

Gay Rights and Moral Panic: The Origins of America's Debate on Homosexuality

Fred Fejes. New York: Palgrave, 2008.

Shortly after the publication of Fejes's book, beauty queen Carrie Prejean campaigned for "opposite marriage"—that is, for denying civil marriage rights to same-gender couples. In light of these events, Fejes's central claim—the claim that contemporary campaigns against gay rights echo the campaign of beauty queen Anita Bryant—feels eerily prescient.

Drawing from multiple sociologists, Fejes defines "moral panic" in part as a "[situation] of high generalized social anxiety where a condition, behavior, person or group . . . [becomes] the focal point of the anxiety" (19). According to Fejes, "[d]ecades of negative media portrayal [of lesbians and gays], buttressed by authoritative medical theories and laws [about homosexuality]," established the necessary conditions for a moral panic over gay rights in the 1970s (218). This panic was then ignited by a "religiously inspired political effort" to oppose gay rights (218). Lesbians and gay men subsequently became the focal point of anxiety resulting not only from a conflict between "gay and straight," but from "a conflict between men and women, Christian and Jew, religion and secularism, the 'common people' and the 'liberal elite,' and the traditional values of America and the radicalism of the 1960s" (83).

Drawing from political scholar Benedict Anderson, Fejes defines "imagined community" as "a community defined not by physical space and boundaries or the actual physical contact among its members but by the mental image of affinity—'the image of communion'—that each [holds] in their minds" (215). According to Fejes, two imagined communities emerged out of the moral panic over gay rights. The first was a "national political community" of lesbians and gay men. San Francisco politician and gay activist Harvey Milk became this community's "first surrogate martyr" (215). The second imagined community to emerge comprised "social and religious conservatives" who viewed the first community "as a dire threat to the moral and spiritual health of the nation" (218).

The overall portrait Fejes weaves is thorough, copiously documented, compelling, and valuable for all who wish to deepen their knowledge of US gay

history without accessing multitudinous primary sources. Nonetheless, I did find myself concerned by the repeated assertion that the Stonewall riots "marked the beginning of the modern lesbian and gay movement" (214). Revisionist historians are recovering the history of lesbian, gay and transgender activism *preceding* Stonewall. In fairness, however, Fejes's word "marked" is ambiguous, and Stonewall did serve as an impetus for greater organization in the nascent lesbian and gay movement.

The flipside of the book's thoroughness is its narrowness in scope. Only one chapter interrogates US media, medical and legislative attitudes toward homosexuality prior to the 1970s; and only a few pages extend beyond the 1970s. Moreover, in the end, the question of what "gay rights" should or should not entail is not only, as Fejes concludes, "a question that America has yet to answer" (229), but a question that Fejes himself leaves largely unanswered.

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Knickerbocker: The Myth Behind New York

Elizabeth L. Bradley. New Brunswick, NJ: Rivergate Books.

This is cultural history at its best. Elizabeth Bradley, deputy director of the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library, has traced the story of Washington Irving's fictitious and satirical creation through one incarnation after another, right up to the present day. Irving's initial gambit was simply to create a fake person to represent a fake history and, in doing so, to parody some of the popular histories of New York in the early 1800s. His creation, however, has far outlived any of those other histories, and in fact, has outlived Irving's other creations, as well. Of course Rip Van Winkle and Sleepy Hollow and the Headless Horseman will live on in the annals of American literature, but none has developed the resonance of Dietrich Knickerbocker. And Bradley shows us how.

This is no mere listing of all the ways that the Knickerbocker name has been used throughout New York City for two hundred years in order to sell nearly any product imaginable—from beer to sports fran-