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Small, but Mighty

A Little Funding for a Huge Cause

In the previous chapter, the story of sex education's existence as a federally funded project was reoriented around a question about its relationship to the history of sex work. Here, I will explore questions that this different understanding of sex education produces, particularly in terms of its existence as a federally funded project. Thus far, I have left untouched the ever-present assumption that sex education was worth investing in. My reason for doing so stemmed from an interest in troubling the very assumption that this form of investment is either normal or good. Calling into question stories about sex education's history, and reorienting them as part of sex work's history, brings us, I hope, to a point wherein such a troubling is not merely interesting but essential in understanding sex education today. It puts us face to face with realities that otherwise sugarcoated might go unappreciated, like that of Sylvia Rivera and Marcia P. Johnson, who "decided it was time to help each other and help our kids. We fed people and clothed people. We kept the building going. We went out and hustled in the streets. We paid the rent."¹ These sex workers changed the world, which suggests something about the significance of maintaining their exclusion.

In this chapter, then, I turn to this assumption about sex education's inherent worth by exploring how its ties to sex work situate sex education as in relation to the federal government and its own long-standing imperialist legacies. The legacies that I explore here are colonialism, slavery, and capitalism. There are others to be explored, for sure, but these legacies are the ones I find most explicitly enacted in the attempt to create sex education as an extension of the federal government's interest in controlling sex work and sex workers. Again, Queer of Color Critiques have much to say about these legacies, and because

of the centering of those who might otherwise be deemed irrelevant to stories about our past, like the sex worker, they offer a way of learning different aspects of these legacies that might otherwise be overlooked. More specifically, they help frame sex education as part of a broader attempt at policing sex work through careful attention to the processes of subjectification that is valued, legitimized, normalized, and depended upon. In highlighting the relationship between these legacies and the processes of subjectification they relied upon to justify and maintain their own legitimacy, we can make better sense of the significance of sex education's existence as a federally funded attempt at reigning in "deviant" sexuality.

Colonial Logics and Capitalist Aims

The alternative story of sex education's purpose includes plenty of evidence of its relationship to colonialist logics and settler-colonial interests. Despite the strength the illusion of colonialism as a thing of the past presently has over American imaginaries, Queer of Color scholars, most of whom depend themselves upon the rich literature done within indigenous, cultural, diaspora, and postcolonial studies, consistently take this illusion to task in their work deconstructing other myths about contemporary categories of racial, sexual, gender, class, and ability differences. Front and center in this process is always the acknowledgment that the project of colonialism is enacted through European, heteropatriarchal justifications of superiority, as well as through the construction of what Maria Lugones calls the 'modern/colonial gender system,' which is imposed through the theft of indigenous land and the use of violence to control the lives of those who inhabit(ed) such land.² Importantly, these experiences are *not* entirely unique to the colonial encounter that took place on what is now the United States; it includes the land that is now labeled North America generally, Central America, South America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands.³ Additionally, Queer of Color Critique works to honor the fact that colonialism was constituted by practices of forced migration, slavery, displacement, the shattering of kinship formations, genocide, religious persecution, rape, and sexual violence, among many others.⁴ The problems analyzed within and addressed by these critiques are, therefore, predicated on an understanding of their

historical, ideological, and material connection to these practices and the lasting legacies of colonization.

Queer of Color Critiques thus offer an analytical framework through which the history offered in the previous chapter can be explored in terms of its own relationship to settler colonialist logics. When I say “colonialist logics,” I am referring to forms of knowledge and systems of knowledge production that extend colonial values and norms well beyond the confines of any so-called colonial era. This includes any moment in which rationality is defined in a way that justifies or normalizes the “binary division between the colonizers and the colonized,” as Stuart Hall describes it, or, to follow Aníbal Quijano, “the control of a specific form of labor” as, “at the same time, the control of a specific group of people.”⁵ The term “settler colonialism” refers, then, to an extension of colonialism that perpetuates colonialist logics about “natural” claims to land and bodies that, while seemingly “less” violent and certainly less explicit than public understanding of “what happened in the past,” remains dangerous and deadly in its legitimization of the destruction of indigeneity today. Additionally, it functions through the overdetermination and control of what constitutes knowledge and by linking the idea of the human to those whose capacities for attaining and using knowledge are aligned with colonialist aims. Sex education’s relationship to sex work can be understood as complicit in these logics in the following moments.

First, of course, is the fact that the federal government began investing in sex education during a global war. As seen earlier, the federal government explicitly situates sex education as essential to wartime efforts, precisely because it would theoretically help preserve the “American” way of life in the face of global threats. In undermining that way of life, sex workers themselves became threats, and thus their eradication becomes patriotic and morally justified. This should be understood as an example of settler-colonial logic: here, racialization and patriarchy work together to uphold the paternalistic belief that not only was the land upon which the domestic military camps were established *not* itself stolen land, but also that the further occupation alongside the driving out (or removal) of “unwanted” bodies was justified on the basis that doing so is essential to any attempt by the “West” at maintaining global control and power.

