Howlett, Caitlin. "Origin Problems." *Against Sex Education: Pedagogy, Sex Work, and State Violence*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 19–46. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350178472.0005>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 14:11 UTC.

Copyright © Caitlin Howlett 2022. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Origin Problems

Josephine Baker, the infamous entertainer who left the United States for France, once said about how such a move impacted her, that she was “amused”; “What did I see first? Men and women kissing each other in the streets! In America, you were sent to prison for that. . . . This freedom amused me. . . . In the theaters, women could show themselves without clothing. I could not believe it, so I bought dozens of pictures of nude women.”¹ Later, about her sexuality and sexual experiences, she’d add: “I’m not immoral . . . I’m only natural.”²

In this chapter, I turn away from a rehashing of the “origins” of sex education’s federal inception and, instead, seek to articulate a view of sex education in relation to an institution and practice that is largely ignored, if not explicitly scorned, by education: sex work. In order to do this, I rely upon Foucault’s concept of problematization as well as critiques of systems of subjectification from those doing Queer of Color scholarship. These discourses frame my look back, so to speak, and provide a previously unconsidered view of why sex education exists as a worthy investment for the US government. I have chosen to focus on federal sex education policies rather than all other kinds of policies and programming not because those do not matter—they do, perhaps even more directly than federal programs—but because it is the relationship between the US state and sex education that is at the heart of the questions about sex work and violence that I laid out as vital in the Introduction. Further, taking this approach allows for new pedagogical questions and concerns about the possibility of using sex education as a space for intervening upon violence that might be of value for those interested in such work.

Because of my interest in examining discourses surrounding institutions engaged with sex education, I want to further clarify my use of Foucauldian

problematization. My use of this framework is grounded in the way it centers absences and silences within dominant discourses. More so, it is valuable to me because it asks *not* for certainty but, instead, for *disruptive understandings* of what has previously been deemed a certainty. This again requires an openness to difference that is, I think, sorely lacking in considerations of sex education's value. Foucault's commitment to critique, or what he describes as "constant checking," allows us to remain in an "ongoing" exploration of the biopolitical discourses and conceptualizations with which we operate in the world and, therefore, to resist the complacency that often attends the discovery of a historical "fact."³ So, this chapter aims not to offer the *right, real, proper history* of sex education but to pry and hold open a space for interrogation and alternative meaning-making that matters in every sense of the word.

This chapter also relies significantly upon Queer of Color critiques. As the name suggests, Queer of Color critique is derived from a critique of Queer Theory. While Queer Theory is itself founded upon a critique of the liberal subject, or of the idea that the "typical" or "standard" subject is inherently rational, autonomous, and heteronormative, it is subject to its own critique related to intersectionality. For many, Queer Theory's critiques of normativity center whiteness and a certain middle- to upper-class politics that continue to marginalize nonnormative lives. In light of this, Cathy Cohen asserts the need for what she calls a "left framework of politics" that "unlike civil rights or liberal frameworks, brings into focus the systematic relationship among forms of domination, where the creation and maintenance of exploited, subservient, marginalized classes is a necessary part of, at the very least, the economic configuration."⁴ Queer of Color critiques generally take up this leftist project and work to respond to marginalization and erasures by asserting the necessity of accounting for certain genealogies of thought about normativity, especially those built by women of color. Roderick Ferguson and Chandan Reddy write that "the decisive intervention of queer of color analysis is that racist practice articulates itself generally as gender and sexual regulation, and that gender and sexual differences variegate racial formations. This articulation, moreover, accounts for the social formations that compose liberal capitalism."⁵ That is, the critiques offered by Queer Theory that focus on sexuality are situated within Queer of Color critiques as overly reliant upon a critique of heterosexuality,⁶ such that they neglect the ways race, gender, sexuality, and class are historically and ideologically co-constitutive of each other, especially when understood

as situated within legacies of colonialism and neocolonialism, slavery, and modern capitalism.⁷ As Kyla Wazana Tompkins says, Queer of Color critics, despite their many divergences, contrasts, and antagonisms, conjure “queer theory from the heart of these other histories.”⁸ Queer of Color critiques amount to what I see as a nexus of analytical and experiential critiques of the most dominant and violent processes that make up contemporary human existence: patriarchy, capitalism, neoliberalism, colonialism, globalization, racism, ableism, and, most essentially, the rational human subject.

To the extent that these processes are inherent to the project of public education in the United States, Queer of Color critiques are slowly but surely beginning to appear within educational discourses. And, when they do—when it has been brought in by careful and dedicated scholars, most of them queer people of color themselves—it has immediately palpable implications for education studies. While there has been a longer genealogy of Queer of Color scholarship around pedagogy, broadly defined, it is only within the past two decades or so that even sporadic attention to schools, as institutions in need of analysis, and to queer students of color within such systems of education, has been paid. In his introduction to what is one of the first collections of Queer of Color scholarship on and about queer students of color and Queer of Color critiques of schools, Ed Brockenbrough writes that the most salient intervention the field makes into education studies is through its epistemological questions. He offers two questions, to be specific:

- (1) How can queer of color epistemologies interrupt hegemonic processes of knowledge production, and (2) how can these interruptions inform transformative pedagogical work that benefits queers of color specifically and anti-oppressive educational scholarship more broadly?⁹

The call to act that Brockenbrough poses here is one that asks scholars of education studies to explore the scholarship that exists well beyond its typical disciplinary boundaries, as the full fruits of such labor promise novel articulations of liberatory pedagogies. He writes, “like the eclectic analyses of social reproduction in queer of color critique more broadly, educational scholarship must begin to cover wider spans of socially reproductive practices that shape the experiences of queers of color.”¹⁰ This project takes up this call. Further, though, I also want to position it as part of a broader effort to bring educational spaces into the view of the vital critiques that Queer of Color

scholars have and continue to offer those interested in dismantling the many systems that make violence possible. It is not just that education studies have yet to engage fully with Queer of Color critiques, but that Queer of Color scholarship also has yet to take systems and institutions of education as serious components of the logic they so often aim to undo.¹¹ The possibilities for education that lie within the work made possible by Queer of Color critiques are endless, so this chapter highlights just one: a new line of questioning for sex education.

