

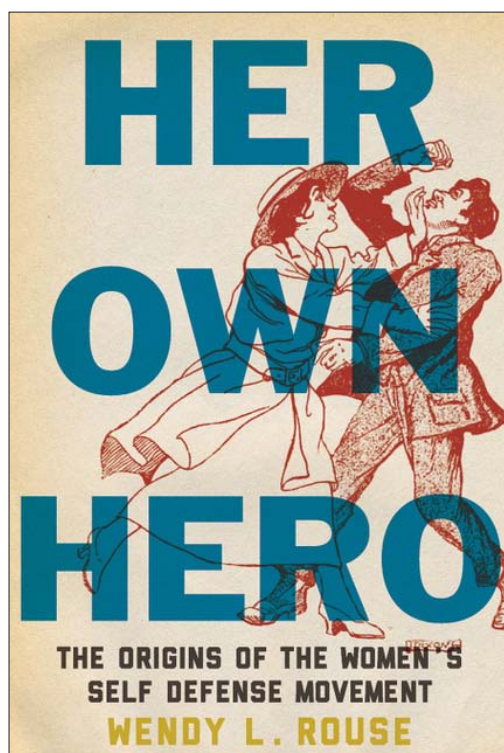
BOOK REVIEW

Her Own Hero: The Origins of the Women's Self-Defense Movement

Wendy Rouse

New York University Press, 2017

288 pages



REVIEWER

Emelyne Godfrey is author of *Masculinity, Crime and Self-Defence in Victorian Literature: Duelling with Danger (2010)* and *Femininity, Crime and Self-Defence in Victorian Literature and Society: From Dagger-Fans to Suffragettes (2012)*. Her *Kitty and the Cats: Mrs Pankhurst's Suffragette Bodyguard and the London Police* is forthcoming in 2018, and will be the first known book-length biography of influential campaigner Emily Katherine (Kitty) Willoughby Marshall.

DOI

10.18573/mas.52

On 30 June 2012, residents of Islington, London witnessed the unveiling, at 60 Thornhill Square, of a People's Plaque to Edith Garrud. Sometimes known as Madame Garrud, she was the martial arts trainer of a team of bodyguards who helped prevent militant campaigner Emmeline Pankhurst from being rearrested by the authorities during the vigorous campaign for female suffrage in pre-World War One 1900s Great Britain. The plaque bears the script: 'The Suffragette that Knew Jiu-jitsu'. Since then, popular and scholarly interest in Garrud and her contemporaries has grown. This is partly due to the publicity surrounding the imminent 100th anniversary of the passing of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, under which some women over thirty were given the parliamentary franchise. Another influence has been the film *Suffragette* [2015] in which Helena Bonham Carter, a descendant of the suffragettes' arch-opponent Herbert Asquith, played martial arts instructor and fiery campaigner for votes for women, Edith Ellyn. Indeed, Bonham Carter had her character named Edith in honour of Mrs Garrud.

Most books and articles that mention Mrs Garrud's name (and the 'jujutsuffragettes' she trained) are works that examine the British suffrage movement. There are some exceptions, including Gretchen Wilson's admirable but imperfect classic *With All Her Might* [1996], an account of her Canadian great-aunt, Gertrude Harding, a member of Pankhurst's elite bodyguard group. But such cases have been rare. Now, however, Wendy Rouse's book *Her Own Hero: The Origins of the Women's Self-Defense Movement* also provides a contrast to much existing scholarship, particularly in that her engaging study focuses on the emergence of women's self-defence in the United States.

While other studies of the jujutsuffragettes are written with an eye for an international market, *Her Own Hero* focusses on the 'Progressive Era', which witnessed widespread reform and a growth of political activism in the United States from the 1890s to the 1920s. The book is written with a North American bias and readers may take issue with an early reference to the 'militant English suffragettes' [7] given that jujitsu-trained suffragette bodyguard Helen Crawford was Glasgow-born while Edith Garrud was proud of her Welsh family connections.

In its five main chapters, the book contends that the women's self-defence movement arose in parallel with concerns over immigration and urbanisation, the health of the nation, the growth of the physical culture movement and the increasing demand for women's social and political rights. The book's unique selling point is its examination of women's motivations to learn Japanese martial arts and the ways in which they used their training to forge a sense of their own identities.

Chapter One looks at the female boxer and begins with a discussion of the Muscular Christianity movement in America in the 1880s, the advocates of which argued that in order to be truly manly a man must

be able to back up his principles by being able to fight if needed. Muscular Christianity was not confined to the United States, however. The movement flourished earlier in mid-Victorian Britain and a famous output was arguably Thomas Hughes's novel *Tom Brown's School Days* [1857]. Hughes's suntanned, brawny and good-natured eponymous hero shifts his weight from foot to foot, poised awkwardly in the wings, hoping for a mention. A proponent of Muscular Christianity, Theodore Roosevelt felt that physically and morally tough nations should potentially be able to tackle adversaries. Eugenic fears over masculine weakness were countered with initiatives such as the founding of *Physical Culture* magazine courtesy of Bernarr McFadden to inspire an interest in bodybuilding. Male-only clubs and the YMCA served to combat fears over masculine unruliness and physical weakness. At the same time, Rouse argues, exercise was becoming more acceptable for women and boxing was made more palatable to critics provided the sport could be marketed as physical preparation for childbearing and domestic duties. Rouse writes that, when interviewed, female boxers frequently referred to the sport's beauty benefits and drew attention to themselves as wives and mothers, thereby strengthening boxing's link with traditional feminine ideals.