More specifically, Smith and Lugones’s work on the heteronormative nature of colonialism details the ways in which colonialist logics hinge upon racial and sexual norms. If we consider the moment in which sex education emerged

as a federally funded project in the early twentieth century, it becomes immediately evident across literature and documentation that central to the United States' general domestic interests was the desire to police populations through the enforcement of a particular conception of racialized sexuality. By "racialized sexuality," I again mean to highlight the interrelated ways in which categories of race and sexuality have been constructed historically and ideologically, particularly in the West. I could just as easily discuss this in terms of "sexualized race," though, as the order of the categories of identity is not meant to signify the importance of one over the other. Instead, I only wish to carry forward the work of the likes of Siobhon Somerville and Roderick Ferguson who have powerfully shown both the ways that racial segregation helped to "ensure the sexual purity of white women and the sexual mobility of white men,"⁶ and how "compulsory heterosexuality in the twentieth-century United States has drawn much of its ideological power from the ways it buttresses as well as depends on naturalized of racial difference."⁷ The point here, though, is that this construction of racial difference, inherent to the purpose of sex education, is itself a lasting mark of colonialist logics. It maintains assumptions about belonging in the United States that 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.

That part of this colonizing was furthered through the use of kidnapping, stealing, and purchasing of African peoples cannot be understated, either. Central to the function of slavery in the United States was taking land from others, taking bodies from other lands, and putting the latter on the former and calling it "natural." Lest those new inhabitants of the stolen land be deemed legitimate owners, they too had to be dehumanized, stripped of their culture, traditions, education, and spirituality, and redefined as mere tools, always disposable and always replaceable, for economic growth. As Adrienne Davis writes, "the economy of American slavery systematically expropriated black women's sexuality and reproductive capacity for white pleasure and profit."⁸ Whereas African men were deemed stronger workers (or stronger animals), African women were hypersexualized in order to normalize the need to control their bodies, denounce their knowledge and experiences, and, ultimately, justify raping them to maintain the labor force. This is a distinguishing feature

of Black women's histories, as Davis describes most powerfully: "Enslaved black women gave birth to white wealth."⁹

As they became foundational to the establishment of the United States' economic infrastructure and emergent international power, albeit in different ways, both African and indigenous women were subject to the whims of Western, white men, and this is clear in the discussions surrounding sex education's founding when sex work is considered. The very people, non-Western, nonwhite, female, as well as nonnormative kinship systems, whose erasure was inherent to colonialism, became symbolic of the immorality plaguing the Progressive era. By the beginning of the 1900s, then, the criminalization of deviant bodies and ways of being became increasingly institutionalized and were deemed necessary for the well-being of both the white family and the white nation. That this is the moment that the very idea of "sex education" as it exists in the United States was introduced and institutionalized is not an accident, and that this idea perfectly supports the maintenance of this vision of the United States and "American" life must be seen as intentional, too. Take, for example, Blair's description of prostitution in Chicago between the 1880s and 1910s. During this time, Black women are largely offered only unappealing, dangerous, or low-wage laboring positions, making it more profitable to engage in sex work, which was itself more profitable depending on the more deviance the worker was willing to perform or enact, in order to survive. Blair shows how the state punished those caught doing this but also provided the context under which such economic exchanges were increasingly profitable, worthwhile, and accessible to such women. This is an erasure coupled with a source of income that mirrors colonial intentions. With the emergence and expansion of vice districting and racial segregation, the federal government works hard to perpetuate the idea that those who participate in such activities are dangerous to the moral and political stability of the United States, particularly because of the threat prostitution poses to the legitimacy and purity of the traditional, heteronormative family.

The eugenic values inherent to calls for federally funded sex education also suggest its participation in settler colonialism. Eugenics, when applied to populations, normalizes the specifically colonial presumption that the growth of one population depends upon the erasure of another. Sex education is argued to be valuable precisely because it can do the work of helping "educate" the public about the validity and necessity of these erasures. The federal

government also took as authoritative the science that upheld these practices as true, and good, and rational. Because part of these seemingly scientific truths was underscored by “evidence” of the great threat posed to those who might think otherwise, “white slavery” itself is therefore also a point of association between sex education and settler colonialism. This view is strengthened by the anxieties around racial mixing that are present in eugenics and “white slavery.” As Cedric Robinson suggests, the introduction of the slave trade to the “New World,” which he sees as a “most natural step” in securing Spanish and Portuguese economic power, complicated the stakes of racial mixing.¹⁰ Whereas many colonizers saw African slaves as harder workers than Natives,¹¹ which furthered colonialist desires to remove Native and Indigenous populations, many colonizers also collaborated with “native elites” in order to have them at their beck and call should African slaves ever take up arms themselves.¹² These mixed messages and contradictory understandings of their situatedness thus heightened concerns around racial and ethnic mixing itself, despite the often contradictory ways in which such mixing through reproduction could move one up or down on the colonial hierarchy. If we see eugenics as a reflection of these continued concerns across races and ethnicities, its targeting of sex workers, among other similarly oppressed people, suggests that the legacy of colonialism is itself very much present in the calls for federally funded sex education.

