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Evil Becomes Her: Prostitution's Transition from Necessary to Social Evil in 19th Century
America

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University
In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in History

by
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August 2013

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Keywords: Necessary Evil, Social Evil, America, Prostitution, 19th Century

ABSTRACT

Evil Becomes Her: Prostitution's Transition from Necessary to Social Evil in 19th Century America

by

Jacqueline Shelton

Nineteenth-century America witnessed a period of tremendous growth and change as cities flourished, immigration swelled, and industrialization spread. This setting allowed prostitution to thrive and professionalize, and the visibility of such “immoral” activity required Americans to seek a new understanding of morality. Current literature commonly considers prostitution as immediately declared a “social evil” or briefly mentions why Americans assigned it such a role. While correct that it eventually did become a “social evil,” the evolution of discourse relating to prostitution is a bit more complex. This thesis provides a survey of this evolution set against the changing American understanding of science and morality in the nineteenth century. By tracing the course of American thought on prostitution from necessary to social evil, this thesis contributes to a growing understanding of a marginalized group of people and America’s view of national morality.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	2
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	5
2. ROOTS IN AMERICA: A NECESSARY EVIL	11
3. PERMANENT VICE: SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF PROSTITUTION	37
4. NECESSARY NO LONGER: THE EMERGENCE OF A SOCIAL EVIL	64
5. CONCLUSION	92
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	97
VITA	113

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“As one aspect of unequal gender relations, prostitution will continue so long as the social structures surrounding it and contributing to it prevail. It will persist so long as men are considered naturally sexually active and aggressive, but ‘respectable’ women must preserve their chastity and honor.”¹ Written for a recent sociological study of prostitution, the preceding statement offers a glimpse into current understanding of prostitution as situated in history. Quietly tolerated, prostitution has existed throughout history as an accepted, if unspeakable, part of society always lurking just out of sight. Based on centuries of understanding prostitution as a “safety valve” for women and an outlet for men’s insatiable sexual urges, it came to be considered an inevitable part of any civilization, a necessary evil. Still, as scientific knowledge of disease increased and the human pursuit of perfection grew to seem achievable, the long-standing, though unspoken, agreement between prostitution and society drew to a close as the twentieth century opened in the United States. Redefined and openly attacked, the institution transitioned from inevitability to an eradicable, parasitic social evil.

The shift from a rural America to an urban and industrialized nation created despair among many Americans who, for the first time, began to see immense social changes that questioned the validity of their morals and values. Bookended by the Victorian and Progressive Eras, the nineteenth century began and ended under very different circumstances in America. This time of change spawned panic over anything that did not fit the more traditional Victorian morals, which held that the utmost duty of women was motherhood and preservation of their virtue while men were seen as naturally licentious and adulterous. Sex during this period,

¹ Lin Lean Lim, “The Social Bases of Prostitution,” *The Sex Sector: The Economic and Social Bases of Prostitution in Southeast Asia*, ed. by Lin Lean Lim (Geneva: International Labor Office, 1998), 12.

though, remained within marriage as only for reproduction purposes. Although prostitution had long existed on American soil, it began to become more visible as a more professionalized institution as cities grew, provided a large population of single transient men, and established an air of anonymity as women left their homes and families to seek work under new economic circumstances. The visibility of prostitution increased discussion of it, and with Americans seeking to protect their established system of morality, people began to wonder what role prostitution played in Victorian America. Initially, it was considered a necessary evil that not only guarded the virtue of wives but allowed men to release their irrepressible sexual energy without raping innocent women. Nineteenth-century thinkers, reformers, scientists, eugenicists, feminists, free love advocates, religious leaders, and others all wrote and spoke extensively on the subject, especially beginning in the 1870s when a new and more scientific analysis of prostitution began. Although devoid of morals, scientific studies did not upset the status quo and said that while prostitution would always exist and always had, it must be controlled by the State for the best results. Shocked by the dangers that prostitution posed even to the innocent, by the 1890s America had turned against it and began to close red-light districts, demanding full eradication of the evil that kept society from progressing. Nineteenth century America best illustrates the full range of thought on prostitution, and how and why it has now become a scattered and outlawed institution that most see as a highly corrupt and immoral part of society.

Due to its relatively marginal place in society, prostitution long received little academic study. However, with a rise in women's studies during the 1970s, new analysis of this ancient profession emerged. These examinations focus on the representations of women who practiced prostitution along with societal circumstances that led to those representations. Paula Bartley's *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform* falls within this tradition and analyzes attempts to eradicate

prostitution, centering on the women responsible for rescue work and reform movements.² Judith Walkowitz reinvigorated the study of prostitution through a feminist lens with her *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, which details English law relating prostitution with the Contagious Diseases Acts and remains a definitive work on the subjects of prostitution and the Acts themselves.³ Studies typically examine prostitution within a specific place and time, and no truly broad study has yet appeared. Particular emphasis has been placed on prostitution within the economic and legal system of societies in order to gain a better perspective of those societies as a whole. For instance, Thomas A.J. McGinn's *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* considers the chronology of ancient Rome and other similar civilizations based on laws about sexuality.⁴ Another such study is Christian Henriot's *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai*, which looks at prostitution as it came forth in China through British influence.⁵

In studies of American prostitution, analysis generally centers on the Victorian and Progressive Eras because these periods were economically, religiously, and socially transformative in America and led, subsequently, to much discussion of prostitution nationally. Ruth Rosen's *The Lost Sisterhood* remains the most cited of these works as it attempts to study the prostitutes themselves rather than the reformers or the movements against prostitution.⁶ Linda Gordon has also published several works that discuss prostitution in this time period, especially *The Moral Property of Women*.⁷ Most frequently prostitution is studied within the context of sexuality in the U.S. as a whole. For instance, *Procreation or Pleasure* edited by

² Paula Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

³ Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1980).

⁴ Thomas A.J. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁵ Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai: A Social History, 1849-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001).

⁶ Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins University, 1982).

⁷ Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2002).

Thomas Altherr, attempts to analyze changing sexual attitudes in America from colonial period to the twentieth-century and has a section devoted to nineteenth-century prostitution.⁸ John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman’s *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* continues to be the most complete look at the history of sexuality in America and places prostitution more accurately within a chronology of America.⁹ A problem faced in all studies of prostitution, and especially those focused on earlier time periods, is the inability of prostitutes to speak to historians outright. Owing to the stigmatized nature of the profession, and the general lack of education among the class, the thoughts, motives, and true situations of prostitutes were not recorded, or if they were, they were written down by those with an agenda who typically interpreted these thoughts and motives differently and with bias.

The aforementioned studies discuss many aspects of prostitution, from legal to economic, and almost all discuss it within the Progressive Era when it became known as a social evil and red-light districts emerged as a seedy part of American history. They all briefly explain that prostitution was once an accepted part of society due to the sexual double standard. Yet, the transition from necessary to social evil has not been discussed, and a deeper understanding of the *way* in which people talked about prostitution, the very words and social formations that caused them to speak of it the way that they did, are largely absent from these studies. Typically, one sentence is reserved to say that regulation efforts were tried and failed in the U.S. before moving quickly to the outlawing of prostitution. The way in which morals and religion combined with science to form a new discourse in which prostitution became *the* social evil scarcely receives notice. Separation of this rhetoric from that of earlier periods when scientists and medical experts

⁸ Thomas Altherr, ed., *Procreation or Pleasure: Sexual Attitudes in American History* (Malabar, FL: R.E. Krieger Pub. Co., 1983).

⁹ John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

ruled in favor of legal acceptance of prostitution through regulation, too, remains absent from historical discussions of the profession.

In fact, no single in-depth study of the rhetoric surrounding prostitution in nineteenth-century America exists. This study attempts to examine the changing discourse of prostitution in America as it evolved from a necessary to social evil. Urban settings dominate this investigation as prostitution existed as a much more visible and, therefore, much more discussed part of urban life. Northern communities published the most on prostitution, but leaders of New Orleans, St. Louis, and San Francisco also discussed prostitution frequently. Still, the majority of Americans across the nation held fairly similar views on the subject, and it can be concluded from newspaper clippings and legal evidence that a like-minded view of the subject at any given time existed throughout the nation. Relying heavily upon works published during the period discussed, which includes legal sources, vice commission reports, scientific examinations and statistical data of prostitution, literature, journals from various scholarly pursuits, and pamphlets published by reform groups, this analysis seeks to compile the various discourses of prostitution in order to understand exactly how and why it was discussed in a particular light throughout the nineteenth century. While the voices of prostitutes themselves are notably absent, it has been the intent to explore society's construction of them, not their own understanding of their work. Hopefully, such a study can provide a more in-depth comprehension of why and how the transition from necessary to social evil occurred.

Organized chronologically, the chapters trace the evolution of American thought regarding prostitution. Chapter two details prostitution from colonial to Victorian America in order to establish its visibility and professionalization as well as where it fell along the spectrum of morality in America up to the Victorian Era, ending in the 1860s. This chapter further

discusses key rhetoric from the Victorian period that maintains acceptance of prostitution as a necessary evil. The third chapter involves new scientific understanding as it unfolds in America and what that means for the role of prostitution in society. Chapter three primarily focuses on the 1870s and 1880s. The fourth chapter highlights the transition of prostitution to a social evil as science and morality intermingled within American thought of the 1890s to the early 1900s.

Although prostitution remained a marginally discussed topic in America prior to its professionalization, primary sources that mention the “necessary evil” do exist. While many of the sources utilized here have been cited time and again in other studies, this allows a fresh look and in-depth comparison of these sources and places them more accurately in the spectrum of American thought. Under analyzed and poorly understood, the evolution of prostitution from a necessary to social evil in American highlights arguments of sexuality that still exist today as the same rhetoric is repeated. Prostitution has been seen in many ways, and by filling in the timeline of American thought better understanding of how it is viewed today is possible. From pure morality to science to a combination of the two, the discourse of prostitution had been anything but one note and has evolved significantly to the point of rendering it a social evil.

CHAPTER 2

ROOTS IN AMERICA: A NECESSARY EVIL

Arriving in Washington, DC in the late 1830s, Mary Hall, a single woman in her early twenties, bought herself a small lot near the Capitol Building.¹⁰ Upon that she built a three-story brick home where she lived with four other women around the same age. Hall and her lodgers took advantage of the large transient population of men who ventured to the nation's capitol unaccompanied by women. She soon transformed her dwelling into a lavish brothel that catered to the wealthiest of Washington's visitors.¹¹ Lawmakers and citizens alike accepted the presence of these women who practiced their trade "with greater profit here than elsewhere."¹² In fact, these "fallen angels," as they would later be termed, were accepted as a "necessary evil" in America at large.¹³ Until the 1850s, discussion of prostitution relied heavily upon language that centered on Victorian morality and was heavily influenced by European ideals. During this period, Americans viewed Madam Hall and her wards not with disgust but as saviors of the home, necessary evils that allowed man's savage nature to be satisfied while keeping his wife "pure." Differing ideas of male and female sexuality largely drove such ideas, creating a double standard that in some respects still exists. While prostitution continued to increase as the population became more transient and women began to take on work outside the home, the very profession provided Americans with an explanation for poverty, disease, and unemployment among the poorest classes. The individual, not society, was blamed for her position and immorality. Americans accepted prostitution as a "necessary evil," discussed it in terms of

¹⁰ "United States Census, 1840," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/XHBC-LGD>: accessed 01 Mar 2013), Mary Hall, 1840.

¹¹ "Cyprian Affinities," *The Evening Star*, March 13, 1863.

¹² James W. Buel, *Mysteries and Miseries of America's Great Cities: Embracing New York, Washington City, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, and New Orleans* (St. Louis: Historical Pub. Co., 1883), 164.

¹³ "Cyprian Affinities," *The Evening Star*, March 13, 1863.

Victorian morality, and used it to maintain and strengthen the class and gender structures already in existence under the Victorian code of morals.

Long before Victorian ideas about sexuality proliferated American society, prostitutes plied their trade discreetly amongst the early colonists. Prostitution in the early United States differed immensely from the later, more professionalized version that existed by Mary Hall's time in Washington, DC. Due to the small-town environments in which early Americans lived, prostitution existed only as a temporary means of supplementing earnings.¹⁴ For single women prostitution represented one of the few opportunities to earn a living as well as a means of gaining some autonomy.¹⁵ Casual prostitution occurred when women required additional funds because their jobs as domestic servants did not pay enough or their husbands were away for extended periods of time for military or political service.¹⁶ Instead of living in a brothel, regular customers visited colonial prostitutes and often paid for services with goods rather than money itself.¹⁷ Larger cities, such as Philadelphia and Boston, did house brothel-like businesses, however.¹⁸ Since the clientele of these early prostitutes generally made up the transient population of soldiers and sailors, residents of cities and towns found it easier to accept.¹⁹ Owing to the discreet nature of these early prostitutes, few complaints to officials were made, and ultimately, the trade of sex for goods became an accepted part of American society.²⁰ Prostitutes often reentered "polite society" and married quite well.²¹ Even if citizens expressed discontent

¹⁴ Dorothy A. Mays, *Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival, and Freedom in a New World* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 314.

¹⁵ Melissa Hope Ditmore, *Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work* Vol. 1, A-N (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 80.

¹⁶ Mays, *Women*, 314.

¹⁷ Mays, *Women*, 314.

¹⁸ John Parascandola, *Sex, Sin, and Science: A History of Syphilis in America* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 24.

¹⁹ Clare A. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830* (Chapel Hill: University Of North Carolina, 2006), 278.

²⁰ Mays, *Women*, 315.

²¹ Lyons, *Sex*, 284.

over prostitution, it usually had more to do with gender or class conflicts than the idea of prostitution itself.²²

Despite general acceptance of prostitution, some communities and states in early America passed laws forbidding its practice. In most states prostitution remained perfectly legal unless the practitioners disturbed the community in some way. Prostitution often fell under vagrancy laws, which communities in the early colonies used to combat “perceived moral threats.”²³ Virginia, the Carolinas, Massachusetts, Vermont, New York, Georgia, and Pennsylvania had all passed similar laws by 1797 at the urging of religious officials who worried about the effect wanderers could have on communities.²⁴ The laws differed by location but generally defined “vagrants” in broad enough terms to include a wide array of perceived troublemakers. Prostitutes, pimps, gamblers, wanderers, rogues, and vagabonds typically fell under these laws and allowed local officials to arrest anyone who could be defined as a vagrant.²⁵ Vagrants faced arrest, a sentence to work on public roads, a hefty fine, and a ban from the community.²⁶ Authorities in a community, typically a local district attorney, could also close down any house which evidence suggested was being used for immoral means.²⁷ This system helped colonial governments not only to maintain order but to label unwanted aspects of society, such as prostitutes, as criminals. The actual enforcement of such laws in the absence of an established police force remained inconsistent.

²² Lyons, *Sex*, 342.

²³ Tim Cresswell, *The Tramp in America* (London: Reaktion, 2001), 51.

²⁴ David Levinson, *Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment* Vol. 1, A-C (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 1653-1654.

²⁵ Cresswell, *The Tramp*, 51.

²⁶ Thomas C. Mackey, *Pursuing Johns: Criminal Law Reform, Defending Character, and New York City's Committee of Fourteen, 1920-1930* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2005), 58.

²⁷ Mackey, *Pursuing Johns*, 57.

As a result of prostitution's limited scope in early America, the attitude held by the majority of Americans regarding the "oldest profession" conformed to that of traditional Catholicism. Prostitution's association with sin meant that it was primarily a religious, not a political, issue. The Catholic belief held that since the Fall, all men and women are sinners who need help to repent and can be forgiven of their sins.²⁸ Traditionally, this view considered prostitution as a "necessary evil" by which the male clientele went free and without blame, and pimping existed as the real problem that needed elimination. Catholics trace this belief to the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine.²⁹ Augustine, for instance, says, "Remove prostitutes from human societies and you will throw everything into confusion through lusts."³⁰ He also asserted that while prostitution went against the prescribed roles for women as mothers, it also encouraged social order.³¹ Society expected elite women to remain chaste but men to engage in numerous sexual liaisons. Prostitutes, thus, acted as a public good by preventing men and women from engaging in unrestricted sexual encounters. St. Thomas Aquinas further added that prostitution kept men from committing adultery with married women and prevented homosexuality, both considered worse sins than unmarried, heterosexual sexual intercourse.³²

The Catholic Church accepted and helped legitimize the existence of prostitution among early Christians, though.³³ In order to reform former prostitutes, the Church believed that either

²⁸ Hans Krabbendam, *Regulating Morality: A Comparison of the Role of the State in Mastering the Mores in the Netherlands and the United States* (Antwerpen: Maklu, 2000), 98.

²⁹ Donna J. Guy, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 165.

³⁰ Augustine *Ordine* 2.12.

³¹ Kathryn A. Sloan, *Women's Roles in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2011), 56.

³² Ditmore, *Encyclopedia*, 389.

³³ Krabbendam, *Regulating*, 100.

marriage or living in a convent were acceptable means of restoring these women back to sexual purity.³⁴ Either way, this implied that men existed as keepers of female sexuality.

Americans largely accepted prostitution along Augustinian lines, and as the Victorian Era dawned in the U.S. more women than ever turned to prostitution as a means of survival. The U.S. felt a mass of changes during the 1830s and 1840s as the Industrial Revolution became fully realized in the nation. The idea of family evolved during this period as lower-class families became less self-sufficient and relied instead upon the earnings of each family member. Industrialization also reduced the number of children women needed to have and spend time rearing because new machinery now decreased the number of people required to operate a family farm. As women left the sphere of protection sustained by their homes and communities, the rules regarding sex changed. Those who engaged in premarital sex, a not uncommon practice in rural settings, and found themselves pregnant could no longer rely on the strength of the community to enforce a proper marriage.³⁵ Women and men began, to a greater extent, to occupy different spheres within the family as the work of the two genders no longer intertwined as it had in a more agrarian America. Certain occupations remained closed for women.³⁶ Families that moved to cities also faced problems as the costs associated with large families and high fertility now outweighed the benefits.³⁷ Young men and women primarily descended upon the city as individuals, not in family groups, as a result.

The ability of women to earn a living in an agricultural setting had decreased dramatically during this period, which subsequently aided in the growth of professional

³⁴ Rebecca Lea McCarthy, *Origins of the Magdalene Laundries: An Analytical History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2010), 72.

³⁵ Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins, 1982), 3.

³⁶ S. J. Kleinberg, *Women in the United States, 1830-1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 35.

³⁷ Peter N. Hess, *Population Growth and Socioeconomic Progress in Less Developed Countries: Determinants of Fertility* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 135.

prostitution. Economic shifts caused by industrialization eliminated traditional jobs for working-class women, such as spinning.³⁸ Moreover, as agriculture became increasingly industrialized, farms required fewer individuals to operate.³⁹ Lower-class women now had to seek employment outside their homes and communities and often took manufacturing jobs with low wages that also opened them up to sexual exploitation.⁴⁰ Manufacturing centers now beckoned women to come and be employed. As women and men moved out of family settings and away from home to find jobs in the more industrialized cities, a class of underpaid working women developed. Prostitutes in industrial America often attributed their position to want of employment or poverty.⁴¹ These early prostitutes served men who, for perhaps the first time, experienced sexual freedom away from their communities and homes.⁴²

Heavy industries excluded women from the workforce during the second wave of industrialization, which only heightened the desperation felt among poor women. The second wave of industrialization peaked in 1841 with heavy industry concentrating on metals, chemicals, and shipbuilding. Large projects, such as canals, came to fruition during this period.⁴³ The second wave generated new concepts like mass production, commercialization, and the division of labor.⁴⁴ Heavy industrial jobs refused work for women, and men who obtained these jobs earned significantly more than women relegated to clerical, service, and domestic

³⁸ John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 132.

³⁹ Gary W. Reichard and Ted Dickson, *American on the World Stage: A Global Approach to U.S. History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 113.

⁴⁰ Wilbur R. Miller, *The Social History Crime and Punishment in America: An Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 1458.

⁴¹ William W. Sanger, *The History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effects Throughout the World* (New York: Medical Pub. Co., 1868), 826.

⁴² D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate*, 166.

⁴³ David E. Meyer, *The Roots of American Industrialization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2003), 142.

