



# Her Best Shot: Women and Guns in America

*Laura Browder*

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The gun-toting woman holds enormous symbolic significance in American culture. For over two centuries, women who pick up guns have disrupted the popular association of guns and masculinity, spurring debates about women's capabilities for violence as well as their capacity for full citizenship. In *Her Best Shot*, Laura Browder examines the relationship between women and guns and the ways in which the figure of the armed woman has served as a lightning rod for cultural issues.

Utilizing autobiographies, advertising, journalism, novels, and political tracts, among other sources, Browder traces appearances of the armed woman across a chronological spectrum from the American Revolution to the present and an ideological spectrum ranging from the Black Panthers to right-wing militias. Among the colorful characters presented here are Deborah Sampson, who disguised herself as a man to fight in the American Revolution; Pauline Cushman, who posed as a Confederate to spy for Union forces during the Civil War; Wild West sure-shot Annie Oakley; African explorer Osa Johnson; 1930s gangsters Ma Barker and Bonnie Parker; and Patty Hearst, the hostage-turned-revolutionary-turned-victim. With her entertaining and provocative analysis, Browder demonstrates that armed women both challenge and reinforce the easy equation that links guns, manhood, and American identity.

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