These colonialist logics also normalized the ever-strengthening system of capitalism. The racial and gendered foundation of labor that colonialism depended upon became, in many ways, the very racial and gendered foundation of capitalism. There are, then, at least two ways to explore the place of sex education within this history, given its relationship to sex work: first, through a consideration of the sex workers themselves, and, second, by an exploration of the more general trend toward the normalizing of the limited notion of work ethic and profit making. When critiquing capitalism, however, there is always the danger of reproducing colonialist narratives. Indeed, many Marxist critiques of capitalism, particularly those developed within the West, have done so by centering their discussions of socialism and Marxism around those lives who were already affirmed by colonialism in the West. As Cedric Robinson argues, such critiques “incorporated theoretical and ideological weaknesses that stemmed from the same social forces that provided the bases of capitalist formation.”¹³ There are other, non-Western,

non-European lineages of capitalist critique, however, that have contributed to modern conceptions of socialism that are often neglected in such discussions. Further, the West has never seen its own true experimentation with socialism either, which means that there are other lessons about socialism to be learned from those who have put these ideas into action themselves in different ways. While this project does not explore those, in addressing the relationship to capitalism that is at stake in sex education's approach to sex work, I do understand part of that relationship as being another instance of colonial imposition. More specifically, it is the alignment with the nuclear family, Protestant work ethic, and, ultimately, the privileging of a specific kind of reproductive labor that binds sex education's colonialist logics to its capitalist ones.

The nuclear family is essential to the project of sex education, and certainly was, too, at sex education's development. It is also an important tool in both colonial and capitalist projects for measuring civility and productivity. The nuclear family's primary function was, as many have detailed, to maintain a societal structure in which Western European colonists could ensure their own superiority by virtue of their reproductive relations themselves. At the core of this idea was the desire to undermine indigenous, slave, and non-heteronormative kinship formations and, in doing so, justify the criminalization and erasure of those who drifted from these norms. Capitalism emerged as a reflection of this hierarchy, positing not only the Western family as superior to others by virtue of the head of household, the male's, preordained ability to work hard and thus deserve the fruits of his abilities, especially when those abilities meant controlling other bodies so as to increase productivity and profit. Likewise, as Ferguson writes, this meant that capitalist relations also came to structure the private sphere itself, so that the white family was the natural benefactor of the labor of others, and the labor of others was justified because of their distance from this white ideal.¹⁴ The development of capitalism in the United States is therefore *not* a purely economic event, but one that was made possible by the always already present exploitation and devastation of Black and indigenous lives through the alignment of work with the heteronormative family, such that the ability to perform kinship "properly," or through previously established Victorian-era values, became a marker of one's economic legitimacy. Sex education's persistent obsession, from the get-go, with this family model suggests its complicity in the development of

capitalism in the United States along the very lines arguably drawn first by colonialist powers.

Part of the naturalization and normalization of this model of the family and the association of all other ways of cultivating systems of care and belonging with deviancy was further enacted by the assertion of a particular kind of work ethic that can be seen clearly within the history of sex education when considering the uneven treatment of various kinds of work, and the value of that work, at the time. This idea of “work ethic” is, according to Kathi Weeks, historically grounded in Protestantism and thus naturalizes “the command to approach one’s work as if it were a calling,”¹⁵ the value of work, the view of work as an end in itself,¹⁶ and the view of work as a path toward salvation.¹⁷ This means that essential to capitalist development was the coalescence of meaning around a view of work that took it to be a reflection of one’s soul. This works both ways in that work ethic reflects the goodness of the soul *and* the goodness of the soul can thus be interpreted on the basis of one’s work and commitment to that work. Weeks adds that this work ethic is therefore always an “ethic of consumption, one that avows the necessary, legitimate, and indeed ethical link between hard work and whatever might count in different economic phases as deserved and responsible spending.”¹⁸ Something like prostitution, then, largely because of the disruption it causes, or threatens to cause, the “normal” and “good” nuclear family, is marked as an illegitimate site of labor, and those who make their livelihoods through that labor are also marked as illegitimate. The emergence and lasting power of capitalism, then, was co-constituted by a reduction of human morality to a judgment of one’s relationship to capital and work, a reduction that, because of its relationship to both colonialism and the nuclear family, was a racialized and sexualized one.

However, the history of sex work suggests another relationship between sex education and capitalism that complicates the idea that this relationship is merely one-sided, with sex education working as a way of normalizing private lives for the sake of capitalist interests. Instead, as Ferguson argues, capitalism is not merely a *homogenizing* institution; it also instigates the creation of heterogeneity:

Capital is a formation constituted by discourses of race, gender, and sexuality, discourses that implicate nonheteronormative formations like the prostitute. In addition, capitalist political economies have been scenes for the universalization and, hence, the normalization of sexuality.

