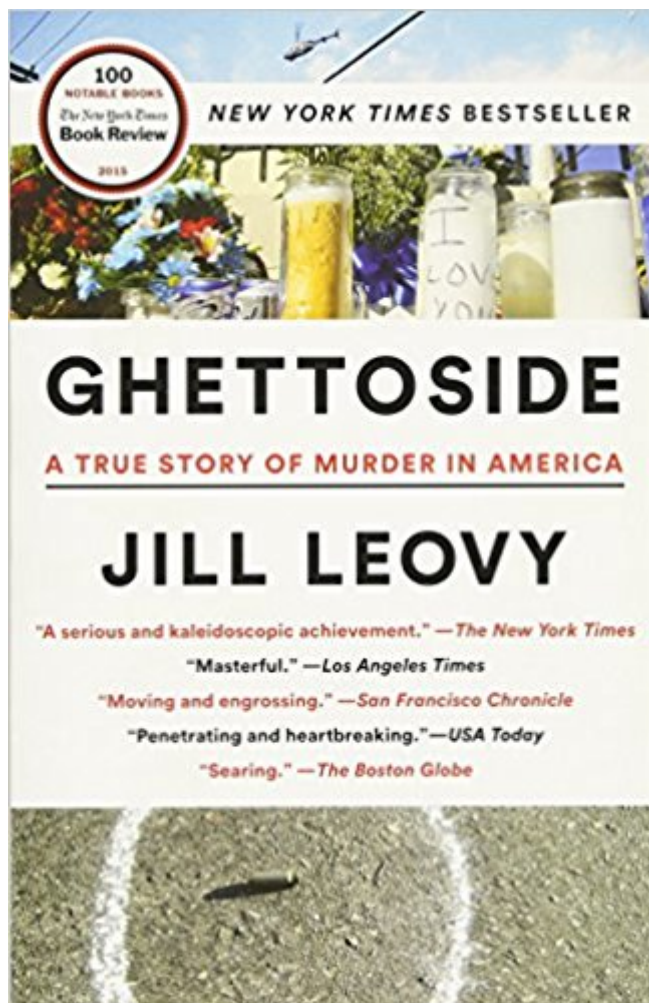


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# Ghettoside: A True Story Of Murder In America



## Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER — NAMED ONE OF THE TEN BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, USA TODAY, AND CHICAGO TRIBUNE — A masterly work of literary journalism about a senseless murder, a relentless detective, and the great plague of homicide in America NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD FINALIST — NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY The New York Times Book Review — The Washington Post — The Boston Globe — The Economist — The Globe and Mail — BookPage — Kirkus Reviews On a warm spring evening in South Los Angeles, a young man is shot and killed on a sidewalk minutes away from his home, one of the thousands of black Americans murdered that year. His assailant runs down the street, jumps into an SUV, and vanishes, hoping to join the scores of killers in American cities who are never arrested for their crimes. But as soon as the case is assigned to Detective John Skaggs, the odds shift. Here is the kaleidoscopic story of the quintessential, but mostly ignored, American murder — a “ghettoside” killing, one young black man slaying another — and a brilliant and driven cadre of detectives whose creed is to pursue justice for forgotten victims at all costs. *Ghettoside* is a fast-paced narrative of a devastating crime, an intimate portrait of detectives and a community bonded in tragedy, and a surprising new lens into the great subject of why murder happens in our cities — and how the epidemic of killings might yet be stopped. Praise for *Ghettoside* — “A serious and kaleidoscopic achievement . . . [Jill Leovy is] a crisp writer with a crisp mind and the ability to boil entire skies of information into hard journalistic rain.” — Dwight Garner, *The New York Times* — “Masterful . . . gritty reporting that matches the police work behind it.” — Los Angeles Times — “Moving and engrossing.” — San Francisco Chronicle — “Penetrating and heartbreaking . . . *Ghettoside* points out how relatively little America has cared even as recently as the last decade about the value of young black men’s lives.” — USA Today — “Functions both as a snappy police procedural and — more significantly — as a searing indictment of legal neglect . . . Leovy’s powerful testimony demands respectful attention.” — The Boston Globe — “Gritty, heart-wrenching . . . Everyone needs to read this book.” — Michael Connelly — “*Ghettoside* is remarkable: a deep anatomy of lawlessness.” — Atul Gawande, author of *Being Mortal* — “[Leovy writes] with grace and artistry, and controlled — but bone-deep — outrage in her new book. . . . The most important book about urban violence in a generation.” — The

