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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Karen L. Graves. *And They Were Wonderful Teachers: Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009. xxi + 186 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-03438-1; $20.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-07639-8.

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Published on H-Education (July, 2011)
Commissioned by Jonathan Anuik

Karen L. Graves investigates the state-sanctioned dismissal of public school teachers in Florida during the early Cold War, following recent scholarly work that has begun to challenge notions that Communist political sympathies were the main cause of investigations and firings within governments. Such scholars posit instead that sexuality was a more common cause for dismissal, and Graves's work is the first, book-length study that illustrates this process on a state level.[1] In her book, the experiences of everyday educators and the perceived threats to social stability and consensus are placed in the context of domestic containment and postwar stability. In *And They Were Wonderful Teachers*, she argues that educators were in a particularly vulnerable position among government workers, given their role in working with children. Therefore, because of the stigma attached to publicly acknowledging their sexuality, Florida teachers were unable to band together for political protection.

Graves uses the records of the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee to reflect on a number of questions about the purge of schoolteachers. Over the course of five chapters, she considers how Florida's persecution of gay and lesbian teachers differed from the state's investigations of civil rights activists and university personnel, and how other state agencies absorbed the anti-gay agenda put forth by the Investigation Committee. By emphasizing public school teachers, Graves also questions whether the Florida schoolteacher purge was an isolated event or if it is consistent with the historical monitoring of teachers' morality and conduct. More broadly, Graves addresses the conditions that enable individuals to resist threats on their civil liberties, and how political ideology can affect education.

Graves focuses on Florida, where investigations were conducted under the auspices of the state government, ostensibly for the public good. The Florida Legislative Investigation Committee, known as the Johns Committee after state senator Charley Johns, was established in 1956 and was tasked with investigating organizations, groups, and individuals whose activities violated Florida laws. In 1957, this was expanded to include organizations considered subversive. In practice, this meant that the investigative committee would work to slow desegregation efforts by intimidating members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other civil rights activists, linking their activities with Communism. However, the NAACP was well organized and experienced with intimidation. They effectively won a case against the state in 1963, which prevented the Johns Committee from confiscating membership records.

With its central purpose fading away, the committee hoped to sustain its life through the investigation of suspected homosexuals. As Graves illustrates, this was not in the initial parameters of the committee's work. However, once they began investigating homosexual teachers, they sought the legislature's approval to continue.

Graves argues that teachers were more vulnerable to persecution than other government workers, largely based on the difficulty of banding together publicly. Having learned from their encounters with the NAACP and university personnel during an investigation of the University of South Florida (USF), the Johns Committee now investigated the teachers privately, without legal counsel. State and county superintendents and the Florida Education Association collaborated with the investigation, leaving no institutional support for teachers. In the case of both the NAACP and USF hearings, the press covered the investigation, leading to a higher level of public awareness and often sympathy. This public support was not available for teachers.

Although organizations for lesbian and gay rights and liberation were becoming organized in this era, teachers faced increased likelihood of losing their jobs and careers if they were suspected of and found to be involved with the homophile movements.[2] Furthermore,

if teachers had demanded a public trial, they also risked being prosecuted under sodomy laws. As Graves persuasively illustrates, a lack of public and institutional support, combined with the connection of homosexuality with Communism, made teachers susceptible to intimidation by the committee.

The vulnerability of teachers was also increased by long-held notions of teachers as role models for students. The notion of protecting youth was a justification for the committee's work, with the claim that teachers would recruit children into homosexuality. While scholarly work has demonstrated that teachers have always been held to additional standards for moral conduct and behavior, especially regarding sexuality, Graves illustrates how this was part of a Cold War political process.[3] Graves goes on to show how the reaction to the investigation and the lack of support for teachers reflects the monitoring of teachers that continues to occur in the state. Presently, there are no statewide laws in Florida to guard against employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. According to Graves, the Florida Education Code still contains language that provides school boards with the leeway to dismiss teachers because of their sexual orientation, on charges pertaining to immorality. It is Graves's conclusion that teachers are uniquely positioned to transform society's ideology regarding sexuality. Teachers are at the forefront of transmitting knowledge to the next generation and as long as there are debates about and discrimination against homosexual teachers, queer rights cannot be fully gained.

Graves concludes that the investigation of lesbian and gay teachers differed significantly from that of other groups. The fate of each group, whether university personnel, civil rights activists, or school teachers, depended on the public accountability of the committee, a supportive network and collective identity for the accused, and community vigilance. With a strong group sensibility, individual teachers could resist the investigators; however, large-scale protest was not possible. Teachers also lacked institutional support necessary for group resistance, as the Florida Department of Education and the Florida Education Association sought to oversee the morality of teachers and complied with the committee, continuing the dismissal of lesbian and gay teachers after the committee was dissolved. Graves concludes that the Florida teacher purges were not an aberration in educational history. Rather, the event reflects long-standing checks of teacher autonomy that arise from expectations of teachers as role models for children and the consequences of the profession's feminization in a sexist culture. Further, the secrecy under which the investigations were conducted typifies the nature of Cold War government, as civil liberties were violated under the guise of security.

Greatly impressive is Graves's use of the committee's records and her conscientious attention to race and gender. By focusing on public school teachers, she provides new dimensions into the study of the Johns Committee's investigations and illuminates the personal effects of Cold War policy on individuals. Additionally, the resistance exhibited by the investigated teachers offers an insightful view into the larger struggle for civil rights in twentieth-century U.S. society. Historians of Cold War politics, lesbian and gay history, and educational history are likely to be interested in Graves's exploration of the Florida teacher purges. Her analysis, centered at the intersection between these divergent fields of historiography, raises important questions about power, politics, and resistance, providing an excellent foundation for future inquiries into the effects of Cold War politics, legislation, policies, and investigations on average citizens.

Notes

[1]. On sexuality as the reason for dismissal of civil servants, see David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). In addition to Graves's previously published articles, see Stacey Braukman, "'Nothing Else Matters But Sex': Cold War Narratives of Deviance and the Search for Lesbian Teachers in Florida, 1959-1963," *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 3 (2001): 553-575; James A. Schnur, "Closet Crusaders: The Johns Committee and Homophobia, 1956-1965," *Carryin' on in the Gay and Lesbian South*, ed. John Howard (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 132-163; and Dan Bertwell, "'A Veritable Refuge for Practicing Homosexuals': The Johns Committee and the University of South Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (2005): 410-431.

[2]. See John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2006); and Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

[3]. See also Jackie Blount, *Fit To Teach: Same-Sex*

Desire, Gender, and School Work in the Twentieth Century (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); and Karen M. Harbeck, *Gay and Lesbian Educators: Personal Freedoms, Public Constraints* (Malden: Amethyst Press and Productions, 1997).

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Citation: Molly Jessup. Review of Graves, Karen L., *And They Were Wonderful Teachers: Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers.* H-Education, H-Net Reviews. July, 2011.
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