⁴⁴ Mark C. Henderson, *The 21st Century Environmental Revolution: A Structural Strategy for Global Warming, Resource Conservation, Toxic Contaminants, and the Environment* (Quebec: Waves of Future, 2010), 32.

positions.⁴⁵ Women grew more disgruntled over work conditions and low wages during this period, especially those who worked in textile mills.⁴⁶ The existence of a number of organized work stoppages and strikes among women textile workers illuminates such issues. A large influx of immigrants throughout the second wave increased competition amongst the unemployed and left women further excluded from many jobs. As heavy industry dominated the demand for labor (22 percent of all American workers held jobs in heavy industry), women sought other occupations.⁴⁷ Prostitution peaked as a result of the second wave of industrialization when women were removed from a large sector of the workforce and increasingly found themselves dissatisfied with what employment they could acquire. Men contributed to this rise by providing an expanded market to which prostitutes could cater.⁴⁸

Premarital sex and prostitution became a regular fixture amongst working-class women for several reasons. These women now lacked the protection their families and communities had once provided and could be coerced or enter into such positions without much resistance. Those who worked as domestic servants particularly despised the position and were placed in a vulnerable situation with regard to the sexual advances of their employers.⁴⁹ Others saw higher wages and adventure in such vices.⁵⁰ Women could make four times as much as prostitutes than they could as hard working domestic servants, waitresses, or factory workers.⁵¹ In addition, the increased chance of coming into contact with someone already in the business of prostitution led

⁴⁵ Scott Sernau, *Social Inequality in a Global Age* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 142.

⁴⁶ Kevin Hillstrom and Laurie Collier Hillstrom, *Communications, Agriculture, and Meatpacking* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 102.

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, Part 1 (Washington, DC: 1975), 121.

⁴⁸ Miller, *The Social*, 1458.

⁴⁹ D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate*, 132.

⁵⁰ D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate*, 200.

⁵¹ Edward Jewett Wheeler and Frank Crane, "Organized Vice as a Vested Interest," *Current Opinion* 52 (1912): 292.

to expanded opportunities for women outside the home to enter the profession.⁵² However, as prostitution became increasingly visible and professionalized, a simultaneous cultural shift occurred that placed more emphasis on the “purity” of women. This meant that those who engaged in the trade had a much lower chance of finding a suitable marriage partner later in life.⁵³

Industrialization did not mean that women working outside the home were always tempted by prostitution, but it certainly did intensify the changes and growth in prostitution’s makeup. As economic opportunities expanded in larger cities, many Americans left smaller towns and villages to pursue work possibilities. Businesses located themselves within existing cities or close by in order to tap into existing resources consisting of capital, labor, cheap sources of power, ancillary firms or business, and transportation.⁵⁴ Initially, American cities had a majority male population as men moved first to establish businesses and homes, and this encouraged a growth in prostitution. Although these men did not always arrive single, most left their families or wives behind and sent a portion of their wages back home to them. In the meantime, however, these men were alone and prostitutes fulfilled a need in this new social order.⁵⁵ Immigrants also flooded new American cities looking for job opportunities and adding to the already-growing group of young, single men and women who lived away from their homes and families.

Cities provided more anonymity, mobility, and isolation to immigrants and Anglo-Americans alike, which weakened the moral authority previously held by churches and families.

⁵² Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 63.

⁵³ D’Emilion and Freedman, *Intimate*, 132.

⁵⁴ Reichard and Dickison, *America*, 112.

⁵⁵ Robert M. Hardaway, *No Price too High: Victimless Crimes and the Ninth Amendment* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 151.

In conjunction with this weakened moral identity, the nighttime entertainment industry began to truly flourish. Men and women usually retained some of their wages for spending on themselves, and dance halls, gambling halls, and massage parlors became popular destinations after work.⁵⁶ Similarly, prostitution grew into a more professionalized business as men sought outlets for sexual repression or frustrations. Men often earned enough money to support themselves but not a wife and family, and prostitution became an outlet for sexual release, especially with the anonymity of the city. Without the “main check upon man’s conduct, the opinions of his neighbours” the pursuit of illicit sexual activities became inevitable.⁵⁷

The development of American cities created an expansion in women who found work as prostitutes, and demand for these prostitutes continued to increase as the nation moved west. As with city life, most men who travelled west did not bring a family with them. Some desired to make money and then call for their family to join them, but others simply had no family to bring with them in the first place. For women western migration proved especially difficult. Few real opportunities were available to those who chose to make the journey west. Frontier industries, such as mining, excluded women from employment just as heavy industry in the East did. As a result, a scarcity of women in the West existed, and men highly prized contact with women.⁵⁸ For unskilled women laborers prostitution offered a reliable source of income in this new setting.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Peter Engelman, *A History of the Birth Control Movement in America* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), 13.

⁵⁷ *The Social Evil with Special Reference to the Conditions Existing in the City of New York. A Report Prepared under the Direction of the Committee of Fifteen*, ed. Edwin R.A. Seligman, 2d ed. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), 8.

⁵⁸ Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 163.

⁵⁹ Melissa Hope Ditmore, *Prostitution and Sex Work* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2011), 61.

Both urban and rural settings served prostitutes well in the West as men in both environments drastically outnumbered women.⁶⁰ Women who earned a living through sex work could eventually buy their own property in the West, as was the case with Mary Brady.⁶¹ The construction of military forts also intensified the want of prostitutes in the West. “Hog ranches” were brothels located three miles beyond a military post’s fortifications and catered exclusively to enlisted men.⁶² Not all prostitutes in the American West moved there from the Eastern states. The demand for prostitutes in the West proved enticing for professional sex workers from other nations. In fact, many prostitutes were of Chinese origin and occupied mining towns in California, particularly San Francisco.⁶³ Shortly after the gold rush began, a ship of professional prostitutes from France arrived to take advantage of the single men who could at any moment make a fortune.⁶⁴ Prostitutes who migrated west used professional names to maintain their anonymity, which, as with the city, helped to foster the growing industry.⁶⁵

As demand and opportunity increased, prostitution quickly became a professionalized trade that could be seen in most cities and towns throughout the nation. Still, with this rapid expansion came a need to define prostitution’s place in society. By the late 1830s, Americans had adopted the manners, morals, and style of dress that dominated in their former mother country. Victorian ideals of England were mimicked in the United States, especially in urban settings. American society’s understanding of prostitution during its early stages of professionalization and growth must be understood in this light.

⁶⁰ Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Mercy: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865-90* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1985), 3.

⁶¹ Wyoming Census for 1880, Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department.

⁶² Butler, *Daughters*, 8.

⁶³ Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1994), 54.

⁶⁴ Marion S. Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1981), 67-69.

⁶⁵ Michael Rutter, *Upstairs Girls: Prostitution in the American West* (Helena, MT: Farcountry, 2005), 112.

Public condemnation of prostitution did not become prominent in the U.S. until the mid-to-late 1800s, and instead a policy of “quiet toleration” reflected Victorian ideals. One New Orleans newspaper expressed this attitude saying, “prostitution is ineradicable...houses of illfame...are a necessary evil....such places are necessary in ministering to the passions of men who otherwise would be tempted to seduce young ladies of their acquaintance.”⁶⁶ A later Vice Commission Report from Bridgeport, CT, reflected a similar belief that “vice is one of the weaknesses of men...for without [prostitution] rape would be common and clandestine immorality would increase.”⁶⁷ Such beliefs stemmed from the longstanding tradition in American society of the double standard with regard to sexuality. Men, it appeared, had sexual desires that could not be repressed, and as long as prostitutes and their customers remained quiet, they could be tolerated as catering to this need.

Some raids occurred on the ever-prevalent brothel during this period, but for the most part legally prostitutes continued to be tolerated.⁶⁸ Officials in densely populated cities believed toleration to be the best course of action because “there is so much licentiousness among men that law cannot restrain it.”⁶⁹ Evidence further suggests the aggressive nature of men’s sexuality during this time as one in three American brides entered marriage pregnant.⁷⁰ Toleration succeeded because it existed as part of larger “Victorian Compromise.” It silently recognized the need for prostitution without formally acknowledging its presence.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Editorial, *Mascot*, June 1892, p. 37.

⁶⁷ Bridgeport Vice Commission, *The Report and Recommendations of the Bridgeport Vice Commission* (Bridgeport, 1916), 15.

⁶⁸ D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate*, 140.

⁶⁹ Edmund Andrews, *Prostitution and its Sanitary Management* (St. Louis: 1871), 21.

⁷⁰ Daniel Scott Smith, “The Dating of the American Sexual Revolution: Evidence and Interpretation,” in *The American Family in Socio-Historical Perspective*, ed. by Michael Gordon (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1978), 323.

⁷¹ Lawrence Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in U.S. History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 225.

The policy of quiet toleration worked because it reinforced Victorian notions of male and female sexuality, which were essentially diametric opposites. American society, drawing upon British ideals, constructed gender roles and corresponding sexuality Victorians subscribed to, for no core idea of masculinity or femininity exists to which males and females aspire innately.⁷² Though historians have devoted countless works to the idea of female sexuality and femininity within the Victorian world, male sexuality has been far less exhaustively examined. In reality, no single ideal “manhood” existed, and Americans accepted a variety of notions regarding masculinity. Manliness ranged in form from Christian gentleman, kind in all aspects of life, to Daniel Boone explorer, conqueror of the unknown.⁷³ Still, overarching and widely accepted ideals did exist within society that men and women strove for, especially created out of this new urban and industrial atmosphere. Individuals did bend these ideals in practice, but writing and speeches on sexuality and gender at the time typically referred to the ideal Victorian definition of masculinity and femininity.

The idea of “separate spheres” for men and women dominated the Victorian Era. Men occupied the public sphere and involved themselves with politics and business, whereas women inhabited the domestic sphere and controlled the home and child rearing. These spheres existed as a way of rationalizing the opposing forces of morals and capitalism. Reproductive capacities of men and women supposedly highlighted the need for these spheres as “the female detaches genetic cells that remain more or less stationary, while the male detaches cells that go more or less at large.”⁷⁴ Males, then, were labeled as active and independent while females became

⁷² Joseph H. Pleck, *The Myth of Masculinity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 10.

⁷³ Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 123.

⁷⁴ James T. Searcy, “Self-Adjustability,” Alabama Collection, University of Alabama Library (1895), 12-13 as cited in John Starrett Hughes, “The Madness of Separate Spheres: Insanity and Masculinity in Victorian Alabama,” in

passive and dependent upon males for fulfillment . Men embodied capitalistic tendencies as they were characterized as aggressive, greedy, and naturally inclined toward competition.⁷⁵ Men did not completely divorce themselves from the private sphere, however, considering that this was where masculinity became spiritually and morally fortified.

The public sphere focused, to an extent, on chivalry. Chivalry, the idea that men protected their homes and families authoritatively but kindly, formed part of the basis for masculinity from the colonial era onward.⁷⁶ During the Victorian Era, men were meant to protect their wives and children from the toil and cruelty of public life by entering that sphere themselves. Women who did not inhabit the upper or middle classes in America did not typically have men to guard them from the public sphere as their families relied upon them for an additional source of income. Due to their failure to meet the chivalric ideal of womanhood, men used these women for sex or labor without fear of endangering their respectability.⁷⁷

“Passionate manhood” grew out of this concept of chivalry and into an ideal as cities flourished and threatened the more physical aspects of masculinity. In this more urbanized view, brotherhood became paramount, and physical challenges, hunting, and sports tested the allegiance of men.⁷⁸ The prevalence of lodges and labor unions grew during this period and often drew upon these ideas of protecting fraternal relations and honor.⁷⁹ “Passionate manhood,” became a way to recapture the more primitive elements of masculinity and channel them into an acceptable, Christian masculinity. Popular magazines, such as *Harper’s* and *Munsey’s*, along

Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America, ed. by Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), 53.

⁷⁵ Bret E. Carroll, ed., “Cult of Domesticity,” in *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 121.

⁷⁶ Carroll, “Chivalry,” in *American*, 87.

⁷⁷ Carroll, “Chivalry,” in *American*, 88.

⁷⁸ Steven A. Reiss, “Sport and the Redefinition of Middle-Class Masculinity in Victorian America,” in *The New American Sport History: Recent Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. by S.W. Pope (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 179.

⁷⁹ Carroll, “Chivalry,” in *American*, 88.

with popular novels formed a basis of cultural emphasis through which ideas of masculinity were broadcast on a national scale.⁸⁰ *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, a best-seller in 1850s America, emphasized the importance of sports in the development of boys to becoming men.⁸¹ The YMCA also formed in order to aid the adjustment of rural youth to urban life in a moral but competitive environment.⁸²

While industrialization thrived, society further grounded manliness in the ability to perform economic transactions freely or to have control over individual capital.⁸³ Marriages that failed to meet these ideas of masculinity were recognized as dissolvable under law. For instance, men who did not “support and maintain” their wives through monetary or other means gave a wife grounds divorce her husband.⁸⁴ Virility also became prized as a key feature of masculinity. Men who fathered a family, picked up women, or frequented prostitutes all demonstrated their virility.⁸⁵

Medical, religious, phrenological, and other experts agreed that men had a higher sexual drive than women. Like their competitive and aggressive nature in the workplace or on the sports field, men were expected to be naturally more aggressive sexually. Men, medical professionals noted, could not live without sex, but the more passionate nature of male sexuality made it potentially dangerous so that it had to be controlled. O.S. Fowler, a phrenologist, believed that “no man can ever become extra great, or even good, without the aid of powerful

⁸⁰ Daniel A. Clark, *Creating the College Man: American Mass Magazines and Middle-Class Manhood, 1890-1915* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 2010), 18.

⁸¹ Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1911).

⁸² Edmund Shorthouse, *A Present to Youths and Young Men* (Birmingham, England: 1908), 1056.

⁸³ Carroll, “Class,” in *American*, 96.

⁸⁴ Abraham Clark Freeman, ed., “Wetmore v. Wetmore,” *The American State Reports* (Bancroft-Whitney, 1897), 756.

⁸⁵ Elliott J. Gorn, “The Meanings of Prizefighting,” *The New American Sport History: Recent Approaches and Perspectives*, Edited by S.W. Pope (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 238.

sexuality....Every intellectual genius on record evinces every sign of powerful manhood.”⁸⁶ If their passions were unleashed onto the chaste women who inhabited the private sphere, men would destroy their purity. Thus, men exerted a heroic amount of self-control to keep this from happening.⁸⁷ Society expected young men to remain chaste before marriage, but men could still engage in discreet sexual relations with impure women who gentlemen would never actually marry.⁸⁸ Within marriage, men were meant to avoid sex except for the purposes of reproduction, but they typically received forgiveness for extra-marital affairs with impure women for other purposes.⁸⁹ “Energy” most often described vigor or vitality in men within literature of the time, and physicians and scientists warned that wasting this energy represented a waste of God’s intentions.⁹⁰ Still, sexual activity for the purpose of reproduction could please God by transforming the treasures of woman “laid away in the dark” with his “power...to multiply the anthems of heaven to all eternity.”⁹¹ Accordingly, morality and a central notion that men and women inherently held different abilities to contain immorality dominated these Victorian standards for sexuality and gender.

Women, unlike men, occupied the private, domestic sphere and had a weak or nonexistent sex drive. Women could either be angels or whores depending on whether they adhered to Victorian standards of chastity or fell into immoral ways. Physicians characterized women by the physiological features that made them different from men. Menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause defined the social and sexual sphere to which women

⁸⁶ O.S. Fowler, *Creative and Sexual Science: Or, Manhood, Womanhood, and their Mutual Interrelations* (Philadelphia: National Pub. Co., 1875), 221.

⁸⁷ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 5.

⁸⁸ Victor C. De Munck, *Romantic Love and Sexual Behavior: Perspectives from the Social Sciences* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 43.

⁸⁹ De Munck, *Romantic*, 43.

⁹⁰ George F. Shrady, “Some Facts About the Sexual Function,” *Medical Record* 39 (New York: May 1891): 570.

⁹¹ Religious Tract Society, ed., “Moral Effects of the Gold Discoveries,” *The Sunday At Home* 31 (1884): 552.

were confined.⁹² These reproductive processes dominated the lives of women and both gave them reason for existing and made them naturally weaker than men. Doctors argued that women only desired sex for reproduction and frigidity was inherent to them.⁹³

The Cult of Domesticity reinforced these ideas, maintaining that women should remain in the home and fulfill the role of virtuous mother, faithful wife, and passive creature. The private sphere existed as a “moral counterpoint to the amoral public sphere.”⁹⁴ Women’s duties centered on the spiritual needs of their families, as guardians of moral and religious values, and ensuring their husbands had a comfortable environment to come home to after a long day at work.⁹⁵ James Fennimore Cooper, among other prominent writers of the time, wrote specifically for an audience of women, incorporating the ideas behind the cult of domesticity into his works.⁹⁶ He assured women that the home played a vital role in the creation of true men for it “formed and nourished” man’s “finest sympathies, tastes, moral, and religious feelings.”⁹⁷ Motherhood was exalted above all else as a woman’s true attainment of “womanhood.”⁹⁸ Those women who abandoned the Cult of Domesticity and its focus on nurture and reproduction endangered not only herself but society at large.⁹⁹ Framed in moral language, robbing the nation of potentially healthy offspring by using methods for controlling reproduction led to punishment from nature and God through cancer, insanity, or a slow and painful death.¹⁰⁰ Children’s literature helped

⁹² Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985), 23.

⁹³ Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly*, 23.

⁹⁴ Carroll, “Cult of Domesticity,” *American*, 121.

⁹⁵ Anna M. Cahill, “Training Colored Girls,” *American Missionary* 37 (February 1883): 11.

⁹⁶ Signe O. Wegener, *James Fennimore Cooper Versus the Cult of Domesticity: Progressive Themes of Femininity and Family in the Novels* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 2.

⁹⁷ Qtd. In Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University, 1977), 64.

⁹⁸ Daniel Walker Howe, “Victorian Culture in America,” in *Victorian America*, ed. by D.W. Howe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1975), 25. {PAGES 3-28}

⁹⁹ Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly*, 23.

indoctrinate the nation's youth by excluding any factual discussion of sex, as had been seen in the 1790s, and replacing it with pious visions of punishment for those who deviated from the societal norms.¹⁰¹

A double standard developed by which men could deviate from Victorian standards of morality, but women who did so received harsh punishments and were labeled by society as "fallen women." Pamphlets, novels, and medical works fixated on the ideal nature of woman, and all deemed sexual purity to be the most important aspect. Purity meant that outside of reproduction, women had no real or passionate interest in sex.¹⁰² Women, Victorians thought, should be "clothed in chastity."¹⁰³ "Pure" women contrasted sharply with "fallen" women who acted as proof that loss of sexual purity resulted in horrifying consequences. Impure women lost all chances of being called real women because sexual deviancy ruined their reputations, chances of marriage, and hopes of economic security.¹⁰⁴ While men possessed the ability to indulge their sexual nature, women who merely set foot near prostitution or vice risked damaging her reputation permanently. Husbands who married impure women also saw their reputations suffer. Those who discovered their supposedly virginal brides had not actually maintained their purity were granted divorces. Others became enraged and slapped, hit, and beat their wives as well as insulted them by equating them to prostitutes.¹⁰⁵ Women often blamed themselves for their failings. One woman claimed she had "suffered herself to be seduced and debauched."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly*, 24-25.

¹⁰² Veronica A. Makowsky, *Susan Glaspell's Century of American Women: A Critical Interpretation of Her Work* (New York: Oxford University, 1993), 141.

¹⁰³ Edward D. Neill, *The English Colonization of America during the Seventeenth Century* (London: Strahan, 1871), 291.

¹⁰⁴ Carroll-Smith Rosenberg, "Sex as Symbol in Victorian Purity: An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Jacksonian America," *Turning Points: Historical and Sociological Essays on The Family*, ed. by John Demos and Saran Spence Boocock (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978): 242-244.

¹⁰⁵ Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), 43.

¹⁰⁶ Qtd. In May, *Great*, 43.

Women occupied the domestic sphere in order to maintain their purity in an amoral world and to provide guidance to the male counterparts who had to venture into it.

Bound in the language of morality, advice books, medical professionals, and religious authorities cautioned women to remain sexually pure even in thought. Precautions had to be taken to shield women from any sexual stimuli or they would become corrupted. Victorians believed that sex existed as an always-lurking force aroused by the right stimulus.¹⁰⁷ This assumption led many to perceive that any sexual thoughts inevitably led to sex or self-stimulation, noted as the “greatest vice.” One advice book warned, “It is lewd thoughts...that causes misery....Cast away impure thoughts, rise above them, and one is safe!”¹⁰⁸ Even in marriage women were expected not to become sexually aroused. Mary Wood-Allen, author of *Marriage, Its Duties and Privileges*, promised women Nature intended them to feel no sexual pleasure but merely endure sex within the confines of marriage for reproduction purposes. She further asserted that sexual feelings were, in fact, morally degrading.¹⁰⁹ In order to avoid sexual stimulation, Victorians went so far as to cover up piano legs because women might find it provocative.¹¹⁰ God commanded that women suppress sexual thoughts, nature required it, and, if a woman succeeded, blessings awaited her in the afterlife.¹¹¹

In light of such condemnation for women who felt sexual desire, and to avoid corrupting “pure” or “good” wives, prostitution, in fact, served a purpose and was accepted as a necessary evil. Like early Americans, those in the Victorian Era believed prostitution to be a helpful tool in maintaining a degree of social order. The prostitute was “ultimately the most efficient guardian

¹⁰⁷ Elise Rose Chenier, *Strangers in our Midst: Sexual Deviancy in Postwar Ontario* (Buffalo: University of Toronto, 2008), 172.