But those economies have also been the arenas for the disruption of normativity.¹⁹

As the historians of sex work discussed previously, prostitution ought not to be understood as merely an irrevocably irrational and evil practice; instead, they show how it was perfectly justifiable given the historical context facing nonwhite women at the time. Situating this within capitalism more specifically suggests that we can read prostitution, especially as something “deviant,” as having been *produced by* capitalist formations. Rather than understanding capitalism as merely homogenizing subjectivity around one particular way of life, it also creates an excess, a body that cannot be brought into that process, a heterogeneous subject developed out of capitalism’s marginalizing capacity: “Capital, therefore, calls for subjects who must transgress the material and ideological boundaries of community, family and nation. . . . Indeed, the production of labor, ultimately, throws the normative boundaries of race, gender, class, and sexuality into confusion.”²⁰ As the state’s actions become more and more aligned with economic interests, instead of creating universal obedience to the sexual, raced, gendered, and class norms that uphold that model, those who “fail” find relief in other ways of being and other models of kinship. This excess therefore becomes the target of moral panic.

In other words, because men must be able to work and because men must be able to *fight* for the federal government, they must be protected from what destabilizes their birthright-like claim to this work and to being able to do it successfully. However contradictory, it is the necessity of work, and the morality attached to one’s access to work, that provides the context out of which prostitution is transformed into a “social problem” in the late 1800s/early 1900s. The creation of federally funded sex education can be read, then, as part of a broader socioeconomic-political effort by the state to negotiate racial, sexual, and class tensions in ways that affirm white male dominance and rule. Insofar as sex education emerges as a tool for orienting racialized sexual behavior around a version of morality asserted by Western white male heterosexuals, it participates in legitimizing capitalist class hierarchies. This is also precisely how anti-immigrant sentiments and practices become part of the work of sex education: to the extent that prostitutes are considered to be less-than citizens and many prostitutes were and are themselves immigrants, whether forced or not, sex education also perpetuates the practicality and rightfulness assumed in this ethnocentrism.

Of course, sex education, when situated within a concern for the history of sex work, was described above as primarily serving the purpose of policing *female* sexuality, begging the question of what to make of this story about work ethic and the family that is so often centered upon white male supremacy. Despite the male-centeredness of these logics, it is important to remember and notice that it was ultimately female sexuality that was deemed both the perpetrator, or the threat, to men, *and* the innocent victim in these discourses. The reason that it can be both at the same time is because of the value of one specific kind of labor, of which only women were seen as capable: *reproductive*. Prostitution was a moral threat, and a physical one, too, but it also threatens the claims patriarchy makes to the economy and to the family as the site of the reproduction of the race. Women *did* this kind of work and *did* make decent money doing so, but it was a *nonreproductive* labor, which undermined these claims to power. Sex work was a particularly slippery thing to control, then, because its profits were substantial enough to keep women (and men) involved in the industry, but it contradicted the gender and sexual norms that were supposed to function to uphold men as the heads of household, economically and otherwise. The only way to approach this problem was to continue to maintain a division between women which, though perhaps more fundamentally a division based on labor and thus a raced and gendered one too, was publicized as a division based on morality. Sex education was proposed and enacted for the very explicit purpose of towing this line, which was itself hitched to the desire to control and eradicate deviant sexual ways of being.

Fast Forward: Contemporary Control and Extended Erasures

While the times between the 1920s and the 1980s saw tremendous changes to the structure of modernity and included experimentation with various forms of sexuality education across places, spaces, and bodies, I want to now fast forward to a consideration of the more recent federal funding for sex education, beginning with the Reagan administration. This is a huge leap, and I do not want to minimize what is left out about the extension of the logics discussed earlier into their contemporary institutionalized forms. Because my original question about sex education's purpose and existence was derived from a concern for modern-day violence, however, I am making the choice to

put this foundational history as thus far interpreted into direct conversation with the federal policies that have most recently been used to invest in sex education at the national level. There are important lessons to be learned about sex education in doing so.

To this end, it is the Reagan administration that we can thank for causing a foundational shift in how the federal government approached sex education. Infamous for its many socially devastating policies, the Reagan administration utilized sex education policy as one space among many for legitimizing the impacts of such policies. Originating in subtitle G of Title IX of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, under the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, the Adolescent Pregnancy Program is listed as part of a broader attempt by Reagan and his allies to, allegedly, improve the health and material situation of mothers and children.²¹ Eventually named the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA), the act took a clear position on female sexual behavior and its relationship to the federal state. Of the most concern was the financial burden associated with nonnormative female reproductive practices. That is, while depicted as a concern for children born out of wedlock, the *cost* of them, to both the family and the state, was the most immediate worry. A still common refrain, and a racist and sexist one at that, the story was that teen pregnancy's relationship to increased financial dependency upon parental figures into adulthood was a threat to national stability. Further, the cause for this issue was described as a lack of individual, personal responsibility. Once again, deviant female sexuality is situated as an economic problem, the solution to which—the regulation of that sexuality—could be justified through the same Progressive-era logics around the nuclear family, public health, and worth ethic.

