

norm; but it could also be that people experience greater mental distress because they work so hard to manage their emotions. “Emotion labor”—nowhere more evident than on the faces of flight attendants—“takes its toll on the individual and often results in burnout, drug use, or alcoholism.” In 2003, Delta Airlines, for instance, spent \$9 million on antidepressants for employees and their dependents.

SOCIETY

Murder Metropolis

THE SOURCE: “Homicide in Los Angeles, 1827–2002” by Eric H. Monkkonon, in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Autumn 2005.

AS ANY FILM NOIR BUFF CAN attest, Los Angeles has a long, sordid history of murder. From its origins as a Spanish mission to the present day, Los Angeles’s homicide rate has placed it at or near the top of the list of most dangerous cities during almost every time period. Gruesome killings, such as the notorious “Black Dahlia” murder of Elizabeth Short in 1947, and celebrity murders, such as that of O. J. Simpson’s ex-wife, Nicole Simpson, in 1994, or of Robert Blake’s wife, Bonny Lee Bakley, in 2001, garner lurid media coverage and help reinforce Los Angeles’s reputation as a place where life comes cheap. There’s a tradition of violence that authorities may find difficult to break, writes Eric H. Monkkonon, a historian at the University of California, Los Angeles.

In its earliest days, when Los Angeles was still part of Mexico, the population was small, and it took only

two or three murders to give the settlement an inflated per capita homicide rate. Yet by the start of the 20th century, when Los Angeles had been a U.S. city for more than 50 years, its murder rate averaged higher than 11 per 100,000, “a figure about 1.5 times that of the whole United States and three times more than that of New York City.”

Monkkonon notes that there are some mysterious anomalies. What, for instance, accounts for the sharp decline in the homicide rate during the Depression (ironically, the period most often depicted in gritty novels such as 1939’s *The Big Sleep*)? Or for a similar decline in the 15 years after World War II? Stricter law enforcement and economic optimism are among the expert guesses.

It’s “astounding,” says Monkkonon, that in years prior to 1967 (when the data still indicated victims’ birthplaces), 67 percent of

Gruesome killings and celebrity murders help reinforce Los Angeles’s reputation as a place where life comes cheap.

those murdered were not from Los Angeles, which lends support to the notion that rootlessness and anomie explain some of the city’s peculiarity. Many of the killers also came from out of town, including Missouri’s William Edward Hickman, the abductor and murderer of 11-year-old Marian Parker in 1927, and Colorado’s Harvey M. Glatman, the 1950s serial murderer known as the Lonely Hearts Killer.

Monkkonon cites the high percentage of homicides ruled “justifiable” by the authorities (seven percent, or 3,345 deaths during the years he studied) as evidence that an



Movies such as *The Big Sleep*, with Humphrey Bogart, depicted Los Angeles as a city rife with violence. But during the Depression, when the novel was set, L.A. saw a rare dip in homicides.

ethic of “street justice” has reigned for much of Los Angeles’s history. Half of these justifiable homicides were committed by citizens with guns, suggesting “an armed population, some of whom may have been waiting for their chance.” Justifiable homicides peaked (as a percentage

of all homicides) during the 1940s, perhaps explaining part of the post-war dip in the homicide rate.

In 2003 the overall homicide rate for the city stood at 8.3 per 100,000 residents, as low as it was in the late 1960s, but still quite high, especially in a period when

other big cities saw declines in their murder rates. Monkkonon, in a bleak coda, expresses doubt that metropolitan Los Angeles, splintered into dozens of jurisdictions, can muster the concerted effort needed to “accept its history, and change it.”

PRESS & MEDIA

The Tabloid Solution

THE SOURCE: “Bye, Bye, Broadsheet” by Michael Wolff, in *Vanity Fair*, Oct. 2005.

“IT’S LIKE AN IPOD,” SAYS EDITOR Alan Rusbridger proudly of his new, petite *Guardian*. Shrunk down to near-tabloid size, the venerable left-wing newspaper has become the third British broadsheet daily in the past few years to decide that small is beautiful. Could a shift to the smaller format be the salvation for today’s troubled American newspapers as well—or are these changes anachronistic newsprint’s last gasp?

The trend began in the fall of 2003, when the 200,000-circulation *Independent*, left-wing Avis to *The Guardian*’s Hertz, launched a parallel tabloid version of its broadsheet self—and immediately experienced a 20 percent rise in circulation. It soon

broke earlier vows of continued fidelity to the older format. “Going tabloid—with big, bold, lacerating, crowd-pleasing, anti-war, anti-American, anti-Blair front pages—does for *The Independent* exactly

what every worrywart (especially the ones at *The Guardian*) has said that the tabloid format would do: It makes everything louder, more simplistic, and appealing,” writes Michael Wolff, a *Vanity Fair* contributing editor.

The next desertion from the broadsheet ranks was far more shocking. Following swiftly on *The Independent*’s heels, *The Times* of

London—for two centuries the very model of “the billowing, luxurious, upper-class broadsheet, with its sweeping view of the world”—also turned tabloid. In the eyes of critics, this was only the latest chapter in the once-hallowed newspaper’s sad quarter-century descent into mediocrity under the ownership of Rupert Murdoch. Yet the tabloid format, Wolff points out, turned the paper’s blandness into a virtue in an era when people feel pressed for time. The new tabloid *Times* is “pure function,” a “news pill.”

Newspaper competition, a thing of the

EXCERPT

Death of the Scoop

News is cheap, and the big Washington stories that transfix the media pack are in many ways the cheapest of all because all of the major outlets are on them together. Keeping track of who got which story first would be a full-time job, and an absurd one.

The true exclusive isn’t the story that beats the clock, or the pack. It’s the one that the pack never cared about. The one that reported the news so well, you remembered it days later, wanted to read it again, marveled at how it changed your understanding of the world. It’s the one that never had to call itself an exclusive, because that was obvious.

—WILLIAM POWERS, a *National Journal* columnist, at *NationalJournal.com* (Nov. 4, 2005)

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