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Tommy: The Gun That Changed America

Rachel Wadham

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Book Review

Title: Tommy: The Gun That Changed America

Author: Karen Blumenthal

Reviewer: Rachel Wadham

Publisher: Roaring Brook Press

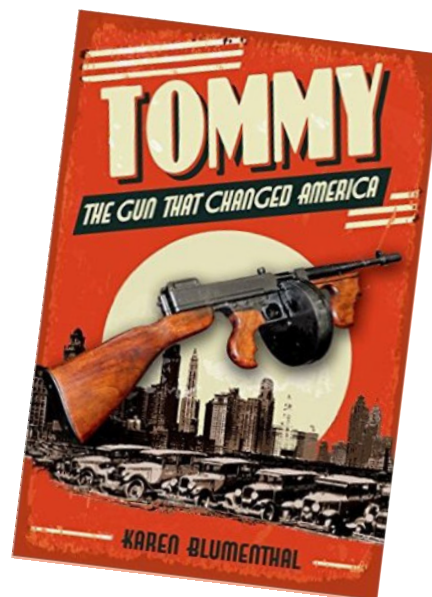
Publication Year: 2015

ISBN: 9781626720848

Number of Pages: 240

Interest Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Excellent



Review

The Tommy Gun, immortalized by texts and films realizing the gangster and outlaw era of the United States, is known by many but few really understand its whole history. Blumenthal seeks to change this in her accessible “biography” of the gun’s invention, rise to fame, and its overall influence on the world. John Thompson was determined to create a lightweight gun that could fire fast for use by soldiers on the battlefield. Delays in development prevented his gun from being ready for use during World War I, but its compact size and its ability to spray hundreds of bullets a second made it the favorite weapon for the bootleggers and outlaws for the 20s and 30s. As the weapon of choice for some of the most famous names of the time from Capone to Dillinger the gun’s infamous history has made it an American icon.

Chronicling both the inventors and purveyors of the gun Blumenthal clearly shows not only the science behind how the gun was made but also how it ended up in the hands of criminals. Portraits of the gun itself and of the people making it and using it bring to life some very interesting historical connections that bring clarity to much of the gun control controversy that still grips the nation today. A fascinating read on its own the text also has some great classroom extensions including other nonfiction like Blumenthal’s *Bootleg* and even fiction like Choldenko’s *Al Capone Does My Shirts*. Readers of all ages will be gripped by this extraordinary book about a familiar object they probably don’t know much about.

*Contains some mild violence, but it contextualized as part of the history of the gun.