

Sexual Politics, Pornography, Eugenics, Communism, and Kompromat

A Historical Development from the Late 19th Century to the Modern Era

Introduction

The history of pornography, sexual reform, eugenics, Marxism, communism, and political blackmail contains several overlapping historical developments. These subjects sometimes intersected through particular individuals, publications, organizations, and political movements, but they should not be treated as one continuous or centrally directed campaign.

A useful historical approach is to distinguish **sexual liberation**, **eugenics**, **pornographic publishing**, **state censorship**, **political propaganda**, and **kompromat** as separate phenomena. Their intersections can then be examined through documented individuals and institutions.

This distinction is especially important when examining the transition from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century, when sexology, heredity science, birth control, socialist politics, psychoanalysis, eugenics, mass publishing, and new forms of popular entertainment were developing simultaneously.

I. Pre-Revolutionary Sexual Culture

Pornographic and erotic material existed before Marxism and before the Bolshevik Revolution.

The Russian Empire had an erotic publishing culture that expanded considerably during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The period surrounding the **1905 Russian Revolution** saw increasing circulation of erotic literature, postcards, illustrations, and other sexually explicit material.

This was occurring within a society that simultaneously maintained strong religious and governmental restrictions on sexual material.

Therefore, the existence of pornography in Russia cannot historically be attributed to the Bolsheviks. **The commercial and underground sexual market already existed under the Russian Empire.**

The same pattern appeared elsewhere. Industrialization, urbanization, mass literacy, cheap printing, photography, postal systems, and expanding commercial markets created new opportunities for sexually explicit material to circulate.

The development of modern pornography therefore predates the Soviet Union.

II. The Development of Eugenics

At approximately the same time, another movement was developing: **eugenics**.

Eugenics attempted to apply ideas about heredity and selective reproduction to human populations. It became an international movement and was adopted in different forms by people across the political spectrum.

Two broad categories are useful:

Positive eugenics

Encouraging people considered to possess desirable hereditary characteristics to reproduce.

Negative eugenics

Attempting to prevent people considered to possess undesirable characteristics from reproducing.

Eugenics consequently became connected with discussions of:

- marriage;
- reproduction;
- birth control;
- heredity;
- disability;
- intelligence;
- physical characteristics;
- race;
- social class;
- sexuality;
- population policy.

Eugenics therefore provides an important bridge between **sexuality and population management**, although eugenics itself should not be equated with pornography.

III. American Sexual Reform and Eugenics

The United States provides an especially important case because **sexual reform, birth control, eugenics, censorship, commercial publishing, and pornography** came into direct contact with one another.

The federal **Comstock Act of 1873** restricted the mailing of obscene material as well as contraceptive information and devices. The result was a complicated legal environment in which legitimate medical and reproductive information could be treated similarly to pornography by postal authorities. ([Textbook History](#))

This produced an unusual commercial environment.

Material concerning:

- birth control;
- sexual health;
- contraception;
- marriage;
- sexual diseases;
- eugenics;
- reproduction;

could become attractive to publishers precisely because it was controversial, restricted, or difficult to obtain.

IV. William J. Robinson

One of the most important people connecting these subjects was **William J. Robinson**.

Robinson was a physician, author, socialist, birth-control advocate, and writer on sex and eugenics.

According to the Textbook History account, Robinson authored more than thirty books between 1912 and the early 1930s concerning sex, birth control, and eugenics. He was also an ally and sometime adviser of Margaret Sanger. ([Textbook History](#))

Robinson's political beliefs are particularly relevant.

He was a **committed socialist** and opposed American entry into World War I. The Textbook History article notes that he considered war "dysgenic," meaning harmful from a eugenic perspective. ([Textbook History](#))

This places one individual at the intersection of:

Socialism → birth control → sex education → eugenics → reproductive theory

But Robinson's relationship to pornography was complicated.

He also opposed sexually explicit material that he considered harmful. In 1935, for example, Robinson publicly attacked the film *Mark of the Vampire*, arguing that it was harmful to the public. ([Textbook History](#))

Thus Robinson demonstrates why the categories cannot simply be combined.

