

Book Review: *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State*

Juan Sebastian Toro holds a BA Honours in Classical Studies from the University of Guelph.

Book Under Review

Reddy, Chandan. 2011. *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

In *Freedom with Violence*, Chandan Reddy studies an important contradiction of the modern liberal state—its claim to provide freedom from violence for its citizens depends on its ability to deploy violence against peoples who are perceived as irrational. Beginning with an analysis of President Obama’s signing of the 2010 National Defence Authorization Act—which also included the Matthew Shephard (gay torture) and the James Byrd, Jr (black torture) Hate Crimes Prevention Act—the book examines the U.S. state’s increasing power over the course of the twentieth century and attempts to develop a new way of understanding the role played by race, sexuality, and national citizenship throughout U.S. history.

As a self-proclaimed “queer of colour” scholar-activist, Reddy encourages the reading of selected American texts produced in the early and later twentieth century “against the grain” (18-19). The book introduces its readers to works like W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk* and Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* and, through the application of analytical concepts (drawing on Michel Foucault and Walter Benjamin), it provides the reader with a new interpretation of the notion of freedom in a neoliberal state. The analysis offers insight into violence as the cost of freedom, given that the struggles for freedom (whether they be for racial/sexual minorities or independent statehood) go hand in hand with violence towards “x” (in this case, people of a certain race and/or sexual orientation).

Issues such as race, sexuality, nation, and class as well as the economics, sociology, and politics in twentieth-century United States are analyzed throughout the text, providing a new perspective on the state and the rise of nationalism in the U.S. Primarily intended for an academic audience, the work contains much complex sociological, political, and historical analysis. The book’s conclusion, however, pulls together the interpretation of various texts in an effective manner that is easy to understand even for general readers. Freedom comes at the cost of violence and does not

always look the same throughout history, nor does it remain static in a society.

Freedom with Violence provides a new understanding of the legitimate state violence monopoly that modern neoliberal states possess and its relation to providing its citizens with freedom from violence. It does so through a well-researched and concise analysis, which draws on a variety of disciplines, giving the reader cause to reflect on the heavy costs that are associated with the freedoms many of us take for granted.