¹⁰⁸ Henry Newell Guernsey, *Plain Talks on Avoided Subjects* (Philadelphia: Davis, 1882), 59.

¹⁰⁹ Mary Wood-Allen, *Marriage, Its Duties and Privileges* (Chicago: F.H. Revell, 1901), 187.

¹¹⁰ Martha Rosenthal, *Human Sexuality: From Cells to Society* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013), 11.

¹¹¹ Guernsey, *Plain*, 53.

of virtue.”¹¹² Prostitution relieved women of unwanted and potentially ruinous conjugal obligations. While men had unquenchable sexual appetites that at times could be repressed, repression of such strong desires indefinitely was thought to lead to violence and rape. Prostitution allowed men a sexual outlet to release such desires without the potential for rape or adultery (defined then as sex with another man’s wife).¹¹³ Prostitutes further served to prevent wives, pure and passionless, from the strong desires of their husbands which they were too weak to manage. It therefore protected the idea of family and wives from corruption. Many feared that if prostitution were abolished, “crimes of the most heinous and revolting character would be of incessant occurrence, and no virtuous woman would be secure.”¹¹⁴ If eradicated, illegitimate children and masturbation would rise, which were considered worse moral offenses than visiting prostitutes.¹¹⁵ Victorians accepted that some women could not uphold the ideal standards and would become “fallen women” and argued that the suppression of prostitution was impossible.¹¹⁶ Medical professionals assured Americans that even if prostitution must exist, the women who practiced it did not do so out of sexual desire for “were the passions in both sexes equal, prostitution would be far more rife in our midst than at present.”¹¹⁷

The argument that prostitution safeguarded morality, though perhaps originating with Augustine, received widespread revival with Frenchman Alex Parent-Duchatelet, who inspired American thinkers. Alex Parent-Duchatelet studied prostitution in nineteenth-century France and

¹¹² Theophilus Parvin, “The Conduct of the Medical Student,” *The Medical and Surgical Reporter* 71 (Nov. 17, 1894): 677.

¹¹³ Paul R. Abramson, Steven D. Pinkerton, and Mark Huppin, *Sexual Rights in America: The Ninth Amendment and the Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: New York University, 2003), 116.

¹¹⁴ S.D. Gross, “Syphilis in its Relation to the National Health,” *Transactions of the American Medical Association* 25 (1874): 282.

¹¹⁵ Gross, “Syphilis,” 283.

¹¹⁶ S.W. Horall, “The (Royal) North-West Mounted Police and Prostitution on the Canadian Prairies,” *The Mounted Police and Prairie Society, 1873-1919*, ed. by William M. Baker (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1998), 174.

¹¹⁷ William W. Sanger, *The History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effects Throughout the World* (New York: Medical Pub. Co., 1868), 489.

published his most influential work, *Prostitution in the city of Paris*, was published in 1836. His opinion on prostitutes strengthened the argument for their existence as a “necessary evil.” He found them to be “as inevitable in a great urban centre as sewers, roads, and rubbish dumps. The attitude of the authorities should be the same in regard to the former as the latter.”¹¹⁸ Parent-Duchatelet found prostitution to be a transitory occupation associated most closely with poverty and suggested not its eradication but its regulation. He argued, like Augustine, that prostitution contributed to social harmony by safeguarding respectable marriages.¹¹⁹ Expanding upon his arguments, other Victorian thinkers argued that prostitution had always and would always exist with the only real punishment being “infamy” and women being labeled as “impure.”¹²⁰

By the 1850s, venereologist William Acton extended Alex Parent-Duchatelet’s analysis, publishing his own meticulous study of prostitution. At the time, Englishmen like Acton felt that the inability of more mobile classes of men, especially soldiers, to marry necessarily created “a class such as those who practice clandestine prostitution.”¹²¹ First published in 1857, Acton’s *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Youth, in Adult Age, and in Advanced Life*, alleviated the fears of male readers and remained in publication in the U.S. more than twenty years later. Acton invoked the moral ideals of Victorian womanhood to implicitly compare the pure woman to the impure. Men, he insisted, “need not fear that his wife will

¹¹⁸ Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet, *Prostitution in Paris: Considered Morally, Politically, and Medically: Prepared for Philanthropists and Legislators from Statistical Documents* (Boston: C.H. Brainard, 1845), 211.

¹¹⁹ Helen J. Self, *Prostitution, Women, and Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003), 27.

¹²⁰ Patrick Mac Chombaich de Colquhoun, *A Summary of the Roman Civil Law* (London: Stevens, 1851), 668.

¹²¹ J. Simon, qtd in Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Contagious Diseases Act, 1866* (London: 1868), 71.

require the excitement, or in any respect imitate the ways of a courtesan.”¹²² Thus, he affirmed that good, pure women were not passionate (whorish) for if they were, all women would behave as prostitutes. Prostitutes themselves, he argued, did not even exist as women but “a woman with half the woman gone.”¹²³ As a result of their ability to arouse desire, prostitutes existed outside the realm of womanhood for Acton and therefore posed no threat to pure, marriageable women.

Yet, he also agreed with Parent-Duchatelet that prostitution must exist because celibacy damaged men’s health and was inevitable in “civilized, and especially close-packed population.”¹²⁴ Acton explained the need for prostitution as an issue of supply and demand. He argued that the “sexual desire for sexual intercourse is strongly felt by the male” and was an “ever-present, sensible want.”¹²⁵ Due to the needs of men, then, prostitution allowed a class of women to remain pure and marriageable by moral standards while keeping men healthy. A woman who failed to stay pure could also use prostitution as “the only course open to her.”¹²⁶ Men primarily benefitted from this as those who could not control their desires, though Acton believed that they should be able to, sought “substitutes for, or imitations of, the relationship [sex] resulting from love, and known in the married state.”¹²⁷ According to Acton, prostitution primarily functioned as a sort of sewer that siphoned off corruption into an acceptable portion of society in order to maintain the purity of the rest.

Similarly, historian W.E.H. Lecky accepted the Victorian double standard and concluded that prostitutes served as the greatest guardians of morality. A member of the middle-class

¹²² William Acton, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Youth, in Adult Age, and in Advanced Life* (London: Churchill, 1857), 81.

¹²³ William Acton, *Prostitution, Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects in London and Other Large Cities* (London: Churchill, 1870), 166.

¹²⁴ Acton, *Prostitution*, 3.

¹²⁵ Acton, *Prostitution*, 162.

¹²⁶ Acton, *Prostitution*, 277.

¹²⁷ Acton, *Prostitution*, 163.

himself, Lecky understood that domesticity played a central role in society. In fact, “the happiness and goodness of society are always in a very great degree dependent on the purity of domestic life.”¹²⁸ At the same time, the purity of homes could not be ensured because men’s sexual urges were frequent and irregular.¹²⁹ In this way, prostitution became an inevitability as long as marriages continued to exist. Lecky famously remarked that if it were not for the prostitute, “the unchallenged purity of countless happy homes would be polluted.”¹³⁰ This observation received countless quotations in medical journals and religious tracts of Lecky’s time.¹³¹

Augustinian ideas permeated Lecky’s writing as he cast the prostitute as “the most mournful and in some respects the most awful” figure who served society’s moral standards.¹³² Though the prostitute represented the “supreme type of vice” she also guarded the home and family from this vice and “remains, while creeds and civilizations rise and fall, the eternal priestess of humanity.”¹³³ Lecky, following moral arguments of the time, argued that while society vilified the prostitute, she also met the demands of male lust and guaranteed that a population of pure, true women existed. If unmarried, desirous men no longer had a population into which they could relieve their passions, surely the pure daughters and wives of other men would become the object of their lust.¹³⁴ Society’s moral standards, then, would collapse without prostitution as repressed desire inevitably broke free and wreaked havoc .

¹²⁸ William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (London: Longmans, Greens, and Co., 1869), 282.

¹²⁹ Lecky, *History*, 282.

¹³⁰ Lecky, *History*, 283.

¹³¹ “Lecky’s European Morals,” *Medical Standard* 13 (Chicago: 1893): 57.

¹³² Lecky, *History*, 299.

¹³³ Lecky, *History*, 283.

¹³⁴ Joseph Donohue, *Fantasies of Empire: The Empire Theatre of Varieties and the Licensing Controversy of 1894* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2005), 140.

Rhetoric like that of Lecky, Acton, and Parent-Duchatelet dominated American newspapers of the time, promoting an argument that morality declared the prostitute a necessity of society. *The Salt Lake Herald*, for instance, confessed that repression of prostitution merely made its presence grow as it inevitably existed in large cities, an idea expressed by Parent-Duchatelet.¹³⁵ The *New York Times* also echoed Lecky's and Acton's philosophies suggesting that prostitution must remain legal and in existence in order to keep virtuous women from experiencing "unutterable shames and horrors."¹³⁶ Even Southern newspapers like the *Nashville Union and American* published stories about the inevitable existence of prostitution as civilizations arise.¹³⁷ The *Omaha Daily Bee* further suggested that prostitution acted as a stagnant pool that helped to collect the immorality of cities.¹³⁸

Morality permeated not only the rhetoric of those who believed prostitution's existence necessary and inevitable but also that of reformers who sought to bring wayward women back to the path of virtue. Upper- and middle-class women formed the bulk of reform efforts as they joined organizations through which they channeled religious notions of mission and charity and the motherly idea of moral guardianship. The first of these reform societies was the Magdalen Society of Philadelphia, founded in 1800 and later expanded as other chapters in order to "restore the paths of virtue those unhappy females who in unguarded hours have been robbed of their innocence."¹³⁹ Those in the Magdalen Society worried that "amidst the blaze of gospel light...[prostitution] presents but a portrait of moral death."¹⁴⁰ The Magdalen Society firmly believed that a sinless society could hasten the millennium and coming of Christ. They

¹³⁵ "The Social Crime," *The Salt Lake Herald*, November 15, 1885, pg. 5.

¹³⁶ Malakoff, "Affairs in France," *New York Times*, May 27, 1858.

¹³⁷ "The Economy of Nature," *Nashville Union and American*, February 10, 1855, pg. 2.

¹³⁸ "Law-Breakers," *Omaha Daily Bee*, January 30, 1886, pg. 5.

¹³⁹ Magdalene Society Constitution, qtd. in Rodney Hessinger, "Insidious Murderers of Female Innocence," *Sex and Sexuality in Early America*, ed. by Merril D. Smith (New York: New York University, 1998), 276. {PAGES 262-282}

¹⁴⁰ Crisis and National Co-Operative Trades' Union, *Letterpress The Crisis* (1833), 34.

simultaneously felt that some sins, especially those of a sexual nature, could not be easily eradicated.¹⁴¹ The Society worked to help prostitutes, treating them as individuals. Society members looked upon a prostitute's condition as an individual sin that needed to be reformed rather than a societal evil. Individual failings, not those of society as a whole, led to prostitution.¹⁴² They carefully examined the reasons behind each prostitute's decision to reform and her intentions upon reentering polite society.¹⁴³ They made it their goal to "reclaim the individual."¹⁴⁴

The causes and remedies for prostitution were individualized by the Magdalen Society. Due to prostitution resulting from individual character flaws, society members felt that the only way to redeem these "fallen women" was to isolate the women from the sins around them, reconstruct their personalities into those of "pure" women who shunned sin, and place them with a family to protect their morality.¹⁴⁵ The Magdalen Society established an asylum for such reform efforts and viewed it as a sort of moral hospital.¹⁴⁶ The asylum itself, however, continued to imprint upon both the reformers and the reformed that prostitutes existed separate from society and could never fully reach true womanhood. Further, by placing the prostitute in a sort of cage for reform, the "pure" moral guardians aiding them kept their own virtue, and that of other women, from becoming polluted.

The Female Benevolent Society of New York, established in 1834, saw it as the Christian duty of women, as the moral guardians of the home and society, to assist "fallen" women as

¹⁴¹ Female Benevolent Society, qtd. in Larry H. Whitetaker, *Seduction, Prostitution, and Moral Reform in New York, 1830-1860* (New York: Garland Pub., 1997), 58.

¹⁴² Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760-1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996), 278.

¹⁴³ Whitetaker, *Seduction*, 58.

¹⁴⁴ Whitetaker, *Seduction*, 57.

¹⁴⁵ Meranze, *Laboratories*, 278.

¹⁴⁶ Meranze, *Laboratories*, 279.

individuals. The Society understood that “no mother desires to receive them [prostitutes] into her house, where they might mingle with the little ones in the nursery, and poison their juvenile minds.”¹⁴⁷ Yet the Society voiced the belief that any sinner could be redeemed, and all Christians should work to help these sinners once they expressed the desire to reform.¹⁴⁸ While expressing the belief that wayward women had been led into open sin, the society maintained the accepted rhetoric surrounding prostitution. Prostitution remained an entirely moral issue, as did womanhood. The Boston Female Reform Society, formed in 1800, similarly concerned themselves with moral reform. Composed entirely of women, Society members feared for the vulnerable state of those more susceptible to seduction and abandonment. They worked diligently to set themselves apart from “fallen women” through reform efforts, making sure to maintain the proper role of women as moral guardians.¹⁴⁹ “Benevolent Societies” of this nature existed across the U.S. in major urban centers.

Entrenched in society, prostitution claimed a role in the United States as keeper of morality despite the obvious paradox. The limited scope of prostitution within the U.S. as colonies led colonists to accept the institution as a necessary, but abnormal, evil. After the American Industrial Revolution and the subsequent urbanization of American cities, prostitution began to grow into a professionalized industry. This expansion in the trade brought discussion of prostitution to fore as it became increasingly noticeable. Changes in the family dynamic, however, had also altered the idea of male and female gender roles and sexuality. A double standard emerged wherein men, naturally sexually aggressive, could be promiscuous but women, as pure guardians of morality, could not. In this social hierarchy, prostitutes served a purpose

¹⁴⁷Whitetaker, *Seduction*, 70.

¹⁴⁸Whitetaker, *Seduction*, 70.

¹⁴⁹Debra Gold Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts, 1993), 76.

though. They siphoned off the irrepressible urges of men while maintaining the purity of wives and marriageable women. The discussion of prostitution hinged on morality as descended from Augustinian arguments. Even early anti-prostitution efforts treated the issue as one of purely morals. Yet, in the decades that followed, scientific rhetoric replaced morals and individual prostitutes transformed from necessary evils into festering wounds that threatened to infect society as a whole.

CHAPTER 3

PERMANENT VICE: SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF PROSTITUTION

With the outbreak of the Civil War, the population of Washington, DC, dramatically changed. Soldiers awaited orders, wounded men healed, and newly freed slaves escaped the war-torn South. As men descended upon the city, so too did prostitutes as opportunities to ply their trade swelled. Mary Hall's brothel grew during this period as she added eight to ten women to her list of residents.¹⁵⁰ Though the women could be arrested under vagrancy laws, police typically only fined them and allowed them to continue their business.¹⁵¹ The discreet nature of lavish brothels like Mary Hall's kept them from being raided, but lower-class establishments were frequently indicted for disturbing the peace.¹⁵² After the war, Washington remained an overcrowded, crime-ridden city. Its occupants continued to accept prostitution, however, on the basis that it be confined to a small portion of the city. A red-light district formed around the area in which Mary Hall lived, and similar sequestered and controlled vice districts formed in large cities around the nation. This transition from unrestrained vice to regulated districts occurred as a result of an important shift in the language used to discuss prostitution. Rather than focus on the morality of prostitution, experts now highlighted scientific data. Medical experts, anthropologists, and criminologists viewed prostitution as ineradicable and state regulation as the best means to control its effects. This transition period still accepted prostitution as a legal and necessary trade but now relied upon statistics, data, and new medical understanding of sex to highlight the dangers of uninhibited vice. Experts suggested that sex was vital to a man's physical and mental health, but without intervention of state and some sort of regulation, venereal disease threatened health as well. This period marked a decidedly different approach to

¹⁵⁰ "Bawdy House Case—The Trial of Mary Ann Hall," *The Evening Star*, February 19, 1864.

¹⁵¹ Metropolitan Police of Washington, General and Special Orders 1862: 28.

¹⁵² *The Evening Star*, October 2, 1863.

thinking about prostitution and served as a transition period wherein prostitution still existed as a necessary evil but would soon be considered a social evil.

Reform of American medicine from a folk practice to a genuine profession helped transform discussions of sexuality from moral ideology to scientific understanding. Following the Civil War, a revival of the economy allowed for the restructuring of American universities. Prior to the war, schools generally admitted students and professors who had little knowledge or qualifications.¹⁵³ While funding expanded, though, universities focused on the expansion of research and scientific knowledge and the advent of more specialization in the field of medicine.¹⁵⁴ Physicians began to apply basic biology to medical problems and diagnosis.¹⁵⁵ They studied diseases, treatments, and cures statistically, which led to the hope that scientific study could produce reliable and predictable medical answers.¹⁵⁶ The confused and contradictory ideas of doctors finally fell away as the germ theory of disease popularized by Louis Pasteur gained acceptance.¹⁵⁷ Germ theory, which states that infectious diseases are caused by microorganisms, created a single medical orthodoxy.¹⁵⁸ Criminologists later applied germ theory to crime in an attempt to medicalize the field of social sciences, which demonstrates the extent to which this new scientific medical knowledge has spread and held influence.¹⁵⁹ As new techniques, knowledge, and technology emerged from Europe, American doctors adopted and updated their practices. Soon, hospitals and clinics became the norm rather than family practitioners, which

¹⁵³ Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 113.

¹⁵⁴ Starr, *The Social*, 113.

¹⁵⁵ Roger L. Geiger, *The American College in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 2000), 272.

¹⁵⁶ Kenneth De Ville, *Medical Malpractice in Nineteenth-Century America: Origins and Legacy* (New York: New York University, 1990), 125.

¹⁵⁷ David J. Russo, *American History from a Global Perspective: An Interpretation* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 336.

¹⁵⁸ Russo, *American*, 336.

¹⁵⁹ Ronald G. Walters, *Scientific Authority and Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1997), 77.

made doctor visits less personal.¹⁶⁰ Doctors also became much more specialized and instead of focusing on every area of diagnosis now limited themselves to areas of interest, such as bacteriology.¹⁶¹

With the growth of an expert class of doctors, science began to develop its own theories surrounding sexuality that often conflicted with religion and morality. Instead of suggesting repression, medical and scientific knowledge now recognized sexual pleasure as natural and normal.¹⁶² Scientific-sounding terms replaced frequently-used phrases, and medical professionals founded societies, published journals, held conferences, and argued for legislation to regulate aspects of sexuality.¹⁶³

The conservation of male reproductive fluids became a popular topic amongst the burgeoning scientific community. A theory called “animal magnetism,” which used electrical and hydraulic metaphors, suggested that the human body contained a finite amount of energy usually contained within a closed circuit.¹⁶⁴ When a man released semen, however, it weakened the body, and this loss was not easily recovered. Doctors asserted that “the best blood of woman as well as man goes to the generative organs for the purpose of forming the new being.”¹⁶⁵ In fact, Dr. S.A. Tissot asserted that “an ounce of semen is equal to that of forty ounces of

¹⁶⁰ Starr, *The Social*, 210.

¹⁶¹ Starr, *The Social*, 210.

¹⁶² Ira L. Mandelker, *Religion, Society, and Utopia in Nineteenth-Century America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1984), 63.

¹⁶³ Susan Marjorie Zieger, *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2008), 5.

¹⁶⁴ Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* (New York: Grossman, 1976), 85.

¹⁶⁵ Eli P. Miller, *Vital Force* (New York: 1874), 46.

blood.”¹⁶⁶ Even when such a release resulted from regular intercourse, men suffered afflictions “ranging from nervous anxiety to general lassitude to specific ailments.”¹⁶⁷

Physicians maintained that intercourse by itself was highly beneficial, and the loss of semen was what made sexual activity potentially dangerous. Sex itself created a transfer of magnetic forces between a man and a woman, which supplied energy and good health to both parties.¹⁶⁸ Friction between the parts of sexual organs identified as relating to love produced this energy.¹⁶⁹ Another theory, “sedular absorption,” stated that if a man could reabsorb his semen back into his body it would increase his physical, sexual, and mental health. Even physicians who did not ascribe to these theories reasoned that the control required to avoid ejaculating tempered a man’s character and his sexual experience.¹⁷⁰

“Spermatic economy” became a popular phrase that meant men must conserve their reproductive fluid by having intercourse, even within marriage, no more than once a month.¹⁷¹ Sylvester Graham and Henry Beecher supported this theory and helped to establish semen as more important than mere procreation.¹⁷² Medical experts believed that the longer a man kept his spermatozoa stored in his body, the more vigorous and manly his offspring would be.¹⁷³ They believed masturbation, then, exhausted crucial reserves of semen, which resulted in illnesses ranging from neurasthenia to insanity.¹⁷⁴ This also contributed to a challenging of the Victorian double standard, especially since many physicians believed that women had separate drives for

¹⁶⁶ Robert Dale Owen, *Moral Physiology: Or, a Brief and Plain Treatise on the Population Question* (London: J. Watson, 1844), 46.

