

crooks,” Amore says. “There are no Brad Pitts out there stealing art, and there is no Dr. No. The first James Bond film had Dr. No holding Goya’s *The Duke of Wellington*, which was missing at the time, and that image has persisted. In fact, *The Duke of Wellington* had been stolen by an old-age pensioner in England who was unhappy with his taxes. It’s not the Hollywood stories you’d expect. More like a Coen Brothers film.”

On rare occasions, thieves actually get away with it. Amore selected his book title because Rembrandts are among the most frequently stolen artworks (“They’re the perfect storm of value and name recognition,” he says). One of the book’s more colorful stories is the case of Myles Connor, a Massachusetts con man in trouble with the law in 1975. Told by a district attorney that he could help his cause by recovering a stolen Rembrandt, Connor stole one from Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, hid it for a time, and then delivered



The Concert by Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675). Now missing, it is one of only 34 verified Vermeers.

are stealing problems, not paintings. About a month after *Stealing Rembrandts* was published, a Rembrandt sketch was stolen from an exhibit in Marina Del Rey, California. After a publicity blitz that included Amore doing radio and television interviews in which he urged the perpetrators to give the sketch up because they’d never be able to sell it, the work was anonymously returned.

But no such luck on the 13 Gardner paintings, at least not yet. They’ve been missing for more than two decades and Amore is still working on the investigation every day, running down leads and “making the haystack smaller.” Someday, he vows, that

needle will turn up, which is one reason he has thus far put off suggestions that he write a book devoted solely to the Gardner theft and investigation.

“In my mind, there is no book until they’re recovered,” he says. “The good news about art theft is that more than 70 percent of them are recovered. And that’s a number that will go up when I get the Gardner paintings back.”

COURTESY OF THE ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

it up and got his deal. He never admitted he was the thief until writing his autobiography years later. “That’s the best example I’ve found of art being stolen as a get-out-of-jail-free card,” Amore says.

More often, however, art theft doesn’t pan out even when thieves can overcome their own ineptitude, because masterpiece paintings are as impossible to sell as they are valuable. As Amore puts it, art thieves



Visit harvardmag.com/extras to view an original video on the Gardner heist, as well as additional images of the stolen paintings.

The Rampage of the Rufus Buck Gang

A gritty Western depicts a brief, violent crusade.

by CRAIG LAMBERT

IN THE SUMMER of 1895, in the Indian Territory that became Oklahoma, a ragtag gang of five teenaged boys—all black, Native American, or of mixed race—went on a vicious two-week spree of robbery, rape, and murder. The apparently random violence terrified not only the local white settlers but also the neighboring Indians and African-American

freedmen. But the violence wasn’t random. The gang’s leader, Rufus Buck, the 18-year-old son of a black mother and Creek father, burned with a zealot’s passion: he dreamed that his gang’s spree would trigger an Indian uprising that would expel the illegal white majority and reclaim the whole Territory for its native people.

That true story forms the basis for the

2011 novel *I Dreamt I Was in Heaven: The Rampage of the Rufus Buck Gang*, by Leonce Gaiter ’80. His fictional account (buckrampage.com) of the gang’s bloody tear through the dusty Indian country had its seeds in a clipping given to him 20 years earlier that included the only known photograph of the five outlaws. “They looked so young that it was quite shocking,” he says. “Some

O P E N B O O K

India's Sacred Geography

interconnected pilgrimage sites throughout India. Now she explicates that interwoven world-view of the sacred and the profane in *India: A Sacred Geography* (Harmony Books, \$27)—a sweeping examination of texts, places, and beliefs that may also help to explain to Western readers the rise of place-based Hindu nationalism in Indian politics. From chapter 2, “What Is India?”

