

Marginal People in Deviant Places

Ethnography, Difference, and the Challenge to Scientific Racism

Marginal People in Deviant Places revisits early- to mid-twentieth-century ethnographic studies, arguing that their focus on marginal subcultures—ranging from American hobos, to men who have sex with other men in St. Louis bathrooms, to hippies, to taxi dancers in Chicago, to elderly Jews in Venice, California—helped produce new ways of thinking about social difference more broadly in the United States. Irvine demonstrates how the social scientists who told the stories of these marginalized groups represented an early challenge to then-dominant narratives of scientific racism, prefiguring the academic fields of gender, ethnic, sexuality, and queer studies in key ways. In recounting the social histories of certain American outsiders, Irvine identifies an American paradox by which social differences are both despised and desired, and she describes the rise of an outsider capitalism that integrates difference into American society by marketing it.

Janice M. Irvine is Professor of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts.

“*Marginal People in Deviant Places* is a wonderful, smart, and multidimensional cultural history of the twentieth century through the eyes of marginalized populations, and a thorough consideration of the contributions of scholars of deviance, which makes a powerful argument for the value of social scientific rather than biological understandings of deviance.”

—Arlene Stein, Rutgers University

“The book makes a compelling argument, tells a fascinating and multilayered story, and is beautifully written. The diverse subjects of the ethnographies will be of interest to specialists in a wide range of fields, including urban studies, the history and sociology of medicine, queer studies, sexuality studies, youth studies, and African American studies.”

—Andrea Friedman, Washington University in St. Louis

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