This stigmatization is exemplified in the rhetoric regarding how sex education ought to participate in the improvement of these health and financial problems. Teen mothers, and their out-of-wedlock babies, are depicted as burdens on their families, and while the government does express concern for the physical and mental health effects of being a teen mother, the final word on the stakes is financial. For example, in its reasoning, the act (US Senate 1981, 579) states that

- (5) pregnancy and childbirth among unmarried adolescents, particularly young adolescents, often results in severe adverse health, social, and economic consequences, including: a higher percentage of pregnancy and

childbirth complications; a higher incidence of low birth weight babies; a higher frequency of developmental disabilities; higher infant mortality and morbidity; a decreased likelihood of completing schooling; a greater likelihood than an adolescent marriage will end in divorce; and higher risks of unemployment and welfare dependency.

Here, the weight of economic well-being is put primarily upon women and the tension between their productive and reproductive capacities, echoing the same problem for which sex education was originally proposed to address. A notable difference, however, is that the male body is now entirely absent from the story. It is hard to believe that absence would be possible if the original intent of the idea of sex education was not itself to control female sexuality, even if that control was intended to benefit men.

Also, a child's life is here overdetermined by the behavior of the child's mother, again putting the responsibility for the whole family upon women. Further, the conflation of female sexuality and economic well-being is used to justify the call for increased attention to the preservation of the ideal American family, "since the family is the basic social unit in which the values and attitudes of adolescents concerning sexuality and pregnancy are formed."²² Now, though, financial stability is not just the reason for controlling, judging, and punishing female sexuality but also a euphemism for justifying doing so. This act, therefore, also marks the beginnings of a neoliberal shift in sex education, or the expansion of capitalist logics more explicitly into the realm of social, political, and cultural life and liberal valuations. Finally, this language makes explicit claims about what constitutes knowledge and thus about who should be educated and for what purposes. Just as with eugenics, social hygiene, and public health narratives, the assumption here is that some people just don't know better, and some people *won't ever* know better, leaving education accessible only to those who have the intelligence to be swayed by such education. Increasingly, then, the very idea of education and intelligence is tied to sexual behavior and federal complicity, and the child, who is innocent and lacking agency, must be protected from the consequences of their mother's lack of education. Paternalistic, patriarchal rhetoric pits the future generation's well-being against female knowledge just as it did so before and during the First World War.

Nonetheless, by 1984, AFLA was extended and amended because of the desire "for education and vocational training activities to be integrated fully

with health and other services provided by the Adolescent Family Life Act.”²³ Here, sex education is not only tied to but justified by the concern for job growth. The evidence used to advocate for this amendment includes this statement about teenage pregnancy and jobs:

Several studies have shown that teenage parenthood significantly affects the educational attainment of teenage parents and that this, in turn, leads to low-skilled and less well-paying jobs. This tendency is exacerbated by two other common outcomes of teenage parenting: the likelihood of larger family size and the probability of single parenthood. These factors “work together to create significant barriers to economic self-sufficiency for teen parent offspring, contributing to a cycle of poverty which is passed from one generation to the next.” The cost to society in terms of public expenditures for health, social services, and public assistance, and the loss of what would have been future economic contributions of teen parents has been repeatedly noted in the research literature.²⁴

The purpose of sex education, and education in general, remains as it was: a mechanism for advancing profit and economic growth. Even health, social services, and public assistance are grouped under a concern for public expenditures. These blatant reductions of life to economic terms represent another instance of education and knowledge production being aligned with one’s participation in the economy, itself depicted as directly influenced by one’s sexual behavior and marital status.

The conclusion regarding the purpose of the act, however, extends its primarily economic concerns and represents once more the ways in which the need to police sexual activity was justified through an appeal to neoliberal understandings of the student as worker, and the parents and family as meaningful primarily as an economic unit:

The benefits of educational and vocational attainment to young parents and to society are enormous. These services will help to meet the long-term needs of teen parents by helping them to break the cycle of poverty and repeat pregnancy that too often accompanies adolescent parenthood. It is now known . . . that a lack of education and marketable skills are the foremost causes of long-term welfare dependency. The Committee intends to strengthen the on-going efforts of demonstration projects to help adolescents, including adolescent fathers, improve their educational and job status.²⁵

As a policy that marks the arrival of a new interpretation of sex education, this source of formalized federal funding is an important moment in the history of sex education as it continues to rest upon the assumption that the federal government's investment in legislating the sexual activity of the public could be done, at least in part, through education in public schools. That is, the public has a vested interest in allowing the government to teach students about sexuality by connecting it to the economy precisely because sex education is, by definition, a mechanism for trying to prevent the disruption of the economic stability of students, as future workers, and their real and imagined families, that uncontrolled sexual activity may cause.