A socialist could support birth control and eugenics while simultaneously opposing pornography.

V. Margaret Sanger and Birth Control

Margaret Sanger belongs to this same American network of birth-control and reproductive reform.

Robinson was connected to Sanger, and Robinson's publications appeared in the **Birth Control Review**. The Textbook History article documents advertisements for Robinson's books appearing in the publication. ([Textbook History](#))

The history of Sanger and eugenics is complicated and deserves separate treatment because she interacted with American eugenicists while also presenting birth control as a means of women's reproductive autonomy.

This illustrates an important point:

Birth-control advocacy, eugenics, women's reproductive autonomy, and population control could overlap institutionally while having different stated objectives.

VI. Edward Bernays and Propaganda

Another important connection is **Edward Bernays**.

Bernays worked with Robinson's publishing environment and helped develop publicity surrounding sexual-health and eugenic subjects.

The Textbook History article describes Bernays assembling prominent New Yorkers into a **Sociological Fund Committee** associated with the *Medical Review of Reviews* and using controversy surrounding the play *Damaged Goods* to generate publicity. ([Textbook History](#))

The significance extends beyond the particular play.

It demonstrates an emerging system of:

controversial subject → publicity → public curiosity → media attention → increased circulation

That same mechanism could later be exploited commercially by publishers of sexual material.

The development of modern public relations therefore belongs in this larger history because sexual and eugenic subjects were sometimes promoted through **attention-generating controversy**.

VII. The Eugenics Publishing Company

One of the most important intersections in this entire history is the **Eugenics Publishing Company**.

The company became associated with **Joseph L. Lewis**, a freethinker and publisher.

According to Textbook History, Lewis operated the Eugenics Publishing Company and used it to publish authors including Robinson, Margaret Sanger, Marie Stopes, and others whose material had encountered censorship problems. ([Textbook History](#))

The company also became associated with the wider world of **exploitation publishing**.

The historical significance is therefore unusual:

Eugenics Publishing Company

- eugenics
- sex education
- birth control
- marriage manuals
- sexual science
- controversial literature
- exploitation publishing
- pornography market

The company did not demonstrate that eugenics itself was pornography.

Instead, it demonstrates that **eugenic and sexual-scientific material could be commercially packaged and sold within the same publishing environment as sexually explicit material**.

VIII. "Eugenics as Erotica"

This is one of the most useful concepts from the Textbook History article.

The article describes how pornographers and exploitation publishers discovered that **eugenics and sexual science could themselves be marketed as sexually provocative subjects**. ([Textbook History](#))

The mechanism was relatively simple:

sexual censorship

↓

restricted information

↓

public curiosity

↓

commercial exploitation

↓

sexualized presentation of scientific/reproductive material

The result was a peculiar cultural mixture in which material originally presented as medical, educational, scientific, or eugenic could be sold alongside erotic material.

This does **not** mean that eugenicists deliberately created pornography.

Rather, **publishers could exploit eugenic and sexual-scientific material for commercial purposes.**

That distinction is essential.

IX. Pornography and Eugenics Were Sometimes Commercially Entangled

The Textbook History article places Joseph L. Lewis within the same historical publishing environment as several well-known exploitation publishers.

By the late 1920s and 1930s, the Eugenics Publishing Company was republishing material dealing with sexual relationships and sexual behavior. The company eventually published works that were increasingly sexually explicit. ([Textbook History](#))

The article also connects Lewis to other exploitation publishers and identifies him within the broader history of pornography publishing.

This gives us a documented historical intersection:

Eugenics

and

Pornography

could occupy the same commercial publishing network without being identical ideologies.

X. Marxism and Revolutionary Sexual Politics

The European Marxist tradition provides another major stream.

The early Bolshevik period produced significant debate over:

- marriage;
- family structure;
- women's emancipation;
- divorce;
- abortion;
- prostitution;

- sexual morality;
- sexuality;
- reproduction.

Historians describe the 1920s as a period of substantial sexual experimentation and debate in Soviet Russia. The sexual revolution was subsequently curtailed as Stalinist policies developed during the 1930s. ([JSTOR](#))

This is sometimes simplified into the claim that "the Bolsheviks promoted pornography."