'Jiu-jitsu symbolized the physical embodiment of the Yellow Peril' [39], writes Rouse in Chapter Two, proposing that American fears over Japanese and Chinese immigration informed the reception of Eastern martial arts in the United States. The chapter argues that jujitsu, which was based on the idea that an opponent could be subdued through clever application of pressure to the joints, was widely considered underhand, as opposed to boxing. Roosevelt embodied an ambivalent stance towards jujitsu: He was both a keen student of Yoshiaki Yamashita and yet he also feared Japanese national and military might, responding with a nervous pro-American stance. Other negative responses to jujitsu included feminizing the martial art and describing Japanese instructors as irredeemably foreign. To counter any claims that jujitsu was a sneaky martial art, promotional literature referred to the Bushido code of honour, arguing that jujitsu was only used as a form of self-defence or defence of honour. In short, the literature argued that jujitsu was moral and manly. What is particularly noteworthy with respect to *Her Own Hero* is Rouse's painstaking sourcing of stories featuring martial arts being used in everyday contexts, a task greatly facilitated by the rapid development of online newspaper databases in recent years. As she argues, the example of ordinary women – such as Hisaso Sota, who, in 1905 in Harlem, threw her attacker to the ground using jujitsu – challenged notions of female passivity.

However, I would like to have seen a reference to Edward William Barton-Wright, who introduced Japanese martial arts to a mainstream audience in turn-of-the-century Britain. Barton-Wright drew together experts from around the world to his Bartitsu Club and influenced the development of martial arts overseas. Barton-Wright's Bartitsu, an early mixed martial art, embraced a variety of fighting styles including French *savate*, boxing and jujitsu. Bartitsu most famously appears, as a typo, in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventure of the Empty House* [1903] in which Sherlock Holmes tells a stunned Dr Watson, who believes Holmes is dead, that he survived his tussle with his greatest enemy using his knowledge of 'baritsu, or the Japanese system of wrestling'. What I find compelling is that, of all the weapons Holmes uses in the stories, it is his knowledge of Japanese martial arts which he takes to his most significant fight. How does Rouse view Barton-Wright's promotion of jujitsu? How was his work received in the United States? What were his attempts (if any) to counter claims of jujitsu's supposed underhandedness?

In the next chapter, urban villains such as the masher, the white slaver and the rapist provide an impetus for upper-class women to learn martial arts and, as an extension of their philanthropic work, to teach shop assistants and working-class women how to defend themselves. When it came to the masher, which the press in Britain had dubbed the 'male pest', Rouse remarks that 'the suggestion of impropriety undergirded every stare, remark, or touch' [79], a statement which evocatively suggests that the frisson of encounters on the

street or at the workplace could be very much one-sided. In recent years, Laura Bates's *Everyday Sexism* website and accompanying book documents the messages left on Bates's site by women who have suffered from verbal or physical harassment and abuse in their daily lives. In the nineteenth century, newspapers provided a forum in which women could discuss their experiences, most notable of whom was the author Olive Schreiner, who in the 1880s was arrested by a police officer who suspected her of being a prostitute simply because she was out walking at night. *Her Own Hero* shows that the flurry of Victorian letter writing on everyday sexism was not confined to the British press. Sympathetic journalists in the United States, including Nixola Greeley-Smith of the *Evening World* and Laura Jean Libbey of the *Chicago Tribune*, discussed the tricky subject of sexual harassment and offered advice to readers. Looking at *Her Own Hero*, it seems that, in both the British and American press, women were advised to make themselves invisible so as not to attract attention. However, Greeley-Smith argued that women who wore makeup and walked proudly down the streets were not to blame for the sexual harassment they suffered. Women were encouraged to discuss their experiences. Their revelations still resonate today, particularly so in the light of the Westminster sexual harassment scandal of autumn 2017 in which numerous female employees had reported that they had been subject to inappropriate attentions from male superiors. The Fawcett Society, founded in honour of Millicent Garrett Fawcett, who headed the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, a non-militant counterpoint to Emmeline Pankhurst's militant WSPU, responded with a campaign against the normalisation of sexism in the Houses of Parliament with the title 'Abuse of Power Comes as No Surprise'.