¹⁶⁷ Gordon, *Woman’s Body*, 85.

¹⁶⁸ Gordon, *Woman’s Body*, 85.

¹⁶⁹ Gordon, *Woman’s Body*, 87.

¹⁷⁰ Gordon, *Woman’s Body*, 86.

¹⁷¹ Laurie Robertson-Lorant, *Melville: A Biography* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1996), 284.

¹⁷² Carolyn Thomas de la Pena, *The Body Electric: How Strange Machines Built the Modern American* (New York: New York University, 2003), 145.

¹⁷³ G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes Toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 267.

¹⁷⁴ De la Pena, *The Body*, 145.

maternal and sexual instincts. Women were not immune to arguments against masturbation, though. Medical experts claimed that women who masturbated were “particularly exposed to hysteric fits, or dreadful vaporous affections.”¹⁷⁵ Masturbation, in fact, caused any illness doctors could not reliably explain or cure. Doctors and ministers further condemned masturbation as a waste of a man’s “life force” and a cause of nymphomania in women.¹⁷⁶

In what appeared as a paradox, however, some physicians promoted sexual intercourse as vital to the health of men. Henry Hanchett, a medical doctor, suggested that ignorance led to disease and vice, and by publishing and informing the public, doctors could reduce these issues.¹⁷⁷ Publications, then, sought not to hide sexuality from men as doctors supposed that sexual intercourse would lead to a healthier man. Doctors maintained that men reabsorbed some of their reproductive fluids, which led to a physically and mentally stronger male. Further, internal secretions that occurred during sex heightened sexual emotions and compelled them to share their life-giving force.¹⁷⁸ Dr. John H. Kellogg, inventor of corn flakes, stated that semen helped to repair the male body internally.¹⁷⁹ Some physicians even thought that if male sexual organs went unused, they would disintegrate and result in feeble-mindedness.¹⁸⁰ Dr. Hanchett, author of *Sexual Health*, supported the idea of engaging in intercourse every three to four days.¹⁸¹ If no life-threatening illnesses occurred, men were to engage in sexual activity until age fifty or sixty.¹⁸² Medical briefs proposed, however, that if sexual intercourse and loss of semen

¹⁷⁵ Henry Thomas Kitchener, *Letters on Marriage, on the Causes of Matrimonial Infidelity, and on the Reciprocal Relations of the Sexes* (London: C. Chapple, 1812), 63.

¹⁷⁶ Robertson-Lorant, *Melville*, 284.

¹⁷⁷ Michael Edward Melody and Linda May Peterson, *Teaching America About Sex: Marriage Guides and Sex Manuals from the Late Victorians to Dr. Ruth* (New York: New York University, 1999), 21.

¹⁷⁸ Melody and Peterson, *Teaching*, 98.

¹⁷⁹ John Harvey Kellogg, *Plain Facts for Old and Young* (Burlington, IA: I.F. Segner, 1882), 51.

¹⁸⁰ Melody and Peterson, *Teaching*, 98.

¹⁸¹ Melody and Peterson, *Teaching*, 30.

¹⁸² Theodore H. van de Velde, *Ideal Marriage; its Physiology and Technique* (New York: Random House, 1930), 139-141.

should weaken the body, energy can be regained through the ingestion of salty foods.¹⁸³ Still, this scientific rhetoric of sexuality promoted the continued existence of prostitution as a necessary outlet for men's health.

By far the largest and most pressing concern for this melding of science and sexuality was venereal disease. Medical professionals gained new understanding of the causes and transmission of disease and reports from Europe and U.S. urban centers of the extent of outbreaks prompted new study and action from the medical community. New York alone reported 243,000 cases a year and Pittsburgh 20,000.¹⁸⁴ Venereal disease threatened the family in particular. Men who visited prostitutes found themselves particularly vulnerable and usually passed diseases on to their wives who in turn could infect newborns.¹⁸⁵ The consequences of such spread of disease distressed the medical community, and Prince Morrow soon emerged as the leading American on the subject. He not only completed a report about the extent of venereal disease in New York but also attended the Second International Conference on Venereal Disease in Brussels.¹⁸⁶ Morrow returned from the conference dedicated to awakening Americans to the dangers posed by venereal disease even within the confines of marriage. Morrow published *Social Diseases and Marriage*, which recounted the many dangers venereal disease posed to women, children, and the Anglo-American "race."¹⁸⁷ Based on the 1890 census, Morrow predicted that one in seven marriages result in sterility due to venereal disease.¹⁸⁸ This use of

¹⁸³ S. R. Percy, "Sexual Debility—Vitalized Hypophosphites," *Quarterly Epitome of American Practical Medicine and Surgery* 3 (1882): 231-232.

¹⁸⁴ Pittsburgh Morals Efficiency Commission, *Report and Recommendations of Morals Efficiency Commission* (Pittsburgh, 1913), 21.

¹⁸⁵ Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880* (New York: Oxford University, 1985), 14.

¹⁸⁶ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 14.

¹⁸⁷ Prince A. Morrow, "Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis," *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 154 (June 14, 1906): 674.

¹⁸⁸ Prince A. Morrow, *Social Diseases and Marriage* (New York: Lea, 1904), 269.

statistics and data combined with scientific terminology would be duplicated later in studies of prostitution.

Moreover, although these doctors seemed concerned with the plight of women, they in fact accepted the Victorian ideal of women as naturally weak and innocent.¹⁸⁹ Morrow, for instance, wrote that women suffered because they knew their “husbands had soiled them with an impure disease.”¹⁹⁰ The term “innocent infection” described a woman or child who contracted a venereal disease as a result of a husband’s promiscuous behavior.¹⁹¹ To make matters worse, understanding of the germ theory had not been perfected by medical experts, let alone average Americans. Americans in over-crowded cities lived in constant fear of contracting an “innocent infection” through even the simplest activities, such as sharing a pencil or drinking at a public water fountain.¹⁹² Such diagnoses, though, allowed upper- and middle-class patients to retain their morality instead of admitting their sexual indiscretions. This also contributed to growing fears of immigrants and lower-class citizens as physicians now felt that these groups created “a circulation which continually tends to equalize the distribution of morality and disease.”¹⁹³ Physicians argued that disease must, then, be controlled among the working and lower classes first.¹⁹⁴

Morrow saw diseases like syphilis and other venereal diseases as threats to the very foundation of family and detailed the effects on children grimly. His analysis of the situation led him to conclude that “no other disease is so susceptible of hereditary transmission, and so fatal to

¹⁸⁹ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 16.

¹⁹⁰ Morrow, *Social*, 30.

¹⁹¹ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 22.

¹⁹² Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 21-22.

¹⁹³ Howard Kelly, “Social Diseases and Their Prevention,” *Social Diseases* 1 (1910): 17.

¹⁹⁴ Kelly, “Social,” 17.

the offspring.”¹⁹⁵ In fact physicians considered venereal disease to be as fatal in its consequences as abortion.¹⁹⁶ Morrow reasoned that because venereal diseases negatively affected offspring, these diseases led to the “degeneration of the race.”¹⁹⁷ French physician Jean Alfred Fournier confirmed Morrow’s suspicions when he demonstrated that children with venereal diseases had a stronger tendency than those without to contract meningitis or to be born with severe mental illnesses.¹⁹⁸

Scientists focused their efforts not only on the venereal disease epidemic but also on the hope of creating and maintaining the fittest genetic pool possible. Social Darwinism emerged as a popular theory in both the U.S. and England in the 1870s, originating with Herbert Spencer. In *On the Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin identified the process through which evolution progressed or created a species, but Herbert Spencer took those biological ideas and applied them to society. Spencer coined the term “survival of the fittest,” which suggests competition between different individuals for access to limited resources.¹⁹⁹ The difference, sociologists and scientists noted, was that evolution in humans consisted of social changes whereas animals gained individual alterations.²⁰⁰ Darwin himself tried to apply his biological framework to mental and social issues with his later works *Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* and *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*. He did not, however, construct an entire socio-political worldview by himself and instead merely adopted many of the more dominant opinions of his day. Darwin, for instance, indicated his belief that Anglo-Saxon nations had

¹⁹⁵ Morrow, *Social*, 78.

¹⁹⁶ Abraham L. Wolbarst, “The Venereal Diseases: A Menace to the National Welfare,” *Medical Review* 62, no. 10 (October 1913): 373.

¹⁹⁷ Morrow, *Social*, 21.

¹⁹⁸ J. William White and Edward Marin, *Genito-Urinary Surgery and Venereal Diseases* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1897), 458.

¹⁹⁹ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology* (New York: Appleton, 1897), 444-445.

²⁰⁰ Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945* (New York: Cambridge University, 1997), 170.

evolved beyond that of other cultures, which remained in a more primitive state.²⁰¹ Spencer too considered Anglo-Saxons a higher race because of their ability to control their more primal sexual urges which other races failed to repress.²⁰² The study of anthropology matured a generation after Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, and anthropologists' findings supported the idea that savages ranked below Europeans on the evolutionary ladder.²⁰³ John Lubbock further advanced the theory that primitive people had progressed into modern man and remnants of savagery remained even amongst the Victorians. His argument suggested a missing link existed between man and ape.²⁰⁴

Social Darwinism spawned several pseudoscientific movements devoted entirely to identifying and ensuring those with the best reproduced and progressed humanity. Eugenics and racial hygiene literature proliferated in America. Discourse of these groups involved a scientific and objective rendering of human inferiority and superiority. Heredity and other biological processes determined these classifications, not society.²⁰⁵ Qualities and key characteristics, such as self-control and rational thinking, gauged a race, individual, or group's superiority or inferiority.²⁰⁶ Moreover, scientists and social planners assumed that the idea of animal husbandry, or the practice of breeding more profitable and desirable livestock, applied to humans as well. A biogenetic law developed by which scientists believed that as an individual develops into an adult it climbs every step on the evolutionary ladder, with the human fetus at first

²⁰¹ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, 36.

²⁰² Herbert Spencer, *Principles*, 499.

²⁰³ John P. Jackson and Nadine M. Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 89.

²⁰⁴ Sir John Lubbock, *Prehistoric Times as Illustrated by Ancient Remains and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1878), 526.

²⁰⁵ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, 217.

²⁰⁶ Spencer, *Principles*, 498-500.

resembling a lower species and ultimately ending as an adult mammal.²⁰⁷ Francis Galton, Charles Darwin's cousin, proposed the science of eugenics in 1883, which held that unwanted and "degenerate" elements of society could be eradicated with proper regulations and controls.²⁰⁸ Other likeminded individuals flourished in American publications. Victoria Woodhull, for instance, insisted that criminality, feeble-mindedness, and poverty resulted from heredity, not society, and could not be cured.²⁰⁹ Social Darwinists thus stressed the importance of biology, using evolution as a metaphor for progress within society. They drew upon scientific language and theories and applied them to politics and social issues. Eugenics, a branch of social Darwinism, emphasized the importance of biological inheritance and offered realistic plans for manipulating heredity in order to obtain the most socially advantageous outcome. The metaphors relating to natural biology became popular, especially with respect to sexuality, among Victorians in the latter half of the century.

Considering the revitalized interest in science and a growth of new disciplines relating to it, such as anthropology and criminology, the scientific analysis of prostitution naturally developed. These examinations typically did not argue for the abolition of prostitution but merely suggested that because of health issues relating to venereal disease, the dangers of prostitution could best be controlled by the state. Such arguments maintained that prostitution would always exist and served a certain niche within society but required a degree of regulation. William Sanger published the first extensive study of prostitution in 1858 entitled *The History of Prostitution; its Extent, Causes, and Effects Throughout the World*. Later surveys of prostitution frequently refer to Sanger's study. *The History of Prostitution* drew from existing works on

²⁰⁷ Ernst Haeckel, *The History of Creation, or, the Development of the Earth and Its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes* (New York: D. Appleton, 1892), 356.

²⁰⁸ Sir Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* (London: Macmillan, 1869), 364-365.

²⁰⁹ Victoria C. Woodhull, *Humanitarian Government* (London: 1890), 30.

prostitution, such as Alex Parent-Duchatelet's *Prostitution in Paris*, as well as many medical sources. Police captains also provided counts of bawdy houses and arrests for prostitution in order to obtain a more accurate calculation of prostitutes in New York.²¹⁰ Sanger attempted to approach his study with scientific objectivity. Instead of portraying prostitution in a moral or immoral light, Sanger insisted on presenting it as a job. Sanger worked as a physician at Blackwell's Island Women's Prison in New York City and interviewed two thousand inmates for his examination of prostitution.²¹¹ Using a more scientific approach, Sanger surveyed the women and compiled their data into charts. The purpose of his study was to understand the social, medical, and legal problems relating to prostitution. Sanger realized the danger of investigating such a taboo subject, saying, "he who dares allude to the subject of prostitution in any other than a mysterious and whispered manner, must prepare to meet the frowns and censure of society."²¹²

William Sanger demonstrated, for the first time conclusively, that prostitution's chief cause was poverty, not the weakness of women.²¹³ Sanger asserted that his figures represented the entirety of the U.S.: "This mean may be fairly assumed as the proportion existing in all the largest cities of the Union."²¹⁴ He also suggested that from his data a fairly accurate count for all prostitutes in the United States could be calculated. His estimate was one prostitute for every fifty-two men in America.²¹⁵ Women normally worked as prostitutes for four years.²¹⁶ Startlingly, half of the women surveyed were married while employed as prostitutes, but many had been deserted by their husbands. Sanger found that of the two thousand surveyed, 513 cited

²¹⁰ William Sanger, *The History of Prostitution; its Extent, Causes, and Effects Throughout the World* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1858), 579.

²¹¹ Rosalyn Fraad Baxandall, Linda Gordon, and Susan Reverby, *America's Working Women: A Documentary History, 1600 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 112.

²¹² Sanger, *The History*, 17.

²¹³ Sanger, *The History*, 326.

²¹⁴ Sanger, *The History*, 342.

²¹⁵ Sanger, *The History*, 342.

²¹⁶ Sanger, *The History*, 348.

“inclination,” or sexual desire, as a reason for becoming a prostitute. However, he insisted that, in fact, other factors contributed to this rather than it being the sole factor behind the voluntary resort to prostitution.²¹⁷ For instance, he cited one former servant girl who had been making only “one dollar a month in wages,” forcing her to take up prostitution.²¹⁸ Another woman had children to support and earned only “\$1.50 a week as a tailoress [sic].”²¹⁹ Still others claimed to have been robbed on their first day in the United States or had no home and no money to rely upon.²²⁰ He listed each response given by the women surveyed, a short analysis of these answers, and the probability of solving the problem through some form of social control.

Prostitution seemed to Sanger to be ineradicable and immortal with the only hope lying in regulation. Prussia, where prostitution was regulated, was cited as a modern solution to the problem that Sanger believed “can never be suppressed.”²²¹ He made numerous connections to unregulated prostitution and venereal disease, which strengthened his argument for state regulation of the problem. Of the prostitutes interviewed, 40 percent admitted to having syphilis or gonorrhea at least once. He further suggested that the abolition of prostitution in Berlin resulted in an increase in venereal disease spread.²²² Although Sanger’s analysis contributed immensely to the study of prostitution, he limited his sample to women who most likely worked as streetwalkers rather than in brothels.²²³ Regardless, Sanger refrained from making a moral argument, advocated regulation, and sought to examine prostitution in the most objective light he could manage.

²¹⁷ Sanger, *The History*, 474 and 488.

²¹⁸ Sanger, *The History*, 491.

²¹⁹ Sanger, *The History*, 491.

²²⁰ Sanger, *The History*, 491.

²²¹ Sanger, *The History*, 240 and 24.

²²² Sanger, *The History*, 487 and 240.

²²³ Rebecca S. Katz, “Prostitution,” *Encyclopedia of White-Collar and Corporate Crime*, ed. by Lawrence M. Salinger (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2004), 645.

Sanger's analysis of prostitution prompted further scientific exploration of the "necessary evil," and the budding field of psychology broadened the possible avenues of exploration. Psychology became popular in the late 1870s beginning with Wilhelm Wundt, who founded "experimental psychology" and introduced psychology into a laboratory setting.²²⁴ As a result, psychology transformed from a philosophical attempt to understand the soul into a study of mental functions by way of the scientific method. Early psychological examinations of prostitutes reasoned that some deficiency or mental illness caused women to choose prostitution as a profession. "Moral insanity" was often cited as a genuine mental illness most closely related to madness, though today it could be defined as "sociopathy."

Psychologists believed those afflicted with moral insanity exhibited amoral behavior or violated some established moral norm and was typically observed in children and younger adults.²²⁵ It manifested itself in individuals who exhibited a "lack of self-control, a weak volition, and failure, if not absence of, ... a full cerebral development."²²⁶ Psychologists stated that moral insanity caused a loss of self-control that led to "excitable, violent, and extravagant" behavior.²²⁷ Those with the illness displayed "tendencies to vagrancy, prostitution, and lawlessness."²²⁸ Prostitutes, in fact, exhibited a specific variety of moral insanity, prone to "alcoholism...pathological lying...and thievery."²²⁹

Some psychologists cited "socioeconomic, cultural, and educational conditions" as the causes of moral insanity while others considered it a genuine mental illness, an "innate organic

²²⁴ Solomon Diamond, "Wundt Before Leipzig," *Wilhelm Wundt in History: The Making of a Scientific Psychology*, ed. by R.W. Rieber and David Kent Robinson (New York: Kluwer Academic, 2001), 29.

²²⁵ Lev Semenovič Vygotskij, "Moral Insanity," *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky* (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), 150.

²²⁶ I.N. Kerlin, "Moral Imbecility," *Medical News* 50 (March 19, 1887): 328. {PAGES 326-328}

²²⁷ David N. Weisstub, *Enquiry on Mental Competency* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1990), 345-346.

²²⁸ Kerlin, "Moral Imbecility," 328.

²²⁹ William Tait, *Magdalenism: An Inquiry into the Extent, Causes, and Consequences of Prostitution in Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: P. Rickard, 1842), 51 and 55.

defect.”²³⁰ Social Darwinists, particularly eugenicists, also contributed to the study of moral insanity and named epilepsy and hysteria as two common symptoms.²³¹ They further considered moral insanity an inheritable illness often resulting in prostitution. Doctors supported the theory that moral insanity was inherited and innate. They studied family histories and often found “a history of neurotic conditions and of insanity in other members of the family.”²³² Injury or disease could also result in the illness, especially high fevers.²³³

Unfortunately, moral insanity was “incurable.”²³⁴ Doctors recommended sequestering those displaying symptoms to keep them from committing “more serious exhibitions of evil.”²³⁵ In the case of prostitution, psychologists declared that women were literally forced into a life of sex work by virtue of mental defect but showed signs of exemplary character otherwise.²³⁶ Prostitution, then, became a naturally-occurring phenomenon that could not be cured, only controlled. Psychologists felt that closely policing or medically treating prostitutes worked best with the problem of such a natural evil. Eradication of the condition was not possible and the individual woman, while regrettably ill, could not be held responsible for her condition. Legally, if a doctor diagnosed a patient with moral insanity, he or she (though usually it was a she), was committed and placed in a mental institution rather than a regular prison.²³⁷ Typically, if a woman or child disregarded a societal norm, a husband, father, or other member of the community called for a doctor who diagnosed the individual.²³⁸ Still, scientific theories asserted

²³⁰ Vygotskij, “Moral Insanity,” 150.

²³¹ Donald J. Childs, *Modernism and Eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the Culture of Degeneration* (New York: Cambridge University, 2001), 123.

²³² Kerlin, “Moral Imbecility,” 328.

²³³ Charles K. Mills, “Some Forms of Insanity and Quasi-Insanity in Children,” *American Lancet* 17 (1893): 336.

²³⁴ Kerlin, “Moral Imbecility,” 328.

²³⁵ Kerlin, “Moral Imbecility,” 328.

²³⁶ Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford University, 1989), 185.

²³⁷ John S. Hughes, *The Letters of a Victorian Madwoman* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1993), 33.

²³⁸ John S. Hughes, *The Letters*, 33.

that the unconventional behavior exhibited by, for example, a prostitute was no fault of her own, could not be helped or cured, and as a result, would best be allowed to continue in a regulated fashion.