Shared Interests

In the Introduction, I offered a glimpse into the reasons for being concerned with the relationship between sex work and sex education, given the historiographical discourses that circulate within education studies. There are many more examples of the centrality of sex work to discussions of sex education at the time to the point that it is very difficult to find an account of the events surrounding its inception as a federal program that is not concerned with the sex worker. For example, there are the words of President Woodrow Wilson to consider. In a “special statement” from a 1917 edition of *Keeping Our Fighters Fit*, a book written with the help of Fosdick to justify the creation of the Commission on Training Camp Activities and to introduce an education about sex to the troops, cited earlier, Wilson writes, “The Federal Government has pledged its word that as far as care and vigilance can accomplish the result, the men committed to its charge will be returned to the homes and communities that so generously gave them with no scars except those won in honorable conflict.”¹² We know, though, based on the context, that the idea of “scars” utilized here refers to the sinful climate the prostitute brings about. Situations that allow for such evil must be gotten rid of, it is argued, certainly so that America can prove victorious, but also so that, in the long run, men can return home and serve as proper husbands and fathers within their families and communities. Thus, the federal government envisioned its sex education as a way to help preserve the heteronormative family against the threat of the diseased prostitute, not simply for the sake of eradicating a health problem.

In 1922, the surgeon general of the US Public Health Service released a manual, in collaboration with the US Bureau of Education, edited by Benjamin

C. Gruenberg, the assistant director of educational work for the US Public Health Service, titled *High Schools and Sex Education*. In the foreword to the manual, the commissioner of education, John J. Tigert, and the surgeon general, Hugh S. Cumming, wrote,

The importance of education along the lines of what is sometimes called “social hygiene” has long been evident to all those interested in the welfare of boys and girls. It was the war, however, that revealed the immediate urgency of this work. Now as before it is essential, both for preventing the destructive venereal disease and for insuring the best use of their creative impulses, that our boys and girls be wisely directed to an understanding and control of their sexual energies.¹³

This call for sex education programming for children in schools comes out of a program to prevent soldiers from being corrupted by prostitutes and the threatening morals their very existence affirms. They continue: “We hope that this publication will be of substantial assistance to those high-school teachers and principals who are earnestly striving to make our boys and girls into more effective, more useful citizens, and that . . . it will contribute to the rearing of a healthier and happier generation.”¹⁴ Schools are thus responsible for fulfilling the promise of future national happiness, which depends on a certain view of the family which itself depends on a certain tacit view of the prostitute.

Given education’s general lack of concern for the sex worker here, Queer of Color critiques also matter for unpacking the existence of sex education insofar as they are so often *explicitly* grounded in a concern for that labor and for those who participate in its many iterations.

Perhaps most notably, Roderick Ferguson’s foundational *Aberrations in Black* begins with a story about a sex worker:

She is disciplined by those within and outside African American communities, reviled by leftist-radicals, conservatives, heterosexuals, and mainstream queers alike, erased by those who wish to present or make African American culture the embodiment of all that she is not—respectability, domesticity, heterosexuality, normativity, nationality, universality, and progress. But her estrangements are not her own. They are, in fact, the general estrangements of African American culture.¹⁵

Likewise, in *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures*, L. H. Stallings offers a reimagining of the idea of sex work itself that challenges

the way it has been defined through Western colonialist assumptions about knowledge and being, so brilliantly asks:

For what is the point in having a pimp/ho degree (PhD) in English if not to create a word hustle that can reimagine cultural and linguistic spaces in which laborers (those who trade sex acts), cultural producers (those who represent and depict sex), sexual intellectuals (those who critique one of the aforementioned or both), and the superfreaks (those who perform all of the work of the previously mentioned sex workers) can resist and riot against heteronormative, capitalist, and puritanical uses of sexuality and cultural together, as opposed to in opposition to each other?¹⁶

Stallings understands the relationship between sex, sexuality, and work as playing an essential role in organizing contemporary discourses around power that, should power itself be reimagined, must be reconsidered beyond the constraints of Western colonialist and imperialist knowledge systems. This relationship is not accidental to questions about power and knowledge but *imbedded within them*, whether we acknowledge it or not.

A final example of the centrality of sex work to the theorizing of Queer of Color critics, no matter the question at stake, can be seen clearly in José Esteban Muñoz's classic *Cruising Utopia*, wherein sex work is discussed as an alternative space that enables economies that challenge the norms set by capitalism for sexual behavior. He writes that sex work is an

alternative economy in which flesh, pleasure, and money meet under outlaw circumstances. This economy eschews the standardized routes in which heteronormative late capitalism mandates networking relation of sex for money. This economy represents a selling of sex for money that does not conform to the corporate American sex trade always on display for us via media advertising culture and older constitutions such as heteronormative marriage.¹⁷

The presence and experience of sex workers here is *not* tangential, and certainly not at all irrelevant to questions of knowledge. Indeed, Muñoz carefully shows that "The hustler-john relationship represents a threat to these other naturalized performances of sex for money, in part because it promotes contact between people of different classes and racial backgrounds."¹⁸

There are many reasons why those studying education in general and sex education in particular balk at calls for sex work to be considered as part of

the conversation, or even at calls for it to be considered as a legitimate form of labor, as these discussions from *Queer of Color* critics hold. Too often, though, this disregard is justified either on the basis of sex work's relationship to exploitation and trafficking in public discourse or by virtue of the tabooed nature of almost any discussion that holds children and sexual agency in proximity to each other. To be clear, I understand the ways in which sex work does indeed take this form, especially for those deemed "children" by the US government and laws. There is an important conversation to consider around the role of sex work in the lives of queer youth, too, especially those facing housing insecurities. However, as *Queer of Color* critiques show here, and as will be expanded upon throughout this project, reducing sex work to a form of exploitation does not sufficiently account for the fundamental ways in which sexuality and knowledge production are guided by capitalist discourses, even in schools, and even in sex education. Questions about sex education cannot be separated from a consideration of sex work if the very understandings of sex and sexuality used in the former are precisely the ones that enact the latter's exclusion.

In what follows, then, I rely upon a narrow set of authors writing specifically about the experiences of sex workers in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As with everything else here, there are many other voices that could and should be added to this, especially ones from outside of the United States, but I have limited myself in this way in order to emphasize the uniqueness of the tensions around race, gender, sexuality, and class present in the States at this time.¹⁹ Through these secondary sources, I explore the history of sex work in this moment of time with the explicit intent of contextualizing sex education's creation and implementation within this history, and not the other way around.

Lessons from Vice

In the context of the United States, one of the most compelling ways for thinking of the presence of sex work at the turn of the twentieth century is by understanding it as undergoing a shift in public meaning and significance. As Ruth Rosen notes, "Prostitution had not always seemed such an urgent problem"; throughout what is now commonly called the "colonial era,"

the significance of prostitution was far less important for community leaders than other deviant practices, like adultery in any form.²⁰ Rosen shows that this minimal attention can largely be understood as a result of the deeply masculine nature of colonialism and the ensuing shortage of colonial women in America at the time.²¹ However, important to this era was the perceived nature of that vice when it occurred: prostitution was understood as an individual problem, rather than a social or commercial one, and it was believed the women who engaged in “prostitution,” which could mean “illicit sexual behavior” in general, were salvageable.²² Here, with no commercial network or formal exchange of money within it, to participate in prostitution was considered to be participating in one kind of sin among many that could be easily addressed, especially through religion. In thinking about sex education, it is important to recognize that the very thing sex education aimed to eradicate had only developed as such a problem by virtue of other shifts in economic and political cultures far bigger than sexual culture itself.

