

Affari Esteri—including the consular files, series P (United States), and series Z (international incidents). The detailed paraphrasing of these official Italian sources marks this book's contribution to the scholarly literature.

This book's archival citations will be useful to scholars writing the local or ethnic history of fin-de-siècle Colorado, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and West Virginia. It explores in detail, for an English-language audience, Italian diplomatic efforts in regard to a series of horrific community murders in the United States. However, this book surely represents a lost opportunity for the author to update her arguments beyond the dissertation and to engage with the current work of other scholars. The relevant fields of ethnic studies, diplomatic history, and criminal justice have developed in the past fourteen years, and this history of Italian lynchings could have informed (and been informed by) the ongoing debates over identity, social justice, human rights, and immigration in the United States.

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Work Cited

Foerster, Robert F. 1919. *The Italian Emigration of Our Times*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

"No One Helped": Kitty Genovese, New York City, and the Myth of Urban Apathy.
By Marcia M. Gallo.
Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015.
240 pages.

The murder of Kitty Genovese has seeped deeply into American popular culture and imagination. Many know the basic outlines of the story: how in 1964 a young woman was murdered in her New York City neighborhood while many of her neighbors witnessed but did not attempt to stop the attack or alert authorities. Kitty Genovese became a symbol of urban apathy and of how Americans had become increasingly numb to the plight of their neighbors.

The fiftieth anniversary of her murder saw the publication of three books about the case, as well as a documentary film titled *The Witness*, which featured extensive interviews with and participation of Genovese's brother.¹ The most scholarly of the books is Marcia M. Gallo's *"No One Helped."* All of the

remembrances have shed more light on the murder and called into question the historical narrative of events that has had such a profound impact over the ensuing years.

The basic facts of the case are that late one night in March 1964 the twenty-eight-year-old Genovese was returning home to her Kew Gardens, Queens, apartment after finishing her shift as a manager at a local bar. On the street, she was attacked twice by an assailant, who stabbed her multiple times and sexually assaulted her. She would die from her wounds before reaching the hospital. Her killer, Winston Moseley, was arrested a few days later and found guilty of the murder. He would spend the rest of his life in prison.

The attack merited only a brief mention in local newspapers. Genovese's name and her tragic end would have been quickly forgotten had A. M. Rosenthal, the hard-charging metropolitan editor of *The New York Times*, not learned from New York City Police Commissioner Michael Murphy that police responding to the crime were shocked that local residents admitted they heard Genovese's screams but chose to do nothing.

Rosenthal saw a story and put it on the front page of the *Times*, headlined "37 Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police," two weeks after the murder. Rosenthal and the *Times* turned Genovese's murder into a morality tale. The real perpetrators, in the paper's retelling, were the residents of Kew Gardens who refused to help a dying woman. The city had become a heartless place where the idea of community was disintegrating. Because of this article, Kitty Genovese's name would be forever tied to a narrative that allegedly exposed a deep sickness in the American soul and touched a chord with many Americans. Most significantly, psychologists John Darley and Bibb Latané were influenced by the murder to conduct a series of experiments on how individuals reacted to threats on others. Their findings, which came to be known as the "bystander effect," became a staple of social psychology.

In recent years, journalists and amateur researchers have poked holes in the original narrative, starting with the very first *New York Times* article, which reported that these thirty-seven witnesses watched in silence three separate attacks that lasted more than ninety minutes. There were, it has been since shown, two attacks, not three; most of the witnesses heard Genovese's attack but only a handful actually saw anything; and the number of actual witnesses has always been in doubt and was contradicted even within the *Times* story.

It can no longer be said that no one did anything to help Kitty Genovese. Some people yelled out their window at Moseley, causing him to stop attacking Genovese and temporarily leave the scene. Someone did call the police, although their arrival was delayed, most likely because many of the witnesses thought they were hearing a lovers' quarrel. And one woman left her apartment and cradled the dying Genovese until the ambulance arrived.

We also now have a much better idea of Kitty Genovese the person, rather than just the victim. In reclaiming Genovese's life, Gallo does a terrific job of reconstructing the story of this young Brooklyn-born Italian American woman. The rest of the Genovese family would eventually leave the city for suburban Connecticut, but Kitty was drawn to the excitement of the city and made a life there. Most significantly, we now know that Kitty was in a committed lesbian relationship with the woman with whom she lived in that Kew Gardens apartment. At the time, it was noted that Genovese had a "roommate," but Kitty's sexuality was kept private, despite being known by the police and reporters.

Gallo, who also is the author of *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, gives a sensitive account of Kitty's relationship with her partner, Mary Ann Zielonko, as well as of the life she created for herself in New York City. Gallo shows a twenty-something woman enjoying the freedoms of the city: folk music clubs in Greenwich Village and restaurant evenings with friends, in addition to her work at local bars, which she found fulfilling. For five decades since her murder, Kitty Genovese was an abstraction; with this book Gallo resurrects the real-life young woman.