The belief that prostitutes inherited their particular brand of debauchery extended well beyond psychology, and social Darwinists along with criminologists strongly considered this to be the case. Researchers identified different types of degenerates that included the tramp, the prostitute, and the pauper.²³⁹ Social Darwinists used biological terminology to insist that female bodies bore an infection similar to lust.²⁴⁰ Criminologists, led by surgeon G. Frank Lydston, thought degenerates occupied the lowest rung on the evolutionary ladder and combined the lowest hierarchical races and classes in America.²⁴¹ Worse still, some scientists insisted that noxious fumes rose from the poverty-stricken regions of cities, occupied by prostitutes, saloons, and gambling halls, and could transmit degeneracy to the upper classes.²⁴² The adherence to “regular habits” and good moral hygiene kept middle-class Americans from becoming debauched, degenerate, or indulging in excessive sexual pleasures.

Social Darwinists believed lower classes, and especially prostitutes, had a more primitive sex drive through which sexual desires could hardly be controlled.²⁴³ According to social Darwinists, immigrants displayed symptoms of degeneracy and feeble-mindedness more than other groups as their biological history attested. Criminologists felt that though physical heredity

²³⁹ Daniel E. Bender, *American Abyss: Savagery and Civilization in the Age of Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2009), 151.

²⁴⁰ Sarah Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 114.

²⁴¹ Bender, *American Abyss*, 152.

²⁴² A. Susan Williams, *The Rich Man and the Diseased Poor in Early Victorian Literature* (New York: Humanities Press International, 1987), 14.

²⁴³ Andrew P. Lyons and Harriet Lyons, *Irregular Connections: A History of Anthropology and Sexuality* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2004), 104.

played a role in the development of the prostitute, the environment was also a factor.²⁴⁴

Sunstroke experienced by an ancestor, for instance, was believed to hasten the process to degeneracy.²⁴⁵ Prostitutes and immigrants could not be reformed, then, for their very genetic structure hosted the disease of degeneracy.²⁴⁶

The physical appearance of those afflicted allegedly demonstrated their degeneracy with the “vast amount of asymmetry, facial asymmetry, facial disharmony and heavily moulded [sic] features.”²⁴⁷ Criminologists agreed that appearance denoted degeneracy, especially in the case of prostitutes. Cesare Lombroso, an Italian criminologist whose works influenced American thought in the field heavily, promoted investigating prostitutes’ physical features. He suggested the brain size, skull shape, and other physical features could identify a prostitute.²⁴⁸ Flat noses, handle-shaped ears, protruding or fake teeth, and receding foreheads were commonly considered physical indicators of prostitution.²⁴⁹ Analysis of prostitution populations held in various detention centers found that “cranial anomalies especially have been observed.”²⁵⁰ Studies showed that 44 percent of prostitutes had skull deformities, 42 percent had face deformities, and 54 percent had teeth deformities.²⁵¹ Of those who bore the physical markings of prostitutes, 53 percent were found to be feeble-minded as well.²⁵² Researchers used a Binet test, or early IQ test, to measure prostitutes’ level of intelligence.²⁵³ In fact, when compared to “peasant women...prostitutes were found to possess more physical deformities and less skull capacity

²⁴⁴ Bender, *American Abyss*, 152.

²⁴⁵ Eugene S. Talbot, *Degeneracy, its Causes, Signs, and Results* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1898), 140.

²⁴⁶ Bender, *American Abyss*, 134.

²⁴⁷ Edward A. Ross, “Ethnological Notes and Observations, ca. 1912 (Vol. 1),” as qtd. in Bender, *American Abyss*, 146.

²⁴⁸ Cesare Lombroso, *The Female Offender* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1895), 40.

²⁴⁹ Talbot, *Degeneracy*, 321.

²⁵⁰ Walter Clarke, “Prostitution and Mental Deficiency,” *Social Hygiene* 1 (1915): 369.

²⁵¹ Clarke, “Prostitution,” 368.

²⁵² Talbot, *Degeneracy*, 321.

²⁵³ Clarke, “Prostitution,” 369.

than the women with whom they were compared.”²⁵⁴ Criminologists concluded from this that “the prostitute, as a rule, is a degenerate, being the subject of an arrested development tainted with morbid heredity and presenting the stigmata of physical and mental degeneracy” from her “imperfect evolution.”²⁵⁵ Prostitutes possessed degenerate brains and “little power of resisting primitive and savage impulses.”²⁵⁶ Consequently, from a scientific, not a moral, standpoint, prostitution necessarily existed as a result of inherited anomalies that could not be altered, but the resulting class of “degenerates” could be closely monitored and controlled to some degree.

While discussion of prostitution transitioned from moral to scientific discourse, the profession itself remained a necessary evil of modern societies, ineradicable and innate. Still, as science unraveled the perilous effects of prostitution, Americans grew concerned that perhaps a solution to the ever-present trade in sex was called for. Science, law, and police forces combined their expertise to formulate the most rational solution based on existing data. The regulation of prostitution in some manner overshadowed all other options and could be “traced equally in scientific opinion and in popular feeling.”²⁵⁷ Suppression, medical professionals advised, “has been attempted by popes, emperors, kings, and republics, but it has never succeeded, and it never will.”²⁵⁸ Without regulation prostitution simply morphed into “more insidious and clandestine forms.”²⁵⁹

Experts in America agreed that the method which had been used successfully in Europe could hold the answer. In such a system, doctors inspected the health of prostitutes at intervals,

²⁵⁴ Clarke, “Prostitution,” 369.

²⁵⁵ Talbot, *Degeneracy*, 319.

²⁵⁶ G.T.W. Patrick, “The Relation of Psychology to Medicine,” *North American Journal of Homeopathy* (May 1899): 286-287.

²⁵⁷ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1900), 332.

²⁵⁸ Ernest W. Cushing, “Sociological Aspects of Gonorrhoea,” *Transactions of the American Gynecological Society* Vol. 22 (1897): 175. {PAGES 170-185}

²⁵⁹ Cushing, “Sociological,” 175.

and diseased women were hospitalized while those who were healthy could continue to practice their trade. Regulation began in France in 1804 with a loose arrangement that included licensing of prostitutes but did not require stringent medical examinations initially, and England followed suit in the 1860s with the Contagious Diseases Acts.²⁶⁰ Medical inspection, however, originated in the U.S. (Nashville and Memphis) during the Civil War when Union Army officials became concerned over soldiers contracting venereal disease.²⁶¹ Such regulation was consciously modeled on France and England's efforts. Regulation allowed the practice to exist with a lowered risk of venereal disease and also prevented women from soliciting in public and "offending respectable women."²⁶² Noticeably, countries with regulations in place saw venereal disease "limited to some extent, and that the condition is decidedly worse in other countries."²⁶³ Though weaknesses did exist, such as prostitutes contracting diseases after examinations or failure of all prostitutes to be examined, this method seemed to work quite well in protecting people from venereal disease.

Knowledgeable individuals like Dr. William Sanger took a special interest in the way Paris's police regulated the brothels there. He emphasized the tax incentive Paris gained from regulation and cited that with a tax on prostitutes, the city made "from seventy-five to ninety thousand francs per annum."²⁶⁴ The money funded clinics used to inspect prostitutes for venereal disease, and those who did not visit the clinic at their appointed time were fined in addition to being taxed.²⁶⁵ Such a system benefitted both the city and the prostitutes without placing a great number of women in prisons or the state's care, which would have been much more draining

²⁶⁰ D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate*, 148.

²⁶¹ D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate*, 148.

²⁶² D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate*, 148.

²⁶³ Cushing, "Sociological," 175.

²⁶⁴ Sanger, *History*, 152.

²⁶⁵ Sanger, *History*, 152.

financially.²⁶⁶ Experts attested that prisons did nothing to help the women anyway were essentially “useless” in controlling prostitution.²⁶⁷ In addition, ten inspectors patrolled one-tenth of the city each to ensure that regulations were followed. These inspectors did not function as a part of the regular police force but could call upon them if resistance occurred.²⁶⁸

Specific regulations of Paris with regard to prostitution were plentiful, but Sanger chose to highlight a few key points. For instance, the city authorized whether a person could own and run a brothel or not, and these could only be kept by women. Any woman previously convicted of a crime could not run a brothel, guaranteeing that she and the house will not give the inspectors or police any trouble. The owner must also have been a prostitute herself in order to eliminate people who do not understand the profession or have not experienced vice from entering a complicated, often demoralizing world.²⁶⁹ By the 1870s, Americans began criticizing the regulation in France, saying it had utterly failed. However, when the city of St. Louis sent a representative to France and Germany to examine their regulatory practices, he found it strange that if the law so completely failed the people and government would maintain it.²⁷⁰ He thought it “stranger still...the system of regulating prostitution has in some form and to some extent been adopted in almost every civilized country....and they contemplate no change.”²⁷¹

England used a similar system by which prostitutes registered with the government and submitted to vaginal examinations. Instead of focusing on entire cities, the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s concentrated primarily on areas where soldiers and sailors gathered, such as

²⁶⁶ Sanger, *History*, 151.

²⁶⁷ Prison Systems Enquiry Committee, *English Prisons Today: Being the Report of the Prison System Enquiry Committee* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1922), 338.

²⁶⁸ Sanger, *History*, 152.

²⁶⁹ Sanger, *History*, 142.

²⁷⁰ St. Louis (MO) Health Department, *Annual Report of the Year Ending* Vols. 5-6 (St. Louis: St. Louis Health Department, 1872), 38.

²⁷¹ St. Louis Health Department, *Annual Report*, 38.

wharves.²⁷² The most rational reasoning behind regulation suggested it lowered the risk of venereal disease and its spread to women and children. Doctors in the U.S. agreed that regulation could best control the health problems related to prostitution. Dr. J. Marion Sims, president of the American Medical Association, advised the adoption of regulation in large American cities.²⁷³ The English government also found that abolishing the practice of prostitution altogether actually led to the criminalization of the police force as they accepted bribes from brothel owners and sex workers.²⁷⁴

Medical experts and legal professionals alike recommended a tolerated and regulated form of prostitution for the U.S. similar to that of England and France. One strong reason for this recommendation was the degree to which vice had already embedded itself into cities through politicians and police forces. For the most part cities accepted prostitution as a semilegal part of urban life, but because of prostitution's strange position as necessary and also evil, politicians offered protection to the trade. Municipal regulation of prostitution became the norm for most large cities in America, and politicians used this to extort large sums of money from brothels by claiming they had violated a local law. Policemen extracted money from brothels as well, making up to five-hundred dollars a month at a time when most laborers made around fifty dollars a month.²⁷⁵ Although this figure seemed high, even small brothels typically paid between five and ten dollars per girl per month to the police.²⁷⁶ A study of Chicago vice claimed that "Affiliation, almost inevitable in American city politics, between vice and politics, was a heritage from an earlier period, when the policy of the police was to keep up a decent

²⁷² D'Emilio and Freedman, 148.

²⁷³ Aaron M. Powell, *State Regulation of Vice: Regulation Efforts in America* (New York: Wood and Holbrook, 1878), 14.

²⁷⁴ Prison Systems Enquiry Committee, *English*, 338.

²⁷⁵ State Senate of New York, *Report and Proceedings of the Senate Committee Appointed to Investigate the Police Department of the City of New York* Vol. 1 (Albany: 1895), 1005.

²⁷⁶ W.T. Stead, *Satan's Invisible World Displayed* (New York: R.F. Fenno & Co., 1897), 170.

appearance, while tolerating vice.”²⁷⁷ Politicians also commonly visited brothels themselves and offered official protection to those they frequented the most.²⁷⁸ Charles Parkhurst, an anti-prostitution reformer, noted that “the strength of the municipal administration is practically leagued with them rather than arranged against them.”²⁷⁹

Though thoroughly entangled in prostitution, municipal officials understood the dangers of abolition and saw regulation as the best method for maintaining cities. Prostitution control, after all, concerned the maintenance of public order, a responsibility associated with the local government or chief of police. For example, with no regulations in place prostitutes typically walked the wealthier streets in town, where they could find more affluent clients. This ultimately meant that property values on those streets plummeted.²⁸⁰ However, regulation could sequester prostitutes to a redlight district built specifically for vice, which allowed for “the value of surrounding property [to be] depreciated in the least degree, thereby benefitting both the private interest and the public revenue.”²⁸¹ Additionally, municipal officials recognized the growing health problems posed by syphilis and gonorrhoea and saw regulation as the best, and perhaps only, way to contain such public health concerns. Municipal regulation, moreover, would bring prostitution under new restrictions, such as taxes, limited number of brothels and hours of operation, and actually enforceable penalties for those who ignored the rules. American towns and cities typically established segregated vice districts to deal with the issue, and by the “first two decades of the twentieth century there was at least one red-light district in virtually every

²⁷⁷ Walter C. Reckless, *Vice in Chicago* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1933), 271.

²⁷⁸ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 72.

²⁷⁹ C.H. Parkhurst, *Our Fight With Tammany* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895), 6.

²⁸⁰ James Lincoln Collier, *The Rise of Selfishness in America* (New York: Oxford University, 1991), 51.

²⁸¹ St. Louis Health Department, *Prostitution in its Relation to the Public Health* (St. Louis: 1873), 11-12.

American city with a population over 100,000, and in many smaller ones too.”²⁸² Since 1857 the city of New Orleans legally accommodated prostitution in this manner and found it to be the most effective means of controlling what city officials felt was an inevitable “sin.”²⁸³ Rationally, municipal leaders and police forces agreed that the best approach to prostitution was regulation, which allowed the deeply entrenched trade in sex to continue while most efficiently decreasing the spread of venereal disease and preserving cities.

City officials in America modeled much of their efforts on those of Europe and pointed to the 1873 European Medical Congress as a sign that regulation was the most modern solution to prostitution. At the International Medical Congress, held in Vienna, every nation that attended signed an international agreement promising that all prostitutes in licensed brothels would be medically tested.²⁸⁴ In fact, the Congress directed each nation to “institute a system of confidential notification of the disease to a sanitary authority” and to make certain that everyone could see a doctor for diagnosis and treatment of syphilis.²⁸⁵ A unanimous decision reached among medical experts from around the world stated that the only true way to deal with the diseases occurring with prostitution was regulation. Specialists insisted on establishing an international law in order to extend and strengthen the regulation movement.²⁸⁶ The International League of Doctors and International Medical Congresses promoted regulation based on scientific facts and efficacy.²⁸⁷ Doctors scoffed at the idea that regulation bolstered prostitution and maintained “that its actual aim is to make marriage safe, and to protect the ignorant and

²⁸² Mark Thomas Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1980), 3.

²⁸³ Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2004), 106.

²⁸⁴ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 9.

²⁸⁵ “State Control of Syphilis,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 61, no. 1 (Sept. 13, 1913): 894.

²⁸⁶ Millicent Fawcett and E.M. Turner, *Josephine Butler, Her Work and Principles, and Their Meaning for the Twentieth Century* (London: Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, 1927), 92.

²⁸⁷ British, Continental, and General Federation, *Annual Report 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th* (1876), 2.

innocent and helpless from a danger they can in no other way escape.”²⁸⁸ Based on data from around the world, the doctors concluded that regulation “involving the sanitary and police control of public women, have undoubtedly accomplished a large measure of good.”²⁸⁹ Though sanitarians perhaps served a “moral good,” they held that a doctor could only be “incidentally a moralist, and must not be diverted from his legitimate mission of waging war against disease as the enemy of mankind.”²⁹⁰

Leaders in several American cities took the advice of doctors and criminologists and legalized prostitution in order to regulate it. Recognized as the most prominent example, St. Louis made prostitution legal in 1870. The Boards of Police Commissioners and Health passed the Social Evil Ordinance in order to limit the spread of venereal disease and to better control the housing and behavior of prostitutes.²⁹¹ The ordinance itself passed using a loophole in the state law.²⁹² The two words “or regulate” were added to an amendment of the city charter aimed at the suppression of vice.²⁹³ The system was modeled on that of Germany, and St. Louis officials sent a German American representative to Germany in order to observe a working method of regulation.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁸ William MacCormac and George Henry Makins, *Transactions of the International Medical Congress: Seventh Session Held in London, August 2nd to 9th, 1881* (London: J.W. Kolckmann, 1881), 461.

²⁸⁹ MacCormac and Makins, *Transactions*, 461.

²⁹⁰ MacCormac and Makins, *Transactions*, 461.

²⁹¹ Katherine T. Corbett, *In Her Place: A Guide to St. Louis Women's History* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 1999), 127.

²⁹² David Pivar, *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868-1900* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 52.

²⁹³ William Dwight Porter Bliss, ed., “Prostitution: In America,” *The Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (New York: Arno Press, 1908), 1132.

²⁹⁴ Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005), 163.

The ordinance passed on the belief that the government should protect individuals from a public health standpoint.²⁹⁵ Dr. William L. Barrett, for instance, stated that prostitution was “destroying the health and vigor of a large portion of our inhabitants, and tainting their blood with an ineradicable poison.”²⁹⁶ City leaders hoped for a decrease in venereal disease and built the Social Evil Hospital to treat infected prostitutes.²⁹⁷ Six physicians examined prostitutes in six districts of the city after the women registered with the city.²⁹⁸ Prostitutes paid a small amount if treated, which paid for doctors’ salaries and the upkeep of the hospital itself.²⁹⁹ Doctors succeeded in treating venereal disease in the prostitute population, but those women represented only a small portion of the sexually active and infected St. Louis residents. Officially sanctioned regulation did provide accurate statistics with required registration. This showed that the number of prostitutes to inhabitants was roughly 1 to 242 or 1 to 60 adult males.³⁰⁰

Tolerating prostitution served other practical purposes as it generated money for the city when people began to invest more heavily in prostitution as a legitimate business.³⁰¹ By registering as a prostitute, women also proclaimed their status and no man could be charged with her rape.³⁰² It protected men from pickpockets as well because women who stole from sleeping clients lost their licenses. Furthermore, the system did not seek to encourage prostitution in young women and forbade the registration of those under eighteen.³⁰³ The city repealed the

²⁹⁵ Karen Graves, *Girls’ Schooling during the Progressive Era: From Female Scholar to Domesticated Citizen* (New York: Garland Pub., 1998), 45.

²⁹⁶ William L. Barrett in *St. Louis Board of Health, 3rd Annual Report (1870)*, 29-32.

²⁹⁷ Corbett, *In Her Place*, 127.

²⁹⁸ John C. Burnham, “Medical Inspection of Prostitutes in America in the Nineteenth Century: The St. Louis Experiment and its Sequel,” in *Prostitution*, ed. by Nancy Cott (Munich: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 219.

²⁹⁹ Corbett, *In Her Place*, 127.

³⁰⁰ Walworth Jenkins, *Prostitution and its Management: Consideration of the License System in Europe and St. Louis Missouri* (Louisville, KY: Bradley and Gilbert, 1873), 8-9.

³⁰¹ Graves, *Girls’ Schooling*, 46.

³⁰² Wood, *The Freedom*, 161.

³⁰³ Wood, *The Freedom*, 161.

ordinance four years later as the tide began to turn against a purely scientific and medical opinion of prostitution.

Red-light districts, however, remained open in almost all American cities as sequestered locations for containing illegal sexual activity. Truthfully, such districts existed with or without official laws by way of police action, and legal regulation merely created additional restrictions, required regular medical exams, and used licensing fees for hospitals. The term “red-light district” supposedly originated in the American West where railroad workers hung their red signal lanterns outside of brothels as a sign to other workers of their presence there in case of emergency.³⁰⁴ In fact, according to the federal census of 1890, 37 percent of cities with a population over eight thousand confessed to having some sort of vice district.³⁰⁵ Omaha and Cleveland, along with many other cities, managed red-light districts though not through any officially legislated system.³⁰⁶ Working-class areas crowded with tenements and immigrants served as areas of cities where prostitution was allowed to thrive through selective enforcement of the law. In 1898, one of the largest red-light districts in the nation opened in New Orleans and was named Storyville after its creator, alderman Sydney Story.³⁰⁷ The ordinance creating it did not, however, declare prostitution legal within the twenty-four blocks set aside as a vice district. Instead, the law decreed that prostitution was “illegal beyond Storyville’s boundaries.”³⁰⁸

Such districts typically served as zones of uncertainty from a legal position, where prostitution could flourish without actually being illegal. Reporters described the districts as

³⁰⁴ Charles Winick and Paul M. Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce: Prostitution in the United States* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 132.

³⁰⁵ Wood, *The Freedom*, 163.

³⁰⁶ Wood, *The Freedom*, 163.

³⁰⁷ Eric Arnesen, ed., “Prostitution/Sex Work,” in *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1138.

³⁰⁸ James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2005), 105.