That is inaccurate.

The Bolshevik sexual revolution concerned **social and sexual relationships**, whereas pornography was a separate category of material.

Indeed, Soviet authorities increasingly censored pornography.

XI. Alexandra Kollontai

Alexandra Kollontai became one of the most famous revolutionary advocates for transforming women's position within society.

Her writings addressed:

- marriage;
- love;
- women's economic independence;
- family organization;
- sexuality;
- reproductive life.

The early Soviet period consequently became associated with the concept of a **sexual revolution**.

But this was principally a political and social transformation of relationships rather than a government pornography program.

XII. Wilhelm Reich and Sex-Pol

The strongest connection between **Marxism and sexual liberation** is arguably found in **Wilhelm Reich**.

Reich was a Marxist and communist who attempted to combine Marxism with psychoanalysis and sexology.

From approximately 1927 to 1933, he developed what became known as **Sex-Pol**, combining sexual reform with communist politics. Research describes his work as an attempt to understand sexual repression as part of the reproduction of class structures and social hierarchy. ([PubMed Central \(PMC\)](#))

Reich established free clinics providing:

- sexual counseling;
- contraception;
- psychosexual treatment;
- sexual education;
- Marxist political education.

In 1931 he founded the German **Reichsverband für Proletarische Sexualpolitik**, or Sex-Pol organization. He subsequently came into conflict with the Communist Party and was expelled from the KPD in 1933. ([PubMed Central \(PMC\)](#))

This is extremely important.

It demonstrates that **Marxists themselves disagreed about sexual liberation**.

Reich's position was substantially more sexually radical than the increasingly conservative Soviet position.

XIII. Freudo-Marxism

Reich became part of the larger intellectual tradition later called **Freudo-Marxism**.

Its basic premise was that Marxist analysis of economic/class relations could be combined with Freudian analysis of sexuality and psychological repression.

The central question became:

How does society shape sexual desire, family structure, personality, and political obedience?

Reich argued that sexual repression could help produce authoritarian personalities.

This created an intellectual bridge:

Marxism

- class relations
- family structure
- sexual repression
- psychology

→ authoritarianism

→ political behavior.

That is a substantially different proposition from simply promoting pornography.

XIV. Bolshevism and Reich Were Not the Same

This distinction is crucial.

Some Soviet leaders were skeptical of the sexual radicalism developing around them.

The research on Reich notes that communists sometimes cited Lenin's criticism of excessive discussion of sexual questions among workers and youth organizations. Reich himself eventually became critical of the Soviet reversal of earlier sexual reforms. ([PubMed Central \(PMC\)](#))

The trajectory therefore looks more like:

Early Bolshevik sexual experimentation

↓

1920s sexual debate

↓

conflict over the meaning of sexual liberation

↓

Stalin-era reversal

rather than:

Bolshevik Revolution → pornography campaign.

XV. Stalinist Sexual Conservatism

During the 1930s, the Soviet government increasingly emphasized:

- marriage;
- family;
- childbirth;
- social discipline;
- restrictions on sexual expression.

The sexual experimentation associated with the early revolutionary period was increasingly suppressed.

This makes the Soviet example particularly important because it demonstrates that **communism did not have a single consistent position concerning pornography or sexuality**.

The same political system moved through substantially different phases.

XVI. Socialist Yugoslavia

A different socialist model developed in **Yugoslavia under Tito**.

Yugoslav socialism permitted considerably more cultural experimentation than the Soviet Union.

One of the clearest examples was **Start magazine**, published in Zagreb from 1969 to 1991.

Academic research describes *Start* as combining:

- political journalism;
- criticism of social conditions;
- progressive political commentary;
- nude photography;
- erotic and pornographic material.

The researchers specifically conclude that sexual liberation became associated with **liberalization and progress**, while female nudity could function as a symbol of Yugoslavia's modernity. ([Hrčak](#))

This provides a genuine example of **erotic imagery functioning within a socialist political culture**.

It is therefore much more accurate to say:

Some socialist societies permitted or incorporated erotic and pornographic imagery under particular cultural and political conditions.

