

# Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Ashford, Chris (2020) Queer Histories and the Politics of Policing, Emma K Russell [Routledge, 2020, 162pp, £120 (hardback)]. *International Journal of Gender, Sexuality and Law*, 1 (1). pp. 1-3. ISSN 2056-3914

Published by: Northumbria University Library

URL: <https://doi.org/10.19164/ijgsl.v1i1.1136> <<https://doi.org/10.19164/ijgsl.v1i1.1136>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:  
<https://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/51511/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)



**Northumbria  
University**  
NEWCASTLE



**UniversityLibrary**

**Queer Histories and the Politics of Policing, Emma K Russell [Routledge, 2020, 162pp, £36.99 (paperback)]**

Chris Ashford<sup>1</sup>

It is perhaps impossible to consider queer history without seeking to understand the historic policing of queer communities. Our struggles for liberation or equality have often been a battle with law and its agent of enforcement, the Police.

This perhaps makes it all the more surprising that there have not been more research texts that focus in on this issue, and this arguably underlines the important contribution this book makes. Drawing on archival research together with empirical interview findings, this Australia-centred (and Melbourne/Victoria particularly) text provides a compelling account of policing from a queer perspective. From Australia as a colony – and the laws and attitudes to enforcement that imported – through to the ongoing struggles associated with police power and resistance today, the book provides a comprehensive overview of the issues of policing, with applicability far beyond the Australian boundaries of this text.

The book is divided into eight chapters beginning with a section contextualising the history of policing and queer criminalisation before moving on to a chapter that specifically positions queer criminalisation within the context of Australia as a colony and the legacy that English criminal law left behind. Chapter two – whilst primarily aimed at an Australian reader – is of interest more generally, and for an English law-based reader in particular, makes for a refreshing and challenging read that builds on a legislative framework that will be at least in part familiar to readers. As such, the chapter would provide a fascinating stimulus reading for both law and criminology students based in England and Wales and other common law-based systems, in addition to Australian students.

The third chapter of the book focuses on the Tasty nightclub raid. In August 1994 Melbourne's 'Tasty' event at the Commerce Club was raided by 40 Police officers, who

---

<sup>1</sup> Chris Ashford, Professor of Law and Society, Northumbria University. Email: [chris.ashford@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:chris.ashford@northumbria.ac.uk)

Citation Format: Ashford, C, 'Queer Histories and the Politics of Policing, Emma K Russell [Routledge, 2020, 162pp, £36.99 (paperback)]' (2020) 1 *International Journal of Gender, Sexuality and Law* 418.

detained and strip-searched 463 patrons. The club was predominantly frequented by white, professional gay men, but also by lesbians, trans women and straight people. Six charges were laid as a result of the raid but only one stuck – for police hinderance. The Police were aggressive and patrons described themselves as treated like “scum” in the raid. It marked a particular low for Police and LGBT community relations but also became a totemic event for Police violence towards LGBT people.

I am rather ashamed to admit that I was not previously familiar with this incident, but the chapter not only brings the events to life in a clear description but provides an important and detailed analysis in which the policing of this queer space is explored in the context of otherness, victimhood, notions of respectable queerness, and the broader cultural policing of gender and sexuality. As such, the chapter works as a stand-alone piece that provides a case study into these themes for students whilst also being a clear and important reference point for researchers.

The book then moves into a consideration of Pride festivals and the broader pink pound and queer anti-capitalism. The chapter draws on some personal experiences and is as readable and engaging as other chapters but feels a less clear fit with the book as a whole. This chapter then sets up the following chapter which describes how in 2002 Victoria Police Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon became the first police commissioner in Australia to march in a public gay pride. The chapter interrogates the idea of a new ‘feeling force’, and in contrast to some of the earlier ‘win’ narratives in wider discourse relating to the presence of the police in Pride marches, this chapter provides a queer perspective that uses queer history to explain why this is far from a simple ‘win’ narrative. In the context of growing questioning by Pride events about the role and presence of the Police at Pride marches, the book not only provides an important scholarly account and critique, but also offers a vital resource for activists and those beyond academia who want to explore these questions. Chapter six then turns to the question of hate crime, interrogates victim narratives, and also seeks to consider institutional failures in addressing violence inflicted on LGBTQ people.

Throughout the text, Russell persuasively advances the argument that the apparent shift to a more inclusive policing requires interrogation, and when one does so, it becomes apparent that perceptions of progress are superficial and flawed. The final chapter before the afterword turns back to the Tasty club raid described in chapter three. This chapter takes as its starting point an apology issued by Victoria Police in August 2014, twenty years after the raid. Again, Russell resists the temptation the

simply welcome the move and hail it as a sign of Policing progress. Russell – as she does throughout this text – demands more than mere symbolism of change, but rather pushes us to collectively demand substantive change in policing. Such is the clarity and uncompromising nature of Russell’s message that it would have been easy for this book to drift into the polemical. It resists this temptation, and provides a thoughtful intellectual contribution, but loses none of the author’s passion in the process.

The book forms part of the *Queering Criminology and Criminal Justice* series from Routledge and will be of interest to anyone considering issues of queerness and law, LGBT History, policing, and broader themes of criminal justice. This is a rich text with much to consider for researchers across all of these areas. As such, the book is likely to appeal to students undertaking a study of gender and/or sex and sexuality on a range of criminology, law, and sociology courses.

This text is a vital queer intervention, problematising policing and knitting together this argument with a critical and deep exploration of the history of policing of LGBTQ people in Australia, although I would suggest that these arguments are applicable to other jurisdictions too. The text is therefore an important intervention, a clear, focused, and persuasive argument, and a vital read for queer theorists and those seeking to re-evaluate and understand contemporary policing.