

should not be exaggerated. Certainly, further investigation is justified if only because of the statistical and demographic significance of accidental injury and death. In Britain in 1991 more than 50 per cent of deaths among minors (aged 5–14) were attributed to accidents, while in the same year accidents were the commonest cause of death for people in the age range 19–34. Infants are hard hit by domestic accidents, while road traffic continues to kill the British at a rate of around 4000 per year, with younger age groups suffering disproportionately to their numbers. In other periods and places the accident toll was higher still. As a former US Commissioner of Labor observed in 1913, American industry had no equal in terms of the “maiming and mangling and killing of those who attempt to earn their bread in the sweat of their faces”.

Perhaps paradoxically, in light of the foregoing, much of this volume, including the editors’ stimulating and incisive introduction, is concerned with denying the existence of the subject under consideration. In other words, insofar as a common argument is presented here, it is that accidents, in the sense of arbitrary occurrences devoid of social, economic, cultural, or political meaning, do not exist. While it is true that accidents have causes and consequences, some of which may lie far from the scene of injury, and also that, for example, the industrial working class is more likely to suffer a workplace injury than the aristocrat or capitalist, it is equally plausible that the identity of any given victim will also owe something to a phenomenon which, for want of a better word, we might call “chance”. In this sense it can be said that accidents, like the poor, are always with us.

The editors of this volume, both of whom have previously written on their subject, are to be congratulated on putting together a wide-ranging collection which provides a valuable introduction to the subject while indicating that there is much scope for further work.

Peter Bartrip,
Nene University College, Northampton

Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Creating born criminals*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1997, pp. xi, 284, illus., \$36.95 (0-252-02237-8).

The title neatly encapsulates Rafter’s central argument: that biological theories of crime “create” criminals by categorizations which reflect nothing more scientific than power relationships and professional interests. Rafter, needless to say, is a self-confessed disciple of Foucault, and throughout applies a Foucauldian approach to her reconstruction of eugenic theories of crime and assessment of their impact on criminal justice practices. This is a “definitional” history which treats “born-criminal discourses as a series of texts that created social-truths” (p. 9), and scientific knowledge as a “resource in the structuring of power and social organisation” (p. 10). Her main contention is that in the period 1870 to 1920 “*eugenic criminology*” (defined loosely and anachronistically) “constitutes a distinctive set of criminological discourses” (p. 7) which have been underestimated in previous works on eugenics and criminology.

The deficiency is made good by a narrative account of the evolution of eugenic criminology and its interactions with asylums for the retarded and prisons for criminals in New York state. Essentially, eugenic criminology is treated as “a story of widening jurisdictional claims” (p. 28), and Rafter ably connects theoretical developments with professional interests. Different phases of eugenic labelling, from moral imbecile, through defective delinquent, to psychopath, are carefully distinguished and each stage presented as a further refinement of “professional legitimation”. Eugenics is not so much appropriated as developed by “psychiatrists, psychologists, prison physicians, social workers, and institution superintendents” keen to excuse their own failures, justify funding for their institutions and establish their own authority, as part of an “emerging professional middle class” (pp. 86–7).

Rafter uses nuanced definitions of the different stages of eugenic criminology to build

Book Reviews

periodizations which are too pronounced to be credible. By 1915, for example, with the advent of the “psychopath”, we have already reached the third phase of eugenic criminology in the twentieth century. Such *caesuralism* leaves her unable to understand why, despite an evolving terminology, attitudes towards “feeble-minded women” remain remarkably unchanged between 1870 and 1911, and struggling to explain why New York’s first eugenic prison arrived only in 1921, when the discourse was on the wane. The latter perhaps points to the limitations of verbal strategies for understanding state penal policy. Yet throughout, Rafter infuriatingly privileges discourse analysis. In consequence, she is patchy on the wider intellectual context of eugenic criminology, and uninformative on the social setting of New York state between 1870 and 1920, either in detail or in comparison with other states. It is a shame Rafter feels the need to be so constrained by her Foucauldian approach, as this well-written text leaves one in no doubt that she was capable of the systematic study of the records of Napanoch and other institutions she points to the need for in her final chapter.

Instead, Rafter is determined to provide “much more than a look at the past”. Underlying her book is a desire to answer contemporary incarnations of eugenic criminology, and to use the history of ideas to “guide us” in this project (p. 237). To the extent that her work suggests that “the concept of the criminal body is a construct” which tells us as much about the categorizers as the criminal, she is successful. Ultimately, however, her Foucauldian approach is again woefully inadequate for the task. We are told little or nothing of what linguistic, let alone political or social, strategies were adopted to counter previous incarnations, and advised only “to approach contemporary biological theories as discourses” (p. 238). Such constructivist relativism leads to a neglect of nature/nurture debates and the conceding of too much ground to hereditarian explanations. Instead of speculating on the possibility of forecasting which foetuses will grow into

crime-prone adults, Rafter would have done better to emphasize that criminality is a product of social conditions as much as of “social control specialists” (p. 238). Both her history and her polemic would have been improved by incorporating the insight that criminals are “created” environmentally, as well as definitionally.

David Stack,
Queen Mary and Westfield College, London

Robert S Robins and Jerrold M Post,
Political paranoia: the psychopolitics of hatred, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1997, pp. x, 366, £20.00 (0-300-07027-6).

One tradition that looms large throughout the history of medicine is the attempt to interpret major cultural, political and social events through the study of psychiatry and psychology. Numerous examples come to mind, dating back at least as far as Charles Mackay’s *Popular delusions and the madness of crowds* (1841). Since then, prominent authors such as Gustave LeBon, Max Nordau, Richard Hofstadter, and Christopher Lasch have followed this path, to say nothing of Elaine Showalter’s well-publicized *Hystories* (1997). Robins and Post’s *Political paranoia* is another contribution to this genre, a well-written and at times fascinating look at the way the world of politics is particularly susceptible to paranoid thinking, especially theories of conspiracy and delusions of persecution. In the past, Robins, a political scientist, and Post, a professor of psychiatry, have both been consultants to the US government on matters related to political psychology. Relying heavily on psychoanalytic theories of paranoia, Robins and Post argue persuasively that political paranoia has cursed the twentieth century. The stress that accompanies dramatic and rapid change, the authors contend, makes people vulnerable to the paranoid messages of hatred, suspicion, resentment, and violence spread by unscrupulous political figures like Stalin,