It is inaccurate to generalize this into a universal communist position.

XVII. Kompromat

Kompromat belongs to another branch of the history.

The term refers to **compromising material** that can be used against an individual.

Sexual material can be particularly effective as kompromat because the threat of exposure can produce:

- embarrassment;
- reputational damage;
- professional consequences;
- political pressure;

- blackmail;
- coercion.

Soviet intelligence services documentedly used sexual entrapment and compromising situations as intelligence techniques.

This means pornography and sexual material can have a completely different political function from sexual liberation.

The distinction is:

Sexual liberation

→ reduce restrictions on sexuality.

Pornography

→ produce/distribute sexually explicit representations.

Kompromat

→ weaponize private or sexual information against an individual.

A sexual photograph can therefore be:

- entertainment;
- commercial pornography;
- private material;
- evidence;
- propaganda;
- blackmail material,

depending on how it is produced and used.

XVIII. The Relationship Between Pornography and Kompromat

The overlap occurs through **sexual vulnerability**.

The historical mechanism can be represented as:

Sexual behavior

↓

documentation

↓

private information

↓

exposure or threatened exposure

↓

leverage

This is fundamentally different from pornography as entertainment.

The important historical point is that **sexual imagery can function as both a commodity and an instrument of coercion**, depending on who controls it.

That makes ownership, archives, intelligence services, publishers, photographers, and distribution systems important subjects of investigation.

XIX. The Post-Soviet Transformation

The Soviet collapse produced another major change.

During the late 1980s and 1990s, censorship weakened dramatically.

Post-Soviet Russia experienced an expansion of:

- erotic magazines;
- pornography;
- sex shops;
- advertising;
- sexualized television;
- Western sexual imagery;
- commercial sexual culture.

The institutional environment therefore changed from:

state censorship and restricted access

to:

commercial production and mass distribution.

The Internet subsequently transformed this again.

XX. Modern Internet Pornography

Modern pornography is primarily a **global technological and commercial phenomenon**.

Its infrastructure now includes:

- websites;
- streaming;
- subscription services;
- social media;
- user-generated material;
- advertising;
- recommendation algorithms;
- online payment systems;
- creator platforms.

This system cannot historically be reduced to Marxism or Bolshevism.

The modern pornography industry developed through the interaction of **commercial capitalism, mass media, technological change, changing sexual norms, censorship battles, and eventually the Internet**.

That is a different historical mechanism from the revolutionary sexual politics of the 1920s.

XXI. Where Eugenics Fits

Eugenics should remain a separate analytical category.

Its central question was:

Who should reproduce, and what characteristics should future generations possess?

Pornography's central commercial function is generally:

What sexual imagery can be produced, distributed, and consumed?

Sexual liberation asks:

How should individuals be permitted to conduct their sexual and intimate lives?

Kompromat asks:

How can compromising information be used against an individual?

These questions can overlap, but they are not identical.

XXII. The Four-Stream Model

The entire historical development can therefore be organized into four major streams.

STREAM A — Sexual Revolution

Marxist/socialist sexual reform

- Kollontai
- early Soviet sexual experimentation
- Wilhelm Reich
- Sex-Pol
- Freudo-Marxism
- Marcuse
- New Left sexual liberation

STREAM B — Eugenics

Heredity science

- eugenics
- marriage/reproductive policy
- birth control
- population management
- positive/negative eugenics

STREAM C — Pornography

Erotic publishing

- commercial sexual literature
- photography
- exploitation publishing
- erotic magazines
- film
- television
- Internet pornography

STREAM D — Sexual Kompromat

Private sexual information

- documentation
 - intelligence gathering
 - exposure
 - blackmail
 - political leverage.
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XXIII. Where the Streams Intersect

The most historically interesting intersections are:

Eugenics + sexual reform

Both became concerned with reproduction, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

Eugenics + pornography

Scientific and eugenic discussions of sexuality could be commercially eroticized by publishers.

Marxism + sexual reform

Reich and Sex-Pol explicitly attempted to combine communist politics with sexual liberation. ([PubMed Central \(PMC\)](#))

Socialism + pornography

Yugoslavia provides a documented example of socialist media incorporating erotic and pornographic imagery. ([Hrčak](#))

Sexuality + kompromat

Sexual information could be transformed into political leverage through intelligence and blackmail.

