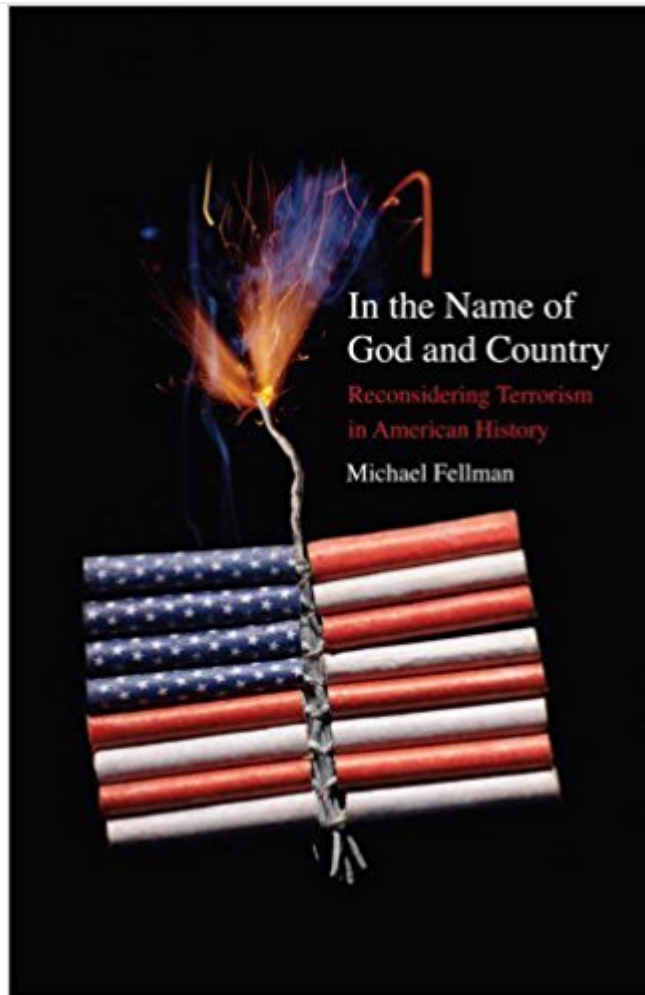


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In the Name of God and Country: Reconsidering Terrorism in American History



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Reviewed Work(s)

In the Name of God and Country: Reconsidering Terrorism in American History. By Michael Fellman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). Pp. 288. Cloth, \$29.95. Paper, \$20.00

In the Name of God and Country, by Michael Fellman, is one of many books that have emerged since September 11, 2001, that examine the historical role of terrorism. While most of those works focus primarily on acts of terror inflicted upon Americans by outside forces during the twentieth century, particularly by fundamentalist Muslims,^[1] Michael Fellman's book is unique, because it specifically examines how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Americans themselves, including the American state, employed terrorism to achieve specific objectives. In his work, Fellman employs a large number of testimonials, contemporary publications, and a wide variety of secondary sources to explain the social and cultural basis for the controversial actions that the American government undertook after September 11 in the War on Terror. Fellman defines terrorism as "the means of social domination to which state as well as non-state actors frequently revert when they drop the mask of legality" (2). Ultimately, *In the Name of God and Country* argues that there are two forms of terrorism, revolutionary and reactionary. In America, terrorism was used to assert "ownership of primary American...values – republicanism and Christianity" (12). The author argues that the actions of many American terrorists aimed to impose a particular definition of republicanism, and he adds that these actions were rooted in Protestant Christianity and its strong sense of good and evil.

To elucidate his concept of terrorism, Fellman examines five events from the late 1850s to the early 1900s in which he finds examples of American terrorism: John Brown's 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry and his subsequent trial, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Haymarket Riot of 1886, and the Philippines War of 1899-1902. Each, according to Fellman, presents examples of both revolutionary and reactionary terrorism undertaken by state and non-state actors. In all cases, the individuals or groups that Fellman identifies as 'terrorist' justify their actions either as defending

Christian morality, true republicanism and liberty, or both. The author employs the 1859 Harpers Ferry raid as the clearest example of his definition of American terrorism and its goals. John Brown's raid was a revolutionary action by a hard-line evangelical abolitionist, designed to destroy the slave system that he regarded as morally evil and fundamentally at odds with a republican society. Brown's subsequent show trial was an event that Fellman points to as an example of reactionary terrorism by the state justified by upholding the structure of the antebellum republic.