There is also ample historical evidence that shows how, during the colonial era and well into the childhood of the United States as a nation itself, the concept of prostitution was also central to discourses that legitimized the institution of slavery. Rosen asserts,

The legal and systematic sexual exploitation of female indentured servants and black female slaves constituted one form of forced prostitution. Female slaves and indentured workers encountered not only forced labor but also the sexual exploitation of their owners. Forced to submit to masters’ sexual demands, both groups of women gave birth to children sired by their masters. The law underscored their total lack of rights: a pregnant indentured servant earned a lengthened period of servitude, and the slave saw her offspring become the property of her rapist.²³

In this way, the use of the word “prostitution” for rape locates prostitution itself as a rhetorical device for minimizing violence against African slaves while preserving the category of “rape” for white women. This is worth highlighting because showing the different usages of the term “prostitute” reveals the highly political nature of the term, as well as its relationship to both sexual and racist oppression and violence. From this view, the very idea of prostitution was used to normalize this kind of sexual and racist violence, which points to its value in producing knowledge systems that, subtly or not, normalize the degradation of

Black women, a practice that we continue to wrestle with, even this long after the “abolition”²⁴ of slavery. Understanding the history of prostitution in this light suggests that not only is it a politicalized concept, but it was conceptually developed alongside the view of the Black woman’s body as existing primarily for pleasure, profit, power, or all three, for others.

Prostitution can also be linked to slavery in a second way: apart from being central to slavery’s functioning, its eradication directly led to the rise of participation of Black women in increasingly commercialized prostitution. As Cynthia Blair argues, “African American prostitutes were a subset of the black women who struggled to make their way in cities and towns after emancipation and in the early decades of the twentieth century.”²⁵ After the “abolition” of slavery, the United States saw a drastic increase in migration of southern Black men and women to northern urban centers to seek new jobs. However, both Black men and women faced limited job prospects and generally exploitive ones at that. Blair argues that by the turn of the century, many Black women had begun to turn to sex work as more profitable and appealing than the domestic labor positions that were available to them. She notes, “for untold and perhaps unknowable numbers of African American women, sex work provided a viable, often necessary, means of earning money in an industrializing and rapidly expanding urban economy.”²⁶ Further, the rise of commercialized business and industrial centers in the late 1800s generally put women in a precarious position. Being allowed to enter the workforce for the first time in large numbers, however financially appealing, was undermined by sexist attitudes toward women’s capacities to work and to generate profit. The effect of these attitudes was compounded by the other effects of industrialization and commercialization on American families in general, as such shifts led to changes in gender expectations and participation in public work.

Women in the working class, of all races, were thus pushed out of the home and, with limited opportunities, often turned to prostitution.²⁷ Prostitution, in this way, is read by most historians as “a means of survival” for women: “All too often, a woman had to choose from an array of dehumanizing alternatives: to sell her body in a loveless marriage contracted solely for economic protection; to sell her body for starvation wages as an unskilled worker; or to sell her body as a ‘sporting woman.’ Whatever the choice, some form of prostitution was likely to be involved.”²⁸ This outcome points to a central component of

prostitution's history in America, particularly in relation to the regulation of female sexuality: prostitution, and sex work generally, must be understood, at least in part, as a reasonable response to the patriarchal, sexist, and racist nature of urbanization and industrialization in the United States.

As cities and industries grew, the lines between what work was deemed respectable and not, and of course between the private and the public, began to blur in new ways.²⁹ Specifically, the benefits of industrialization for the working and owning classes precipitated greater visibility of leisure culture. Keire argues,

As movies, music, and dancing became increasingly common pastimes among young men and women of the respectable working class, the red-light districts, which frequently abutted the cities' theater districts, gained an institutional legitimacy that obscured the difference between respectable and disreputable night-life. Under "liberal" administrations, tenderloin proprietors established dance halls, pool rooms, and restaurants alongside the more traditional brothels and saloons. . . . At the turn of the century, the range of recreation offered in the tenderloins made them as integral a part of the new popular culture as the legitimate entertainment of the white-light districts.³⁰

This change had a profound effect on who was able to get jobs and what kinds of jobs were available. Keire notes, "Due to persistent underemployment among poor men, including district men, women had a greater likelihood of securing steady work. Respectable jobs did not, however, prove the only employment for poor families."³¹ "District economies," or those economies that developed within and for the sake of sustaining these night-life industries, offered more regular paid work opportunities than "respectable" jobs across race, gender, and class. Keire details how "The wages earned as an unskilled domestic or factory worker, moreover, rarely compared with prostitutes' former incomes. Subsistence wages could not support a young woman unless she lived with her family—and few prostitutes felt they could return to their parents or families."³² It is of note, too, that while women found steady pay through prostitution, men reaped the benefits of this industry itself by taking advantage of the jobs that it created.³³

Not only did this new leisure culture depend upon women to generate profit, but it also depended explicitly upon access to women's bodies: whether on the stage, on display, or at a brothel, the use of women's bodies to entertain

men both offered income for those left out of more “respectable” jobs and, as a result, made the separation between respectable and non-respectable, or white-light and red-light entertainment, much harder to maintain. This blurring of the moral lines around work contributed to the appeal that prostitution offered women, and this appeal made it difficult for authorities to intervene and thus made it almost impossible for such lines to be reestablished. At the same time, social norms worked doubly to persecute those women for whom respectable jobs were not available or were not as profitable as was satisfying the increasing demand for female bodies.