“plague spots of a proud metropolis” that contained “lepers, who would contaminate the vilest wanderer.”³⁰⁹ These districts, however vile, limited the spread of prostitution throughout the city, thereby protecting the value of homes and keeping venereal disease somewhat confined. Doctors supported the creation of such districts since they allowed for better control over venereal diseases. Red-light districts also contained the influence and spread of “degenerate” sexuality and values as middle-class women rarely met working-class women, immigrants, or prostitutes who lived their lives inside such confined zones.³¹⁰ Segregating vice, officials believed, rendered it unnoticeable. Moreover, courts relied on “reputation” as an admissible piece of evidence in lawsuits, which meant that women could be affected by the state of the neighborhood in which she lived.³¹¹ A segregated vice district ensured that middle-class women remained reputable while those from red-light districts were easily labeled as untrustworthy. Prostitutes themselves even demanded the creation of such districts in many cases as they saw it as a means for protecting their profession.³¹² Serving the interests of all parties involved, doctors, municipal officials, and legal experts promoted the formation of red-light districts in the 1870s-1890s. These professionals used the dominant language of the period and described such sex districts as scientifically advantageous for containing and controlling both venereal disease and the degeneracy spread by prostitution.

Prostitution’s growth and its unchecked ill effects helped breed a new discourse through which officials attempted to explain its role in society and establish solutions, such as regulation, to contain its resultant problems. Though still considered a “necessary evil” that could not be

³⁰⁹ J.A. Dacus and James W. Buel, *A Tour of St. Louis* (St. Louis: Western Pub. Co., 1878), 445.

³¹⁰ Corbett, *In her Place*, 125.

³¹¹ Corbett, *In her Place*, 125.

³¹² Cristina Rivera-Garza, “Criminalization of the Body,” *Crime and Punishment in Latin America: Law and Society Since Late Colonial Times*, ed. by Ricardo Donato Salvatore, Carlos Aguirre, and G.M. Joseph (Durham: Duke University, 2001), 167.

eradicated from society, rhetoric discussing the nature of prostitution turned from morals to science. Scientists and medical experts replaced religious leaders and accepted moral standards as the new leading authorities on prostitution. Whereas discussion had once centered on a moral ideal of purity, it now revolved around a biological understanding of inheritance and the spread of disease. Data, in-depth studies, and medical reports took the place of stories of “fallen women” that treated all prostitutes as equal with no motives or individuality. While doctors advised men to abstain from releasing their “life force,” they also understood sex to be a vital part of man’s nature. Prostitutes became a necessary reserve of women through which men could discharge their otherwise aggressive nature. Yet, the threat of disease and potential “degeneracy” spread through contact with prostitutes constantly worried the medical community.

After the Civil War, discussions of inheritance and the reduction of prostitution and sexuality to their basic biological roots dominated pamphlets, books, and newspaper articles written about the “necessary evil.” Since prostitution expanded considerably during the 1870s, much of the literature about it regarded the dangers it posed medically to society, both from a pathological and a social Darwinist viewpoint. The best solution scientists could muster to the inevitable and ineradicable “evil” was to contain and control it in order to decrease its spread. While this period centered on a scientific analysis of prostitution, the 1890s soon used such discussions and infused them with feminism and moral reform to create a strong abolition movement that opposed the “social evil.”

CHAPTER 4

NECESSARY NO LONGER: THE EMERGENCE OF A SOCIAL EVIL

Previously accepted by society, though sequestered in a vice district, prostitution met stern opposition in the 1880s as morality crusaders and feminists mobilized their efforts. Mary Hall of Washington, DC's vice district, The Louse, died before reformers of the new social purity movement could close her brothel. She died in 1886 with "integrity unquestioned, a heart ever open to appeals of distress, and a charity that was boundless."³¹³ Such appreciation for one of Washington's richest madams quickly dwindled, however, as reformers began to use the scientific data collected during previous decades to illustrate the need for the abolition of prostitution. After her death, social purity advocates seized the opportunity to "cleanse" the space once occupied by "this spot reserved for Satan's tenure."³¹⁴

Infused with moral appeals and feminist rhetoric, champions of the social purity movement maintained that brothels in the nation's capital left the "city disgraced before the civilized world."³¹⁵ A transformation had once more taken place in the discussion of that "oldest profession." Reformers no longer considered prostitution inevitable or ineradicable and felt that the creation of vice districts merely encouraged the extension of prostitution by making it seem like a legitimate profession. Prostitution became a scourge on the nation, a social evil that affected not just individuals but the very morality of the entire nation. After cities abandoned regulation efforts following much pressure from reformers, the medical and scientific rhetoric popularly used to examine prostitution was combined with moralistic rhetoric to create the social purity movement in which prostitution now posed a threat not only to the individual woman's

³¹³ "Hall," *The Evening Star*, Feb. 11, 1886.

³¹⁴ Rush R. Shippen qtd. in "Dr. Shippen Calls Upon the Authorities to Purify the Locality," *The Evening Star*, Jan. 9, 1888.

³¹⁵ Shippen, "Dr. Shippen."

purity but also to that of America at large. The movement aimed to abolish prostitution entirely and wanted to purify the social mores of America. Merging new ideas of millennialism and feminism with older scientific understanding of venereal disease and social Darwinism produced a new rhetoric in the 1880s and 1890s that perceived the prostitute as a social evil and a menace to America's morality.

The social purity movement had its roots in other nineteenth-century reform movements, like utopianism, and aspired to suppress prostitution as well as other forms of promiscuity. In the Victorian lexicon, "social" was a polite euphemism for "sexual," and social purity reformers desired to maintain and moderate sexuality within marriage.³¹⁶ Like free love, utopian, and feminists, social purity supporters did not approve of any form of contraception because it undermined the idea of sexual morality by doing away with many of the dangers, such as pregnancies and venereal disease, of extramarital sex.³¹⁷ Drawing ideas from utopian and science fiction writers like Edward Bellamy and his *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, social purity promoters argued for a society free of foreign influence, especially free of foreign "sexual novelties."³¹⁸ Alice Stockham, for instance, wrote *Koradine Letters* in which she promoted a utopia free of sexual desires. She argued that women did possess sexual desires, and using the science born from social Darwinism, that this lust did not necessarily need to be expressed through sex acts, whether in marriage or not. Stockham asserted that sexual energy translated to creative power and it "does not follow that this creative power shall be devoted to procreation, but it may be used in any good work."³¹⁹ The promotion of self-sacrifice and "pure" womanhood

³¹⁶ Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2002), 72.

³¹⁷ Gordon, *The Moral*, 72.

³¹⁸ Edward Bellamy to William Dean Howells, June 17, 1888, in Joseph Schiffman, "Mutual Indebtedness: Unpublished Letters of Edward Bellamy to William Dean Howells," *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 12 (1958), 370.

³¹⁹ Alice Bunker Stockham, *Karezza: Ethics of Marriage* (New York: R.F. Fenno and Co., 1903), 115.

returned to discussions of sexuality though they now largely relied upon social Darwinist and scientific theories as a foundation.

Family once again became elevated as the center of American life, and social purity reformers maintained that “true love” existed only within the confines of marriage. This “true love” produced morally-sound individuals as well as biologically exceptional children.³²⁰ Social Darwinists advised women to take control of their reproductive processes for the sole reason that women could then select better mates and produce healthier, stronger, and morally superior children.³²¹ Doctors also joined the movement, such as Dr. F.E. Daniel, and endorsed the creation of a “sanitary utopia” formed through sexual purity and applied eugenics.³²² Often they reasoned that castration for unwanted individuals, like sex criminals, was the most human and viable solution for creating such a utopia.³²³ Prostitution posed a realistic threat to society at large in this vision by creating and sustaining a class of diseased and degenerate individuals. Indeed, relying heavily on scientific analysis of prostitution, social purity campaigners believed that “prostitution must be regarded as the fountain head from which venereal diseases originate.”³²⁴ To ever obtain a truly sanitary society in which the biologically fittest flourished, “prostitution must be annihilated first.”³²⁵ Purists advocated abolition, which to some seemed like “a utopian dream” but was considered “feasible with the honest cooperation of everybody

³²⁰ D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate*, 165.

³²¹ D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate*, 165.

³²² Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011).

³²³ Bronski, *A Queer*.

³²⁴ Ludwig Weiss, “Venereal Prophylaxis that is Feasible,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 40, no. 1 (Jan. 24, 1903): 233. {PAGES 232-240}

³²⁵ Weiss, “Venereal,” 233.

concerned.”³²⁶ Racial purity and freedom from disease became the goal of sexual acts under social purity ideals and necessitated the abolition of prostitution.

In seeking to purify the nation, social purity reformers extended ideals of the “social gospel,” which held that personal holiness social reform were rooted in one another. Charles Finney, a leader of the Second Great Awakening, significantly influenced late nineteenth-century social reform movements. He viewed conversion to Christianity as a transformation from a selfish existence to a benevolent one.³²⁷ Finney also considered perfection achievable and millennialism possible.³²⁸ He thought that as people received salvation, it contributed to reform within the social order.³²⁹ Personal spiritual needs became trivial compared to a desire to obtain unity and cooperation among all members of society. Millennialism contributed to the idea that society needed improvement rather than the individual as it held that once purified, Earth would become a paradise. Americans especially held this belief claiming that America “will be the last on Earth,” a “glorious Sabbath of peace, purity, and felicity.”³³⁰ America was meant to produce the millennium through the moral purification of every member of society.³³¹

Social purity advocates generally accepted millennialism and strove to cleanse society until it met the standards of attaining paradise on Earth. The end result was valued over the means which had to be instituted to achieve it. Strict guidelines had to be established, especially concerning sexuality, and those failed to meet those guidelines could be exiled or worse.³³²

³²⁶ Alfred Schalek, “Prophylaxis of Syphilis and Professional Ethics,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 61, no. 2 (1913): 1566.

³²⁷ Ung Kyu Pak, *Millennialism in the Korean Protestant Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 72.

³²⁸ Pak, *Millennialism*, 72.

³²⁹ Pak, *Millennialism*, 72.

³³⁰ Timothy Dwight, “A Valedictory to the Young Gentlemen who Commenced Bachelors of Arts at Yale College, July 25, 1776,” *Fisher’s National Magazine and Industrial Record* 1 (1846): 326. {PAGES 322-327}

³³¹ Ira Chernus, “Religion and Nonviolence in American History,” *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*, ed. by Andrew R. Murphy (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 557.

³³² Richard Landes, ed., “The Rises and Falls of Western Utopia Movements,” *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 752.

Women, as guardians of morality, became essential to social purity because they could influence men and children as exemplary models of piety and purity.³³³ Reformers optimistically thought that modern science could aid in their goal of restoring America to its former glory, before urbanization, immigration, greed, and corruption caused its deterioration. Eugenic and social Darwinist ideas provided a scientific measure for creating a pure society, which social purity reform quickly latched onto. Forced sterilization of more than thirty thousand individuals in twenty-nine states attests to the lengths advocates of millennialism went to advance their cause.³³⁴ Prostitution, too, stood in the way of their vision of a purified America, and as such, affected the entire society in a negative manner instead of contributing to moral standards. Jane Addams, one of America's most famous reformers, exhibited a "millennialist fervor" through which she identified prostitution as a social evil to be eliminated for the sake of improving society as a whole.³³⁵ In the name of social improvement and the ultimate hope of achieving paradise on Earth, social purity reform combined scientific measures with moralistic ideas to breed a new, modern discussion of America's future.

At first, social purity agitators shared visions of this paradise with the most unlikely group—sex radicals. Both groups, for instance, placed importance on consensual sex for women.³³⁶ However, the repressive nature of social purity reform soon made it much less liberal as advocates sought laws to control sexuality, especially for women and "inferiors." One key example of this repressive tendency was the abolition of prostitution which ignored entirely a

³³³ Zoe Detsi-Diamanti, "Early American Women's Romantic Tragedies and the Rhetoric of Republicanism: The Case of Charlotte Barnes's *Octavia Bragaldi* (1837)," *Women's Contribution to Nineteenth-Century American Theatre*, ed. by Miriam Lopez-Rodriguez and Maria Delores Narbona-Carrion (Valencia, Spain: Departamento de Filologia Anglesa i Alemany, University of Valencia, 2004), 44.

³³⁴ Susan D. Bachrach and Dieter Kuntz, *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004), 59.

³³⁵ Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 155.

³³⁶ Joanne Ellen Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2003), 93.

woman's right to earn a living in any way she so chose.³³⁷ Women of the social purity movement stressed the "moral contribution their special nature enabled them to make to American society," rather than the ideal that all citizens should be equal.³³⁸ Still, they shared concerns with radicals like those who supported free love, especially regarding a woman's right to refuse sex even to her husband. Those behind the free love campaign defined it as freedom from marriage and obligatory motherhood.³³⁹ Though less realistic than voluntary motherhood within conventional marriages, free love defenders endeavored to strengthen the control women had over their own sexuality.³⁴⁰

The free love movement influenced the social purity movement greatly as free love advocates wanted to create limitations for men's sexuality. Men, they felt, had no right to dictate every sexual encounter. Free lovers also argued that sexual encounters obtained meaning only when the two partners were truly in love, not out of duty to marriage.³⁴¹ Ezra Heywood, chief proponent of free love in America, argued that sex in marriage without love gave citizens "legal license and power to invade, pollute, and destroy each other."³⁴² They likewise asserted that women and men should suppress their sexual desires in order to devote more energy toward social progress. Social purity activists also believed that sex drives hindered a person's ability to focus on work and thereby threatened essential societal markers of success, such as status and competition.³⁴³ Prostitution, then, formed a barrier to social progress as an outlet for and promoter of high sex drives. Women in such extreme groups, as well as social purity reformers,

³³⁷ Carole S. Vance, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1984), 37.

³³⁸ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 112.

³³⁹ B.O. Flower, "Prostitution Within the Marriage Bond," *The Arena* 13 (1895): 72. {PAGES 59-73}

³⁴⁰ Marlene LeGates, *In Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

³⁴¹ Robin E. Jensen, *Dirty Words: The Rhetoric of Public Sex-Education, 1870-1924* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2010), 13.

³⁴² Ezra H. Heywood, "Cupid's Yokes: Or the Binding Forces of Conjugal Life," *The Collected Works of Ezra H. Heywood* (Weston, MA: M & S Press, 1868), 255.

³⁴³ Gordon, *The Moral*, 74.

still flouted the moral superiority of women, however, and insisted that this gave them the potential to reform the world.³⁴⁴ In order to make any change, though, women and men had to acknowledge that women actually had sex drives to begin with. In order to be fulfilled, they suggested that women needed the power to make their own sexual choices, just as men had.³⁴⁵

Free love supporters and social purity reformers also campaigned for voluntary motherhood, or the idea that women should be able to use contraceptives to decide when they have children. Radical groups and those in the social purity movement believed that children had a right “not to be born.”³⁴⁶ Eugenic and scientific arguments defended these and other bold proposals for radicals and purity reformers alike thought that children born of love were superior to others, whether illegitimate or not.³⁴⁷ Prostitution threatened marriages of love because it was an alternative option for men who chose not to devote themselves to their marriages and wives. It was also an option that was purely capitalistic in nature, devoid of love. Consequently, social purists considered prostitution a concern that society had to end before it destroyed the very institutions that made society workable, such as marriage and motherhood. Worse still, prostitution promoted the existence of “malformed, demented, and vicious offspring,” which inevitably resulted from sexual liaisons lacking love.³⁴⁸ Thus, as social purists maintained some radical beliefs, especially regarding motherhood, they infused these ideas with traditional morality and scientific understanding to create a new discourse that analyzed the “purity” of female sexuality and reproduction from a eugenic standpoint.

³⁴⁴ Passet, *Sex Radicals*, 156.

³⁴⁵ Heywood, “Cupid’s Yokes,” 256.

³⁴⁶ Margaret Deland, “The Change in the Feminine Ideal,” *Libraries: A Monthly Review of Library Matters and Methods* 14 (1909): 90.

³⁴⁷ “Bastard,” *Political Dictionary* (London: C. Knight and Co., 1845), 323.

³⁴⁸ John B. Ellis, *Free Love and Its Votaries; Or American Socialism Unmasked* (New York: United States Pub. Co., 1870), 416.

Social purity created a more sophisticated argument for voluntary motherhood than traditional feminists, using eugenics to support the idea that women should have control over their own reproduction processes. The movement of social purity took hold of such scientific notions and introduced to them concepts from already-active crusades like feminism. Feminists believed that the sex drives of men, contrary to popular Victorian thought, were excessive, and this contributed to the near-enslavement of women which in turn hindered the growth of society.³⁴⁹ They remained devoted to the idea that women held moral superiority as guardians of the home and had to control the excessively bestial sex drives of husbands.³⁵⁰ Feminists and social purists supported voluntary motherhood ardently and held that deviations from the sexual norms regarding reproduction were natural and acceptable.³⁵¹ They did not, however, advocate the use of contraceptives, which they feared would allow men to engage in more extramarital sex blamelessly and force sexual relations upon wives.³⁵² Social purity advocates spoke in more religious and moral terms than did feminists, however. The National Purity Association quoted Saint Paul and then announced, “Enslaved motherhood is the curse of civilization.”³⁵³ In a similar fashion, when speaking of the feminist-born hope for a single moral standard, a woman of the social purity movement remarked, “For two thousand years we have preached Christ and practiced Moses, in all our dealings with woman—stoning her to death and letting the man go free.”³⁵⁴

³⁴⁹ Gordon, *The Moral*, 74.

³⁵⁰ James Schouler, *A Treatise on the Law of the Domestic Relations* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1870), 12.

³⁵¹ Gordon, *The Moral*, 75.

³⁵² Ellen Carol DuBois and Linda Gordon, “Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth Century Feminist Sexual Thought,” *U.S. Women in Struggle: A Feminist Studies Anthology*, ed. by Claire Goldberg Moses and Heidi L. Hartmann (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995), 61.

³⁵³ Belle Mix, *Martial Purity* no. 2 (Chicago: National Purity Association), 3.

³⁵⁴ Elizabeth Lisle Saxon, “The Truth Shall Make You Free,” *Report of the International Council of Women 1* (1888): 249-250.

The Victorian double standard had allowed men to act irresponsibly and blamelessly with regard to sexual encounters, whereas women were oppressed within the system as beings with no sexuality whatsoever. Social purists and feminists from which they drew much of their thought were convinced that increasing the controls on extramarital sex, seeing men as "impure" beings if they acted upon their sexual urges, became a vital strain of social purity discussion. This also meant that they favored abolition, not regulation, of prostitution.³⁵⁵ In order to end prostitution many sought higher wages being that low wages had been found in previous studies like William Sanger's to be a major factor in a woman's turn to prostitution.³⁵⁶ Preventing women from "falling" became a top priority alongside penalizing men for engaging in extramarital affairs. Reformers no longer considered prostitution the fault of the individual but the result of a myriad of societal forces. The society, not the woman, was to blame for her condition, and this rendered prostitution preventable and eradicable so long as society put proper barriers in place. Prostitution became a social evil as in need of legislation as the venereal disease it spread.

The cancerous effects of prostitution on society appeared not only through venereal disease but more urgently in the "feeble-minded" class it helped to perpetuate. Social purity advocates considered vice a hereditary trait, and, consequently, once vice was abolished it would be gone forever. Richard L. Dugdale first linked propensity for criminal behavior to heredity in his work *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity* published in 1877. The allegedly scientific study found that of all prisoners in thirteen county jails in New York, 709

³⁵⁵Laura Hapke, "Social Purity Movement," *Women's Studies Encyclopedia: Q-Z*, ed. by Helen Tierney (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 1322.

³⁵⁶Susan B. Anthony, "Social Purity," *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony*, ed. by Ida Husted Harper and Carrie Chapman Catt (Indianapolis: The Bowen-Merrill Company, 1898), 1007.

shared a common ancestor: Margaret Juke.³⁵⁷ Among these, he established that 180 received public assistance, and of those, fifty were prostitutes.³⁵⁸ The average cost on society, he estimated, was sixty-thousand dollars.³⁵⁹ Dugdale asserted that sexual excess generated a “contaminating” environment in which individuals chose to pursue “licentiousness,” such as prostitution, rather than hard work.³⁶⁰ He suggested that state regulations in place for prostitution and pauperism did little to combat such culturally unsuitable behavior. Benjamin Flower addressed prostitution in a similar fashion, saying that “bad heredity” generated lust which produced prostitution. Therefore, if prostitutes could be kept from having children, the prostitution would cease to exist.³⁶¹

Purity Congresses and the American Purity Alliance advanced related notions that social problems were ultimately hereditary in nature, and a purifying of society was therefore possible.³⁶² Victoria Woodhull, an outspoken anti-prostitution advocate, latched onto ideas like Dugdale’s as a scientific means for supporting the effectiveness of negative eugenics.³⁶³ Negative eugenics aimed to eliminate the reproductive capacity of the morally, mentally, or physically undesirable classes of society. Woodhull believed that Anglo-Americans formed the “culmination of the development of nations” and had a certain “superiority over other races.”³⁶⁴ She argued that negative eugenics could do away with crime, prostitution, and poverty and

³⁵⁷ Richard L. Dugdale, *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity* (New York: Putnam, 1877), 15.

