This well-written account of several sensational murders and their associated trials focuses on Richmond, Virginia, between the Civil War and World War I. Michael Ayers Trotti is the third historian to write an important book about crime and Virginia during that time; Suzanne Lebsock’s *Murder in Virginia: Southern Justice on Trial* (2003) and Richard F. Hamm’s *Murder, Honor, and Law: Four Virginia Homicides from Reconstruction to the Great Depression* (2003) explore issues of race, class, honor, and the law in Virginia by examining murders and duels and their consequences. Add to them James M. Campbell’s *Slavery on Trial: Race, Class, and Criminal Justice in Antebellum Richmond, Virginia* (2007), which treats antebellum Virginia law and slavery, and suddenly the library shelves contain excellent scholarship that unravels how various groups of Virginians dealt with and reacted to deadly crime.

Trotti’s study goes further. His book is also about the popular culture associated with violence and with sensationalism. It is very much a book about how journalism, particularly technological and commercial changes in newspaper publication, as well as popular tastes and expectations, transformed the ways in which people learned and thought about crimes of violence and the people who committed them. At the heart of the change was sensational newspaper coverage—what came to be called, during the time Trotti considers, “yellow journalism.”

Trotti draws important lessons from the dramatic differences between the manner in which murders, trials, and executions were reported in the 1860s and the manner in which they were reported in the 1910s. Whatever claims to better taste or more refinement white ladies and gentlemen in antebellum Virginia may have once made, during the first half-century after the Civil War they became just as crass as they believed people were everywhere. In that regard, the changes in newspapers and in the public’s taste for sensational journalism indicate how very different old Virginia and its inhabitants had become by the twentieth century.

—reviewed by Brent Tarter, editor, Dictionary of Virginia Biography

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**Call for Reviewers**

The “Virginia Reviews” column has been an important part of *Virginia Libraries* since it was undertaken by the Library of Virginia’s Publications Department in the early 1990s. It was begun by Sandra Treadway, the current librarian of Virginia, in response to a suggestion from Peggie Rudd, now the Texas state librarian. John Kneebone was the first editor of “Virginia Reviews,” and he has been succeeded by Julie Campbell and eventually Sara Bearss. The reviews have maintained a very high standard of scholarship over the years, and have allowed us to publish the work of many talented LVA staff members.

We have recently learned that staff reductions will force LVA to eliminate the production of “Virginia Reviews” as an assignment for the publications staff. This is disappointing because we will lose a reliable, well-written feature that could be useful to almost every reader our journal reaches; however, it does present the opportunity to broaden the participation in the book review column we will be developing in 2009. Therefore, we are inviting potential reviewers to contact both Lyn C. A. Gardner (cgardner@hampton.gov) and Cy Dillon (cdillon@ferrum.edu) with proposals for reviews or simply to say you are willing to submit reviews in the future.

While we want potential reviewers to make themselves familiar with the length, diction, and style of the reviews from this and past issues, we also want to extend the scope of the books reviewed in *Virginia Libraries* beyond historical works to include fiction, poetry, and nonfiction works set in Virginia or by Virginia authors. The editors plan to include children’s books, young adult literature, and even graphic novels that are candidates for library collections around the Old Dominion. At this point, we are not yet able to offer review copies, but we hope that our readers, as librarians, will have access to most new publications.

Become a participant in the acquisitions decisions of the Virginia library community. Become a reviewer for *Virginia Libraries*. ▶