



A History of Rape: Sexual Violence in France from the 16th to the 20th Century

By Georges Vigarello

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This important new book, by one of the leading social historians in France today, analyses the changing meaning of rape through numerous case studies across the centuries.

The book begins with a history of the relative tolerance of sexual violence in early modern France, and the tendency to condemn the victims by enveloping them in the shame of the act. It then traces the changing legal attitudes to sexual violence at the end of the eighteenth century, and the slow recognition of the role of moral violence in rape in the nineteenth century. Vigarello also stresses the importance of the new medical jurisprudence and the introduction of forensic psychiatry into the courtroom.

But despite the increased number of convictions in the nineteenth century, it was only after the campaigns conducted by feminists in the twentieth century that the true gravity of rape as a crime against women's integrity was fully recognized. As a result, acts of sexual violence are no longer assessed in terms of the risk of debauchery, but in terms of the risk of 'psychic murder' and inner damage.

A History of Rape is a valuable resource for students and scholars of social history, and anyone interested in changing attitudes to sexuality and sexual violence

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Editorial Review

Review

"Presents an excellent social interpretation of rape and sexual violence ... easy and interesting to read. Although the examination of rape takes place in France, the major themes of the book are applicable to most Western countries. It is extremely well researched and a valuable resource to anyone interested in changing attitudes to sexuality and sexual crimes."

Medical Sociology News

"Littered with interesting insights."

Times Literary Supplement

"Georges Vigarello has written a fascinating sensitive and nonsensational history of rape and sexual violence in France over the course of the last five centuries ... this English translation is a welcome edition for all scholars interested in what society, the courts, the law, and culture considered as rape or sexual violence ... Vigarello is to be highly commended for undertaking this difficult research and for producing an important work on the subject."

American Historical Review

"An excellent survey of the evolution of popular, learned, and juridical attitudes toward rape, this work is suitable for students as well as scholars."

The Historian

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From the Back Cover

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