

[Hartjen on Myers, 'Youth Squad: Policing Children in the Twentieth Century'](#)

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Tamara Gene Myers. *Youth Squad: Policing Children in the Twentieth Century*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019. xiii + 253 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7735-5893-9; \$110.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-5892-2.

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Policing Children

Youth Squad: Policing Children in the Twentieth Century provides a lucid and informed historical account of the increasing involvement of police in the lives of North American youth throughout the twentieth century. In their efforts to protect and deter "at risk" young people from delinquent activity and potential lives of criminality, law enforcement agencies devised a number of strategies that increasingly embedded them in the lives of children, especially those deemed to be pre-delinquents or incipient delinquents.

Tamara Gene Myers's introduction offers a succinct discussion of the overall analyses that follow in more detailed chapters. Each chapter documents how the police in Canadian and American cities changed their approach to "wayward" young people from intimidation/punishment to one of "prevention" and "reform" of those involved in, or at risk of involvement in, delinquency and potentially harmful behavior. Throughout her analysis, Myers implies that in addition to trying to "save" young people from lives of crime, police departments had a hidden agenda to infiltrate communities of young people in order to combat the negative image people held of them as well as to enhance police legitimacy, status, and ultimately control.

Substantive, very readable, and well documented, chapters describe in detail how police departments, primarily in Canada, came to develop policing strategies that focused on deterring the assumed delinquency/criminal tendencies of various populations of young people—specifically disadvantaged youths from ethnic neighborhoods and, later, racial minorities. Both generally and with specific case examples, Myers describes the origins and development of "youth squads," curfew laws, the creation of police-sponsored athletic programs (such as Police Athletic Leagues), traffic law observance, and finally the increasing use of police officers as school resource officers (SROs) throughout Canada and the United States. Ironically, as Myers points out, the introduction of SROs in schools appears to represent a return to the pre-twentieth-century "intimidate and punish" approach to policing young people. As she states: "In the name of keeping students safe, the police presence in schools has meant a more repressive approach toward young people" (p. 178).

Youth Squad is an excellent and highly accessible documentation of North American changes in

thinking about young people and the role of police authority in dealing with their presumed criminal potential as well as the assumption that they needed special nurturing and protection. Both as a historical analysis and as a statement of bureaucratic as well as social science folly, this volume is a must read for anyone interested in public policy and the ways ideology can lead to the intrusive, if well-intended, involvement of authority in the lives of people.

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