

Richard M. Weaver, M.E. Bradford, Clyde Wilson, and Grady McWhiney, among others. They believe that if there is any hope of restoring ordered liberty and self-government, it will spring from this intellectual tradition. What seems to them equally evident is that the renewal of American civilization will not emerge from the Contract With America or from any half-measure cooked up inside the Beltway. Our forefathers knew that good government worked its way up from the household through local communities and churches, the states, and finally, and only as a last resort, to Washington, D.C. They also understand that when government ceases to serve households and the intermediate associations that shield them from centralized power, it is up to the people themselves to put things right. By helping to reopen the debate over the principles our imperial rulers hoped were long dead—states' rights, nullification, and secession—James R. and Walter D. Kennedy have struck a decisive blow at the very heart of the American Empire. Doubtless it will not be the last from these gentlemen.

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SCIENCE

Crime Genes and Other Delusions

by Kevin Lamb

In his closing argument before jurors in the O.J. Simpson murder trial, Deputy District Attorney Christopher A. Darden described Simpson as being "out of control" when he allegedly killed his former wife and Ronald Goldman. Mr. Darden pointed to a series of events in the hours before the brutal killings that, having ignited the short fuse of Mr. Simpson's unstable temperament, turned a "homicidal fit" into a "rage killing."

The renewed concerns over a recent University of Maryland conference on "The Meaning and Significance of Research on Genetics and Criminal Behavior," cast new light on Mr. Darden's

metaphor. What ignites and fuels this short burning fuse? One's environment or genes? Is there a predisposition toward impulsive violence or is violent crime simply a matter of poverty and oppression?

Sociologists like Dorothy Nelkin argue that "social factors" generate violent crime, although a growing amount of evidence shows that violent behavior stems from several interacting factors—both social and biological. Sometimes referred to as "criminogenetic traits," the risk factors of age, gender, race, personality, intelligence, temperament, childhood development, peer influence, and socioeconomic status are solid and persistent correlates of crime.

By focusing upon social forces alone, critics continue to ignore other important factors that contribute to violent crime. The line of reasoning that indicts "society" for the conduct of violent predators is a fallacy of early 20th-century behaviorism, namely that the human mind is like a blank slate, that all human behavior is determined by social conditioning.

Critics also maintain that no one has identified a gene for "crime." This is simply a red herring. Genes influence behavior indirectly. As Thomas Bouchard, director of the Minnesota Twin Studies Project, points out, genetic influences on behavior are mainly distal rather than proximate. Recent findings from twin and adoption studies confirm this. To contend that no "crime gene" exists does not discredit behavior genetic research, not to mention the fact that the discovery of a "crime gene" would astonish the scientific community.

Advancements in behavioral genetics over the past 20 years have changed the way researchers view the effects of heredity and environment on behavioral development. Once thought of as nature *versus* nurture, hereditary and environmental influences are no longer viewed as rivals but interacting forces, or quite simply nature *via* nurture. The outcome of this interaction takes the form of individual differences in personality traits and characteristics, which produces both social and antisocial behavior.

It is not enough for critics to explain away crime as merely the product of social conditions. They must clarify *how* these conditions produce violent behavior, *why* biological factors are irrelevant, and *why* behavior genetic research is unable to determine the "root causes" of

crime. Arguably the most comprehensive study of "root causes" to date, a leading panel of experts under the auspices of the National Research Council found that both social and biological factors influence violent crime.

One of the findings corroborated by behavioral scientists (one which sociologists are reluctant to acknowledge) is that the demise of the traditional family environment acts as a catalyst for juvenile delinquency. As David Lykken, a professor of psychology at the University of Minnesota, points out in his recent study of antisocial personalities, dysfunctional parenting plays a major role in violent crime. The lack of moral guidance, when combined with individual differences in personality and temperament, explains delinquent behavior better than economic status alone.

Although a disproportionate number of violent offenders are disadvantaged, not all disadvantaged people are criminals. What Columbia University psychiatrist David Abrahamsen noted 50 years ago remains valid today, that "so-called 'poor-environment' cannot be considered a sufficient explanation for criminal behavior, because a number of law-abiding citizens have lived and grown up under unfavorable conditions. A poor environment can only be regarded as causative insofar as it is combined with a certain disposition in the individual making latent criminal tendencies manifest." By the same token, a similar set of circumstances may not always yield identical results. Anyone who unknowingly touches a hot stove will flinch in pain, but the difference between someone who immediately treats a blistered hand or someone who violently strikes a spouse for leaving the stove on may have as much to do with one's predisposition as with sheer circumstance.

The same holds true for understanding the "root causes" of crime. Often, these so-called "root causes" reflect inaccurate assumptions about violent crime, such as that "society" is somehow responsible for crime because of failed social welfare policies. As Dwight Ingle once put it, lack of water is not the cause of fire. Individual differences in personality, intelligence, and temperament explain violent behavior more comprehensively than inadequate sociological theories.

Moreover, survey data presented by Lee Ellis, a professor of sociology at Minot State University, reveal that soci-

ologists often view social problems through an ideological prism. Rutgers University sociologist Irving Louis Horowitz argues that sociologists promote outdated and questionable theories of crime. A once promising academic discipline, the demise of sociology exemplifies the toll of political correctness.

