



## Sex Panic and the Punitive State

By Roger N. Lancaster

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One evening, while watching the news, Roger N. Lancaster was startled by a report that a friend, a gay male school teacher, had been arrested for a sexually based crime. The resulting hysteria threatened to ruin the life of an innocent man. In this passionate and provocative book, Lancaster blends astute analysis, robust polemic, ethnography, and personal narrative to delve into the complicated relationship between sexuality and punishment in our society. Drawing on classical social science, critical legal studies, and queer theory, he tracks the rise of a modern suburban culture of fear and develops new insights into the punitive logic that has put down deep roots in everyday American life.

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## **Sex Panic and the Punitive State** By Roger N. Lancaster Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Review

“Casts a thought-provoking perspective.”  
(*Salon* 2011-12-09)

“A convincing argument.”  
(*The Gay & Lesbian Review* 2012-09-01)

“Smart, witty, and political. The critique of state responses to sex offense is desperately needed in a policy debate that celebrates ever harsher punishment.”  
(*Contexts* 2012-08-30)

“This book provides a . . . window on the use of sex panics and fear-mongering by the state to increase its control over private behavior.”  
(J.A. Myers *Gay & Lesbian Review/Worldwide* 2011-09-01)

### From the Inside Flap

"Lancaster's approach is fresh, critical and engaging. Many scholars have examined America's 'carceral state,' but few so successfully combine personal narrative and passion with sober assessment. This is a landmark book—a dismaying, angry, but powerful analysis of America's justice system."—Michael Sherry, Northwestern University

“*Sex Panic and the Punitive State* is a passionate, wide-ranging analysis of a culture of American fear that takes shape as moral panic and a socially permeating knee-jerk vindictiveness—not just against the criminal but against anyone (therefore everyone) who could be cast as a potential perpetrator. Its focus on sex and crime is centrally on the male sexual predator, especially the pedophile figure: but its richly archived and narrated examples reach from 19th century victimology to the present, from slavery to terrorism, and their legitimation of the preemptive moral strike. A manifesto against the contemporary paranoid style and its hold on the law, media and you, this book is an important contribution to LGBTQ studies and to American studies in general.”—Lauren Berlant, Department of English, University of Chicago

"*Sex Panic* is gripping and provocative. Lancaster effectively weaves historical and ethnographic accounts along with his own experiences to illuminate the dangerous tilt in America's legal system toward a presumption of guilt. This is an important book for anyone interested in how crime and justice are perceived in society."—Jonathan Simon, Berkeley Law, Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice

“A profound meditation on sex panics in the modern period, coupled with a biting polemic against the role of the punitive state in American culture. This is a must read for everyone concerned with the state of human rights, sexuality, and political economy. You may not agree with it all, but it will rattle your brain.”  
—Gilbert Herdt, founder, Department of Sexuality Studies, San Francisco State University

"From the moral panics about child abuse to the war on terror, Roger Lancaster brilliantly explores the fears and anxieties of the United States in recent decades, showing how they continuously participate in the shaping of the nation. His vivid depiction of the paranoid style and bellicose rhetoric in politics gives remarkable clues to comprehend contemporary punitive governance." —Didier Fassin, James Wolfensohn Professor of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton University

"*Sex Panic & the Punitive State* is a sensationally smart integration of the ever-expanding regime of sex-offender surveillance and punishment with all those vexing phenomena you knew were related but couldn't figure out how: victim worship; parental paranoia; the racialization of crime; neoliberalism; the 'war on terror'—and more. Lancaster spares neither right nor left, feminist nor religious conservative; he privileges neither cultural nor economic theories. Meticulously historicized, complexly thought-out, and elegantly written, this exegesis of sexuality and the 'punitive state' will long be vital to academics, policymakers, and activists alike."—Judith Levine, author of *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex*

About the Author

**Roger N. Lancaster** is Professor of Anthropology and Cultural Studies at George Mason University and is the author of several books, including *Life Is Hard* and *The Trouble with Nature*, both from UC Press.

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