

## UNDERSTANDING AND TEACHING U.S. LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER HISTORY

Edited by Leila J. Rupp & Susan K. Freeman ■ University of Wisconsin Press ■ 2014

Reviewed by Clare A. Lyons

Leila J. Rupp and Susan K. Freeman have assembled a terrific book for anyone teaching U.S. history to high school or college students. It is designed to explain why, and especially how, educators can integrate LGBT history into their existing courses. The volume contains superb essays by scholars and teachers that speak to pedagogy, sources, and methods, and includes seventeen topical essays that span the breadth of U.S. history, from colonial same-sex experiences to contemporary same-sex marriage.

The authors make a compelling case that bringing LGBT history into the U.S. history curriculum is both important and enriching. Historicizing same-sex intimacy and gender nonconformity gets to the core of what good history is about: comprehending how people in the past understood their world differently than our own. The LGBT history they present opens up questions and enriches analytical thinking. As contributing teachers Emily K. Hobson and Felicia T. Perez put it, this is a history about “systems of knowledge, state policies, and social movements, not sexual acts” (p. 89). If the task of teaching LGBT history in the classroom seems daunting, the first section of the book presents first-hand accounts by high school and college teachers who have taken the plunge. They represent a broad range of teaching experiences: public and private schools, affluent and impoverished student bodies, hostile and sympathetic parents and administrators, survey and elective courses, tight and flexible time constraints. Each teacher attests to the importance this history had for their students.

Much of the book’s focus is on integrating Queer history into the units and analytical

frameworks a course already contains. For example, a unit on the nineteenth-century gender system and separate spheres can easily incorporate the history of romantic love between women and that between men. Some chapters discuss how to bring Queer history into staple topics in U.S. history courses: colonial America, the far West, urbanization and industrialization, World War II, the Cold War, Civil Rights, 1960s radical movements, and the rise of the New Right. Other chapters focus on topics more commonly associated with LGBT history: landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases, same-sex parenting, the history of AIDS, “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell,” same-sex marriage, and transgender history. The essays are full of teaching exercises the contributors have used in their own classrooms, useful primary and secondary sources, and specific historical details of individual lives.

Five essays on sources and teaching methods contain a treasure trove of materials. These essays offer more than a bibliographic encyclopedia. Essays on oral history, fiction, documentary films, popular culture, and online digital resources such as Outhistory.org (the premier online source of U.S. LGBT history) present extensive resources but also focus on how to use the materials to great effect.

Especially helpful are wonderful examples of strategies to achieve specific goals. For example, several chapters discuss how to demonstrate the social construction of sexualities by revealing unexpected histories, such as transgender lumberjacks in the American West, or third gender/Two-Spirit persons in Native American cultures. Other chapters illustrate teaching intersectionality by

exploring life histories, such as that of gay civil rights activist Bayard Rustin. Yet another chapter takes a global perspective by examining less-familiar societies such as seventeenth-century Japan, where men were expected to desire both women and boys. The beauty of the book is that teachers can pick and choose the subjects and approaches that fit into their own vision for their courses.

*Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History* also grapples with the politics of developing LGBT curriculum in distinct local and state educational environments, suggesting strategies to recruit support or counter objections. This is essential reading for teachers working to integrate historical skills into the Common Core, teaching LGBT content now part of the AP exam, or who are involved in curricular transformation projects, including the one initiated by California’s 2011 Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Responsible (FAIR) Education Act. “Outing the past” by integrating LGBT and Queer history into our U.S. history courses also counters the self-hate and homophobic bullying engendered by academic silence. The contributors to this volume have outlined a plan of action for curricular transformation. Let us heed their call. ■■■

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