

Delinquent Daughters explores the gender, class, and racial tensions that fueled campaigns to control female sexuality in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Mary Odem looks at these moral reform movements from a national perspective, but she also undertakes a detailed analysis of court records to explore the local enforcement of regulatory legislation in Alameda and Los Angeles Counties in California. From these legal proceedings emerge overlapping and often contradictory views of middle-class female reformers, court and law enforcement officials, working-class teenage girls, and working-class parents. Odem traces two distinct stages of moral reform. The first began in 1885 with the movement to raise the age of consent in statutory rape laws as a means of protecting young women from predatory men. By the turn of the century, however, reformers had come to view sexually active women not as victims but as delinquents, and they called for special police, juvenile courts, and reformatories to control wayward girls. Rejecting a simple hierarchical model of class control, Odem reveals a complex network of struggles and negotiations among reformers, officials, teenage girls and their families. She also addresses the paradoxical consequences of reform by demonstrating that the protective measures advocated by middle-class women often resulted in coercive and discriminatory policies toward working-class girls.

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