Indeed, Rouse recognises that the topic of self-defence encompasses more than just a discussion about hand-to-hand combat. Campaigners also fought for economic protection from employers, against the employers who might practice, as one newspaper put it, 'the Capitalist Class jiu jitsu of 'firing' the girls and throwing them breadless, sprawling upon the street' [Rouse 2017: 113]. This valuable observation is left hanging. Yet, the struggle for economic rights was a key factor in the militant campaign for the vote and became symbolically interlinked with physical self-defence. For instance, in her essay 'The Woman with the Whip' [1907], Teresa Billington-Greig of the Women's Freedom League, which operated in Britain, discussed the ways in which a dog-whip which she had used to defend herself at a political meeting in 1906 was also a symbol of the fight against women's oppression:

The unfair marriage laws, the divorce and separation laws, the laws of parentage, the criminal offences laws, were seen in a new light. ... There is no law of solicitation where men are concerned. There is one for women. A woman being approached insultingly by a man can only charge him with annoyance, and the charge is not made easy to sustain, as in the opposite case. ... [M]en and women together can solve those terrible problems which man alone can never hope to solve. Then the dog-whip can be burned, and the memories it wakens be forgotten.
[Billington-Greig 1907/1913: 43-52]

Interestingly, Rouse maintains that martial arts training for women was acceptable to many white men on the basis that 'self-defense training was seen as preserving white women's bodies for white men' [114]. What her chapter shows is that white men could be threats to white women, rather than being their perceived protectors, and that martial arts training provided white women with a means to counter this danger and presumably also any values inherent in hegemonic masculinities which could pose a danger to all women.

The book's last two chapters explore the ways in which martial arts were promoted for self-defence in the home, and they consider the links between the suffrage and women's rights campaigns on the growing adoption and social acceptance of women's self-defence. Rouse also assesses the strengths and limitations of various approaches today. What is admirable is Rouse's fresh perspective on the works of nineteenth-century

women's rights campaigners Lucy Stone and her daughter, Alice Stone Blackwell, as well as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, all three of whom influenced suffragette campaigners of the 1900s. While Elizabeth Cady Stanton argued that women ought not to rely on men to protect them and devise their own means of self-defence, Alice Stone Blackwell openly advocated boxing for women. Rouse also considers the ways in which women responded to Roosevelt's very public espousal of jujitsu. For example, Washington heiress and critic of Roosevelt Martha Blow Wadsworth engaged Fude, the wife of Roosevelt's trainer, Yoshiaki Yamashita, to teach a class of the wives and daughters of the Washington political elite. One of these students, Jessie Ames, became involved in the women's suffrage campaign and the birth control movement. The increasing stigmatisation of violence in the long nineteenth century resulted in a revision of masculine forms of settling disputes, from the criminalization of duelling to the increasing acceptance of regulated boxing. Rouse's book thoughtfully considers the ways in which ideals of femininity were re-sculptured in response to women's new roles within changing societies. Hopefully the observations of Louise Le Noir Thomas, a contemporary of Jessie Ames, will provide further stimulus for research relating to physical culture and gender identity: 'It is not unwomanly to protect herself – rather it is unwomanly to be overpowered by the assailant' [125].

REFERENCES

Billington-Greig, Teresa. 1907/1913. 'The Woman with the Whip'. *Towards Woman's Liberty*. London: Women's Freedom League.

Rouse, Wendy. 2017. *Her Own Hero: The Origins of the Women's Self-Defense Movement*. New York: New York University Press.

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Martial Arts Studies is an open access journal, which means that all content is available without charge to the user or his/her institution. You are allowed to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of the articles in this journal without asking prior permission from either the publisher or the author.

The journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Original copyright remains with the contributing author and a citation should be made when the article is quoted, used or referred to in another work.



Cardiff University Press
Gwasg Prifysgol Caerdydd

Martial Arts Studies is an imprint of Cardiff University Press, an innovative open-access publisher of academic research, where 'open-access' means free for both readers and writers.
cardiffuniversitypress.org

Journal DOI

10.18573/ISSN.2057-5696

Issue DOI

10.18573/mas.i5

Accepted for publication 24 January 2018

Martial Arts Studies

Journal design by Hugh Griffiths

MARTIALARTSSTUDIES.ORG

TWITTER.COM/MASTUDIES

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

EDITORS

Paul Bowman
Benjamin N. Judkins

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Kyle Barrowman
Qays Stetkevych

To discuss publication or to submit
a paper please contact:
martial.arts.studies@gmail.com

EDITORIAL ADVISORY PANEL

Oleg Benesch *University of York*
Stephen Chan *SOAS*
Greg Downey *Macquarie University*
D.S. Farrer *University of Guam*
Adam Frank *University of Central Arkansas*
Thomas A. Green *Texas A&M University*
T. J. Hinrichs *Cornell University*
Leon Hunt *Brunel University London*
Felipe P. Jocano Jr *University of the Philippines*
Gina Marchetti *Hong Kong University*
Meaghan Morris *The University of Sydney*
Daniel Mroz *University of Ottawa*
Meir Shahar *Tel Aviv University*
Dale Spencer *Carleton University*
Douglas Wile *Alverno College*
Phillip Zarrilli *Exeter University, Emeritus*



creative
commons

