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A Hand Prepared to be Red

The white man’s revenge is pure terrorism…In the war of the races…there is much useless slaughter, much that is not only not chivalrous but is absolutely revolting.

(Frederick Richmond, Queensland in the Seventies: Reminiscences of the Early Days of a Young Clergyman)

Some men, and at times great numbers of men, engage in violent behaviour. It is overwhelmingly males who control and use violence. Pieter Spierenburg points out that in every historical context violent crime has been a predominantly male enterprise.¹ It is not only in crime, however, that male violence is expressed. Wars, slavery and conquest are inherently violent enterprises, and men have been at the forefront of these activities. So ubiquitous is male violence that John Archer argues that it should be considered a ‘normal’ characteristic of masculinity.² Similarly, Elizabeth Stanko argues that violent behaviour is neither deviant or abnormal but ‘an ordinary part of life’.³

On the frontiers of Queensland and British Columbia violence was not only ubiquitous, but it was often considered manly. I argue that the manly ideal had within it the potential for violence. The manly attributes such as courage, strength, rationality and perseverance could be distorted to justify violence. Moreover, the ideals of reason, civilisation and progress, outlined in the last chapter, were often used to justify violence against Indigenous people. Violence could also have an economic face. ‘Capitalist patriarchy’, when exported to the frontier in the name of progress and development, had the potential to encourage male violence.

Brian Moon argues that theories of male violence which are based on biology or Freudian psychology are all predicated on the idea that

R. Hogg, Men and Manliness on the Frontier
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violence can be understood as a product of the psychosocial construction of the individual male. According to Moon, one flaw with these theories is that they ignore the effect of culture on the development of the individual. Furthermore, as Moon suggests, such theories ignore the specific character of different forms of violence. Rape, wife-beating and war are all explained either by male anxieties arising from the rejection of the mother and the identification with the father or by learnt behaviour. Whatever the nature of the violence, it is the nature of men as individual subjects that lies at its heart. As an alternative Moon proposes a Foucauldian analysis of violence in which the task is not to discover what it is about men that causes them, as individuals or collectively, to commit violence, but to establish how certain forms of masculinity are constructed with a tendency towards violence. In this analysis the capacity of men to act violently is conditioned by their position within a specific social milieu or apparatus and by a discourse and ideologies which normalise and rationalise violence.

Moon’s suggestion is useful in examining three aspects of frontier violence: firstly, the prevalence of violence in Victorian Britain; secondly, the nature of violence on the frontier, particularly interracial violence, and how acts of violence were construed as expressions of manliness; thirdly, the nexus between violence, civilisation and manliness. Violence in mid-Victorian Britain was far from universally condemned. Moreover, while the ideal of manliness did not explicitly embrace violence, male violence was normalised, and certain types of violent behaviour by and among men were not only tolerated, but expected and positively valued.

In Britain prior to the eighteenth century, male violence was often not prosecuted as there was an expectation that men would defend their reputation, position and manhood by fighting. Towards the end of the eighteenth century violent behaviour was increasingly frowned upon and punished by the law, and intolerance of male violence grew. Nevertheless, according to Vic Gatrell, ‘Violence in the nineteenth century was ubiquitous.’ He cites industrial disputes, popular recreation areas, the streets and the home as common sites of violence. In addition, there were regular moral panics about violence including that of Chartists in the 1840s, garrotting and trade union violence in the 1860s, and child abuse, hooliganism and armed burglary in the latter part of the century. To observers such as Henry Mayhew and Charles Booth criminals appeared to form a separate social class. That class was the working class, and violence was constructed as a working-class problem. It was a widely held belief that working-class adult males were prone to outbursts