Blair argues that this phenomenon was particularly salient for Black women, as such women were caught in what she says was a more complicated contradictory position than other women might have faced. Speaking primarily about Chicago, she writes,

All labored in a society that assumed black women’s immorality, scoffed at their aspirations, and mocked their straightforward desire for economic independence. Like other working-class black women, they toiled in a society that held only contempt for the poor, urbanizing African American women who strained in myriad ways to give substance to their freedom.³⁴

Within this wage economy, even as more opportunities came into existence for which Black women were theoretically welcome to, prostitution suited the demands of the mainly young and single female Black population better than the opportunities in service work which were more constraining. Thus, “it was precisely the constraints of service work that pushed a wider range of Black women to seek temporary or recurring stints in the sex economy.”³⁵ Given the ways in which their race and gender worked against them within so-called legitimate spaces, prostitution was all the more important for Black women insofar as it brought in money to red-light communities in general, which were largely Black and poor themselves. This economy enabled women to profit, as prostitutes, madams, waitresses, or in other related capacities, from men’s recreational activity, and, with such profit, “supported black households that had a difficult time making it any other way.”³⁶ In this way, prostitution existed as a lasting option for many women. Importantly, industrialization also prompted the creation of male populations in search of escape from their laboring days, which has been repeatedly understood by scholars of prostitution in this era

as evidence that participation in prostitution did *not* mark a lack of choice or agency.³⁷ Blair summarizes this finding clearly when she writes that

Participation in the sex trade resulted from black women's profound economic marginalization. Yet black women were not passive victims of economic displacement. Resorting to prostitution exemplified resourcefulness within Chicago's racially and gender-stratified industrial economy. African American women strategically made use of the opportunities available within late-nineteenth-century sex economy.³⁸

Industrialization, and the shifting demographics that accompanied it, thus created much needed opportunities for women, particularly nonwhite women, in the face of their continual exclusions from industrialist projects, and made prostitution an essential component of the work that went into sustaining communities that were otherwise left to fend for themselves.

However, these communities were also *constructed and controlled* from the outside through local and state actions. As local and state governments became increasingly "concerned" with prostitution, segregation-promoting actions were taken, and not just on the basis of race but also one's proximity to prostitution, implicating racialized sexuality in the early institutionalization of segregation, too. The practice of vice districting thus became popular. As Keire describes it, vice districting was "a distinctly American phenomenon, [and] arose out of the United States' creole cultural heritage and the new science of city planning."³⁹ Notably, the move on the part of local politicians and reformers to begin the work of segregating vice from reputable business areas came as a result of a *rejection* of the public health model for dealing with prostitution: to American reformers, restructuring the city's moral geography mattered more than monitoring the health of "already-errant sinners."⁴⁰ This trend is also significant in that it suggests that Prince Morrow initially ended up on the *losing* side of the battle over what to do with prostitution. Skeptical of the possibility that vice districting would actually lessen the presence of vice, Morrow fought against it, but he ultimately lost a 1901 municipal election in New York City as a result, with the idea that a "little hell" was better than a "big hell" winning out among constituents.⁴¹ The segregation of homes and businesses on the basis of vice thus took hold in America by 1890.

Again, vice districting is especially important to the history of sex education because it offers an alternative view into the significance of race

to the policing of female sex workers and female sexuality in general. First, it is important to note that the idea of segregation that Americans tend to hold today, as bound to race, resulted from and was grounded in segregation based on sexual reputation.⁴² In the late 1800s and early 1900s, that is, systematic segregation happened primarily on the basis of “vice,” which, as a concept, was more complicated than referencing a single characteristic or population. Interestingly, Keire shows how the very idea of reputational segregation was seen as in tension with the aims of Jim Crow precisely because it not only allowed for the possibility of racial mixing within its businesses, but, in many ways, it promoted and profited from that mixing. Few places allowed for the mixing of races in the ways that red-light districts did in the early 1900s.⁴³ Leaders and reformers thus began to envision social reform as requiring the balancing of racial mixing with the presence of vice.⁴⁴ However, this tended to lead to the segregation of vice as being seen as synonymous with distance from whiteness, and proximity to non-whiteness, prompting the creation of vice districts in not only poor neighborhoods but those “inhabited by ghettoized and racialized populations,” in order to encourage the elite white patrons to at least exercise caution in visiting such spaces.⁴⁵ This also meant, as one sociologist notes in 1913, that “the segregation of the Negro quarter is only a segregation from respectable white people. The disreputable white element is forced upon him.”⁴⁶ Through vice districting, the most stigmatized and seemingly immoral actions were pushed into spaces occupied by those who had already been defined as immoral, all in service of the maintenance of white male respectability.

Given this, it is perhaps no surprise that some of the earliest and largest race riots, including in Atlanta in 1906 and Springfield, Illinois, in 1908, began in red-light districts. These were not purely “race” riots, then—at stake were racialized boundaries of sexuality and class: “Both riots started in red-light districts, were triggered by rumors of a black man assaulting a white woman, and led, not only to the death of black citizens at the hands of rampaging whites, but also to the destruction of black businesses throughout the tenderloin.”⁴⁷ In fact, it was in direct response to the Springfield riot in particular that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was formed, marking this important moment in Civil Rights history as grounded in debates over sexuality and prostitution. In response to these riots, as Black leaders organized to promote varying combinations of integration or uplift

within their communities, white leaders were able to justify further racial segregation, including residential segregation policy, by appealing to the seemingly close proximity of racial violence to urban vice.⁴⁸ The depth of these tensions can also be seen in the fact that at the other end of Du Bois's "talented tenth" narrative was the "submerged tenth," within which prostitutes existed, pointing to what Blair argues is an example of "the difficulty that many blacks had at the turn of the century in publicly acknowledging the existence among them of women who exchanged their sexual services for financial gain."⁴⁹

As racism took hold of the public discourse around vice districting and segregation, there remained no genuine attempt to eradicate prostitution at the local level, as white men still continually demanded access specifically to Black women's bodies.⁵⁰ The general Progressive concern with race and science, then, was in no way separate from Jim Crow sentiments, nor did it seek to include all "Americans" in its efforts at social progress and change. As Rosen carefully shows, this was in part because prostitution was embedded within the web of respectable work: "Economically, prostitution was a source of income to the police, to procurers, madams, doctors, politicians, and liquor interests. Politically, it upheld gender and class divisions."⁵¹ With red-light districts overrepresenting Black women as they remained central to the fulfillment of middle- and upper-class white male desire, Progressive attempts to control vice perpetuated the normative race-based use of Black women's bodies that had been exhibited in slavery and demonstrated a shared interest in racial segregation and exploitation.