Gallo's larger thesis about the murder and its legacy, however, is somewhat problematic. She attempts to disprove the theory of "urban apathy" by highlighting the various forms of left-wing political organizing in the city, whether it be gay rights or African American protests, during the period. Of course, it would have been perfectly possible for Genovese's neighbors to have ignored her cries at the same time that other New Yorkers organized to fight for what they believed was a better society: Those are not mutually exclusive scenarios. Gallo is strongest when discussing the connection between the murder and the later development of feminist organizations such as the Kitty Genovese Women's Project and the Kitty Genovese Memorial Anti-Rape Collective, which promoted women's self-defense. Too often, however, Gallo's political perspective takes the reader away from the story of Kitty Genovese.

Gallo's dislike for A. M. Rosenthal's conservatism permeates the book. He had requested that the epitaph "He Kept the Paper Straight" be carved on his tombstone, a reference to his desire to balance out the liberal tendencies of his reporters; but, as Gallo notes, for "the closeted gay reporters who worked under his supervision . . . and were acutely aware of his overtly homophobic attitudes, the double entendre is especially fitting" (51). But mostly, Gallo faults Rosenthal as the prime "creator of the myth of urban apathy" in the Genovese case.

Rosenthal wove an elaborate morality play based on dubious facts to make sense of a senseless act of violence. However, his motives in publicizing the case were not necessarily malicious. He hid the fact of Genovese's sexuality to protect her reputation, which he must have thought would have been

blemished had the general public known the truth at the time. And, as Gallo notes, Rosenthal would admit many years later that his interest in the Genovese case was driven by the death of his sister Bess as a young girl. One night Bess was confronted by a man who exposed himself to her, and she ran home to escape him; in Rosenthal's telling, Bess was sweating profusely from the experience and contracted pneumonia and died two days later. To Rosenthal, his sister Bess was "murdered" just the same as Genovese. And he wasn't going to let the city or the country forget Kitty Genovese's name (159–161).

Rosenthal's narrative also deflected attention from the dramatic increase in crime that the city was beginning to experience: In the *Times's* coverage, which Rosenthal shaped and directed, the fault of this vicious murder lay not entirely with the perpetrator but with the broader society. In 1964, Kitty Genovese was one of 636 murder victims in the city, more than twice the number of murders the city had experienced a decade earlier. A decade after Genovese's murder, the city murder rate increased by almost 150 percent. Reported rapes more than tripled. Genovese's murderer, Winston Moseley, was African American, and by playing up the culpability of the predominantly white Kew Gardens residents, the *Times* also managed to avoid racializing her murder. (Once arrested, Moseley confessed to having murdered other women, one of whom was an African American woman killed weeks before he killed Kitty Genovese. That murder received little press attention.)

Why did Rosenthal's narrative of Kitty Genovese's murder have such an impact? One cannot exaggerate the legacy of the Holocaust on the story. The question of how great evil is perpetrated in society was consuming postwar U.S. society. Hannah Arendt's (1963) *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, with its theme of the "banality of evil," had been published the year before Genovese's murder, and the image of dozens of ordinary citizens refusing the help a young woman being assaulted was the epitome of the banality of evil. The Genovese murder provided a ready explanation and affirmation of Arendt's powerful and popular thesis: Evil occurs when average people do nothing. Not all of the original narrative about the murder was a myth: Some neighbors did hear her screams for help and did nothing. If anything, the case of Kitty Genovese's murder should convince us to be skeptical of grand sociological explanations and historical morality tales that flatten our understanding of a complex past.

After reading Gallo's solidly researched book, readers can no longer simply accept the standard narrative about Kitty Genovese's murder and the claims of urban apathy. Good scholarship adds the elements of complexity and texture to history that journalism and conventional wisdom too often ignore. Gallo has done that by reconstructing Genovese's life and her senseless murder, as well as recounting how the original myths surrounding her murder took root. She asks us to think more broadly about the ways in which historical narratives build

up around important events and sometimes cloud our view of the past. When “*No One Helped*” veers too far from the story of the Genovese murder and into a broader discussion of social activism of the time, the book loses much of its force and becomes distracting. But when Gallo picks apart the conventional wisdom of Kitty Genovese’s murder and reintroduces the public to the “real” Kitty Genovese, not merely a victim, she makes an important contribution to the academic literature.

The best comment on the Genovese murder comes from psychologist Stanley Milgram and sociologist Paul Hollander in an essay quoted in the book that bemoans the fact that “the crime against Miss Genovese no longer exists in and of itself. It is rapidly being assimilated to the uses and ideologies of the day” (108–109). It is a wise statement and one that historians, journalists, and the general public should keep in mind. With this book, Gallo has at least brought the real Kitty Genovese back to life.

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Note

1. A review of *The Witness*, by James Solomon, appears in this issue.

Work Cited

Arendt, Hannah. 1963. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. New York: Penguin Books.