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A Book Review of *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America*

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Gabriel Rosenberg's book is a critical perspective of Extension and 4-H club work in the United States and the export of 4-H abroad. A retrospective of early 4-H and Extension domestic history, it highlights the social, cultural, political, and economic implications of 4-H implementation in rural America. An examination of 4-H's role in creating gender, race, and sexuality norms in society today is conducted. Stories and history are told with rich detail providing extensive information to foster critical conversations about where 4-H has come from and where 4-H should be going. Extension professionals should read this book to understand the current domestic and international implementation context.

Gabriel Rosenberg's book, *The 4-H Harvest* (2015), is the first of its kind: an in-depth review of 4-H and Extension, which is an institution that has had a significant impact on rural America, and America as a whole. It is a critical perspective of 4-H and Extension and is a must read for all 4-H program staff because Rosenberg delves into the cultural, political and economic history of 4-H and Extension.

The reader will likely first read the book as a skeptic as he or she is challenged to find criticism in 4-H's founding purpose, implementation, and export. Then readers will likely find themselves in awe of the 4-H organization's effectiveness to create change and the many impacts that it has had on rural America. This book is both a powerful message and a cautionary tale of the wide-reaching large-scale social influence that 4-H and Extension bring to bear on youth and families.

Rosenberg relays the sociological and political context of 4-H club work to a broader audience of sociologists and historians. The reader is asked to take a *critical perspective*, which is a way of viewing information that involves asking questions about the rationale and legitimacy of the presented argument and to have an openness that helps remove previously held biases. Rosenberg writes with this critical perspective and finds limitations and shortcomings in the 4-H and Extension programs and provides thought-provoking evidence that speaks volumes to past and current 4-H and Extension programs.

The book not only shares a historical view of 4-H and how the program was started, utilizing first-person accounts of people like Mann, Knapp, and Bailey, but Rosenberg also compiled

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other artifacts, like club newsletters, newspaper clippings, and county fair bulletins to illuminate the story. The history is much richer and more powerful than the common origin story of Corn and Canning Clubs. Rosenberg fills in the details about how and why those clubs started.

Extension staff in all program areas will be enthralled with early history about the formations of Extension Councils, Farm Bureau, Farmer's Cooperatives, and the relationship between 4-H, Extension, and the organization of early 20th Century rural civic life, and how that history is still integral to current relationships and partners. Rosenberg's history of Extension and 4-H is an opportunity for Extension professionals to reflect on the role of Extension in the past and to vision into the future.

First-person accounts and historical artifacts tell the story of 4-H implementation, at home and abroad, throughout the decades. Many of these stories will be familiar to 4-H and Extension staff, but many more may have been left behind or possibly hidden. Some stories, like the simplified retelling of Corn Clubs and Canning Clubs, are ones that Extension professionals use to highlight historical beginnings. However, other anecdotes, like the one about counties in the North during the Jim Crow-era not serving Black youth, are forgotten but still resonate in today's programming efforts. Rosenberg also discusses the role of 4-H in supporting the development of normative gender roles, emphasizing standard beauty characteristics, changing rural sexual norms, expanding the corporate agriculture system, and not supporting African American access to the same opportunities as white populations. Rosenberg uses his critical perspective to challenge the reader's concepts of who and what was benefiting as youth were and continue to be organized by 4-H and Extension programming. These influences and beneficiaries included the government, the business community, and parents at different times throughout 4-H's history.

Through his critical perspective, Rosenberg examines the closeness of the federal government's efforts to make social change in rural America. The United States Department of Agriculture used 4-H and Extension efforts for community and societal change. The adoption of improved agricultural and agribusiness practices is widely attributed to 4-H and Extension. However, the reader is asked to examine the role of the 4-H organization in the efforts of the eugenics movement at the turn of the 20th century, the cultural assertion of whiteness, and the promotion of the ideal white heterosexual youth to populate rural America, while also promoting ideal gender roles. Rosenberg drew the connection that beauty pageants, Personal Appearance contests, and other personal competency contests promoted through 4-H were an outcropping of the competitions used to assess corn or canning produce to define advantageous characteristics in the inhabitants of rural America. In addition to the exploration of 4-H's role in promoting the image of ideal youth, the connection that 4-H has to the defining of stereotypical gender roles was examined. 4-H and Extension programming had a role in how youth viewed themselves because of this participation; the question the reader is left asking is, "Was this an intentional social reconstruction movement, or was it outcomes of a nonformal education organization that

reflected the societal pressures of the time?" Many stories and history are provided to spark critical conversation, analysis, and reflection.

The book leaves the domestic 4-H program in the 1970s and switches to focus on international 4-H projects in the Cold War era and today. Rosenberg tells about the State Department and CIA's use of 4-H club work in Latin America as a political tool in an effort to change the hearts and minds of youth into Capitalists and a force against Communism. This use by the United States government to change international rural youth into U.S. allies and consumers of American products should leave the international 4-H professional questioning whether 4-H can and should be exported and used for social change. Rosenberg provides an opportunity for the reader to ask his or her own questions about who benefits and the objectives of the current wave of 4-H program expansion around the globe: "Is it to improve agriculture production or is it for societal restructuring?" All international 4-H practitioners should be asking, "Who is the 4-H model designed to help? To what ends is the model expansion supporting?"

Unfortunately, Rosenberg does not bring the story of the 4-H program all the way to the modern context in the United States. He leaves the reader half-way in the 4-H story. As a reader, I was left wondering, "Was 4-H implementation changing society or reflecting society? Can or should it be used to shift society, or does it only reflect society as a whole?" Not finishing the history prevents Rosenberg from being able to offer a definitive answer to whether the first 4-H implementers only wanted to improve agricultural productivity or intentionally trying to change American society. The answer is likely that they were trying to change society, just as 4-H professionals today try to provide young people positive holistic opportunities. However, whether or not 4-H was an intentional plan for wide-scale societal re-engineering, 4-H's impact makes it imperative to examine the desired ends of current Extension and 4-H efforts.

The quote by Spanish philosopher George Santayana (2014), "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" is the greatest argument for 4-H professionals to read this book. For the 4-H professional, this book provides a broad and well-researched historical context that highlights the effectiveness and strength in the 4-H organization to create change in communities. Rosenberg, however, leaves the reader questioning how the power of 4-H youth development should be used, while still recognizing its importance in developing rural America and the America that we know today.

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