Robin Sager. Currently, Baggett's is the only work that considers intimate partner violence in terms of time, space, and race. Baggett's analysis begins with a thorough examination of intimate partner violence found mostly in criminal court cases in New Orleans from 1840 to 1865. From these cases, she finds that courts intervened only in extreme circumstances, regardless of gender. As a result, for the most part, antebellum Southern women did not have the right to be free from intimate partner violence if they were not submissive to their male partners and antebellum Southern men had the right to use violence against their partners as it was part of the gendered expectation of patriarchy and male dominance.

Using the Civil War as a major turning point in gender expectations, Baggett shifts her analysis to intimate partner violence cases in New Orleans from 1880 to 1900. During this twenty-year period, Baggett successfully demonstrates how the shifts in gender expectations have a direct impact of intimate partner violence. However, Baggett's choice in skipping over court cases during Reconstruction raises a few important unanswered questions. As many historians have shown, the Civil War did indeed have an impact on gender roles and expectations. According to Baggett, "Essentially, the Civil War upended the 'separate spheres' ideal, and even after 1865 resurrecting antebellum gender expectations appeared impractical at best. Demanding more reciprocity, women expected the right to be free from violence and sought the help from the courts to enforce this right, which they overwhelmingly did during the 1870s and 1880s" (p. 17). Baggett also ties this shift in women successfully using the courts to be free

from intimate partner violence during this time to a change in marriage. Baggett calls this new view of marriage “reciprocal marriage” which was “based on emotion rather than female submission” (p. 99). This shift in marriage beginning in the 1870s in the South very closely resembles what scholars have identified as “compassionate marriage” beginning around midcentury in the North. In turn, this close resemblance begs the question of to what extent did judges and courts during Reconstruction influence gender expectations and intimate partner violence in New Orleans? Baggett’s explanation for excluding intimate partner violence cases during Reconstruction is that the judges and courts did not reflect local views on these matters but by ignoring such a crucial period of time, it remains unknown as to what had the greatest influence over these important changes.

The final shift in gender expectations and intimate partner violence analyzed by Baggett corresponds with the rise of Jim Crow in the South in the 1890s. After identifying and recognizing the positive progress made by Southern women to be free from intimate partner violence in the late 1870s and 1880s, Baggett demonstrates how the gender and racial expectations of Jim Crow reinforced white male privilege and dominance and effectively ended this earlier progress. Baggett also explains how progressives also ended this same positive progress in the North by the 1920s.

Overall, Baggett makes an impressive case in demonstrating that gender expectations mattered to nineteenth-century Americans in New Orleans and the South because these expectations had very real implications. *Intimate Partner Violence in New Orleans* is a highly valuable contribution to the existing scholarship on violence and power in the nineteenth-century South as it sheds light on some of the darkest corners of women’s lives at that time.

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