Washington Post “Riveting . . . This timely book could not be more important. • Associated Press “Leovy’s relentless reporting has produced a book packed with valuable, hard-won insights • and it serves as a crucial, 366-page reminder that black lives matter. • The New York Times Book Review “A compelling analysis of the factors behind the epidemic of black-on-black homicide . . . an important book, which deserves a wide audience. • Hari Kunzru, The Guardian

From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An Best Book of the Month for February 2015: There’s a statistic that surfaces early in Jill Leovy’s fundamentally important book *Ghettoside* that should catch your attention: black men compose about 6% of the country’s population, yet they are the victim in nearly 40% of homicides. And who’s killing those black men? The answer is most often other black men. Leovy, a writer for the Los Angeles Times, explores the culture of black violence, specifically in South Central LA, describing a world that seems to exist hermetically sealed off from the rest of the city. With nearly zero mobility and little policing, the people of South Central are left to fend for themselves • further amplifying the devastating drumbeat of gangs and violence. Leovy builds her book around one family’s story: Wally Tennelle, an LA cop, has refused to move his wife and kids out of his Watts neighborhood. Then his youngest son is murdered (unlike most murders in the area, this one was covered by the local media). Through the gathering of evidence, the roundup of suspects, and the trial that ultimately comes to be • all spearheaded by John

Skaggs, a very dedicated and capable LA homicide detective—Leovy makes the argument that what places like South Central need is more policing, not less. They need more attention—not debate, finger pointing, and inaction. —Chris Schluep --This text refers to the Kindle Edition edition.

—“A serious and kaleidoscopic achievement . . . [Jill Leovy is] a crisp writer with a crisp mind and the ability to boil entire skies of information into hard journalistic rain.—Dwight Garner, *The New York Times* —“Masterful . . . gritty reporting that matches the police work behind it.—Los Angeles Times —“Moving and engrossing.—San Francisco Chronicle —“Penetrating and heartbreaking . . . *Ghettoside* points out how relatively little America has cared even as recently as the last decade about the value of young black men’s lives.—USA Today —“Functions both as a snappy police procedural and—more significantly—as a searing indictment of legal neglect . . . Leovy’s powerful testimony demands respectful attention.—The Boston Globe —“*Ghettoside* is fantastic. It does what the best narrative nonfiction does: It transcends its subject by taking one person’s journey and making it all our journeys. That’s what makes this not just a gritty, heart-wrenching, and telling book, but an important one. From the patrol cop to the president, everyone needs to read this book.—Michael Connelly —“*Ghettoside* is remarkable: a deep anatomy of lawlessness.—Atul Gawande, author of *Being Mortal* —“[Leovy writes] with grace and artistry, and controlled—but bone-deep—outrage in her new book. . . . *Ghettoside*, if there’s any justice, will be the most important book about urban violence in a generation.—David M. Kennedy, *The Washington Post* —“Riveting . . . This timely book could not be more important.—Associated Press —“Told with the chilling detail and gripping pace of a prime-time drama.—The Economist —“Leovy’s relentless reporting has produced a book packed with valuable, hard-won insights—and it serves as a crucial, 366-page reminder that black lives matter.—The New York Times Book Review —“A compelling analysis of the factors behind the epidemic of black-on-black homicide, and the beginnings of a policy prescription for tackling it . . . an important book, which deserves a wide audience.—Hari Kunzru, *The Guardian* —“*Ghettoside* has many successes: its complicated portrait of the LAPD, the humanity it lends to the families of murder

victims, and its ability to engage readers from a historical and current-day context (the sundry facts Leovy provides throughout the book never overwhelm).

—Jason Parham, *Gawker*

“A brave book . . . It is not often that I pick up a work of non-fiction and picture the movie unfolding before my eyes. . . . [Ghettoside] offers a calm dissection of America’s oldest epidemic. . . . [Leovy’s] knowledge makes for lapidary prose that crackles with insight. It is also deeply humane.