Centering prostitution as I have, albeit very incompletely, here, points to a very different way of understanding what was at stake in Progressive-era efforts to combat venereal disease through sex education. Keire depicts this different story beautifully, as she writes,

Throughout much of the Progressive era, urban leaders in the South, but also in the North and West, addressed racial order and vice control as intertwined problems. City officials and social reformers used the transgression of social norms and the possibility of interracial violence as a rationale for regulating urban vice. The reverse also held true. City leaders used the control of urban vice as a way to strengthen racial and sexual hierarchies.⁵²

Rather than understanding prostitution, and thus sex education, through a limited representation of the Progressive era reducible to a time in which social hygiene, science, medicine, and education converged to help address

problems of disease and family, as is the case in much of the history around sex education, these authors show the necessity of calling upon other frameworks that complicate this view through a prioritization of racialized female sexuality. For example, Rosen suggests that Progressive-era reformers were uniquely “willing to use the state as a regulator of the nation’s morals,” requiring us to understand the burgeoning of Progressive policies, including funding for sex education, as bound to the governmental institutionalization of a certain kind of national subject, a point often diluted when focusing upon disease and hygiene. Blair also argues that instead of studying prostitution through the framework of “the rise and fall of Progressive anti-vice zeal,” that it needs to be considered specifically through a consideration of the “sexualization and policing of racial boundaries These processes both predated and outlived Progressive reformers’ preoccupation with urban prostitution.”⁵³ Only by such study, and in refusing to adopt those Progressive concepts and narratives in exploring that era itself, can we understand the extent of prostitution’s relationship to the history of race in the United States, and thus see sex education’s past differently.

Finally, considering vice in relation to sex education points to one other lesson about education itself: with vice districting increasingly being used as a tool for housing segregation, the drawing of districts enabled an ideological collapse of raced spaces and queer spaces, and this impacted schooling just as much as it did everything else. Speaking, as an example, of the South Side of Chicago, Ferguson notes in his own discussion of sex work that “The Chicago School’s construction of African American neighborhoods as outside heteropatriarchal normalization underwrote municipal government’s regulation of the South Side, making African American neighborhoods the point at which both a will to knowledge and a will to exclude intersected.”⁵⁴ Vice districting, and the racialized policing of female sexuality, should be an essential consideration for anyone exploring the history of education in the United States in general.

Criminal by Definition

Not to be sidelined, the role of scientific expertise can, through this lens, also be read as justifying the use of vice as a means for adjudicating moral

intelligence and subjective validity. Up until the turn of the century, there was relatively little conversation about the role of prostitution in the spread of diseases, but this shifted as languages of science became favored over moral arguments about vice and sin in dealing with prostitution.⁵⁵ As doctors and scientific experts gained more voice and power, they worked to publicize the link between prostitution and venereal disease, and, as has been discussed, eugenics provided an authoritative discourse for normalizing this link. The increased criminalization of prostitution enabled scientific experimentation on prostitutes themselves, and thus prostitutes were also some of the first subjects of eugenics in America. This, rhetorician Robin Jensen argues, marks these discourses of science as a strategy for controlling sexuality. That is, behind the allure of calls for science to motivate sex education, a limited understanding of “fact” was produced, namely as “value-neutral.”⁵⁶ Jensen thus argues that this limitation resulted in the structuring of scientific discourse upon a lack of information.⁵⁷ I will argue that this limitation resulted in the structuring of sex education upon something more malignant than a lack of information.

Vice reform, with the Mann Act of 1910 and subsequent local efforts to criminalize prostitution, was successful only at reducing the presence and size of organized prostitution.⁵⁸ After all, where would these women go, and what would they do, upon being removed and arrested? The answer was found in an already popular practice: they would go to carceral institutions. In fact, the creation of reformatories for criminalized prostitutes, beginning in 1910, resulted in prostitutes being one of the first groups of people upon whom eugenic experiments and testing for certain alleged genetic defects were carried out.⁵⁹ In another important connection to education, these studies on prostitutes were used to construct the idea of “feeble-mindedness,” which was increasingly argued as one of the causes of prostitution and thus became a way of further stigmatizing female sexuality.⁶⁰ This stigmatization coincided with the emergence of sterilization in state-run institutions. Rosen notes,

By 1913, twelve states had laws that permitted the sterilization of criminals, idiots, the feeble-minded, imbeciles, syphilitics, moral and sexual perverts, epileptics, and rapists. Such legislation, like reformatories and prisons in which prostitutes were housed, reflected a society that increasingly associated degeneracy with poverty and gradually sought means to control the sexual behavior of the poor.⁶¹

The cultures of scientific expertise and social hygiene that structure the stories told about sex education's existence, then, are deeply problematic when one considers its impact on those seen as unhealthy, irregular, uneducated, and thus unintelligent. It was not merely a time for more education for some but also a time of institutionalized violence against boundary-crossing others.

Often, this practice of eugenics took the form of sterilization. Jennifer Terry documents in *An American Obsession* that one of the first incidents of sterilization occurred in 1899 in the Indiana Reformatory, a woman's prison in Indiana. The purpose of this practice of sterilization was to mitigate the spread of deviance by making it impossible for anyone with "hereditary defects" to reproduce.⁶² Those most impacted by these state-sanctioned actions were: the insane, epileptic, imbecile, idiotic, sexually suspect, inebriates, criminals, paupers, orphan children, tramps, and, of course, prostitutes.⁶³ The first set of sterilizations was recorded as having been performed on 236 people with these traits.⁶⁴ It is of importance that the idea of deviancy, or perversion, used here collapses a lack of "normal" intelligence, having an unpredictable disease, breaking the law, and not having a proper "family," into the same category of life. Further, the label of sexual deviant was attached to that category. To be clear, this reduction of a certain level of intelligence with sexual deviancy, as well as even the failure to be a familial child, represents the ways in which the traits of non-"normal" intelligence, sexual deviancy, and the disruption of the idealized notion of the family come to be so closely linked ideologically that one comes to signal the others, and each signals a literal lack of value and worth to the state. Terry estimates that, conservatively, by 1931 over 12,000 sterilization operations had been performed; to be labeled according to these traits, including to be a prostitute, meant being defined as a criminal and was sufficient for being robbed of the ability to reproduce at all.

By the start of the First World War, then, the fear of prostitution was systemically produced, particularly given the still present concern for "white slavery," which I will discuss in more depth later in the chapter. The preexistence of this fear became fodder for those who needed ways to convince others of the danger of vice districts, as it was now attached to the possibility of military victory. That is, the First World War enabled a shift in rhetoric about and in federal power to regulate prostitution. Terry argues, "Martial rhetoric sounded superb when mobilizing a movement, but it took an actual war to

eradicate tolerated vice districts from America's cities."⁶⁵ Attempting to close brothels, rather than shut down districts, was the rage, but, as is the case with most things, the elimination of certain spaces for prostitution did not in itself end prostitution. Rather, it prompted the relocation and recalibration of its activities:

The new forms of prostitution that emerged had one specific goal: to avoid police detection. Since brothels and parlor houses could no longer advertise their wares, rooming houses, flats, hotels, and massage parlors became the predominant sites for prostitution. . . . For the majority of poor women, however, the closing of the houses meant increased streetwalking, which was immediately noticed in most American cities.⁶⁶

