



Sex Ed, Segregated (Gender and Race in American History)

Courtney Q. Shah

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In *Sex Ed, Segregated*, Courtney Shah examines the Progressive Era sex education movement, which presented the possibility of helping people understand their own health and sexuality, but which most often divided audiences along rigid lines of race, class, and gender. Reformers' assumptions about their audience's place in the political hierarchy played a crucial role in the development of a mainstream sex education movement by the 1920s. Reformers and instructors taught middle-class youth, African-Americans, and World War I soldiers different stories, for different reasons. Shah's examination of "character-building" organizations like the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) reveals how the white, middle-class ideal reflected cultural assumptions about sexuality and formed an aspirational model for upward mobility to those not in the privileged group, such as immigrant or working class youth. In addition, as Shah argues, the battle over policing young women's sexual behavior during World War I pitted middle-class women against their working-class counterparts. *Sex Ed, Segregated* demonstrates that the intersection between race, gender, and class formed the backbone of Progressive-Era debates over sex education, the policing of sexuality, and the prevention of venereal disease. Courtney Shah is an instructor at Lower Columbia College, Washington.

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