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Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America. Paula S. Fass.

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Book Notes

Paula S. Fass, *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. \$15.95 paperback.

While the problem of child abduction may appear to many to be a straightforward affair, requiring little more than a resolute public response, this book shows just how complicated the problem has become. Like many contemporary analyses of social issues, Paula Fass demonstrates that child abduction is permeated by cultural, social and attitudinal factors of great complexity.

Although Fass is a historian, she implicitly draws on well established traditions of sociological inquiry that have dissected ostensibly uncomplicated social problems and revealed just how culturally laden they are. The notion of 'moral panics' and 'folk devils' which characterize interactionist analysis in the sociological study of social problems and deviance applies equally well to the study of child abduction. This is not to minimize the tragic reality of children who go missing, or to detract from the suffering of parents and loved ones who are not infrequently left with no explanations or traces of the abducted child. But Fass's work also shows how quickly a case of a missing child can develop into a media circus, the application of popular stereotypes and a rush to erroneous conclusions. In a series of fascinating case studies, she shows how the problem of child abduction evolved during this century into a complex phenomenon which reflected changing sexual mores, cultural fears and the role of mass communications. The chapters of her book dealing with the sexualization of child abduction and kidnapping by parents will be of particular interest to those working in the field of child welfare. With great insight, she shows how the re-formulation of this interpretation was influenced both by feminist and radical right thinking and how, in the political arena, efforts to gain political advantage resulted in wildly inaccurate accounts of the incidence of the problem and the transformation of interpretations (inspired by the work of Kinsey and his associates) which emphasized the commonplace nature of sexual experiences into an interpretation which emphasized its predatory and morbid character.

This is an extremely interesting and readable book. It will stimulate critical reflection not only among sociologists and social workers but among anyone interested in the way tragic social problems are interpreted in the public domain.

Rita Laws and Tim O'Hanlon, *Adoption and Financial Assistance: Tools for Navigating the Bureaucracy*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999. \$35.00 hardcover.

Permanency for children is a major goal of child welfare policy. However, finding permanent homes for 'special needs' children is difficult. These children often languish in the foster care system resulting in burdensome medical and other costs. Laws, the adoptive mother of eight, and O'Hanlon, a former adoption assistance policy specialist, contend that the biggest obstacle the average family faces when adopting a special needs child is money. Although the Title IV-E adoption provisions allow for state and federal financial assistance for the costs of adoption and for maintenance, not many parents know what to ask for. Furthermore, financial problems often do not surface until the child reaches school age long after the adoption is finalized.

In four well-defined and carefully written parts, this book serves as a guide for prospective parents who are considering adopting special needs children. The first part of the book describes how the intent of PL 96-272 is often deflected by bureaucracy. Part two briefly discusses parental support groups and community capacity building, and then proceeds to show how families can obtain financial assistance to adopt special needs children. The advocacy skills described in this part can be used by parents not only to secure financial assistance but help with medical and educational needs. It also shows how parents can use fair hearings to their advantage. The authors caution that sometimes even hearing officers don't know everything about the law. The third part of the book contains legal documents, including Policy Interpretation Questions (PIQs) which are relevant to parents seeking adoption financial assistance retroactively. The sections of the *Adoption and Safe Families Act* relating to adoption assistance are also covered. The final section of the book offers readers information and resources available at various internet sites for on-line support and advice.