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Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America by Philip Jenkins

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is the notion that there is clearly a balance to be struck between control and cooperation.

Warren's analysis illustrates the factors that affect the development of new policy initiatives, which include changes in cultural ideology, impact of community or political interests, and the recognition of a crisis. Clearly as more community groups took an interest in environmental lead poisoning and as it became increasingly apparent that large segments of the population were at risk, government policy regarding lead poisoning began to change. Warren places a great deal of emphasis on the impact of changing cultural ideology as American society developed more of an aversion to risk, resulting in increased government mandates to protect the population as well as changes in social behavior, the practice of medicine and law. Clearly, the impact of that changing ideology is crucial.

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Carolyn Leonard Carson

*Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America.*

By Philip Jenkins (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. xii plus 302pp.).

*Moral Panic* examines the shifting political, legal, social scientific, and mass media treatments of child sexual abuse in the United States during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jenkins argues that definitions of child molestation are neither transcendent, nor universal, nor natural, because the character and intensity of our outrage, and even our ability to see and name behavior as sexual abuse shifts rapidly with social relations. For Jenkins, to write the history of child abuse is not to uncover a dirty secret. Childhood is not a "nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken" as it has been for Lloyd deMause since the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> Rather, child sexual molestation is a nightmare of our own recent construction. Jenkins argues that in the last century the social significance of molestation has emerged through a cycle of panic framed by demographic shifts and competing groups of reformers including feminists, psychiatrists and therapists, crime wave reactionaries, religious conservatives, bureaucrats, and political opportunists.

*Moral Panic* charts more twists and turns in the history of sex-crime policy than can be summarized here. In fact, Jenkins' central argument for viewing child molestation in terms of history and society, rather than in terms of pathology and abuse emerges from the multiple, swift, non-linear, highly politicized fluctuations he has found in public policies regarding sexual deviancy over the last century. He begins with a persuasive account of how early century eugenicist physicians and psychologists aroused public outcry against and tried to medicalize definitions of criminal sexual behavior. The success of Progressive era reformers is testified to by the great increase in sterilizations and incarcerations of feeble-minded citizens during the era. Assured as these experts were of the real scientific basis of the feeble-minded menace, their panic quieted in the 1920s. But, Jenkins shows that the Progressive era opened a new space in the law for therapeutic discourses on deviant sexual behavior and these discourses resurged with sex-psychopath

legislation from the late-1930s to the early 1950s. He explores how the states increased police power, muddled what seem to be obvious current distinctions in sexual acts, stripped the accused of basic constitutional protections, expanded institutional populations, and practiced new treatments such as shock-therapy, psychosurgery, and psychotropic drugs. Although supposedly rational scientists had implemented the practices of the 1940s, it was no more than two decades before a liberal era overturned the old truth about deviant sexual behavior. From the late-1950s through the mid-1970s, the due process protections for those accused of sex-crimes were reestablished. Moreover, a man convicted of fondling, taking nude photos of, or exposing himself to a person under 17, who may have been incarcerated long-term in psychiatric hospitals during the 1940s, was more likely to be viewed in the late 1960s as a harmless pervert with an underdeveloped sense of manhood.

As in the early 1930s, in the sixties social research emerged to support the notion that deviant sexual behavior was not especially harmful to children, yet the cycle of perception turned again with incredible speed into what Jenkins calls "the child abuse revolution." By the late 1970s, child molestation had taken center stage in waves of new social research, organized pressure groups, media blitzes, and heralded legislative reform. Initiated by feminist critiques of male violence in sexual relations in the early 1970s, Jenkins documents the twists and turns that led the child abuse revolution away from problems within households to focusing on threats from outsiders. From incest, to outrage against child abduction in the late-1970s and early-1980s, to child pornography and pedophile rings in the mid-1980s, to daycare scandals, ritual abuse, and satanic cults in the early 1990s, we arrived at the current panic over sexual predators. In Jenkins' assessment, the focus on abuse within households was the only aspect of the revolution that merited public concern, but merit has not corresponded with power in the history of concepts about child molestation. Even clear and convincing evidence that "pedophile rings" was a misnomer and that the satanic cults' scourge was largely fictitious has not slowed the wider preoccupation with child sexual abuse. Instead Jenkins describes a spiraling "witch-hunt" for outsiders disrupting family harmony, now without the liberal cycles experienced during the twenties and the sixties. He says we may stand on the threshold of a more permanent departure in child protection policies from basic liberal rights such as the presumption of innocence, the right to face those who testify against you, and most glaringly, prohibitions against unusual punishments such as requiring offenders to notify their neighbors of their criminal records.

Anyone engaged in research on child abuse will benefit from Jenkins' careful observations and voluminous notes drawn from novels, films, newspapers, popular magazines, academic literature, and government documents. The book is clearly written and well reasoned throughout. It identifies more fully the spectrum of competing interpretations and fears about child vulnerability than does Paula Fass' excellent book *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America*. I offer only one critique. Jenkins explicitly frames *Moral Panic* as a study of the cultural construction of an essential category—the taboo of child sexual molestation, but he spends far more energy exposing interest group rhetoric and politicking, than exploring cultural subtlety, latent meaning, and ideological nuances in the discourses on child molestation. The book never really offers a deeper sense of

why child sexuality has become so powerfully taboo in our culture. We learn too little about the discursive relationships between sex, identity, childhood, consent, vulnerability, abuse, and violence. Instead Jenkins concludes that the major shifts in the discourse have been caused by interest group power struggles framed by demographic changes such as the percentage of women in the workforce and the proportion of children in the population. This explanation of cultural change is surprisingly acultural. Be that as it may, *Moral Panic* is an interesting and valuable study that helps researchers while it remains accessible to larger audiences.

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#### ENDNOTE

1. Lloyd deMause, "The Evolution of Childhood," 1, opening sentence of chapter 1 in Lloyd deMause, *The History of Childhood: The evolution of Parent-child relationships as a factor in history* (1974; repr. London, 1980)

*Rogues, Thieves and the Rule of Law: The Problem of Law Enforcement in Northeast England*. By Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton (London: University College London Press, 1998. xiii plus 287pp. £55 hb.).

The social history of crime is a vibrant area of intellectual enquiry, which since the 1960s has generated a proliferation of monographs and essays on a diversity of issues. There has been, however, a dearth of enquiry into criminal activity and law enforcement in northeast England. Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton's contribution is an ambitious attempt to readdress this imbalance. *Rogues, Thieves and the Rule of Law* is the first large-scale investigation into gendered criminality and law enforcement in the old counties of northeast England, (Durham, Northumberland and Newcastle upon Tyne), between the years of the 1718 Transportation Act and the early nineteenth-century. This historical period is one of the most symbolic in criminal justice history for the foundations of the modern legal system were being laid. Morgan and Rushton's meticulous attention to source material, however, illustrates the unique, yet diverse, character of criminal and civil law that persisted across these three northeastern administrative units into the nineteenth-century. Significantly this did not preclude justices co-operating with colleagues both within the region and in the capital on penal policy. Local justices, for instance, collaborated with Bow Street under Sir John Fielding in the 1760s to apprehend criminals in their environs and some years later supported his initiative for a national criminal register. Local officials were prolific too in petitioning central government for pardons and reprieves for the condemned.

Morgan and Rushton succeed admirably in restoring women to their rightful place in histories of crime whilst also overcoming the difficulties that blight comparisons of rural and urban crime during the eighteenth-century. In so doing they