Once again, though, the context that is Reagan's presidency and its relationship to the Christian Right matters to understanding the nature of the relationship between education, sexuality, and the economy here. As Jennifer Terry writes, "By 1980, when Ronald Reagan took presidential office, the New Christian Right had successfully delivered millions of votes to the Republican Party through campaigns aimed at morally cleansing the nation."²⁶ When it came to sexuality, the primary way that this influence played out in the Reagan era was through the stigmatization of promiscuity, assumed to be prevalent among nonwhite women. Building upon the legacy of the 1965 Moynihan Report, or "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," which repeated the idea of the Black woman and mother as an incapable, overly sexual, threat to their own children and thus to the future itself—or, as overall unintelligent and ill-informed—Reagan's depiction of the Black welfare queen harkens back to the same kind of moralizing about Black lives that was central to many Progressive-era movements, including those advocating for sex education.

Roberts's work again poignantly details how Reagan's "War on Drugs" was part of a long tradition of demonizing Black women as bad mothers and financial problems.²⁷ Roberts shows that these rhetorical campaigns were so effective that by 1990, 78 percent of white Americans believed that Black people preferred to live on welfare.²⁸ Further, Alexandra Lord notes that Reagan's allegiance to the Religious Right, as well as his economic policies, resulted in a great increase in the role of the federal government in sex education during his administration, despite his cutting of other welfare programs. She adds that there is a coherence of ideology present, though, as these policies, or his changes to them, "ensured that federal institutions began to reflect the views of those who opposed both sex education and the sexual revolution of the

1960s.”²⁹ His interest in disinvesting social services, his lack of attention to particular populations of American citizens, including Black working women and also people living with and increasingly dying from AIDS/HIV, and his historical role in enabling the rise of neoliberalism further justify the reading of this act as an extension of the same moral panic over the impact of deviant, racialized, female sexuality on the family and thus the economy seen in sex education’s inception.

Not to be outdone, though, it was in 1996, under the Clinton administration, that the same grant that was originally used to fund AFLA, though now located in Title V of the Social Security Act, was restructured to explicitly invest in abstinence education, or sex education that views abstinence until marriage that only reasonable and justifiable sexual behavior. Therefore, as part of the amendment to include a “Separate Program for Abstinence Education” in the SSA, a detailed eight-point definition of abstinence education was offered for the first time and remains intact today.

“Abstinence education,” accordingly,

- (A) has as its exclusive purpose, teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity;
- (B) teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school-age children;
- (C) teaches that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems;
- (D) teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity;
- (E) teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects;
- (F) teaches that bearing children out of wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child’s parents, and society;
- (G) teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increases vulnerability to sexual advances; and
- (H) teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity.³⁰

This definition allows only for the teaching of the importance of abstaining from sex until marriage, the moral, political, and financial consequences of

doing otherwise, and places ultimate responsibility upon the individual to maintain this lifestyle.

Much has been made of this policy, and rightly so, as it is amazingly concerning in so many ways, but my interest in it here is because of the way in which the idea of abstinence itself seems to maintain the logics of sexual deviancy as a concern for economic production that we see in the early 1900s. Here, one's sexual practices are only legitimate to the extent that they don't disrupt the norms that structure capitalism's righteousness. Abstinence here is described as necessary for preventing economic dependencies that are seen as undermining these aims. The language of dependency is somewhat different from the language of the nuclear family used previously, though. Rather than being a sign of a *different* logic, this can be read, I think, as a nuanced articulation of the *same* logic if we understand it as evidence of the replacement of the family as the guiding institution of personal and political relationships with the state that has also been documented as shaping the twentieth century. This language also exists to collapse one's value to economic worth along neoliberal logics that mirror the activity that Weeks, in her analysis of the danger of reducing the human to a capitalist laboring subject, is so concerned with. Here, sex, race, and sexuality become foundational to one's ability to labor and, as a result, one's ability to assert their value to the state.

In 2002, under the George W. Bush administration, when the original Title V funding was set to expire, funding was extended for another five years. The extension went on to reaffirm its commitment to the eight-point definition given in 1996.³¹ In December 2010, the Consolidated Appropriations Act eliminated funding for all abstinence-only programs, including this one.³² In the meantime, however, the Community Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) program was enacted in 2000 under the Clinton administration, as part of Congress's Special Projects of Regional and National Significance. Clinton's own relationship to the image of Black womanhood is of importance here. As Roberts again reminds us, Clinton was perhaps just as complicit with perpetuating a view of the Black woman as a leech on the public and as a sexually promiscuous, unintelligent person who exists as a danger to her children. For example, Roberts highlights the fact that demonizing Black mothers who receive money from the state to support their children was central in Clinton's welfare reform proposals.³³ CBAE reasserted the value and necessity of Title V's definition of abstinence education and required

all programs funded through it to also adhere to such a definition.³⁴ As with the language of dependency, this language is both a departure from and an extension of the formative assumptions about knowledge that shaped sex education's creation. Whereas previously deviant, nonwhite women and prostitutes were excluded from the education their existence mandated, which was especially possible given their exclusion from most forms of education more generally, this form of sex education seems to acknowledge that, with the expansion of public education, such an exclusion is far less kosher for the American public. As such, these policies reflect the fact that