Censorship + pornography

Restrictions could themselves create commercial demand for forbidden sexual material.

XXIV. The William Robinson / Joseph Lewis Intersection

The **Robinson–Lewis connection** deserves particular attention because it provides a concrete example rather than a generalized theory.

The documented network looks approximately like:

William J. Robinson

- socialist
- physician
- birth-control advocate
- eugenics writer
- sexual-health writer

↓

Margaret Sanger / birth-control movement

↓

sexual and reproductive publishing

↓

Joseph L. Lewis

- freethinker
- publisher
- Eugenics Publishing Company
- exploitation publishing

↓

sexological/eugenic publications

↓

commercial sexual publishing

The Textbook History article specifically traces Robinson's publishing relationship with Lewis and the later development of the Eugenics Publishing Company. ([Textbook History](#))

This is a legitimate historical network to investigate further.

It should, however, be described as a **network of individuals and publishing ventures**, rather than as evidence that socialism, eugenics, and pornography were inherently one movement.

XXV. A More Accurate Historical Model

The evidence supports a much more complicated picture:

Late 19th century

Heredity science + sexology + urbanization + mass publishing

↓

Early 20th century

Eugenics + birth control + sexual reform + censorship

↓

1900s–1930s

Commercial exploitation of sexual and eugenic subjects

↓

1917–1920s

Bolshevik sexual revolution

↓

1920s–1930s

Freudo-Marxism / Sex-Pol

↓

1930s

Stalinist reversal + stronger Soviet sexual regulation

↓

1930s–1960s

Expansion of international commercial pornography despite censorship

↓

1950s–1980s

Documented use of sexual compromise and entrapment in intelligence contexts

↓

1960s–1970s

New Left + sexual liberation + socialist erotic culture in places such as Yugoslavia

↓

1980s–1990s

Decline of Soviet censorship

↓

1990s

Post-Soviet commercialization

↓

2000s—present

Internet pornography + digital distribution + online blackmail/sextortion.

XXVI. What the Evidence Does—and Does Not —Show

Documented

There was an early Soviet sexual revolution. ([JSTOR](#))

Wilhelm Reich explicitly combined Marxist politics with sexual reform through Sex-Pol. ([PubMed Central \(PMC\)](#))

American socialists such as William J. Robinson participated in birth-control and eugenic debates. ([Textbook History](#))

Joseph L. Lewis's publishing activities connected eugenic/sexual literature with exploitation publishing. ([Textbook History](#))

Sexual and eugenic subjects were commercially exploited by publishers. ([Textbook History](#))

Socialist Yugoslavia permitted a substantial amount of erotic imagery in parts of its media culture. ([Hrčak](#))

Soviet sexual policy subsequently became much more restrictive. ([JSTOR](#))

Not established by this evidence

It does **not** establish that:

- the Bolsheviks created modern pornography;
- communists as a unified movement promoted pornography;
- pornography itself was a communist eugenics program;
- eugenicists collectively intended to create pornography;
- all sexual-reform movements were communist;
- all pornography was created for political purposes;
- modern pornography is a continuation of a single Bolshevik operation.

Those stronger claims require separate evidence.

XXVII. The Most Useful Research Question

The strongest historical question emerging from all of this is therefore not:

"Did the communists create pornography?"

A more historically precise question is:

How did sexual reform, eugenics, Marxist theories of repression, commercial pornography, censorship, propaganda, and political kompromat intersect during the twentieth century, and which specific people and institutions connected those different spheres?

That question gives us a way to investigate the subject **person-by-person, organization-by-organization, and publication-by-publication.**

The **Robinson–Lewis–Sanger–Bernays network**, the **Reich/Sex-Pol network**, the **early Bolshevik sexual-reform network**, the **Yugoslav socialist media network**, and the **Soviet intelligence/kompromat system** should therefore be treated as **separate networks that sometimes intersected**, rather than assumed to be one organization.

That distinction is what makes the historical record much more interesting—and much easier to document accurately.