

Youth, moves in this direction when he refers to Beth Bailey's chapter on the gender politics of parietals at the University of Kansas in his chapter on the spatial politics of skateboarding (338). In chronological order, the cumulative effect of the essays was noticeably repetitive, particularly in Parts I and II. The same recurring issues — racial oppression, gender privileging/marginalizing, sexual disciplining, youthful resistance to the tabooed — in true Foucauldian form, appear to produce strikingly similar effects and cultural phenomena despite the variance in historical moment. Even so, chapters of *Generations of Youth* will likely be read selectively by students and cultural scholars thus lessening the repetitive effect. In any event *Generations of Youth* makes a provocative contribution to American cultural studies.

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Mike A. Males. *Framing Youth: 10 Myths About the Next Generation*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1999. Pp. 391. \$29.95; \$18.95 pb.

Mike A. Males. *The Scapegoat Generation: America's War on Adolescents*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1996. Pp. 329. \$29.95; \$17.95 pb.

Clashes between generations are nothing new; not surprisingly, the transfer of power that inevitably takes place is disruptive and frightening for elders who must give way to the next generation. As youths begin to flex their political muscles, the adults they will displace view them with doubt and suspicion, while gazing back nostalgically to their parents' and grandparents' time as a golden age when youths were respectful and hardworking (however erroneous this perception may be). Perhaps this is no more than a natural anxiety on the part of adults, but it can produce a multitude of negative effects, as it often translates into oppressive social systems designed to consolidate power in adult hands while disenfranchising youths. Scholars of children's literature and culture have been analyzing the potentially oppressive nature of adult/child relationships for some years. However, these discussions rarely have seeped into larger cultural discourse and, indeed, are resisted by lay people. At the same time, politicians and media outlets tap into powerful adult constituencies and readerships by exploiting adult fears. Hence, disturbing anti-youth rhetoric recurs unabated in the popular media and political debates.

In his books *The Scapegoat Generation: America's War on Adolescents* and *Framing Youth: 10 Myths About the Next Generation*, Mike Males attempts to explode the popular myths that adults propagate about youths. He aims his tough, scathing arguments squarely at the politicians who exploit widespread fear of youth for political gain, the scholars whose

sloppy statistical work furthers these political ends, and the reporters and editors who recycle platitudes, half-truths, manipulated statistics and outright fabrications. In *Framing Youth*, Males identifies five major means of distorting discussions of youth issues: dissemination of anecdotes that make rare cases appear to be "trends"; use of decontextualized statistics; reliance on secondary sources; citation of studies that the writers have not read; and refusal to face the ways in which race and poverty are implicated in social problems erroneously attributed to youth (25-26). Males largely avoids these problems in his own work (though other problems do arise). His general methodology is to define a "common perception" of youth and then dispel it with a profusion of numbers, organized into graphs and charts and then fully analyzed according to standard statistical procedures that he explains clearly to the reader. He also demonstrates how such procedures, too often, are tossed aside blithely by those who wish to bolster erroneous perceptions in order to score political points. Males attacks the ideas that adolescents are irresponsible, irrational, sex-crazed, driven by hormones, addicted to drugs, likely to engage in risky behaviour, and unconcerned about the consequences of their actions. In short, he refutes the common perception that teens display numerous social pathologies that render them dangerous to themselves and to those around them — particularly adults. Instead, he argues, adults exhibit far worse behaviour than teens, yet blame the resulting social problems on youth behaviour.

Although generational wars are probably inevitable, Males argues that the current clash is more bloody and conflicted than those of previous generations. He attributes this to several factors, including worsening drug abuse among parent-age adults and increasing rates of felony violent, property, and drug-related crimes in the white, over-30 population (*Framing Youth* 5). He also accuses older generations of selfishness and hypocrisy: although today's Baby Boomers and elderly argue that they achieved their current comfortable status without government help (thus attempting to justify ever-deeper cuts in funding for the young), Males argues that this is "nostalgic hokum," because "Americans over the age of 40 were subsidized by some of the most generous social programs government has ever funded" (*Framing Youth* 299). In the 1970s, Males claims, these programs began to be "slashed" — by the same people who enjoyed affluent lifestyles founded on government subsidies, but who did not want to take their turn sacrificing for the benefit of the next generation (*Framing Youth* 300). This is not due simply to sheer self-indulgence on the part of elders; Males pinpoints 1970 as a time when demographic shifts became clear to the general public: "[T]he 1970s and afterward represent the period in which the traditional majority, Euro-whites, began to realize that the U.S. will in the near future [. . .] become a nation of no racial majority. This all-minority future is portended by the younger

generation and is particularly visible in urban states" (*Framing Youth* 334). Thus, one of the underlying causes Males identifies for the growing viciousness of public discourse regarding youth is racism and "fear of racial transition" (*Framing Youth* 8). Because it is no longer politically expedient to express overt racism or sexism, elders mask these underlying attitudes by focussing on controlling so-called "teenage behavior."