In other words, the war was a great gift to anti-vice reformers, as prostitution could now be deemed a threat to national security in a way that was not possible before, and it marked a notable increase in power on the part of the federal government to address prostitution.⁶⁷ And here, we learn more about the situation to which Fosdick, and eventually the US war department, was responding that led to the first federal form of sex education discussed previously. In this way, war, and the need to affirm the United States' power in the world, enabled the growth of the anti-vice movement precisely because it justified calls for respectability and health that cohered with the stigmatization of prostitutes. Jensen points out, too, that the rhetoric at the time was such that "Women who were sexually available to soldiers were working against the U.S. war effort by potentially infecting them with venereal diseases and enticing them to break their moral codes."⁶⁸

When Fosdick went south—to Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico—in 1916, his concern was with understanding the "moral readiness of the army."⁶⁹ From Keire: "What Fosdick and subsequent investigators saw disgusted them. Border towns already had a reputation for raucous red-light districts, but the tenderloins of southwestern cities such as Douglas, Arizona, El Paso, Texas, and Columbus, New Mexico exceeded even the most dire expectations of debauchery."⁷⁰ Concerned with what would happen if troops were to be mobilized, the Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) was created to find ways to distract soldiers from prostitutes and red-light districts. This concern also led to the section on prostitution to be added to the Selective Service Act of 1917, in which the secretary of war was given the ability to "do everything by him deemed necessary to suppress and prevent the keeping

or setting up of houses of ill fame, brothels, or bawdy houses within such distance as he deem needful of any military camp.”⁷¹ Keire argues that this policy enabled the federal government to establish rules about morality for American citizens and, ultimately, to put the power of the federal government behind the movement to eradicate vice.⁷² Jensen also adds that because the CTCA refused to educate white women, and continually characterized African American girls and women as “inherently immoral and overly sexual,” it *actively created* a public that was uneducated and thus further reliant upon men for their health and knowledge.⁷³ That African American men, of whom there were some in the camps at the time, were also excluded from being a focus of this education perpetuated the notion repeatedly emphasized by the US government at the time: African American men, too, could be reduced to their ostensibly uncorrectable sexual urges.⁷⁴

In trying to understand the involvement of the federal government in the project of sex education in relation to prostitution, we can better understand the depth of blame placed on women across races, while in different ways, for the sexual vices of men.⁷⁵ This is important because it demands that the concept of female sexuality also be defined as always racialized and also because it shows how white women’s fates were bound to those of Black women. This incentivized white women’s interest in sex education because it was posited as a way for white women to distinguish themselves from Black women without having to address the inherent racism in sex education. This conclusion is evidenced in the language used at the time, which was notoriously confusing and vague for popular audiences. Jensen argues that much of the discourse around sex and sex education at the time was purposely “clouded by ambiguity” so as to strategically appease Victorian notions of respectability at the time without violating that illusion through articulations of the belief in the subhuman nature of Black women.⁷⁶ This was not mere rhetoric, though—the stakes were high. During the First World War, the CTCA was authorized to intern 15,520 women in federally funded reformatories and homes, a number that does not include those held in jails or quarantined in hospitals for the purpose of eradicating vice and prostitution.⁷⁷ White women’s ability to distinguish themselves from other women might mean the difference between being confined to a prison and being confined to their family.

Wartime rhetoric also increasingly shifted from discussion of prostitutes as dangerous to women in general as being in need of more surveillance,

and experts went so far as to label them in their educational programs such things as “malarial mosquitoes,” “used toothbrushes,” and “German bullets.”⁷⁸ Keire argues that these acts forced a “single sexual morality” upon the United States, reduced women to their sex organs, and solidified the inferior status of prostitutes and disease-carrying noncitizens.⁷⁹ The work of the federal government under Fosdick and the CTCA on prostitutes and prostitution in the form of sex education for soldiers reveals the project of sex education as a fundamentally anti-woman movement, something passed over by those who assume talk of traditional femininity and family roles signals concern for the lives of women. One of the only ways for some women to distinguish themselves from the “bad” women was to buy into the very criminalization that threatened all women who were in the position of having to make difficult choices about their livelihood and made some women, especially white woman, complicit in the construction of prison industry as a fundamentally racist one. That federal funding for sex education emerges during this time is no accident, then, and instead situates it as part of the criminalization of sex work in the United States.

White Slavery and the Gaps in Sex Education’s History

Let us briefly return, though, to one founding narrative of sex education’s relationship to prostitution, white slavery, which was a fear-based source of political intervention into sex education between 1911 and 1916.⁸⁰ What do we learn about sex education when we take seriously the relationship between the regulation of female sexuality and the idea of “white slavery” that was so widely circulated at the time? White slavery, as an idea, reveals something important about the significance of race to the history of sex education that has, to my knowledge, been only glossed over by sex education historians. While the historical relevance of the push to eradicate “white slavery” has been cited by many historians as part of the justification for the federal government’s attitude toward the prostitute, there remains much work to do in unpacking its importance to understanding sex education. There are at least three ways that the issue of “white slavery” can be addressed, all of which overlap: with a concern for “White,” with a concern for “slavery,” and with a concern for the assumptions required to understand the two ideas together.

“White slavery” was, on Keire’s account, generally defined in the Progressive era as “the selling of women’s bodies (the ‘traffic in women’) for the purposes of prostitution.”⁸¹ Though the term itself has international origins, it became an increasingly popular term in the United States in the mid-1800s. Keire attributes the rise of the term to the prevalence of economic language during the era, which was dominated by concerns over labor, corruption, and trusts.⁸² However, the allusion to race was not accidental: this language was able to “provide white workers with a way to condemn industrial inequities, evoke an artisanal ideal of labor republicanism, and yet differentiate themselves from black chattel slaves in the South.”⁸³ This language was also increasingly sexual in connotation, with the figure of the Black sexual predator, typically male, appearing more and more in Progressive-era discussions—and media depictions—of vice and segregation.⁸⁴ As Ferguson argues, the Mann Act was even known euphemistically as the “White Slave Traffic Act” and “was designed to protect white men’s access to white women against the presumed desires of black men. Black critics, in turn, charged that the law made white women the only worthy beneficiaries of state protection, while black women were the legitimate prey of white men.”⁸⁵ It must be noted, though, that the discourse of white slavery did also condemn a whole slew of other immigrant populations, too. As Bromfield argues, “The ideologies that were imbedded in the white slavery movement were multidimensional but ultimately worked to maintain white Anglo-Saxon superiority and racial hegemony over newly arriving Italian, Eastern European, Chinese, French, Irish, and Jewish immigrants during the third U.S. immigration wave.”⁸⁶