³⁵⁸ Dugdale, *The Jukes*, 70.

³⁵⁹ Dugdale, *The Jukes*, 70.

³⁶⁰ Dugdale, *The Jukes*, 60.

³⁶¹ B. O. Flower, “Wellsprings and Feeders of Immorality,” *The Arena* 12, no.1 (Dec. 1894): 350-351. {PAGES 337-352}

³⁶² Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 26.

³⁶³ Michael W. Perry, *Lady Eugenist: Feminist Eugenics in the Speeches and Writings of Victoria Woodhull* (Seattle: Inkling Books, 2005), 52.

³⁶⁴ *Sunday Trojan*, Aug. 22, 1875. Qtd. in Perry, *Lady*, 46.

create a society of morally, mentally, and physically superior beings.³⁶⁵ Through negative eugenics a “perfect woman, possessing every virtue and worthy attribute of her sex” was possible.³⁶⁶ A similar study published in 1912 by Henry Goddard entitled *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-mindedness*, along with Arthur H. Estabrook’s *The Jukes in 1915*, revitalized and extended the notion that an undesirable class of morally depraved citizens contributed to the overall descent of society.³⁶⁷ Studies such as these concluded that, after being tested for mental capacity, 53 percent of prostitutes exhibited a mental age of ten or under.³⁶⁸

Moreover, social purity reformers feared that regulated prostitution demonstrated exactly the kind of anti-modern, uncivilized behavior that eugenics could do away with. Allowing such activities to go on unchecked, they worried, would hinder social order and economic progress.³⁶⁹ These immoral, “feeble-minded,” women, purists explained, spread impure “germplasm” (the Victorian equivalent of DNA).³⁷⁰ Germplasm allegedly held the material responsible for human behavior, which spread in a similar manner to disease and physical features—through heredity. Innocent housewives fell victim to this spread of moral decay as spouses infected them after visiting prostitutes.³⁷¹ Eugenics associated immigrants especially to poor “germplasm,” which left them more uncivilized, diseased, and inclined to vice, such as gambling, prostitution, and alcohol abuse.³⁷² These immigrants represented a threat to the Anglo-American “stock” as well

³⁶⁵ *Sunday Trojan*, Aug. 22, 1875. Qtd. in Perry, *Lady*, 46.

³⁶⁶ *Sunday Trojan*, Aug. 22, 1875. Qtd. in Perry, *Lady*, 46.

³⁶⁷ Perry, *Lady*, 52.

³⁶⁸ Robert Mearns Yerkes, *Psychological Examining in the United States Army* (Washington, DC: Govt. Print Off., 1921), 808.

³⁶⁹ Katherine E. Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2001), 15.

³⁷⁰ Alfred Wilmarth, “The Rights of the Public in Dealing with the Defective Classes,” *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 31 (Nov. 26, 1898): 1277.

³⁷¹ Howard A. Kelly, “What is the Right Attitude of the Medical Profession Toward the Social Evil?” *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 44 (Mar. 4, 1905): 679. {PAGES 679-681}

³⁷² Julietta Hua, “Chinese Americans,” *The Social History of Crime and Punishment in America: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Wilbur R. Miller (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 244.

as its moral values, which ultimately led to increased immigration restrictions.³⁷³ Unfortunately, neither education nor “moralizing” efforts could change those with impure “germplasm,” and social purists asserted that the only way to prevent the spread of such “germplasm” rested in abolition of prostitution or, more extremely, sterilization.³⁷⁴ By 1912, five states had eugenic sterilization laws in place that targeted the “feebleminded,” prostitutes, syphilitic individuals, “hereditary criminals,” and “moral degenerates.”³⁷⁵ Prostitution and sexual immorality classified individuals as mentally impaired and could also lead to their institutionalization.³⁷⁶ Purists “had become persuaded that for the good of society and the rescue of unborn posterity such blighted lines of descent should be cut off.”³⁷⁷

Feminists like Christabel Pankhurst claimed prostitution resulted in a weakening of women biologically, which in turn created a more degenerate class of men.³⁷⁸ Moreover, unwanted children were considered more likely to be morally or physically deficient.³⁷⁹ Using the scientific language associated with the eugenic movement, social purists highlighted fears of immorality as they blamed classes of “undesirables” for the ills of society. Prostitution contributed to the degeneration of the nation’s genetic makeup and allowed a whole host of social problems, such as criminal behavior and poverty, to continue to exist. In this way, prostitution became a social evil that could be scientifically solved, even if those who lobbied for

³⁷³ Hua, “Chinese Americans,” 244.

³⁷⁴ Herbert E. Walter, “Human Conservation,” *Readings in Evolution, Genetics, and Eugenics*, ed. by Horatio Hackett Newman (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1921), 475.

³⁷⁵ United States Government, *Public Health Reports: Supplement* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Marine Hospital Service, 1913), 3-5.

³⁷⁶ J. David Smith and K. Ray Nelson, *The Sterilization of Carrie Buck* (Far Hills, NJ: New Horizon Press, 1989), 226.

³⁷⁷ J.A. Field, “The Progress of Eugenics,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 26 (1912): 45.

³⁷⁸ Christabel Pankhurst, *Plain Facts About a Great Evil* (New York: Sociological Fund of the Medical Review of the Reviews, 1913), 116-117.

³⁷⁹ Elizabeth Macfarlane Sloan Chesser, *Woman, Marriage, and Motherhood* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1913), 136.

a solution did so because they believed immorality was hereditary and introduced into this scientific language that of feminism and the social gospel.

By twisting previous scientific studies to meet their needs, social purity reformers sought not to regulate vice but to eliminate it entirely through a process of national moral reform. Staggering numbers of prostitutes existed in New York (forty thousand) and Chicago (ten thousand) according to analyses of prostitution like William Sanger's.³⁸⁰ Brothels and hot-beds of vice tainted the morality of all major U.S. cities. The desire to end prostitution took on a religious zeal, accompanied by statistics and scientific evidence proving its devastating effects. Groups mobilized to "throw the protective influences about exposed young people of both sexes in our towns and cities."³⁸¹ Social purists argued that the need to abolish prostitution was as strong as the need to abolish slavery had been. Reformers demonstrated a particular effectiveness in the repeal of laws suggesting tolerance or regulation of prostitution. St. Louis's legalized prostitution lasted only four years (1870-1874) because of agitation on the part of women's voluntary organizations, which lobbied heavily against regulation.³⁸² Similar regulation bills for New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Philadelphia were also defeated by such efforts.³⁸³

After success in eliminating the threat of state regulated prostitution, social purists aimed to abolish prostitution entirely and establish a single moral standard for women and men. They believed that, as it stood, the "needs" of society could be transformed so that sexual encounters did not rank highly among the needs of men.³⁸⁴ In order to cleanse society of vice, reformers

³⁸⁰ Wayne E. Fuller, *Morality and the Mail in Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 134.

³⁸¹ Fuller, *Morality*, 134.

³⁸² Laura Hapke, "Social Purity Movement," *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*, ed. by Helen Tierney (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 1322.

³⁸³ Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995), 10.

³⁸⁴ Gordon, *The Moral*, 74.

believed that prostitutes, as victims of the established double standard, could actually be rehabilitated or rescued. In 1876, the Women's Temperance Christian Union, a social purity organization, initiated rescue work to combat prostitution.³⁸⁵ They concluded that regulating prostitution reduced women to second-class citizens.³⁸⁶ Social purity advocates also resisted the establishment of a national board of health, saying that it would offer a backdoor for regulation.³⁸⁷ Others of the more Eugenic camp considered sterilization a fit solution for ultimately ending prostitution. Either way, the reformers asserted that instead of being a necessary evil, prostitution contributed extensively to the moral degradation of society and could be eradicated through a number of proposed solutions.

Moreover, using the language of municipal leaders, social purity supporters suggested that prostitution was merely a type of job and could therefore be modified or eliminated.³⁸⁸ The job, however, was one which they thought no woman would freely and rationally choose for herself.³⁸⁹ Poverty, trickery, and the lure of young men who promised marriage or wealth coerced women into prostitution.³⁹⁰ By 1886, moral-education associations and groups for the abolition of prostitution formed an official journal for the social purity movement, the *Philanthropist*.³⁹¹ The American Purity Alliance became a prominent group at the national level and described their goals as, "the repression of vice, the prevention of its regulation by the State, the better protection of the young, the rescue of the fallen...and to maintain the law of purity as

³⁸⁵Ruth C. Engs, ed., "American Purity Alliance," *The Progressive Era's Health Reform Movement: A Historical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 19.

³⁸⁶ Tracey S. Rosenberg, "Purity Movements," *Encyclopedia of Sex Work*, ed. by Melissa Hope Ditmore (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 375.

³⁸⁷ Engs, "American Purity," 19.

³⁸⁸ Jerome D. Greene, "The Bureau of Social Hygiene," *Social Hygiene* 3 (Jan. 1917): 6.

³⁸⁹ Peter Andreas and Ethan Avram Nadelmann, *Policing the Globe: Criminalization and Crime Control in International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 34.

³⁹⁰ Andreas and Nadelmann, *Policing*, 34.

³⁹¹ Engs, "American Purity," 19.

equally binding upon men and women.”³⁹² Like-minded groups emerged across the nation and hoped to further the social purity crusade which aimed to eliminate prostitution entirely.

Although many in the medical community considered regulation efforts, like those of England and Paris, to be a success in controlling vice and venereal disease, social purity reformers contested the effectiveness of “Parisian values” over “American morals.” Vice commissions linked to the social purity campaign emerged in every major American city to analyze the extent to which vice had penetrated the U.S. The New York Committee of Fifteen selected Professor Albert S. Johnson to prepare a report on the history of vice regulation. Johnson determined that vice changed with time based on social, economic, and religious conditions and, contrary to popular belief, did not exist as a constant element of society.³⁹³ The Women’s Christian Temperance Union publicized the findings of the Johnson Report and organized petitions and letter-writing campaigns denouncing the state regulation of vice.³⁹⁴ Cities considering regulation used such reports to gauge the efficiency of the system and often left, in the case of a Minnesota Commission, “unanimously opposed” to regulation.³⁹⁵ Regulation was a “method foreign to the sentiments and feelings of the American people and repugnant to their high moral sense.”³⁹⁶ Purists alleged that state regulation actually facilitated the growth of the “social evil” by, in a sense, approving of it. They highlighted the fact that regulation created “safer” vice, which in turn led to an increase in prostitution. Returning to a scientific analysis mixed with moral thought, reformers attested that once vice became “state approved” people

³⁹² William Dwight Porter Bliss, ed., “American Purity Alliance,” *The Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), 52.

³⁹³ Amos Griswold Warner, Stuart Alfred Queen, and Ernest Bouldin Harper, *American Charities and Social Work* (New York: Crowell, 1930), 79.

³⁹⁴ Paul A. Kramer, “Ordering Others,” *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. by Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University, 2006), 382.

³⁹⁵ Committee of Fifteen, *The Social Evil: With Special Reference to Conditions Existing in the City of New York* (New York: 1900), 239.

³⁹⁶ Committee of Fifteen, *The Social Evil*, 239.

failed to internally repress sexual desires.³⁹⁷ “The seal of legal sanction and State approval” of “depravity” meant, for reformers, that depravity enlarged its hold on society.³⁹⁸ Even the Prefect of Paris found that “prostitution is increasing in Paris in spite of the strictest regulation.”³⁹⁹

Supporters of social purity maintained that while Europeans might consider “safer” vice and state policing of vice acceptable, American morals could not reconcile with such a system. In fact, the uniqueness of the American makeup rendered European systems inadaptable. The “Parisian” scheme could not be forced upon Anglo-Americans.⁴⁰⁰ Due to America’s “constitutional law,” creating a class of people whose civil liberties could be restricted and regulated, it was thought, was not possible.⁴⁰¹ Social purists feared adoption of the “immoral and oppressive license system.”⁴⁰² Europeans were used to government interference in everyday life, but Americans, purists argued, would not find this appealing.⁴⁰³ They determined that “the perpetuation of Governmental regulation of prostitution in Europe is a standing menace to...America.”⁴⁰⁴ As late as 1915, Abraham Flexner weighed in on the argument with his study *The Regulation of Prostitution in Europe*, which he felt demonstrated the need for Americans to continue their opposition to “European regulation.”⁴⁰⁵ Even with regulation efforts in place, the

³⁹⁷ Kramer, “Ordering,” 382.

³⁹⁸ Josephine Butler, “Sursum Corda,” *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic*, ed. by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 169.

³⁹⁹ Robert Newton Wilson, *The American Boy and the Social Evil from a Physician’s Standpoint* (Philadelphia: J.C. Winston Co., 1905), 109.

⁴⁰⁰ Frances E. Williard, *Extra Voice*, cited in *Let Something Good be Said: Speeches and Writings of Frances E. Willard*, ed. by Carolyn De Swarte Gifford and Amy R. Slagell (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2007), 92.

⁴⁰¹ Committee of Fifteen, *The Social Evil*, 115.

⁴⁰² William Burgess and Harry Olson, *The World’s Social Evil: A Historical Review and Study of the Problems Relating to the Subject* (Chicago: Saul Brothers, 1914), 238.

⁴⁰³ Committee of Fifteen, *The Social Evil*, 252.

⁴⁰⁴ Burgess and Olson, *The World’s Social Evil*, 238.

⁴⁰⁵ Abraham Flexner, *The Regulation of Prostitution in Europe* (New York: American Social Hygiene Association, 1915), 14.

police practiced such slack enforcement that the system did not truly curb vice. Regulation, they asserted, proved “worthless and disadvantageous to the cause.”⁴⁰⁶

Americans regarded prostitution as a social problem rather than a purely criminal one, and, as a result, “the efficacy of social remedies” replaced regulation as a way of dealing with such an immoral problem based “mainly upon the conditions of modern life.”⁴⁰⁷ Rather than submit to a system of regulation, reform committees proposed “teaching the youth...loyalty and honor to womanhood” and raising the nation’s morals “to the highest possible standard of righteousness.”⁴⁰⁸ As the people repressed slavery, so too could prostitution be abolished as “American people grow in righteousness and in the knowledge of this curse.”⁴⁰⁹ Reeducation also seemed a viable option. Still, regulation remained a system discussed frequently by social purity advocates as unworkable in America. They highlighted not only the logistical and medical failings of such a system but also the moral exceptionalism of America, which suggested that Americans could rise above legal acceptance of prostitution by merely reinvigorating the morality of the nation.

For the most part, those involved in establishing stronger morals for the nation did so through women’s religious and charitable organizations. Women entered the public sphere through such organizations and therefore saw them as tantalizing opportunities to have their voices heard. Moreover, as pious guardians of virtue and loving mothers they held vital positions in society as reformers. Women protected their families from moral perversion and, through charitable organizations, defended the morals of others as well.⁴¹⁰ Groups such as the Salvation

⁴⁰⁶ Wilson, *The American*, 109.

⁴⁰⁷ James Bronson Reynolds, “Regulation of Social Evil,” *Cyclopedia of American Government*, ed. by Andrew Cunningham McLaughlin and Albert Bushnell Hart (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1914), 327.

⁴⁰⁸ Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil in Chicago* (Chicago: 1911), 26.

⁴⁰⁹ Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil*, 26.

⁴¹⁰ Joan Waugh, *Unsentimental Reformer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1997), 7.

Army and the Women's Christian Temperance Union could be labeled as such associations. The National Council of Women formed through the partnership of suffragists and social purity reformers, and municipal councils of women appeared soon after.⁴¹¹ The organizations took part in missionary work, helped widows, orphans, and "fallen women," aided in prison reform, and actively affiliated themselves with temperance efforts. One organization listed its goals as "studying the social and industrial conditions of the city with a view to remedying the evils of poverty, sickness, vice and crime, and removing the causes thereof."⁴¹²

Typically, these groups were connected in some way to local church groups, and they intended for their efforts to be directed toward solving social ills and moral problems.⁴¹³ Religious and moral opinion then served to "guide...public opinion in dealing with" social issues.⁴¹⁴ Social purity reformers felt strongly that prostitution's prevention relied upon "agencies other than law-enforcing authorities."⁴¹⁵ In fact, women's religious and charitable organizations successfully pressured legislators to abolish prostitution after its legalization in St. Louis in 1870.⁴¹⁶ Investigation of social problems, and subsequently formed committees used to analyze them, arose from women's organizations. These committees often represented the joint actions of religious organizations and local businessmen in order to encourage social and moral reform.⁴¹⁷

Acting through charitable and religiously associated groups, women, and to a lesser extent men, rallied around such goals as abolishing prostitution, raising the age of consent, and

⁴¹¹ Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreamers of New Day: Women Who Made the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 2010), 107.

⁴¹² James Phinney Munroe, "Religious Co-Operation and Civic Advance," *New Boston* 1 (1910): 91.

⁴¹³ Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Athens of America: Boston, 1825-1845* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 174.

⁴¹⁴ Munroe, "Religious," 91.

⁴¹⁵ Frederick H. Whittin, "Laws Relating to Sexual Immorality in New York City," *The Survey* 35 (Feb. 12, 1916): 590.

⁴¹⁶ Hapke, "Social Purity," 1322.

⁴¹⁷ Deidre Anne Heenan and Derek Birrell, *Social Work in Northern Ireland: Conflict and Change* (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2011), 13.

outlawing the “immoral trade” in women that became known as White Slavery. Focusing on the eugenic degeneration of society due to continued immoral activity, along with scientific data proving the extent of and connection to disease inherent in prostitution, these moral guardians of society attempted to re-educate, reform, and permanently repress the “oldest profession.” In 1885, feminists and purity reformers in England came together to urge Parliament to raise the current age of consent from twelve to fifteen in order to protect young women and girls. Their success in this campaign led American women to act. They formed the New York Committee for the Prevention of the State Regulation of Vice and started lobbying for an increase in the age of consent for women in New York. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union also formed a vice-related unit, the Department for the Suppression of Social Evil.⁴¹⁸ Capitalizing on moral degeneracy spread by prostitution and the accompanying loss of female virtue, these groups campaigned vigorously at the state level to raise “the age at which a girl can legally consent to her own ruin” to eighteen.⁴¹⁹ To aid in their lobbying. Many groups also relied heavily upon statistical data gathered from cities. One report, for instance, claimed that 1,646 minors “without adult escort” roamed the streets of Minneapolis after dark.⁴²⁰ All states responded by raising the age of consent to sixteen or eighteen, and Tennessee set the age of consent particularly high at twenty-one.⁴²¹ Reform did not happen overnight, however, and many states attempted to once again lower the age of consent within the same decade, but women’s organizations remained

⁴¹⁸ Carolyn Cocca, *Jailbait: The Politics of Statutory Rape Laws in The United States* (Albany: State University of New York, 2004), 14.

⁴¹⁹ Michigan, *The Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Michigan* 1 (Feb. 17, 1887): 441.

⁴²⁰ J.H. Landes, “The Social Evil in Relation to the Health Problem,” *The Lancet-Clinic* 110, no. 16 (Oct. 18, 1913): 406.

⁴²¹ Cocca, *Jailbait*, 14.

vigilant and halted such efforts.⁴²² They felt that by raising the age of consent, fewer young women would be forced into prostitution because of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Protecting women from venereal disease and securing their virtue was merely an extension of the idea of women as protectors of the home, even if such a notion now highlighted more scientific and medical concerns. Reformers confessed that although immorality itself could not be entirely eliminated, the supply of venereal disease to the general populace could be decreased by abolishing prostitution and closing associated vice districts and bawdy houses.⁴²³ In Los Angeles where prostitution had been outlawed by 1913, the chief of police said that “at least a step toward a solution has been taken...the foundation has been laid on which to build anew.”⁴²⁴ Although he could not definitively determine whether or not such measures had decreased venereal disease and vice, his optimism was shared in other cities that hoped abolition would be the solution to the social evil. Most notably, Prince Morrow, became actively involved in the social purity movement after reaching prominence in his campaign against venereal disease. The National Vigilance Committee which he was involved in devoted itself to the passage of legislation against organized vice.⁴²⁵ Morrow consistently supported a single standard of morality and endorsed the mandatory testing of men for venereal disease prior to marriage to defend “innocent wives and children.”⁴²⁶ For purists, prostitution endangered not only individuals but all of society, even the innocent aspects, and therefore could not be tolerated or potentially extended through any form of legislation. The use of rational evidence along with moral language represented an evolution in the discussion of prostitution.

⁴²² David J. Pivar, *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868-1900* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 144-145.

⁴²³ Landes, “The Social Evil,” 406.

⁴²⁴ Qtd. in Landes, “The Social Evil,” 406.