However, Males deconstructs this rhetoric by demonstrating that the very concept of "teenage behaviour" is faulty and misleading. First, he shows that teens in general are less likely than adults to engage in risky behaviors. Then he demonstrates that by many measures teens are far less likely to act like peers of their age than they are to act like adults of their own race, class, and gender. Thus, many other social variables besides age are far more useful in predicting and explaining behaviour. Males argues that when these factors are carefully accounted for, negative behaviours in any particular age group are far more strongly linked to poverty than to age. He discusses the complexities of converging trends that drive the current generation strife in the concluding chapter of *Framing Youth*, briefly exploring solutions that (not surprisingly, given his ultimate focus on the problems caused by poverty) are dependent upon more equitable distributions of wealth, particularly in regard to public education.

The two books are similar in many ways; if one turns to *Framing Youth* expecting a substantially different book from *The Scapegoat Generation*, one will be disappointed. Rather, *Framing Youth* is a revision and update that neither moves into new territory nor covers new ground. However, in this book, Males shuffles the material into a more smoothly-flowing order, separating his discussions of politics and the media into a separate chapter (thus sharpening the arguments), and he updates numerical information, revisiting his previous analyses accordingly. In *The Scapegoat Generation*, Males discusses the work of other social critics but almost always from an oppositional viewpoint. In *Framing Youth*, by addressing other writers whose work also explores the effects of oppressive adult/child relationship, he situates his own work more carefully within a scholarly context. Not only does this contextualization increase the credibility of the later book, but it also highlights Males's contribution to the larger field of study. In particular, his careful analysis of statistical trends across age, race, socioeconomic, and gender categories provides a solid factual background for the heartrending tales that other writers depend upon to make their arguments. For example, in his 1995 book *Amazing Grace*, Jonathan Kozol worries that the stories he tells about people's reactions to living in a ghetto will be taken out of social context to support conservative messages about so-called personal responsibility (161). His concerns are well founded, and one of the strengths of Males's strongly analytical and statistical approach is that it demonstrates how

the conditions that Kozol discusses are not due simply to personal moral failings, but to a complex set of social problems. While Kozol and others provide stories that emotionally move readers, Males provides the larger context that forces readers to face their responsibility in creating and maintaining such social conditions.

This is not to say that Males's work is merely dry and statistical. Far from it. His hot attacks on various public figures, coupled with heavy-handed, bombastic prose that is laden with puns, colloquialisms, and overwrought verbs, are designed to incite a strong reaction. He never openly suggests that deliberate conspiracies are afoot, but his occasional tendency to paint opponents with a broad brush creates the impression that there is more to this generation war than meets the eye — an impression that may leave readers feeling skeptical of some of his conclusions. Two omissions also mar both books. First, Males only briefly discusses the tricky issue of agency, a problem that forms the subtext in many discussions of youth responsibility and rights. In books that reveal the many ways in which adults exploit children and teenagers, a full discussion of the complexities of determining agency would have provided effective background. Second, in some places, Males's analysis pits Baby Boomers against Gen-Xers, but in other places, the age groups under comparison appear to be the older and younger edges of Generation X. Discussions of the social constructs that such terms imply and the complexities of defining generational trends and behaviours across several decades also would have been useful.

In the end, while the prose and the conclusions are neither nuanced nor graceful, the ideas that Males conveys in both books and his handling of the statistical analysis are convincing because of the breadth and depth of his coverage. In both books, he tends to belabour points by returning to them again and again from varying perspectives. His conclusion that, by many measures, adults are far more drug-addicted, violent, and prone to crime than teenagers is inspected from different angles in virtually every chapter. However, the fact that few in media, politics, or the general population seem to be heeding his words may explain the apparent need to hammer the points home again and again. Anyone who has read his book, at any rate, will never look at adolescents, adults, politicians, the media — or, indeed, statistics in general — in quite the same way again. Males reminds us of how much we would prefer to forget, and he forces us to confront issues we would prefer to ignore. While his tone may be strident and overbearing, he is someone to whom we need to listen.

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WORK CITED

- Kozol, Jonathan. *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation*. New York: Crown, 1995.