Most social critics will never recognize the value of behavior genetic research for the simple reason that it challenges the deeply held egalitarian beliefs of social scientists. When scholars begin to claim that too much is made over the “validity of research data” rather than “real issues,” scientific research becomes hostage to the political agendas of social activists. By opposing a legitimate field of scientific study, ideologically driven scholars undermine not only their own work but the credibility of the behavioral sciences as well.

The message this sends is that, when it comes to examining socially sensitive issues, ignorance is better than knowledge. Such a narrow-minded view should concern anyone who values accuracy and academic integrity in the pursuit of scientific research.

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THEATER

One Flea Spare & Other New Plays

by *Katherine Dalton*

Actors Theatre of Louisville started its new play festival 20 years ago—that’s a long life in the American theater, and the Humana Festival of New American Plays achieved institution status several seasons back. Unfortunately, the festival is now a little like a fully endowed congregation that no longer has to look to itself to underwrite its annual operating budget. The altar flowers are beautiful, but the spirit is wanting.

There were two good full-length plays this year and some entertaining shorts, and ATL deserves credit for regularly producing new work. Most theaters can-

not, or think they cannot, afford to. But there is more good work out there than ATL is finding, and I am convinced a festival that has been so-so in recent years could be so much better. Part of the problem may be in the way the festival is organized. ATL’s practice now is to commission plays from established (or at least working) playwrights, and well-known journalists or novelists. That sounds like a good idea, and sometimes works, but more often it does not. This year, for example, the biggest names wrote the shortest plays, some of them nice but sketches at best. Also this year, as has happened before, one of the best plays (*One Flea Spare*) was originally produced elsewhere, which means ATL cannot take the credit for fostering it.

Every season I wish once again that ATL would return to its original practice of holding an open contest—keeping some commissions, but spending some of the Humana grant to hire a legion of part-time readers to cull the large number of plays the theater would surely receive. I am convinced that out of this gargantuan slush pile would come a much stronger festival. Plus ATL would once again discover new playwrights—something the theater cannot really claim anymore, despite all its good work, its well-earned prestige, and all the hours and sweat its staff put into producing a dozen plays at once.

One of the best pieces this year was by Prospect, Kentucky, native Naomi Wallace. I wish it had not taken several London productions for anyone in the States to take interest in her work, but never mind. *One Flea Spare* is set in England in 1665 during the plague. A child and a seaman break into a wealthy merchant couple’s house, forcing them all to live together for a month under quarantine. The husband patronizes the sailor and puts him to work, scrubbing the boards with vinegar against infection, while the wife (played by the excellent Peggy Cowles) falls in love with him. The fey child, a servant girl masquerading as her dead master’s dead daughter, focuses on surviving.

It is an ugly, sexual story about class and death, with a young actor playing (to my discomfort) a child that knows too much too early. But the play is redeemed by Ms. Wallace’s skill. She is a powerful writer with beautiful if sometimes terrifying imagery, who has written a good play with *One Flea Spare* and may someday write a great one.

The festival’s other full-length success was by Joan Ackermann, a former *Sports Illustrated* writer who is now co-artistic director of the Mixed Company theater in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. *The Batting Cage* concerns sisters Julianna and Wilson, who have come to St. Augustine to spread the ashes of their third sister, and to grieve in their very different ways. Ackermann has a reporter’s eye for ridiculous detail and has a good track record of quirky comedies (including *Zara Spook and Other Lures*, set at a bass ’n’ gal tournament). Unlike too many comic writers, Ackermann is funny, and this play transcends her usual hilarity with a poignancy and seriousness that is very nicely done. Veanne Cox was particularly good as the shopaholic divorcee Julianna, and so was ATL apprentice Justin Hagan, as the hotel room-service waiter (with a barnacle growing in his ear) who befriends her.

Of the shorter pieces, the best included *What I Meant Was*, by *Prelude to a Kiss* author Craig Lucas. This play is a Thanksgiving dinner fantasy conversation in which each member of a dysfunctional family actually says what he thinks. John Patrick Shanley (best known for his screenplays *Moonstruck* and *Joe Versus the Volcano*) had two one-acts about love and relationships that were slight, but which showed his nice ear for conversation.

There were also two plays I could respect if not like: *Jack and Jill* by the pseudonymous Jane Martin (who is probably ATL producing director Jon Jory and/or friends and relatives), and an Anne Bogart-and-company created piece called *Going, Going, Gone*. Martin’s play traces a very modern couple’s troubled relationship over time, and while the piece is well constructed and was skillfully set in ATL’s round Bingham Theater, it is maddening to watch. The two characters are so annoying that it’s impossible to care what happens to them.

Going, Going, Gone is not a play, but a created piece using various “texts” on quantum physics. Anne Bogart, co-director of the Saratoga International Theater Institute, has directed some of my favorite and least favorite theater pieces—among the former the ATL production of Elmer Rice’s *The Adding Machine*, which was superb.

Ms. Bogart demands that her actors learn great physical control, and that their body language always convey some-