⁴²⁵ Ruth C. Engs, “Prince Albert Morrow,” 218.

⁴²⁶ Prince Albert Morrow, *Social Diseases and Marriage, Social Prophylaxis* (New York: Lea, 1904), 32.

Activists in America relied upon well-known reformers like Prince Morrow not only to help their cause at home but also as inspiration and aid abroad. Social purity reformers found Josephine Butler particularly inspiring after she effectively campaigned for repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in both England and throughout the English empire. England introduced the Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1860s in order to protect sailors and servicemen from venereal disease. While the Acts only applied to areas frequented by the navy, police officers merely had to accuse a woman of prostitution for her to be detained and examined for signs of disease.⁴²⁷ Josephine Butler considered the Acts to violate civil liberties and harmful to the reputation s of all women. Further, they could potentially cause “irreparable injury to innocent women.”⁴²⁸ She proposed alternative moral and social reforms to take the place of the Acts that would “strike at the causes of the social evil from many sides at once instead of solely dealing with the physical penalties attached to sin.”⁴²⁹ A believer in millennialism, Butler assured women that Christ wanted them to aid “fallen women” through reform, and by so doing, Christians “could hasten the advent of that day of grace for which [they] daily hope and pray.”⁴³⁰ She went so far as to suggest that by opposing the Contagious Diseases Acts, women (and men) made “a permanent inroad upon the kingdom of Satan.”⁴³¹

Butler’s alternatives to the Acts would become common suggestions amongst American purity advocates and focused on rehabilitation and reeducation. She felt that the only true option legally for dealing with prostitution was to abolish “the great and soul-devouring evil.”⁴³² While

⁴²⁷ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siecle* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University, 1997), 40.

⁴²⁸ Burgess and Olson, *The World’s Social Evil*, 144.

⁴²⁹ Josephine E. Butler, *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic*, ed. by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 75.

⁴³⁰ Butler, *Josephine Butler*, 126.

⁴³¹ Butler, *Josephine Butler*, 126.

⁴³² Butler, *Josephine Butler*, 130.

she acknowledged the problems venereal disease caused, she remained adamant that if legislation relating to prostitution must be put in place, it had to attack the “causes of vice.”⁴³³ Prostitution, Butler insisted, could no longer be termed a “necessary evil” but constituted a social problem because of its “corruption of . . . national life through its influence.”⁴³⁴ The Acts, as Americans fretted with regulation, represented a government approval of such corruption, and Butler alleged it told the world, “He that is filthy, *let him be filthy still.*”⁴³⁵ The legislation “proceeds from evil” and “forces evil upon the people.”⁴³⁶ She maintained that if the Acts stayed as law, eventually people would not be able to distinguish between good and evil and self-control would be abandoned in favor of vice.⁴³⁷

Social purity organizations in the U.S., inspired by Ms. Butler, coordinated to oppose legislation for regulation throughout the U.S. St. Louis, of course, presents such an example, but other cities saw purists mobilize before legislation had even been enacted. The Moral Education Society of Philadelphia, for example, quashed efforts to pass the Social Evil Bill in Pennsylvania in 1875. Intended to license prostitution throughout the state, the Moral Education Society felt that the bill would have morally degrading effects on society by recognizing and allowing the continuance of vice.⁴³⁸ U.S. representatives also attended an international conference in Geneva in 1880 meant to address concerns that legalized prostitution still lingered in many nations.⁴³⁹

Alongside efforts to repeal the Acts, Butler claimed that widespread reform campaigns had to be launched because while previous devoted to redeeming individual prostitutes had been

⁴³³ L. Hay-Cooper, *Josephine Butler and her Work for Social Purity* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1922), 47.

⁴³⁴ Butler, *Josephine Butler*, 130.

⁴³⁵ Butler, *Josephine Butler*, 130.

⁴³⁶ Butler, *Josephine Butler*, 151.

⁴³⁷ L. Hay-Cooper, *Josephine Butler and her Work*, 64.

⁴³⁸ Josephine Butler, *New Abolitionists: A Narrative of a Year's Work* (London: Dyer Bros., 1876), 197.

⁴³⁹ New York Committee of Fifteen, *The Social Evil*, 197.

helpful, a “national purification” was now necessary.⁴⁴⁰ To define prostitution as necessary, Butler asserted, meant that a certain number of women were doomed to serve men as “mere instruments for the basest and most unholy purposes.”⁴⁴¹ Butler contended that abolition along with moral reform was the only way to rescue all women from prostitution. Otherwise only some victims saw reform while more fell from virtue to fill their places.⁴⁴² She called upon women specifically to work toward social reform since they alone could imagine “the abysses of the social evil, wherein...the souls and bodies of women, cut off from motherhood and disinherited from wifedom.”⁴⁴³ Men had responsibility as well, to “learn to live virtuously” so that a single moral standard for men and women could be established rendering prostitution not a necessity but merely a moral deviancy.⁴⁴⁴ Still, as it stood for Josephine Butler, prostitution blighted what could be a nearly perfect society, and all women and men had to work toward its perfection by eliminating the cause of vice, not merely its physical symptoms.

By the turn of the century, social purity reformers began to circulate stories of the alarming depths of evil that existed in prostitution. Worse than venereal disease, white slavery stories told of innocent women snatched from the countryside and forced into prostitution in American cities. Magazines like *McClure's* published exposes of the traffic in women for immoral purposes. White slavery captivated Americans, and social purity advocates used the alarm it generated to their advantage. American reformers inspired by Josephine Butler promoted campaigns against white slavery because many purists thought that the system of licensed prostitution overseas encouraged a traffic in young women who were needed to meet

⁴⁴⁰ Butler, *Josephine Butler*, 162.

⁴⁴¹ Josephine E. Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (London: Horace Marshall and Son, 1898), 405.

⁴⁴² Burgess and Olson, *The World's Social Evil*, 297.

⁴⁴³ L. Hay-Cooper, *Josephine Butler and her Work*, 29.

⁴⁴⁴ Butler, *Personal*, 408.

demand.⁴⁴⁵ Regulation also appeared to safeguard the white slave trade as police in America took bribes to allow such vices to continue.⁴⁴⁶

Immigrants in America comprised a significant portion of the prostitute population, and social purists argued that far from travelling to America to “submit to sexual commerce with racially varied men,” these women must have been coerced into the trade.⁴⁴⁷ White women, however, were the only true victims. American reformers placed no emphasis on prostitutes who were not of Anglo-American descent.⁴⁴⁸ Pamphlets vividly warned of white slavery’s dangers saying, “There are hundreds of wretched parents who do not know if their daughters are alive or dead, for they have suddenly vanished.... This trade is a very lucrative one, as the men of South America are of a very amorous disposition, and the fair merchandise soon finds buyers.”⁴⁴⁹ Imagery such as this played upon already-heightened fears of Americans that their morals and values were being replaced or, worse, mixed with and corrupted by those of immigrants. Pamphlets further proclaimed that “the man of the stone age who clubbed the woman of his desire into submission” stood as a gentleman next to immigrants who dealt in the traffic of white slaves.⁴⁵⁰ White slavery placed at stake national purity that needed to be redeemed. Anglo-American women required protection from foreigners, who eugenics held were naturally inclined to be less civilized and morally debased.⁴⁵¹ In fact, Americans contended that the “white slave

⁴⁴⁵ Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University, 1980), 249.

⁴⁴⁶ Burgess and Olson, *The World’s Social Evil*, 247.

⁴⁴⁷ D.J. Guy, “‘White Slavery,’ Citizenship, and Nationality in Argentina,” *Nationalism and Sexualities*, ed. by Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger (New York: Routledge, 1992), 203.

⁴⁴⁸ F.K. Grittner, *White Slavery: Myth, Ideology, and American Law* (New York: Garland, 1990), 56.

⁴⁴⁹ *The White Slave Traffic* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1910), 18.

⁴⁵⁰ Blanche Johnston, “Methods of Mitigating the White Slave Traffic,” *Feminism and the Periodical Press, 1900-1918*, ed. by Lucy Delap, Maria DiCenzo, and Leila Ryan (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁴⁵¹ Edward J. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight Against White Slavery, 1870-1939* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 43.

traffic is the most pitiful and the most revolting phase of the immigration question.”⁴⁵² American reformers urged the adoption of an international system to guard women seeking employment in other countries.⁴⁵³

Purity reformers suggested that slavery of white women in this way somehow exceeded or equaled the harshness of black slavery.⁴⁵⁴ Advocates of social purity wrote that though “the slavery of black women is abolished in America...the slavery of white women continues.”⁴⁵⁵ Indeed, commentators noted that white slavery was so-called because it fit the definition of *slavery*, which meant “complete subjection to the will and commands of another.”⁴⁵⁶ Trade in white women, suggested reformers, “would by contrast, make the Congo slave traders of the old days appear like good Samaritans.”⁴⁵⁷ Non-whites played the roles of slavers in white slave narratives. Americans targeted Jews in particular as the immoral slavers. Testimonies published in vice reports and newsletters indicated that one method of procurement was to gain her trust through fake love and marriage proposals.⁴⁵⁸ One white slave tract described this procurement process saying, “Some pimps take months and months to gain proper control over their victims...Once he teaches the girl to trust him, love him, he ruins her and...dumps her [in]...Buenos Aires.”⁴⁵⁹ The District Attorney of Seattle confirmed that a significant number of men participated in white slave traffic, and he asserted that “between seven and eight hundred men...live[d] from the revenue of “white slave” traffic” in Seattle alone.⁴⁶⁰ Still, confusingly,

⁴⁵² Burgess and Olson, *The World's Social Evil*, 62.

⁴⁵³ Burgess and Olson, *The World's Social Evil*, 237.

⁴⁵⁴ Grittner, *White Slavery*, 56.

⁴⁵⁵ Butler, *Personal*, 7.

⁴⁵⁶ McLaughlin and Hart, “Regulation of Social Evil,” *Cyclopedia*, 327.

⁴⁵⁷ Johnston, “Methods.”

⁴⁵⁸ Maude Miner, *The Slavery of Prostitution* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 96.

⁴⁵⁹ Olive Christian McKirdy, *The White Slave Market* (London: Stanley Paul, 1912), 276.

⁴⁶⁰ Burgess and Olson, *The World's Social Evil*, 65.

some purists considered all prostitution to be white slavery.⁴⁶¹ Typically, though, prostitution of all varieties was referred to as “commercialized vice” instead of “white slavery.”⁴⁶²

Although reformers generally had in mind Anglo-Saxon women, internationally the campaign to end white slavery encouraged the creation of treaties that protected foreign women from sexual corruption. Law enforcement did not know how to police claims of white slavery though as all they had to go on were stories of girls being taken from ports in, for example, America to other countries “professedly to find them good situations.”⁴⁶³ Even if the country of origin requested the detainment of suspects and victims, foreign governments typically refused because they were not citizens of the destination.⁴⁶⁴ To solve such problems on the national level due to interstate transportation, municipal commissions grew out of the social purity movement’s concern over white slavery. These examined prostitution in individual cities and proposed solutions for dealing with it. New York, Minneapolis, and Chicago most notably organized such committees on vice which subsequently published lengthy reports detailing the extent of prostitution in those cities.⁴⁶⁵ Most reports agreed with social purity advocates that abolition was the only viable solution.

Purists proposed a system of education in addition to legal restrictions in order to correct the vice of white slavery. Educating women of the dangers inherent in city life could awaken their consciences and moral senses.⁴⁶⁶ Parents, too, required education because those living the countryside did not “understand conditions as they exist and how to protect their daughters

⁴⁶¹ Engs, “American Purity Alliance,” 18.

⁴⁶² Burgess and Olson, *The World’s Social Evil*, 51.

⁴⁶³ D.J. Guy, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2000), 77.

⁴⁶⁴ D.J. Guy, *White Slavery*, 77.

⁴⁶⁵ McLaughlin and Hart, “Vice Investigations,” *Cyclopedia*, 615.

⁴⁶⁶ Arthur M. Dodge, “Woman Suffrage Opposed to Woman’s Rights,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 55-56 (1914): 103.

from... traders who have” created a “national system of ruining young girls.”⁴⁶⁷ Rural residents did not know that a trade in girls took place as readily as a trade in sheep or cattle in the city.⁴⁶⁸ Legally, reformers maintained that abolishing prostitution itself would solve the problems of white slavery and the great social evil simultaneously. Segregation of vice into red-light districts did nothing to combat white slavery, which held principal ports of trade in Chicago, San Francisco, and New York.⁴⁶⁹

Wide-sweeping laws resulted from white slavery campaigns in the U.S. and abroad. In the U.K., the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 was adopted that not only raised the age of consent but also made procuring women for “immoral purposes” illegal as well as made brothels illegal.⁴⁷⁰ The U.S., likewise, passed the Mann Act in 1910, which prohibited the procuring of women for white slavery as well as the interstate transportation of women for “immoral purposes.”⁴⁷¹ The Mann Act intended to strengthen state laws and create interstate cooperation against white slavery. Between 1905 and 1910, thirty-five states also passed laws designed to eliminate white slavery.⁴⁷² America also attempted to solve the immigration issues attached to white slavery with the Immigration Act of 1910, which punished those who brought women into America for such purposes.⁴⁷³ The culmination of years of social purity agitation, laws abolishing prostitution finally passed, completing the transition of prostitution from a necessary to a social evil.

⁴⁶⁷ Johnston, “Methods.”

⁴⁶⁸ Johnston, “Methods.”

⁴⁶⁹ Clifford G. Roe, *The Prodigal Daughter, the White Slave Evil, and the Remedy* (Chicago: L.W. Walter Co., 1911), 277.

⁴⁷⁰ Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 211.

⁴⁷¹ Grittner, *White Slavery*, 96-102.

⁴⁷² McLaughlin and Hart, “Regulation of Social Evil,” *Cyclopedia*, 327.

⁴⁷³ McLaughlin and Hart, “Regulation of Social Evil,” *Cyclopedia*, 327.

As America neared the end of the nineteenth century, a shift occurred in discussions of prostitution. The problem of prostitution transitioned from an accepted nuisance to a full-fledged social evil. Generally communicated by social purity reformers of the 1880s and after, the rhetoric of prostitution centered on its dangers to society at large, not merely the individual, and its need to be eradicated. Purity reformers invoked the language of religion through millennialism and morality to assert that women, as guardians of the home, must rehabilitate prostitutes in order to hasten the reign of God on Earth. Peppered with equally scientific speech, social purity literature also discussed the hereditary risks of prostitution on society. They claimed that the entire society suffered because of a class of “degenerates” who were “feebleminded” and passed on their inadequate genetic makeup in the same way they passed on venereal disease. All of society suffered morally and physically as a result of prostitution, and reformers advocated abolition as the only real solution. The penultimate threat, white slavery, combined all the elements most feared by reformers and so alarmed the nation that Americans sided with the reformers. This end forever labeled prostitution as a social blight. The scientific analysis of prostitution advanced in the prior decades was turned on its head, infused with moral and religious language, and marketed as proof that the “great social evil” had to be abolished forever.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

“The effort to create a properly sober and ‘Americanized’ society...resulted in criminal chaos and social disorder associated with prohibition. Similarly, the attempt to eliminate prostitution from American society drove the Social Evil underground, where it became more closely yoked to liquor, drugs, theft, and increased violence.”⁴⁷⁴ Described thusly, the failings of the social purity movement become obvious. In spite of their view that once prostitution had been eliminated it would be gone forever because the State no longer encouraged it and its moral degeneracy could not spread, prostitution remained a part of urban life. Commercialized sex and prostitution seem now truly to be ineradicable as the scattered streetwalkers who once dwelt in vice districts continue to haunt American cities. Moreover, by driving it further underground, prostitution became more associated with the behaviors social purists felt were immoral, almost as if they had cast a self-fulfilling prophecy. The way in which prostitution has been discussed and the solutions attempted remain important though. As America begins to decriminalize previously “immoral” behaviors, such as marijuana use, a level of understanding regarding the historical location and evolution of opinion on activities like prostitution becomes vital.

The trajectory of such discussions on prostitution naturally evolved from conceptions of gender, health, and social structure present at the time. During the early nineteenth century, discourse centered on morality as society strove to understand itself in the face of a wave of new changes sweeping across America. Americans wondered how morality fit into this new, more urban environment, and what exactly that morality would be. As the century marched on, science advanced and new knowledge of germs, evolution, inheritance, and disease coalesced to form new conversations about prostitution. Experts in the fields of medicine and eugenics tried to

⁴⁷⁴ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 169.

explain immorality as a kind of disease spread both physically and through heredity. Social purity reformers, feminists, and religious leaders turned the logical and rational solutions of science for prostitution into warning signs that told of a future overrun by “immoral degeneracy” if prostitution was not eradicated immediately. Throughout this spectrum of varying belief, however, women’s roles in society changed little. From beginning to end they remained the moral conscience of society and served as the guardians of virtue in American life. Even as international communities became involved, the discourse remained the same—prostitution moved from one form of evil to another. While successful in their campaigns, reformers failed to recognize the prostitute as an individual, ignored her motivations, and changed little in regard to environmental circumstances that led to prostitution, leaving it to persist in secret while claiming moral victory.

Despite discussing a continuously-covered period of prostitution in American history, a broader understanding of the evolution of prostitution from an accepted part of society to a prohibited practice can now be found. While briefly mentioned in previous studies, the discourse regarding prostitution can now be seen not to suddenly emerge and call the trade a social evil outright. Instead, American opinion formed a spectrum with a key transition period that still regarded prostitution as a necessary evil but from a scientific perspective. This period seldom receives mention and often is not separated from later social purity thought. Such a range of thought on prostitution shows that while many have written on the topic of Victorian and Progressive Era prostitution in America, much remains to be discovered. Dissenting opinions on popular wisdom, for instance, have widely received little voice, especially within the history of prostitution. Essential to such a study would be an analysis of how prostitutes viewed themselves and the moral spectrum into which they were fitted. Their thoughts on popular discussion of their

position in society and how this affected such opinion or politics has yet to be thoroughly uncovered. Widely-accepted opinion on prostitution, however, fits into a larger paradigm that suggests that the changes affecting America during the nineteenth century drove Americans to near-hysteria over issues of “morality.”

The scope of this study was limited to widely-discussed and congruent thoughts on prostitution, but that discourse surrounding prostitution involved many more actors than can be represented here. For instance, women did write about prostitution while it was still considered a necessary evil, and some even held medical degrees and wrote about it from a scientific point of view. However, because these sources typically represented smaller, dissident voices or were unavailable except as vague references in secondary sources, they were not included. Again, while prostitutes themselves probably did elicit opinions on their situations, documents that provide such information are basically nonexistent. Few prostitutes would have felt entitled to leave a written account because of their social standing and few, too, would have been able to do so. Even if they had recorded their thoughts themselves, it is doubtful such accounts would have been preserved.

Access to sources can be limiting, but the sea of opinions has still not been fully explored with regards to prostitution. Although this analysis remains top-down and most sources were written by men, other explorations are necessary to fully understand the entire scope of discourse about prostitution. New studies that do not merely recreate prostitutes as victims the way that reformers imagined them are also necessary. While men constructed the world in which these women lived, they exerted a tremendous amount of power behind-the-scenes, so-to-speak. Such analysis remains wanting in order to truly place prostitution in history. Reformers, for instance,

often acted as they did in order to be accepted on equal terms sexually as men, which greatly shaped their actions and opinions regarding prostitution.

Despite many gaps left open for later studies, examination proves that prostitution, contrary to popular belief, did not always exist as a completely immoral institution and its transition to such a state was not a sudden change. The discussion surrounding prostitution allows for a better understanding of the American conception of morality and its evolution throughout the nineteenth century. Questions of sexuality and morality continue to plague the U.S. government, and knowledge of how and why such concepts are shaped becomes important in finding future solutions to such issues and progressing instead of moving backwards. Solutions to social problems that create prostitution, such as low wages, still need to be resolved. Perhaps even labeling prostitution as a real occupation option rather than a moral cesspool would allow women who choose to enter sex-work a voice.

Since the history of prostitution typically focuses on reform efforts or legislation, a study in discourse about prostitution adds to the larger history of prostitution to show that anti-prostitution movements in the U.S. did not always exist and did not emerge from nowhere. The U.S.'s failure to consult those affected by legislation and instead base their opinions on popular notions of morality continues as a critique today, especially in light of issues like gay marriage. By focusing on the evolution of thought regarding prostitution, it becomes clear that other behaviors labeled as "immoral" may have evolved in a like manner and may still be on a trajectory towards acceptance once more. Most importantly, though, ideas about morality are always more complex than they seem. What is "right" and "wrong" are so perceived because of a slew of social, economic, and political concerns that shape them that way. Moreover, this morality does not spring suddenly into existence, but what was once considered a necessary

guardian of such morality can eventually be regarded as the most dire evil in need of permanent extermination.

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