Justification of anti-vice laws usually employed melodramatic narratives about what forced women into prostitution, what kept them in such positions, and what distinguished victims from others, typically along racial lines.⁸⁷ Most importantly, though, there is much debate in historical accounts of prostitution and the Progressive era over the extent to which “white slavery” actually existed en masse. Rosen finds some evidence for it in sources that show that between June 1910 and January 1915, 1,057 people were convicted of white slavery in the United States.⁸⁸ In a Progressive-era survey that asked 6,309 prostitutes why they had entered prostitution, 7.5 percent listed white slavery or extreme coercion.⁸⁹ One of the most significant questions, then, is why “white slavery” was considered such a desperate problem at the time, given these limited numbers. Rosen argues that while the melodrama

surrounding the issue itself may have been significant, even if it was not truly such a threat, that rhetoric made it possible for the mere mention of white slavery “to deflect attention away from the very real social and economic factors that led women into prostitution. The class guilt of middle-class Americans for conditions that gave rise to prostitution was projected onto a few villainous white slavers, typically represented as foreigners.”⁹⁰ The idea of white slavery, she argues, existed and gained popularity for its use as a way for white people to acknowledge prostitution without recognizing their relationships to it. Further, as Jensen also exhibits, “the number of native, white Christian victims of the slave trade was comparatively small. Many women forced into prostitution were Southern black women sold into northern states, Asian women sold into Western States, Jewish women sold into north-eastern states, none of whom were generally the focus of white, Christian middle-to-upper-class societal concern.”⁹¹ Thus, “white slavery” was a racialized, gendered, *and* classed construction, calling attention to those whose class did not disrupt the high-class norms associated with whiteness.

It is perhaps for this reason that much of the task of policing white slavery consisted of addressing the importation of women into the United States, often by means of the Mann Act.⁹² Racially speaking, it is of importance to acknowledge the fact that many of the women who were imported during the Progressive era were from China and Japan and, according to the research presented by Rosen, endured truly slave-like treatment. When the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was passed and made the importation of Chinese prostitutes more difficult, it also increased their value, making the selling of girls by their families the primary source of forced prostitution for Chinese women.⁹³ Take, for instance, this retelling of the white slave market that emerged in San Francisco as a result:

There, Chinese white slaves were directly brought from ships to endure a humiliating physical examination by potential buyers. In an apartment called the “Queen’s Room,” young girls were subjected to the kind of dehumanizing objectification that Africans had experienced upon landing in the hands of southern auctioneers. Many of these girls, often as young as eleven and twelve, ended up as slaves of the infamous crib system—viewed by one reformer as the worst form of American sexual slavery. He described the cribs as “small rooms opening into inner passages by means of a barred

window and door, which is kept locked by the manager, the key being given to men as they apply to him. Within these little cells, scantily furnished, are kept young girls, most of them Chinese and Japanese, but some of the European and American. They have little light or air, are rarely allowed to leave their rooms, and the manager receives their money.”⁹⁴

The conditions under which prostitutes operated at the time were varied, but if anything akin to “slavery” was happening, it was less to white girls and women than to those Chinese women who were transferred across the ocean as sexual commodities.

As Judy Yung argues in *Unbound Feet*, the desire for Chinese women, particularly in western America, was driven by the lack of women in general in the West at the time.⁹⁵ At a time when white prostitutes were moving north from Central America and West from other eastern cities for the purposes of sex work, wherein one could make almost five times as much than if one worked as a domestic laborer, Yung notes that “Chinese prostitutes were almost always imported as unfree labor, indentured or enslaved.”⁹⁶ This most often involved kidnapping or being sold and purchased for profit by one’s own family members to someone who would then sell them to the person who would become their new master. It was largely for this reason that the Alien Contract Labor Law of 1885 was enacted to protect indentured servants; however, this law did not apply to Chinese prostitutes. Instead, they were subject to large-scale abuse and even resale when they did not meet the expectations of their owners.⁹⁷ Others, though, were immediately sold into parlor houses, “luxurious rooms on the upper floors of Chinatown establishments that were furnished with teakwood and bamboo, Chinese paintings, and cushions of embroidered silk.”⁹⁸

Within these parlor houses, there were at least two kinds of labor occurring. First, the sale of sex was only open to certain patrons. Here, Yung explores the way the value of these women was dependent upon racist and xenophobic depictions of them: “the ‘exotic’ atmosphere, the relatively cheap rates, and the rumor that Chinese women had vaginas that ran ‘east-west’ instead of ‘north-south’ attracted many white patrons.”⁹⁹ However, some women were also sold to entertain through song and dance. No matter what, though, these women tended to be valued primarily as property.¹⁰⁰ This meant they were more scrutinized by their owners for their appearance and behavior and were much more limited in mobility than other turn-of-the-century prostitutes because

of their status as indentured servants. Chinese prostitutes were also subject to institutional segregation and racism, much like those from Central America as well as nonwhite prostitutes in general. Yung argues that “both groups of women were ghettoized and, in accordance with the racial prejudice of the day, consistently singled out for moral condemnation and legal suppression, even though white prostitution was also prevalent.”¹⁰¹ That is, there was a hierarchy of prostitutes from the perspective of the law that operated upon the assumption of the criminality of nonwhite prostitutes, an assumption that was not extended to White prostitutes in the same way. However, this hierarchy was often reversed when it came to valuing these women, as the more taboo or illegal, the higher the price to be demanded. The prostitution of Chinese women was exacerbated in the early 1900s to fulfill what Yung calls “a specific need in Chinese bachelor society” alongside a declining population of Chinese prostitutes.¹⁰² Chinese women’s worth in the sex trade rose from as much as \$6,000–10,000 in gold.¹⁰³ Like other areas, Chinatowns, too, were subject to the “nation’s purity crusade,” amplified by the idea of “white slavery,” but to very different ends.¹⁰⁴ When the Mann Act was passed, for example, its blind spot in relation to voluntary prostitution made further, more targeted legislation necessary, prompting California to pass the Red-Light Abatement Act in 1913. Raids of spaces wherein prostitution was suspected ensued. Yung shows, though, that the first raid occurred in a Chinese brothel.¹⁰⁵