In ancient Greece, Eratosthenes, in the third century B.C.E., was the first to coin the word “geography.” He clearly saw his work—the mapping of the known world, the *oikoumene*, and the calculation of its circumference—to be quite distinct from the kind of world description found in Greek myths or in the epics of Homer. Ernst Cassirer has distinguished the “geometric space” that concerned Eratosthenes and, a few years later, Euclid,

and for the multitude of gods and goddesses one encounters in the temples and public spaces of India. Less well known, however, is the fact that Hindus have been equally avid geographers who have described with considerable detail the mountains, river systems, and holy places of India. For the most part, Hindu mythology has been studied by one group of scholars, primarily historians of religion, while the geographical traditions have been studied and catalogued by another group, primarily British and Indian civil servants, historical and cultural geographers. The great geography scholar Bimala C. Law speaks for this latter group when he confesses, “One finds it tedious to read the legendary history of *tirthas* or holy places, but to a geographer it will never be a fruitless study.”

Here we look at mythology and geography together, in a single view, to see what we can learn of this complex conception of the land of India. Rather than focusing exclusively on texts, however, we begin “on the ground,” with shrines, rivers, and hilltops where pilgrims have enacted the sense of connectedness that is part of pilgrimage. This intersection of mythology and geography reveals how the people who have come to be called Hindus have “mapped” their world and how they have understood the land they have called *Bhārata* in relation to the larger universe. There is arguably no other major culture that has sustained over so many centuries, and across such diverse regions, a fundamentally locative or place-oriented world-view.

The boys in the gang aren't even faintly romantic villains, but lost, unloved souls.

of them looked like babies. There was something incredibly compelling about that photograph, and I immediately felt, ‘My God, I would love to write about that.’”

Yet the writing came hard, and Gaiter, whose 2005 novel *Bourbon Street* is a noir tale set in 1958 New Orleans, made multiple false starts. Still, he did extensive historical research, mining century-old news clippings and court documents. “This was an extraordinarily difficult piece to get my head around,” he explains. “You have people who are doing horrible things, but you must understand *why* they are doing them. I'm not asking you to sympathize with their actions, but I want you to find their motives, given the personal and sociopolitical contexts, compelling. I wanted to create a dramatic story—I *do* write to entertain—but I also wanted a story that gives you a reason to read it. Not just something where you say afterwards, ‘Well, that was unpleasant.’”

He finally hit on the story's rhythm, register, and key—a jazz buff, he says that “Music is my principal metaphor for everything”—by expanding its scope to include the politics of the Indian Territory



Sacred scene in a sacred landscape: “Radha and Krishna Walk in a Flowering Grove,” Kota Master, 18th century

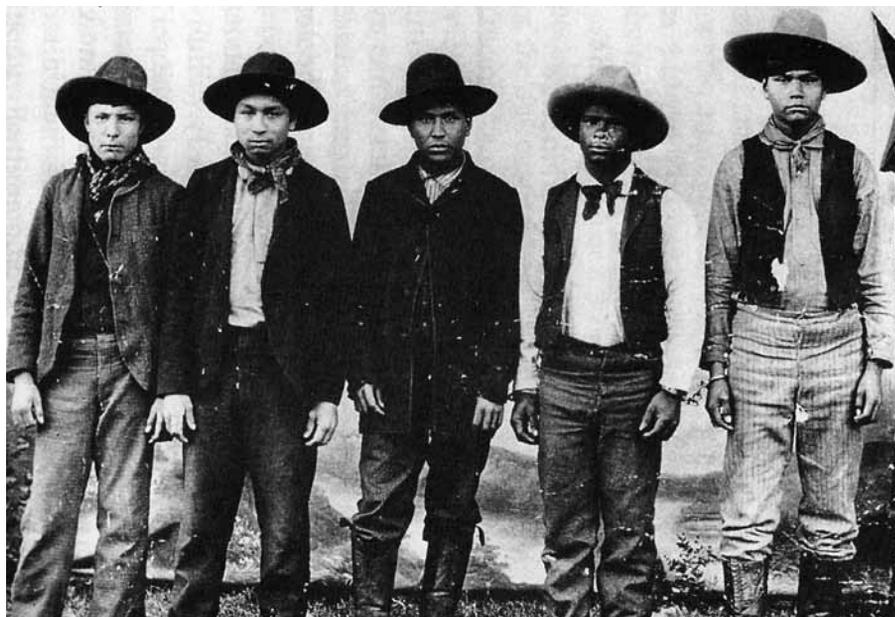
from what he calls the “space of perception” and “the space of myth.”...While Olympus and Delphi retained their mythic charge in Greece itself, the study of geography began to diverge from the image of the world composed by the great Greek mythmakers....