Fellman's two strongest chapters are those in which he expressly draws comparisons to the War on Terror. The author examines terrorism motivated by class conflict through the Haymarket Riot, where both labor and capital "wrapped the mantle of liberty and morality around its shoulders" and claimed that the other side, "subhuman and dehumanizing," threatened the tenets of republicanism and Christianity (144). The Haymarket affair was a clash not only between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie but also between immigrant masses and the American elite. Fellman explicitly notes that his analysis of the Riot and the ensuing trials, where (mis)treatment of the labor leaders was rooted in the first Red Scare as well as the recognition and distrust of a distinct 'other,' is meant to help the reader draw parallels between anti-communism and the anti-Islamism reaction of the Bush administration "as an exchange between revolutionary and reactionary terrorism" (144).

In his final example of American terrorism, Fellman links American mistreatment of Filipinos during the Philippines War to the American persecution of Native Americans, and he notes that in both instances, those facing conquest employed "terrorism...to push back and kill the invaders; in response, American soldiers behaved with equal or greater brutality" (187). The author discusses how Americans were committed to assimilating the colonial, predominantly-Catholic Filipinos into a republican, Protestant system – the so-called "White Man's Burden." Citing examples of the racism exhibited by those same Americans, such as calling the Filipinos "khakaic" and repeatedly referring to their sub-human status, and practices used against Filipino rebels, such as the "water cure" (strikingly similar to our modern "water-boarding"), the author clearly draws comparisons between the Philippine War and American involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. In his coda, Fellman

relates state behavior in the five events to the Bush administration's actions in the War on Terror, and he takes the position that the methods employed by the United States to fight Islamic terrorism are a form of terrorism as well. He concludes that "terrorism provokes terrorism in a cyclical and reciprocal manner" (235).

Fellman relates his work to Jill Lepore's *The Name of War* and Peter Silver's *Our Savage Neighbors* to demonstrate that terrorist acts have played a role in American history since before the Revolution, as European colonists and Native Americans fought each other and committed atrocities ranging from kidnapping to outright slaughter for territory and resources.^[2] Lepore concentrates on King Philip's War, and Silver looks at the colonists' conflicts with Indians in Pennsylvania. Both authors focus primarily on contemporary language surrounding the violence and how that language played a formative role in American identity. Where Fellman is concerned however, is not so much in the words surrounding violence but the violence itself, and how those violent events affected the shaping of American society. Beverly Gage, in *The Day Wall Street Exploded*, and Joseph T. McCann, in *Terrorism on American Soil*, both explore what Gage calls the "First Age of Terror" and the role that terrorism played in shaping American society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.^[3] Fellman's book demonstrates that the "First Age of Terror" starts farther back in American history than either author considered and expands the central role of violence in America's past.

Fellman presents a compelling argument about American involvement in terrorism and presents it in a clear, straightforward manner. He successfully shows that some of the actions taken by the American state and the American people in the name of republicanism and Christianity can indeed be considered terrorist acts and that the majority of the American people accept those actions without questioning their nature. However, in doing so, the author expands the definition of terrorism so broadly that it becomes difficult to distinguish real terrorism from 'mere' violence. Guerrilla fighting, unjust trials, murder, bad military discipline, class conflict and racial conflict – all fall under Fellman's definition of terrorism. This is perhaps too simplistic for a concept that has generated hundreds of attempts at definition, an endeavor Fellman himself explores in a "Note on Terms" at the end of his book. The reader may

have been better served if the “Note” were placed at the beginning of the book, so as to better understand the author’s definition of terrorism within the larger context of study on the subject. Despite this criticism, *In the Name of God and Country* asks us to reconsider our established notions of terrorism, and America’s relationship with terrorism, as well as the role of violence in the formation of the modern American state. Even for those who disagree with Michael Fellman’s interpretation of terrorism, *In the Name of God and Country* is an invaluable read for scholars of American history of all varieties.

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[1] Examples include: Mark Ensalaco, *Middle Eastern Terrorism: From Black September to September 11*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Raymond Ibrahim, *The Al Qaida Reader*, (New York: Doubleday, 2007); and Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *History and September 11th*, *Critical Perspectives on the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

[2] Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998); and Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

[3] Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in Its First Age of Terrorism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Joseph T. McCann, *Terrorism on American Soil: A Concise History of Plots and Perpetrators from the Famous to the Forgotten* (Boulder, CO: Sentient Publications, 2006).



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