In understanding the history of sex education through prostitution, then, and in taking race seriously as an analytic for that understanding, the significance of the word “slavery” in such discourses also grows. It is troubling, then, that there is almost no attention paid in stories of sex education’s history to the relationship between “white slavery” and the institution of slavery itself; instead, it is as if such a connection is either obvious or unimportant. Either way, this neglect only makes sense if the imagined historical issue is viewed in a way that makes slavery irrelevant to that history. On this point, and following in the footsteps of Darlene Clark Hine, Blair argues that “any discussion of black women’s sexuality must take into account both the communal memory of sexual abuse and the continuing centrality of acts of sexual violation to the structure of racial inequality well into the twentieth century.”¹⁰⁶ If this position is taken seriously, and if these people, who existed as full, complex, important people at the time in which the language of “white slavery” was taking hold in the American

imaginary, are granted legitimate space in this story, it is devastating to see them continually dismissed in such stories. The idea of “white slavery,” therefore, enabled a facade of concern for women’s lives at the time, but instead “materially worsened the lives of prostitutes” and worked hand in hand to support racial segregation.¹⁰⁷ In this way, “white slavery,” as a widely circulated frame for limiting what constitutes a life worth protecting through racist sexual norms is essential to understanding the existence of federal sex education. If “white slavery” mattered to those calling for sex education, it was because it allowed for the federal government to assert its benevolence while maintaining racist tropes about Black female sexuality, as well as Chinese female sexuality, and female sexuality in general, in order to do little to actually intervene, because, after all, it fueled an industry that was a site of growing capital wealth.

Sex education’s history might well be told, then, as a story about “white slavery.” Roberts argues that “America has always viewed unregulated Black reproduction as dangerous. . . . A persistent objective of American social policy has been to monitor and restrain the corrupting tendency of Black motherhood.”¹⁰⁸ In tying the history of social policy in America to the dehumanization of Black womanhood, Roberts convincingly demonstrates the consequences of social policy for how dominant understandings of sex, sexuality, and reproduction, including what it means to be sexually educated, have been structured against the lives of Black women. In her reading of the history of Black female reproduction, she argues that this process of dehumanization can be traced back to the founding fathers’ ideological and material visions for the United States. She writes, “The white founding fathers justified the exclusion of Blacks from the new republic by imbuing them with a set of attributes that made them unfit for citizenship. The men who crafted the nation’s government, such as Thomas Jefferson, claimed that Blacks lacked the capacity for rational thought, independence, and self-control that was essential for self-governance.”¹⁰⁹ This belief is pertinent to how we analyze and understand the history of sex education because both makes normal what might otherwise be seen as confoundingly pernicious: its existence as an extension of the government’s attempt control sex work. In order for this connection between sex education and sex work to be so systematically avoided as a serious part of sex education’s very existence, it requires some kind of allegiance with the idea that sex work is fundamentally immoral, or

that it is tangential to the experiences of students in educational spaces. My point is that this nascent allegiance to this belief is, as Roberts shows, a racist one, too.

Finally, the focus on “white slavery,” both during the Progressive era and in stories of sex education’s founding, often leads to a neglect of the very real presence of indigenous women in these histories, spaces, ideologies, and, well, prisons. This group is perhaps one of the most overlooked populations in studies of sex education in the United States,¹¹⁰ and, as a result, direct connections between sex education and the colonization of indigenous groups in these borders remain almost entirely unexamined and therefore desperately in need of attention by those serious about addressing the relationship between sex education and violence. The experiences of Native women *must* be included in any analysis of sex education’s existence. Native women’s experiences reveal some of the most drastic and pervasive cases of sexual and gender-based violence and, as a population, have been stigmatized and delegitimized to the point of erasure, and their absence in these histories is in desperate need of addressing.

Silencing, erasing, and neglecting Native women are part and parcel of the history of the United States itself. Andrea Smith has spent much of her career pointing to the use of silence to minimize, if not entirely erase, any sign of Native women’s suffering. Silencing is an extension of violence in this way. The assumptions about worth and belonging in the United States were first established through the erasure and displacement of indigenous peoples, which included the rape of indigenous women, the theft of indigenous children, the killing of indigenous men, and the eradication of indigenous models of kinship, sexuality, and community. Sarah Deer’s work on sexual violence in the United States offers one of the most detailed depictions of the centrality of colonialism and the trafficking of Native women’s bodies in the history of prostitution on what is now “owned” by the United States. She writes specifically about how “Removing Native women from their lands, homes, and families was an essential factor in depriving them of their personal liberty.”¹¹¹ Of additional importance are her experiences in the absolutely evil places that were Native American boarding schools at the time, which existed purely for the sake of more erasure and silencing and were fraught with sexual violence against children of all ages and genders.¹¹² Deer writes how, by the beginning of the twentieth century, if anything akin

to what was brought to mind in the use of “white slavery,” existed, and it was the treatment of indigenous children, as they were regularly kidnapped, stolen, beaten, and trafficked.¹¹³ Of course, the military training camps built at the time were often built upon stolen, Native land, further implicating them in what Deer calls “a different kind of attack on tribal cultures.”¹¹⁴ Though there is almost no accounting for indigenous people in the stories told about sex education, it must, at the very least, be acknowledged that the erasure of these people from our understanding of sex education’s founding is far more suggestive of an allegiance with this history of erasure than with anything meant to disrupt it.

It is also worth noting that Rosen is the only author here who explicitly discusses sex education. This observation comes in her discussion of the Progressive reaction to prostitution: sex education, Rosen argues, was one of many attempts at social reform that emerged precisely as a way to address sex work, backed mainly by social hygienists.¹¹⁵ This fact points to the limits of these histories themselves and, if we shift perspectives momentarily to educational concerns, raises the question of why education as an institution is absent from these narratives despite its centrality to the era. However, whether cited or not, these histories ask us to reconsider sex education drastically. From within this history, sex education is understood, to use Rosen’s words, as part of the network of reforms that “increased state repression of the most visible evidence of commercialized vice, and increased state control over the lives of prostitutes.”¹¹⁶ To understand sex education through both the history of sex work and the experiences of the prostitute is to expose new contingencies of sex education itself. Through this story, we can see the way in which sex education was a racialized, classed, and heteronormative project dependent upon a particular relationship to sex work.

What, then, are the implications of this history for sex education and for the relationship between education and sexuality? In an interview about her less-famous autobiographical book *Gather Together in My Name*, Maya Angelou recalls a different interview, where her own history of sex work was brought up in conversation. Of this moment, she says,

The woman who interviewed me, who I knew slightly, said “Maya Angelou, how does it feel to know you are the first Black woman to have a national best seller, non-fiction, second book nominated for the Pulitzer and to know that at 18 you were a prostitute?” It was like a kick in the stomach. However,

there is this. You must always be careful who you call out. . . . I said, “Ah, but there are many ways to prostitute oneself. And you know a lot about that don’t you dear?” Whereupon they went to break.¹¹⁷

On this note, then, what are the different lessons that this history of sex work might have for us? In the next chapter, I explore this impact by considering its relationship to the broader political and economic interests of the United States.