

COURTNEY Q. SHAH, *Sex Ed, Segregated: The Quest for Sexual Knowledge in Progressive-Era America* (Rochester: The U of Rochester P, 2015), 228 pp.

In *Sex Ed, Segregated*, Courtney Q. Shah examines the early twentieth-century sexual education movement in the United States by exposing the debates surrounding sex ed and curriculum development in schools; how messages pertaining to sexual education were tailored for specific populations (men/women, girls/boys, working/middle class, black/white); and how groups with political agendas (e.g., Progressives, the YMCA, the military, the media, girls' schools) tried to shape mainstream sex ed. As Shah adeptly illustrates, sexual education was, and still is, contoured by social, cultural, political, economic, religious, and scientific forces, and is never simply about education. More often than not, it is part of the arsenal of props deployed by American society to promote a specific hegemonic racial, gender, moral, or medical discourse.

A revised version of Shah's PhD Dissertation ("This Loathsome Subject: Sex Education in Progressive-Era America," University of Houston, 2006), *Sex Ed, Segregated* builds on the existing early twentieth-century sexuality, social hygiene/purity, and reproduction literature by mining under-examined sources, particularly those illustrating how sexual education was modified based on its target audience. In the early twentieth century, sexual education included instruction on a range of topics such as courtship, marriage, sexual intercourse, human anatomy and development, health, wellness, procreation, contraception, and venereal diseases, usually combining practical knowledge with the scientific and morals ideas of the era. As Shah explicates, sexual education was, and still is, a product of its time. Thus, the sexual education of the first few decades of the twentieth century reflects its social context: Jim Crow, xenophobia, eugenics, class tension, World War I, and rapid social change (urbanization, industrialization, Progressivism, and the rise of the "New Woman" and "New Negro").

As Shah illustrates, sexual education texts were often modified for specific populations (titles, introductions, and illustrations were changed for black and white readers), and such alterations were based on racial assumptions and an unquestioned acceptance of racial difference. For example, while chastity and

respectability were emphasized in African American texts, books published for white audiences focused on political and social hierarchies (white racial superiority) and eugenics (improving the national stock by encouraging reproduction among the "fit" and discouraging it among the "unfit"). Such manuals, however, also had certain elements in common: their religious and moral undertones, their emphasis on education and reform, and their faith in science, medicine, and technology. Moreover, they "normalized white male (middle class) sexuality and pathologized any departures from the white male norm" (x).

Americans were far more divided when it came to the sexual education of women, and in particular white women. While some Progressives advocated candid and explicit education that would eliminate ignorance and sexual double standards by empowering women to take control of their bodies (i.e., they saw it as part of larger feminist goals), others believed such a direct approach would ruin the moral fiber of womanhood and motherhood. World War I erased a great deal of the conservative resistance to sexual education, forcing Americans to come to terms with the high incidence of venereal disease among soldiers as well as the reality of prostitution. The need to protect officers and enlisted men became a matter of national security, and reformers developed a specific type of male, military-oriented sexual education. As private concerns gradually entered the public sphere, the federal government responded by implementing new sexual education policies and programs which, over the course of the twentieth century, became increasingly pro-active and intrusive. As Shah contends, "what could have been a revolutionary way to empower people was more often used to reinforce power relations" (xiii), with different groups with different agendas—the government, charities, clubs, social and political associations, religious authorities, eugenicists, physicians, legal/criminal experts, and other professionals—vying to dominate sexual education discourse.

The bulk of Shah's work deals with these groups and their competition to define and control sexual education in America. Over the course of six chapters, she delineates how the American Social Hygiene Association, the National Medical Association (the main medical society for black health care professionals), the YMCA, the Boy Scouts of America, the federal government, municipal authorities,

law enforcement, educators, and social purity (anti-prostitution) activists all attempted to shape—with varying degrees of success—the American sex ed agenda. In chapter seven, Shah extends her analysis of sexual education into the Roaring Twenties, a period of intense social upheaval when, spearheaded by co-eds, flappers, and the mass media, America developed a sex culture. This new culture was part of the broader expansion of personal freedoms, which came in numerous forms: the automobile, birth control, alcohol and cigarette consumption, and the clothing revolution. As Shah concludes, while the Progressive sexual education movement empowered many (some information is better than no information), it also harbored a dark side, especially in terms of its support of rigid gender, racial, class, political, cultural and social hierarchies and ideologies (e. g., eugenics).

The strength of Shah's work lies in the vast array of both primary and secondary sources used in its writing. *Sex Ed, Segregated's* footnotes includes the major texts for each area explored, whether it is Shah's discussion of WWI soldiers and venereal disease or her exploration of Margaret Sanger's birth control movement. Moreover, its bibliography of primary and secondary sources can also serve as a required

readings list for anyone researching sexuality during the Progressive Era. However, the number of manuscript collections Shah consulted is limited. There are five in total: one is an online database, two are located at the University of Minnesota, and two are located in San Antonio, which underscores my main criticism of the work—that more could have been done in terms of delineating regional similarities and differences with respect to sexual education. Furthermore, while Shah's conclusion ties Progressive Era sexual education agendas to contemporary dialogues, this section of the book could have been enriched in numerous ways (for example, by comparing contraception/abortion, venereal diseases, and teenage pregnancy discourses found in contemporary sexual education to early twentieth-century discourse; or, by discussing how discourses of race, class, and gender have or have not changed). Nevertheless, Shah's *Sex Ed, Segregated* is very classroom friendly, and would be a welcome addition to specialized courses on the American Progressive Movement or the History of Sexuality in the United States, as well as general courses in American social and cultural history or the medical humanities.

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