

Marketing Sexuality: Sex Industry and the Politics of Race in Twentieth-Century America

There has always been a profound connection between sexual attributes and individual identity, but this was reimagined in the late twentieth-century United States in the context of sexuality-based civil rights movements. Over the course of the 20th century, racial minorities in the United States came to be categorized as they are known today: Black, Asian, Latino/a, White, and Native American. In my dissertation, I will show how marketing principles shaped these terms in a racialized and gendered capitalist system, in which sex workers' physical attributes became commodified in specific ways. In a previous paper on Hooters workers, I tried to establish how sexuality has become commodified in the U.S. economy. In my dissertation, I will investigate how this process of commodification occurred over time in relation to race, class, and gender inequalities and power dynamics in U.S. society. Furthermore, I will endeavor to show how the forces of marketing in the sex industry, and porn industry operating as its media, have shaped gendered and racial identities, which have in turn been reproduced in a broader context through the manipulation of public memory.

My research will show how organized crime, the sex and porn industries, border and welfare/health politics, and the legacies of slavery have created racial brands as we know them today. The complication that I will endeavor to showcase is the fine or even blurred line between the commodity (a subjugated gendered racial identity) and labor (a rebellious gendered racial identity), which complicates the history of sex work in twentieth-century America. If the production of a price-based racial hierarchy in the sex industry was at work at the turn of the century, it also persisted until the civil rights movement of the 1960s. I will demonstrate that during this period the quality and quantity of sexual commodities directly influenced their placement in a price scheme, which was amplified in the marketing strategies of the sex and porn industries. My

first three chapters focus on Chinese immigrant women working for the gangs known as the Tong in San Francisco (1900-1920), Black women working as sex workers in Harlem during the Jazz Age, and South and East European women working in the Upper Westside, New York City (1920-1940), and last, Mexican immigrant women working as sex workers in the borderland (1946-1960). I will go on to show that after the 1960s, the civil rights movement also flourished inside the sex industry and its media counterpart, the porn industry. To demonstrate the relationship between paid and unpaid publicity and the formation of a racial hierarchy in the form of a price scheme, I will examine the period from the turn of the century until after 1986, when COYOTE was well established and held two sex workers' international conventions. My research will focus on the cities of New York, San Francisco, and Borderland Texas, as well as the larger media landscape of U.S.-made porn.

Scholarly work on the history of organized crime, labor history, and women's history has yet to explore all the documents available on the sex industry. By combining the story of gangsters involved in the sex industry, and sex worker activists fighting the impossible discriminatory politics affecting them health-wise and legally, I hope to present a comprehensive work that speaks to an audience beyond academia. This dissertation promises to significantly expand scholarly understanding of sex workers and processes of racialization in the United States. It will demonstrate that the marketing of bodies in the criminalized "underworld" of sex work has profoundly influenced the formation of racial categories in the United States.