Students of Hinduism or travelers in India quickly become aware of what prolific mythmakers Hindus have been. The Hindu tradition is famous for its mythol-



Leonce Gaiter

COURTESY OF LEONCE GAITER



The only known photograph of the Rufus Buck gang, taken in the summer of 1895 in Indian Territory. Buck is in the middle.

COURTESY OF LEONCE GAITER

and characters like the famous mixed-race outlaw Cherokee Bill (1876-1896), who was jailed in Fort Smith, Arkansas, when Buck was also incarcerated there. The deeply religious federal magistrate Isaac Parker (1838-1896), a “hanging judge” who ruled the judiciary in the area for decades and tried Buck’s gang, also plays a central role.

The fictional Theodosia Swain is the blonde, beautiful, and feral 13-year-old daughter of a white bourgeois widower, a thoroughly embittered ne’er-do-well from Mississippi whose world collapsed with that of the old South after the Civil War. When the Buck gang carries her off, she blithely accompanies them on their rampage—and the racial and sexual overtones of that reality both outrage and confound the white citizenry after the gang’s arrest.

The novel’s raw, unvarnished portrait of the Old West sounds and feels both grittier and more real than the place frequently seen in Hollywood Westerns and on television. For example, when the embryonic Buck gang starts selling liquor, they receive “three cases of brown whiskey in plain bottles that had been mixed with creek water and seasoned with chilies, tobacco, and a touch of strychnine to give it a much-appreciated kick.” The boys in the gang aren’t even faintly romantic villains, but lost, dimwitted, unloved souls staggering clumsily through the world, creating havoc not from evil plans but from sheer teenage impetuosity. When the gang

steals some horses from a livery stable, for example, one boy heedlessly tosses a lantern onto a pile of hay as they leave, setting the building ablaze, nearly incinerating two other horses left behind, and eventually burning down half the small town.

The gang embodies a dangerous combination: a volatile, high-testosterone mix of young male energy with no meaningful channel (or future), lethal weapons, and an evangelical, simplistic, dogmatic ideology. It has much in common, in other words, with today’s terrorist cells and extremist paramilitary groups. “Rufus’s trajectory, the quasi-religious mania that inspires his mission, has a template,” Gaiter says, “and that template fits religious zealots, from John Brown to Saint Paul. If you want to consider them all crazy, you can—but some of these crazy people have changed the world.”

Rufus Buck (“Even his name sounds like a criminal’s,” Gaiter notes) did not change the world. But the author says he went down “fighting for his identity. What was done to the Indians was as brutal as what Rufus did.” Buck’s victims were mostly unlucky whites the gang happened on (though his first murder is that of a black U.S. marshal), but “people alight with righteous rage go after symbols of their oppression,” Gaiter explains, “not the people who’ve done the actual harm.”

Gaiter himself is an African American, from a military family with New Orleans roots. He concentrated in visual and en-



Visit harvardmag.com/ extras to hear Leonce Gaiter reading passages of his work aloud.

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environmental studies and says he spent “thousands of hours” listening to jazz and classical music in the Loeb Music Library. He has lived most of his adult life in California, first in Los Angeles, where he was a story analyst for CBS and a paralegal for A & M Records. Now he lives in a “horsey community” near Sacramento, where he works as director of marketing for a technological company—and rides horses. “That’s something I never thought I’d do,” he says. “Own horses.”