Modern-day racist ideology, then, seems to have shed the assumption that Black people are entirely incapable of rational decision making. Rather, Blacks are more likely to be blamed for the poor choices they make. . . . Black mothers are portrayed less as inept or reckless reproducers in need of moral supervision, and more as calculating parasites deserving of harsh discipline.³⁵

From this perspective, these more modern policies do not deviate from previous iterations of sex education so much as they move from maintaining exclusion in general to maintaining exclusion by associating behavior with individual choice. If “deviants” must be allowed an education, and if that education is going to maintain its reputation as a serious institution, the only way to account for deviancy is by offering an education that makes it appear as a choice, and a very bad, morally despicable one at that.

Obama's presidential era included continued funding for programs adhering to Title V's definition of abstinence education through the Competitive Abstinence Education program, which included funding numerous teen pregnancy prevention funds, sometimes more comprehensive than school-based funding allowed for. However, with the passing of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, federal funding for sex education took on a new form. Within this act, and still part of Title V, is the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP). PREP allotted each state that applied for funding through it at least \$250,000 a year, from 2010 through 2014.³⁶ The goal of the act remains ideologically the same as those laid out in Title V: reducing pregnancy rates for teenage girls, especially by focusing on those who are “the most high-risk or vulnerable for pregnancies or otherwise have special circumstances, including youth in foster care, homeless youth, youth with HIV/AIDS, pregnant youth who are under 21 years of age,

mothers who are under 21 years of age, and youth residing in areas with high birth rates for youth.”³⁷ However, PREP requires that adolescents be educated in different ways than did its predecessors. First, it is comprehensive and allows for the teaching of both abstinence and contraception and requires that the teaching of both be based on other evidence-based programs and “rigorous scientific research,” be medically accurate, include discussions of sexual behavior in terms of both abstinence and the use of contraception, discuss sexually transmitted infections, be age appropriate, and be attentive to the cultural context of its students.³⁸ The emphasis here also, for the first time, acknowledges students as potentially sexually active at the time they are in school, better enabling their sex education to reflect their experiences as such.

Additionally, PREP takes an additional step away from previous abstinence education programs and requires that each program funded must address at least three “adulthood preparation subjects,” chosen from this list:

- (i) Healthy relationships, such as positive self-esteem and relationship dynamics, friendship, dating, romantic involvement, marriage, and family interactions.
- (ii) Adolescent development, such as the development of healthy attitudes and values about adolescent growth and development, body image, racial and ethnic diversity, and other related subjects.
- (iii) Financial literacy.
- (iv) Parent-child communication.
- (v) Educational and career success, such as developing skills for employment preparation, job seeking, independent living, financial self-sufficiency, and work-place productivity.
- (vi) Healthy life skills, such as goal-setting, decision making, negotiation, communication, and interpersonal skills, and stress management.³⁹

This list offers what many would consider important interventions upon abstinence-only education, particularly in its broadening of discourse on relationships to include those beyond the person with whom one has sex or marries, allows for conversation about issues related to sex and sexuality beyond pregnancy and disease, encourages relationships with parents, and considers a person’s future financial success and life goals as related to the project of being educated about sex and sexuality.

Despite this, though, PREP seems to reinvest in a neoliberal attitude toward sexuality and education perhaps more than its “controversial” predecessors. For instance, we see a blatant return to the economic language used during the Reagan era that associates one’s financial stability to one’s family life, to one’s sexual activity, as well as a continuation of the importance of marriage from the abstinence programs to that relationship. Further, the view of the individual that PREP asserts is especially concerning, because, in broadening its understanding of how sexuality and sexual activity relate to the rest of one’s life, it reinforces a definition of individuality grounded in self-sufficiency, rationality, and one’s capacity to labor and make money, all pillars of neoliberal subjectivity. This is mirrored in both the stated aims of PREP and the subjects to be taught: both emphasize the individual’s ability to collect and act upon “medically accurate” and appropriate information, which then is to allow for clear, reasoned decision making that many have, I think rightly, argued to be problematic. For instance, Nancy Kendall has argued that this turn depicts the student as a consumer of sex and sexuality and implies that individual, rational decision making is the standard for adjudicating whether or not one is to engage in sexual activity.⁴⁰

