

2011

Review of : "And They Were Wonderful Teachers :
Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers," by
Karen L. Graves

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Recommended Citation

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TAMPA BAY

H I S T O R Y



VOLUME 24

2010

And They Were Wonderful Teachers: Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers. By Karen L. Graves (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009. xxi, 186 pp. Preface, acknowledgments, table, map, conclusion, notes, index. \$65.00, cloth; \$25.95, paper)

Denison University Professor of Education Karen Graves has thoroughly documented the removal of gay and lesbian schoolteachers during the notorious nine-year reign of the Johns Committee (1956-65). Officially known as the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee (FLIC), this arm of the legislature attempted to quash the civil rights movement, curtail academic freedom, and expose any activity that threatened the political hegemony of Senator Charley E. Johns and his Pork Chop Gang colleagues. After the FLIC's attempts to shut down NAACP branches in Florida and connect "race agitators" with a larger communist conspiracy had failed, investigators launched probes between 1957 and 1963 against a "homosexual menace" that focused on schoolteachers.

Graves effectively incorporates sources from the rich, even if redacted, Johns Committee records that became available to researchers in July 1993. She built upon earlier studies of the FLIC and similar state-sponsored, cold war-era witch hunts written by Stacy Braukman, John D'Emilio, and David Johnson – scholars who have enriched Florida's historiographical record by examining the notable intersection of social, political, ethnic, and queer history that defines the FLIC's contemptible legacy. An educational historian by training, Graves understands that many of her colleagues in the areas of social and historical foundations of American education have avoided exploring issues of sexuality and queer theory even as a growing number of social historians have embraced these topics. By realizing that the persecution of gay and lesbian educators often eclipsed the purges of suspected Communists, she views her study as a way to bring this story out of the closet for educational historians who "want to know how political-economic changes influence sexual identity" (viii).

The author acknowledges the complex nature of the Johns Committee's history. She introduces elements of earlier and concurrent investigations targeting members and supporters of the NAACP, students and instructors at Florida's colleges and universities, and others called to give testimony. Utilizing surviving committee transcripts in the State Archives of Florida, Graves clearly compares the similarities and differences between the civil rights and academic freedom probes with the closed-door sessions of eighty-seven schoolteachers known to have appeared before FLIC. Describing these educators' dilemmas as a story of "stealth, silence, control, and resistance" (xv), she explains that even though the Johns Committee employed extreme tactics to fire and remove teachers under investigation, this agency's practices did not represent an aberration or deviation from the status quo: Indeed, since the expansion of free public education during the days of Horace Mann, educators have endured restrictions and prohibitions not mandated universally across other segments of society.

Capitalizing on the fear that gay and lesbian teachers might “pervert” their students or recruit them into acts still deemed as “crimes against nature” by the larger culture, the FLIC’s probes believed that they had a right to regulate private and consensual adult behaviors for the public benefit. As Graves later reveals in her narrative, the Florida Department of Education (DOE) and Florida Education Association (FEA) often assisted the Johns Committee’s investigations and ultimately embraced the FLIC’s tactics by codifying elements of them into practices that have long outlived Charley Johns and his committee. Indeed, during the early 1960s, the DOE and FEA even viewed the FLIC as a partner that could help local districts sniff out suspicious characters, such as single men of “marriageable age” in elementary schools and others who matched certain stereotypes.

In her valuable study, Graves correctly views the FLIC investigations as part of a larger attempt by Florida’s political and educational leaders to confront the changing social landscape as newcomers swarmed to the Sunshine State. She understands the peculiar nature of Florida’s Pork Chop Gang politics under one-party rule. As Florida recruited elsewhere in order to meet an unprecedented demand for educators, teachers recruited from outside the state aroused suspicions, and this in part helped to explain how they could become a target for the FLIC. Graves’s discussion of Thomas Bailey, the state superintendent of public instruction from 1949 through 1965, enhances an understanding of this era by revealing the complex nature of state-sponsored investigations of educators and affirming that complicity went beyond the Johns Committee.

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A Consummate Lawyer: William Reece Smith, Jr. By Michael I. Swygert (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2010. xvi, 237 pp. Foreword, acknowledgments, photographs, selected list of awards, countries visited, bibliography, index of names. \$25.00, cloth)

A recent biography entitled *A Consummate Lawyer* portrays the life and work of William Reece Smith Jr., one of Florida’s and the nation’s most prominent lawyers and citizens. Its author, Michael I. Swygert, is a professor of law emeritus at Stetson University College of Law and the author or coauthor of several other books. In this biography, he reviews Smith’s life and work in an orderly, chronological sequence that provides valuable insight into the character and achievements of a remarkable individual. Anyone interested in the practice of law and the administration of justice will find this biography to be of great interest.

Raised in Plant City, then a small town in central Florida, Smith enjoyed