

Herbert Shapiro. *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988) xvi, 565 pp., \$16.95 paper.

In scholarly, but more often popular, thought there is the benighted attitude or inclination to believe that racial violence is located at the margins of the American experience. Violent clashes between ethnic groups are subtly framed as “outbursts,” thus implying an aberration from normal relations. Because ignorance or stupidity is branded the ugly parent of such behavior, we are led easily to overlook the significance of such violence.

The overthrow of this myth is of vital importance. Consequently, the publication of Herbert Shapiro’s *White Violence and Black Response* is a heralded, scholarly event. For Shapiro has proven what many have tried to ignore: that violence, particularly racial violence, is a basic feature of American history.

White Violence and Black Response tells the grim history of American racial violence from Reconstruction to the early 1960s. Central to this story is the issue of power relations between communities of differing color. Shapiro contends that white violence constitutes an easy means of maintaining societal supremacy. Two pillars support this vicious domination: race and class.

Shapiro does not isolate racial violence in the South; rather, he traces it in both halves of the Union. There are two themes regarding white violence against blacks: 1) its primitive, monotonous constancy; 2) governmental indifference and inertia — if not, outright toleration — in dealing with white brutality. The monotony of white savagery works as a brilliant foil for Shapiro’s chronicle of black responses. Pragmatic and ideological discussions emerged among African Americans over how to confront white racism. *White Violence and Black Response* splendidly covers the many voices in this debate. Shapiro details the positions, ranging from accommodationist to militant, of such groups and persons as: The Niagara Movement, the NAACP, Pan Africanism, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Jr., the Black Muslims, and many more. The ever-present target, variously expressed by these responses, was the obvious ending of white violence, and the realization of full citizenship and, by implication, economic and societal equality.

The context of race and class provides Shapiro a framework for his discussion of racial violence. This smooth equation, however, lacks the ambiguous — but nonetheless powerful — variable of the psychology of racism. Granted psychology is a wide, complex terrain, but so too is racial hatred and violence. A scholarly work on racial violence is weakened when its author ignores this issue.

White Violence and Black Response is still a significant contribution to the study of American race relations. Shapiro is to be applauded for the breadth of his detailed research. As the work’s copious footnotes prove,

Shapiro has synthesized a tremendous amount of material and has delivered a lucid, compassionate history. His prose is clear; his sense of narrative detail sharp. Shapiro says he is at work on a companion volume, one that will deal in greater depth with the civil rights struggles of the 1960s and beyond. *White Violence and Black Response* is an impressive overture; we eagerly await the sequel.

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Gary Soto. *Baseball in April and Other Stories*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990) 111 pp., \$14.95.

Gary Soto's previous prose collections (*Living Up the Street: Narrative Recollections*—1985, *Small Faces*—1986, and *Lesser Evils: Ten Quartets*—1988) all contained stories about growing up, but this latest book focuses exclusively on the trials and tribulations of children and young teenagers. The eleven sketches in *Baseball in April* range in subject from broken Barbie dolls to championship marble tournaments, and all reveal a compassionate, understanding insight as well as the deft handiwork of a fine writer. For those who do not understand Spanish, the author has supplied a short appendix with translations of words and expressions. Artist Barry Root's dustjacket depicting a red pickup full of boys and baseball gear is a splendid one that invites the reader to delve into the volume.

The title piece (a revision of a story of the same title in *Living Up the Street*) shows how young boys and their springtime enthusiasm for baseball evolve into summertime disinterest when distractions such as television and girls gradually draw them in different directions. "Broken Chains" sketches the adolescent concern for physical development, while "Seventh Grade" is about a boy who takes French in order to impress a girl on whom he has a crush. Soto explores family relationships in "Mother and Daughter" and "Growing Up," and provides sketches about youthful enterprises that begin as failures but turn out as successes in "La Bamba" and "The No-Guitar Blues." All of the pieces are well-written and engaging, but the best is perhaps the last in the collection, "Growing Up," about a 10th grade girl who decides she is too much of an adult to go on the family's annual vacation. She remains with her godmother, alternately bored and terribly concerned that her relatives have been killed in an accident. When the family returns with tales of great fun and excitement, they go out to eat together and her thoughts reveal to the reader that she has learned how important they all are to her.