PREP also asserts a definition of sexuality in economic terms. While the act nods its head at community and group differences regarding sex and sexuality, it ultimately doubles down on an understanding of the individual, as an “accurately” informed decision maker and a financially literate worker, suggesting its investment in neoliberalism. In fact, if programs must discuss only three of these points, it is easy for sex education to turn into a lesson on financial stability and career readiness, which is likely to happen in a cultural climate where sex education and its teachers are increasingly under attack for merely talking about sex in schools, which Janice Irvine has convincingly documented.⁴¹ Finally, equally important is the fact that the very next section of the Affordable Care Act following the establishment of PREP restores the abstinence education as laid out in Title V, through 2014.⁴² From the perspective of the federal government, then, in PREP’s attempt at expanding sex education to reflect a variety of cultural and sexual differences, it invests literally and ideologically in the form of sex education that it seems to replace and furthers the historical commitment to the student and worker and consumer, and a view of sexuality mediated by an economic framework, by reinforcing the relationship between sexuality, family life, the economy, and the job market, through an emphasis on individual

sufficiency, intelligence, and control, all qualities of the ideal neoliberal subject, a subject who serves neoliberalism itself. Intelligence is to be displayed in one's sexual activity, and the more one adheres to these standards of sexual life, the more legitimacy and value one has. Of course, then, the more that deviance exists in one's life in relationship to this set of expectations, the larger the threat one is to the state, and thus the more one is allowed to be subject to violence of a racial, heteronormative, or capitalist nature.

As we move into Trump-era policies, what has been true thus far mostly remains the same. In 2016, CAE was replaced with Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) grants and was intended to be more discretionary in terms of promoting abstinence-only until marriage education than were the CAE ones. SIECUS again describes this move by abstinence-only advocates as a "rebranding" of abstinence-only programs: CAE proponents "co-opted risk reduction language used by proponents of sex education and the public health community in order to make their programs seem more in line with experts in this field. But the substance of these SRAE programs remains the same."⁴³ Though some of the language around the definition of abstinence has since changed, and the Title V definition is no longer standard in CAE programs, the current iteration of this funding asserts that the purpose of this funding is "to enable the State or other entity to implement education exclusively on sexual risk avoidance (meaning voluntarily refraining from sexual activity)."⁴⁴ Funded through FY2020, these grants do require that medically accurate and age-appropriate information be taught and that discussion of contraception may be included, so long as it "ensures that students understand that contraception offers physical risk reduction, but not risk elimination," and that "the education does not include demonstrations, simulations, or distributions of contraceptive devices."⁴⁵ In addition, the topics to be covered in these programs reaffirm the long-held federal assertion that sex education's importance lies in its jurisdiction over public health and economic stability and the neoliberal concept of the individual that was instituted decades ago:

- (1) Topics: Education on sexual risk avoidance pursuant to an allotment under this section shall address each of the following topics:
 - (A) The holistic individual and societal benefits associated with personal responsibility, self-regulation, goal-setting, healthy decision making, and a focus on the future.

- (B) The advantage of refraining from nonmarital sexual activity in order to improve the future prospects and physical and emotional health of youth.
- (C) The increased likelihood of avoiding poverty when youth attain self-sufficiency and emotional maturity before engaging in sexual activity.
- (D) The foundational components of healthy relationships and their impact on the formation of healthy marriages and safe and stable families.
- (E) How other youth risk behaviors, such as drug and alcohol usage, increase the risk for teen sex.
- (F) How to resist and avoid, and receive help regarding, sexual coercion and dating violence, recognizing that even with consent teen sex remains a youth risk behavior.⁴⁶

Point A centers responsibility on the rational individual and their ability to prioritize their future in decision making about sex; B doubles down on this by entrenching SRAE in a narrative about the relationship between one's future and one's health; C explicitly claims that nonnormative sexual activity can lead to poverty; D locates the ideal life in "healthy marriages" and "safe and stable" families. As the story goes, E reminds us that sex is about risk and more akin to drug usage than anything else. Finally, F posits a seemingly new and desirable idea—the need to educate students about violence and consent—while nonetheless claiming that it is neither violence nor a lack of consent that is the real threat; it is sex itself. From Reagan to Trump, then, the federal government can be seen as continuing to advance a vision of what it means to be sexually educated that itself maintains the same assumptions about whose lives matter and for what purposes that sex education's earlier advocates set into motion.

Telling Silences

Of course, absent from these newer policies is explicit reference to sex work. Given the historical story I have offered here, it is notable that the sex work has gone missing from these policies. However, this erasure is one that I read as reflective of a more complete naturalization of the erasure of sex work from any thought about what it means to be educated in the United States. She still

haunts these policies in their utilization of the very ideas and values that she came to stand in for within discussions of sex education in the early 1900s. She need not be mentioned—sex work need not be acknowledged itself—because her very existence, and the existence of this industry as a whole, is rendered impossible given the parameters set by sex education. Why talk about what does not exist? Why mention what *our* children could never be?

This silence is telling, particularly if we consider what such an erasure itself suggests about the imagined community for whom sex education, and thus education itself, serves. That the sex worker and the institution of sex work disappear in contemporary discourses around sex education, especially given her centrality to the very project at its start, points to a new question, to which the next chapter will be directed: if the understanding of sex education that I offered by virtue of its relationship to sex work remained, as I have argued, intact through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, what does the perfected erasure of sex work from these discourses mean for the politics of sex education today? What do we miss out on—what do we *miseducate about*—when our sex education cannot even address sex work, or what Eve, a streetwalker from Canada, says is “an answer to a lot of things over the years”?⁴⁷