—Financial Times

“First-rate stuff.

—Newsweek

“Jill Leovy writes with exceptional sharpness and tautness, and her pages glow and glitter with the found poetry of the street. This book will take an honored place on the shelf that includes David Simon’s classic *Homicide* and Michelle Alexander’s explosive study of mass incarceration, *The New Jim Crow*.

—Martin Amis

“A gripping and powerful account of urban homicide investigation in the United States.

—Gilbert King, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Devil in the Grove*

“Unmissable . . . I’m astonished by Jill Leovy’s forthcoming *Ghettoside*. Police and race in America are examined with forensic skill and furious, exceptional prose. Lucid, revelatory, superbly written, incredibly timely. A book of the year.

—Chris Cleave, author of *Little Bee*

“*Ghettoside* is a brilliant taxonomic investigation into the American violence epidemic disguised as a highly entertaining true crime book.

—Matt Taibbi, author of *The Divide*

“A thoroughly engrossing true-life policier full of vivid and sympathetic characters, but also the bravest book about race and crime I’ve ever read.

—Dan Baum, author of *Nine Lives*

“What an amazing book—a totally gripping piece of reporting.

—Paul French, author of *Midnight in Peking*

“Absorbing . . . Readers may come for Leovy’s detective story; they will stay for her lucid social critique.

—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

From the Hardcover edition.

*Ghettoside* was a word used to by a Watts gang member to describe his South Central Los Angeles neighborhood. The author writes that *Ghettoside* is both a place and a predicament. It is a place where black boys and men are safer in jail than on the streets. *Ghettoside* is also a frame of mind. It is a place with a culture of violence where the heroes are seen as the villains; the villains are seen as the heroes and all the victims are seen by one detective as some father’s child. By the time you finish this book you will know the heroes (detectives, including those whom the author calls *ghettoside* craftsmen whose involvement, dedication and self sacrifice is the stuff of which legends

are made) and the victims (the focus here is on a good boy, the murdered 18 year old sheltered son of a homicide detective) and the addicts, the whores and the gangster-villains. You will better understand the police culture, and neighborhood culture and what they are all up against. You will understand why there are so many murders. This is more than a story about heroic and tenacious homicide detectives' almost impossible task of identifying, tracking down, arresting and aiding in the prosecution of the drive by shooter of an 18 year old boy; it is an illuminating history and an exploration of a culture of lawlessness and violence and the multigenerational tragedies of its victims. Author Jill Leovy, award winning reporter and editor for the Los Angeles gives startling and sickening statistics. She states that lawlessness is its own kind of order and where the criminal justice system fails to respond vigorously to violent injury and death, homicide becomes epidemic. "Wherever law is absent or undeveloped---wherever it is shabby, ineffective, or disputed---some form of self-policing or communal justice usually emerges." She says reformers focus on the rights of defendants while being blind to the under enforcement of violent crime. The author writes that police are preoccupied with nuisance crime and lax when it comes to answering for black lives. In poor urban centers those who live in minority enclaves settle their scores outside the law.\*During the 1960s the number of people sent to prison for criminal homicide was less than half the number of homicides. From 1994-2006 suspects were arrested in just 41% of the 3,300 killings involving black male victims in Los Angeles.\*The author does not preach. She shows. She explains. She tells true stories that will break your heart. Crime witnesses are terrified to testify because they and their families are threatened, beaten and often killed. Mothers weep over children who join gangs for protection or for the teenage allure of girls, guns and excitement. According to the author, blacks who make up only 12 percent of the U.S. population, account for nearly half of all homicide victims. The Southeast's per capita murder rate is eight to ten times the national average. The majority of the victims are black on black. So why was the budget for police overtime cut 57 percent? For detectives, working odd hours is essential. The author writes of budget cutbacks that eliminate necessary overtime and equipment. How can one do a job if the office phone don't work? Why would a detective have to live out of his sedan for two days when his unit lost the salvage cars they hoarded? When Detectives aren't issued departmental cell phones, they purchase their own. Detectives buy their own pads, pencils staplers, keyboards, calendars and binders. One detective purchases his own fax machine and printer for the office. Local appliance dealers provide video machines for interrogations. This book is an eye opener and a heart breaker that will change the way you see black on black crime in America and the detectives who devote their lives to seeking justice for its victims. Maybe the book should be titled, "Ghettocide" because it is about the physical,

emotional and spiritual death that happens in pockets of cities all over America.