Reflecting on his novel, he says, “The history of African-American letters is largely a history of people who take the outside world’s condemnation and destroy themselves by turning it inward. *Native Son*, *Invisible Man*, *Beloved*—these are all people who take the hatred that is spewed at them and internalize it. I got sick of reading those books, because they suggest a passive, pathetic people, which I know I am not from. The fact that these teenagers were fighting back—as a black man, that meant a great deal to me. Win or lose, right or wrong, they went out fighting, and that matters.”

Chapter & Verse

Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

Donald Kinnear asks which Aldous Huxley novel “contains a dissertation on death and dying with the first line, ‘Death is the beginning, not the end.’ It was written in French and then translated into English.”

More queries from the archives:

A hymn containing the phrase “Jesus seeking the humble heart.”

A poem containing the lines: “In the corner of the field/A boy flicks a spotted beetle from her wrist.”

A poem that refers to geese and also contains the line, “The distant hills draw night.”

A poem that contains the sentence, “The woodlands lead the feet to green adventure.”

The titles of a Broadway show and the song from that show with a chorus declaring, “Maybe I’ll jump overboard but I’m afraid I’ll drown;/Water isn’t cool enough to cool this baby down.”

“stalk” (January-February). Responding to a request for pre-1968 usage of “stalk” in the “modern sense of obsessive, unwanted attention,” a reader suggested a line from Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*: “...I stalk about her door;/ like a strange soul upon the Stygian banks/ staying for waftage” (act III, scene ii).

Send inquiries and answers to “Chapter and Verse,” Harvard Magazine, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138, or via e-mail to chapterandverse@harvardmag.com.

Justice Falls Down

America’s flawed criminal justice system

by TRACEY L. MEARES

THE TITLE OF William J. Stuntz’s masterwork, *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice*, is at first glance a misnomer. “Collapse” does not describe a system that seems to be humming along, processing ever-larger numbers of Americans. Stuntz notes that our rate of incarceration is closing in on 500 inmates per 100,000 people, up sevenfold from a century ago. But upon reflection, the last word of the book’s title really makes his point: it is *justice* that has collapsed, not the system that purportedly delivers it.

Stuntz, the late Friendly professor of law, was a giant among legal theorists of criminal law and procedure. This reader has long followed his scholarship, which is characterized by impressive originality and quirky counterintuitive claims. In his book, published just months after his trag-

ic early death from cancer at 52 last spring, Stuntz lodges two major complaints about U.S. criminal law and procedure. First, he claims that far too many people are caught up, prosecuted, and incarcerated. Today’s system is directed primarily and often-times arbitrarily by over-powerful prosecutors whose discretion is not adequately circumscribed, given the political realities of local urban law enforcement dictated by disinterested suburbanites who also fuel the politics of legislative actions. Second, Stuntz claims that African Americans bear the brunt of official decisionmaking and—primarily because of two sets of Supreme Court decisions—have little power to effect systemic change. In support of these conclusions, Stuntz pursues a fascinating and intricate journey through history, empirical evidence, and judicial interpretation, contrasting our contem-

porary practices with those of the past.

The book’s first section is a big-picture history. Stuntz creatively compares the country’s crime statistics and punishment practices from the mid nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries (when thousands of mostly European immigrants arrived in the United States and settled primarily in eastern cities) to those from the “Great Migration” (when thousands of southern African Americans moved north). According to Stuntz, white northeastern immigrant defendants in the early nineteenth century were able to protect themselves from injustice without the benefit of constitutional rights and procedures. Instead, they relied upon local politics. The second wave of migrants, black, was unable to deploy comparable political power in the same ways. In the second section of the book, Stuntz explains what he thinks caused the difference in a rich, detailed, and thorough analysis of the jurisprudential path to the constitutional procedures that today are celebrated as the hallmarks of American

William J. Stuntz,
*The Collapse of American
Criminal Justice*
(Harvard, \$35)