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Review

Reviewed Work(s): I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn of the Century Chicago by Cynthia M. Blair

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romanticism that was at odds with the portrayal of courtship and marriage in contemporary popular culture.

Part III, “Exploring Sex and Love in Marriage” reinforces many of the themes that have already emerged—the discrepancy between what marriage manuals were advocating and what couples were practising, the centrality of privacy to respondents' appreciation of their sexuality and the importance of being “natural” in relationships. One chapter develops the authors' existing research into birth control and the secular fertility decline. They illuminate regional and class differences and make a strong case that controlling birthrates need not be due to modern forms of contraception. A picture emerges of couples employing a mixture of methods like withdrawal and abstinence instead of or as well as the use of barrier contraception. Another chapter explores interviewees' perception of bodies and finds that it was not the physical body that was attractive so much as how it was presented in terms of cleanliness, a contrast to the body cultures of the interwar period. There is a chapter arguing that women's sexual satisfaction has been downplayed for this period under liberationist scrutiny. Many of the women interviewed reported satisfaction with their sex lives, but not in the terms of individualistic pleasure that has acted as the marker of a positive sex life for subsequent researchers, but, provocatively, as a duty which they took pleasure in fulfilling. The next chapter considers the impact of the sexual revolution on respondents' understanding of their sex lives, looking not at the content of the testimonies, but at the context.

Szreter and Fisher make the point that it can be hard to find records of the sexual histories of those whose sexual lives, like those of their interviewees, are not marginalised and are inherently private. In value-laden language they claim their interviewees' sex lives are “normal, mundane and unremarkable ... the silent majority” (45). This idea of “ordinariness” is somewhat overstated and belies the specificities of the participants—the inclusion of one woman who was never married is classed as an “oversight” (1) and there is an assumption that none of the married participants will have been anything but heterosexual (53). Aside from this occasional heterosexism and the anxiety to be empirical, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution* is an impressive achievement which combines the unparalleled breadth of its oral history testimonies with the authors' agility in applying this material to historiographical debates. What emerges is a strong call to be attentive to the voices and values of the past before passing judgment, which will no doubt be of great influence to subsequent researchers.

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*I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn of the Century Chicago.* By Cynthia M. Blair (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010. xiii plus 323 pp. \$40.00).

In *I've Got to Make My Livin'*, Cynthia M. Blair uses census data, police reports, newspaper accounts, and property records to describe the Great Migration of

southern Blacks to Chicago, and the contexts that they found, influenced and created in the milieu of sexual commerce. Blair offers an overview of Black women's migration to Chicago and their involvement selling sex, with emphasis on understanding prostitution as an economic activity, generating income for sex workers and for house and saloon management of all ethnicities. Her use of the late-20<sup>th</sup> century term "sex work" surprised this reader because it is anachronistic, but for most of the period Blair describes, no obvious terms exist, and all carry pejorative baggage or euphemistic lack of clarity, without emphasis on the sale of sexual services as an economic activity but instead emphasizing sexual availability.

Blair has a uniquely strong understanding of the labor involved in sex work, "greeting and entertaining men; constantly assuring prospective clients of their desirability or urbanity; the constant self-care required to produce alluring personal effects" (68-70) and distinguishes between venues where women sold sex and the additional responsibilities of each, from parlor house rules to independent negotiations in saloons and the vagaries of streetwalking. The nuanced picture painted by Blair demonstrates that sex work contributes to both formal and informal economic sectors, and that even people unaware of it were part of the gigantic ecosystem of sexual commerce in turn-of-the-century Chicago. Her deep understanding of the milieu is further demonstrated by her recognition and description of the slippery uses of the word "pimp" for not only exploitive male bosses but also lovers, husbands, and family of women who sell sex, saying, "Most often the term reflected reformers' inability to comprehend women's willing involvement in the sex trade" (166). What Blair hints at is the divide between working class people of all ethnicities and the upper class leaders of reform. This theme of the different and sometimes conflicting agendas—working class everyday life and efforts to uplift the race—is an underlying theme of *I've Got to Make My Livin'*.

Blair is at her best describing shifting economic and leisure landscapes, the ways such shifts affected Black women's options, and the responses to these changes, including creative responses and new workplaces. This is the crux of all she writes about, sexual commerce, black-owned business, limited economic options, migration toward improved situations. She also describes backlash and blame from whites and Blacks on Black sex workers for the decline of Black neighborhoods and for general discrimination against Blacks, including stereotypes of sexually voraciousness and promiscuity. Blair locates the root of Black-on-Black blame in the contrast between economic motivation and the desire for respectability. This is inevitable in light of the contradictions faced by Black people living in the areas with Black saloons and whorehouses while living mainstream lives without participation in sexual commerce.

Despite Blair's great understanding of the work of sex work, in a few instances, Blair refers to sexual activity across race in a commercial setting as being contemptuous, but without information about sex shows in other entertainment. These instances were the only false notes heard by this reader, and they are no object to the great information throughout this book. However, these instances jar because they lack Blair's nuanced understanding and contempt is not demonstrated with further documentation, as with other sentiments described by Blair. Perhaps later publications will offer clarity from Blair, and I look forward to reading more of her work.

Blair links the racial changes in sexual commerce to white slavery panics and campaigns, which had a definite racial component. Today's anti-trafficking campaigns would benefit from her analysis's exposure of the exclusion of minority-owned and run businesses in the wake of racist campaigns. However, Black women of majority selling sex held no "symbolic value" for race movements and the economic factors that pushed women to sell sex remain overwhelming for any movement, and so were unaddressed on any level. The lack of support for sex workers of color by campaigns to advance racial issues and awareness remains the case today. There is a small movement within sex worker networks to advance the specific concerns of sex workers of color but this is in part because the concerns of all sex workers include economics and policing. Blair's documents the social anxieties around sex manifesting in the form of scape-goating Black sex workers for other crimes and for neighborhood degeneration, by Black communities as well as the mainstream (non-Black) press; we see this in current anti-trafficking work, focusing on particular ethnicities and on sex work again. Blair's work is timely and important. Her insights to the ways "respectability" has alienated sex workers seeking economic benefit from larger movements is also relevant today in the ways sex workers have not advanced in the movement against HIV/AIDS in the U.S., especially Black sex workers, who may be the people most affected by the pandemic. We need to learn from the history Blair documents in order to stop repeating it.

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*Creating the College Man: American Mass Magazines and Middle-Class Manhood 1890-1915.* By Daniel A. Clark (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010. 256 pp. \$26.95).

If you're reading this review, you've likely been there: college. Today, more than 8 million men are enrolled. Attendance is pervasive. A century ago, however, the college campus was transitioning from the reserve of the elite to the proving ground of the middle class. The term "college man" packed cultural punch, with much owed to the editors of *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's Weekly*, *Munsey's Magazine*, and *Cosmopolitan*. These magazines, Daniel Clark convincingly argues, were primary vehicles for promoting the new face of American masculinity—young, educated, and clean shaven. The book details how "college became part of the new formula for American success and middle-class identity in the dawning of the corporate age" (5).

*Creating the College Man* engages a range of scholarship from studies of turn-of-the-century masculinity to explorations of the cultural impact of Chandlerian corporations. While undoubtedly a cultural history, the book impressively integrates the history of the media, consumerism, masculinity, and the middle class. The book adds to the history of higher education, finding