As a police psychologist and writer, I was truly impressed with Jill Leovy's book. Her writing is engaging and her observations and ideas are unique and important. She adds much to the current national conversation about police community relations and her book should be required reading by anyone involved in law enforcement. Her principle observations are 1) that historical data suggests that marginalized people who don't trust and therefore don't depend on institutions responsible for public safety (police, courts) will develop a sub-legal system of justice and take matters into their own hands; 2) that marginalized (geographically as well as socially) people who depend upon each other for trade, income etc. are more likely to have conflicts with each other and to settle these conflicts themselves 3) That violence prevention doesn't work as well as reaction. For example, the broken window theory of policing is only partially helpful in violence prevention. More helpful would be a strong, quick, persistent police reaction that ensures the perpetrators are brought to justice, thus sending a message to the community that violence will not be tolerated and generating trust in victims and witnesses who hold information pertinent to solving the crime. 4) That the ability to do #3 is stymied by bureaucracy and inadequate funding, training, staffing and equipment. 5) That officers working in high crime areas are vulnerable to burn out, frustration and apathy. 6) That the best officers/detectives ignore the bureaucracy, have a high tolerance for frustration, are undeterred and have families who are willing and able to tolerate the long working hours involved.

This is a very important book. Most of it is devoted to an interesting but not unusual police procedural. However, the essential thing about the book is contained in its commentary on the lack of policing in the black ghettos of America. Leovy makes the rare but persuasive point that the worst problem in policing the ghetto areas is not police misconduct, but the lack of a police presence. Her argument is that when the government does not have a monopoly on interpersonal violence, illegal and informal mechanisms will fill the role the police are expected to perform -- and will perform it violently and dangerously. As a result, ghettos tend to be subject to vigilante justice at the hands of gangs and sociopaths. Ghettos then become "no go" areas for the police, who prefer, for obvious reasons, to live outside the community they are supposed to be policing. And partially as a result, the police get little or no cooperation from the community when investigating violent crimes. Leovy makes some interesting subsidiary points. She indicates that Hispanic barrios, while subject to higher crime rates than normal for white residential areas, not only have a lower violent crime rate

than black ghettos, but are much more cooperative with the police when they investigate crimes. She also takes the rather more controversial position that detection and punishment is more effective in reducing crime and securing community cooperation than is preventative policing through a "blue presence" in the area served by law enforcement. She also cites some statistics from troubled communities not served by official law enforcement to indicate that the problem of informal violence networks will spring up to enforce "order" in non-black areas and that these networks and the resulting violence bears a remarkable similarity to the rate of violence in the Los Angeles ghettos. Most impressively, Leovy is very persuasive in detailing the pressures on black men to join gangs and commit crimes. I suspect Leovy is a rather conventional liberal, but she is quite careful not to put a political spin on her claims. She does argue that a society interested in keeping a minority under control has a vested interest in "underpunishing" crimes between minority members, citing the Southern experience that so many blacks underwent before moving to, e.g., Los Angeles. But her other claims could be as problematical for liberals as for conservatives. She makes a strong case, for example, that attacks on the police for racial profiling and other actions against the black community are far less destructive than failure to investigate and incarcerate more violent black males. And she even suggests that if the police were really an occupying force as, e.g., Malcom X suggested, the black community might have been better off. Less radically, she concludes that the larger community might want to take anti-police rhetoric stemming from black spokesmen less seriously and fainter cries of "underpolicing" more seriously, because there is a strong tendency for black leaders and spokespeople to criticize the police, and it is easier to criticize them for what they do than what they fail to do. I am not sure that Leovy is right in all her contentions. For example, she was embedded with Los Angeles detectives for long periods of time, and shows a strong bias in favor of detecting and prosecuting crimes -- and a bit of a prejudice against the "blue uniforms" picked up as part of those detectives' attitudes. But her larger point -- that the black community suffers more from underpolicing than overpolicing -- is profound, provocative, and deserving of great attention.

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