

WOMEN ON THE MOVE: SEX WORK
AND SEX TRAFFICKING
IN THE 1950S SOUTH

by

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ABSTRACT

“Women on the Move: Sex Work and Sex Trafficking in the 1950s South” examines the commercial sex market in post World War II America. During the war, concerns about venereal disease led the government and reformers to conduct a national campaign to close down red-light districts. Federal law focused on criminalizing prostitution near military bases and informing troops about the danger of “loose women.” Public health reformers concentrated their efforts on educating the public and civil officials about the importance of prevention and treatment. The campaigns against disease and the commercial sex market met with mixed success in both repressing prostitution and reducing infection rates. In the post-war era, nationally led efforts to repress prostitution faded, even as sexual commerce rebounded, and local communities in the South assumed the responsibility for purging vice from their towns. The motivation, however, shifted from a concern about public health to one about public morals. This project argues that as red-light districts closed in southern cities sex workers adapted by locating new venues and new cities to ply their trade. In the wake of the closures, geographically fluid commercial sex rings developed across the South. Sex workers negotiated the new market by migrating between commercial vice establishments that remained opened. Increased mobility afforded some women freedom and independence. However, the new system of constant movement created an opportunity for sex trafficking syndicates to exploit women through coercion and violence, tactics that would become the hallmarks of contemporary sexual slave rings. Regardless, the movement across the country, whether by force or consent, subjected migratory sex workers to the scrutiny of the FBI. Tasked with enforcing the Mann Act (1910), which criminalized the

transportation of women across state lines for immoral purposes, the FBI worked to destroy commercial sex rings. Pursuant to the act's language, the FBI constructed sex workers in these networks as "victims" negating women's individual experiences, choices, or voices. Many of the women in these cases challenged the idea of victimization through their actions and behavior, demonstrating the adaptability of commercial sex workers in the face of a shifting sexual market.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to the memory of LaVonne and Cressie. Two remarkable women who challenged convention, followed their own paths, and never waived in their love for family.

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INTRODUCTION

“There can be no compromise with prostitution. If it is condoned, it is promoted. Suppression by every means available using the administrative, legal, judiciary, and public health weapons trained upon this common enemy appears to be the only rational policy.”¹ Two medical professionals in Memphis, Tennessee made this statement in an article about how to eradicate prostitution and venereal disease just prior to America’s entry into World War II. The men, both doctors and both active in local and national public health organizations argued, as had many before and many since, that prostitution was an enemy to men, to families, and to the moral foundation of the nation.

Fear of venereal disease dominated the approach federal and state governments took to repress and eradicate sex work during World War II. Each government implemented policies and laws that criminalized prostitution and that required venereal disease testing of suspected prostitutes as a means to reduce the threat of transmission. The legislation primarily targeted women and conveyed the message that women’s sexual behavior was perilous to troops and the country, essentially sanctioning a double standard of sexual morality in the United States. Spectacular episodes of mass arrests, quarantines, and detentions of prostitutes took place all over the country during the war, but occurred most often in the South due to the sheer number of

¹ G.F. McGinnes and Henry Packer, “Prostitution Abatement in a Venereal Disease Control Program,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 27, no. 7 (October 1941): 363.

troops stationed in military facilities located in the region.² The South served as the principle location for military training in the country, housing eight of the nation's nine largest training centers.³ Venereal disease posed a serious threat to the health of troops, who if infected could sometimes undergo treatment that lasted for weeks or months, impairing the overall war effort by reducing the number of active servicemen. Therefore it is no surprise that the federal government allotted funds to southern states for facilities to test prostitutes suspected of infection and urged local authorities to reduce the high rates of disease that plagued civilians in their towns. Local officials closed vice districts and embarked on raids to rid prostitution, sometimes under threat from the federal government, who insisted that cities abide by federal law or contend with federal intrusion. When the war ended, a combination of improved medical treatment for disease, a desire to construct a nation of strong families based on traditional gender roles, and the threat of communism overshadowed the issue of prostitution, removing it from its wartime position as a national health threat, and making the problem itself, seemingly, disappear.

Prostitution, however, did not vanish. Despite the image of conservative sex roles and gender ideology after the Second World War, a commercial sex market continued to operate, even experiencing a reinvigoration. Some men sought out this market for sex, and some, just for

² Repression efforts, of course, took place all over the country and officials tenaciously pursued a policy to arrest and segregate women who were sexually suspect. The 1941 May Act granted the federal government authority over local officials who could not or would not control their local prostitution problems. Federal authorities enacted the May Act twice during World War II, in Tennessee and North Carolina, but threatened other southern cities with federal intervention throughout the war. The South, because of the high number of troops, was a hotbed of prostitution activity, followed then, by repression efforts.

³ The facilities were Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia, Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina, Camp Hood in Killeen, Texas, Fort Jackson near Columbia, South Carolina, Camp Claiborne near Alexandria, Louisiana, Camp Blanding outside of Starke, Florida, and Fort Knox in Louisville, Kentucky. These facilities each respectively trained 50,000 or more troops at one time.

companionship. Either way, the market obliged as long as the patron was willing to pay. This dissertation tells that story, illuminating not only the continued efforts to root out commercial vice, but also the experiences of women who engaged in sex as their primary form of wage labor. In the process, it reveals an alternate sexual reality than what historians usually associate with the 1950s South.

City officials continued the battle to eliminate commercial vice in the post-war era. In some cities, such as Birmingham and Phenix City, Alabama, Galveston, Texas, and Miami, Florida commercial sexual markets reemerged after the war creating tension between local officials, national anti-vice organizations, and residents. Debates raged over the presence of commercial sex operations within respectable communities, and citizens wondered if their presence would define their city's identity and character. Sex workers caught up in these debates actively struggled against city-wide repression campaigns and the moral condemnation that their sexual activity underwent. They continued to work, albeit clandestinely, in the contested cities or sought out new locations, engaging in sex work migration to evade increasing legal encroachments. The ever-growing local cleanup campaigns pushed migrating sex workers to cities with less repression, in some cases plying their trade along a circuit made more accessible by the newly developing state and federal highway systems that made travel easier. Migration provided a level of invisibility for prostitutes who worked in rural locations, but even these women found they could not successfully avoid repression. The federal government, through the mandate of the 1910 Mann Act closed down vice circuits and prosecuted operators who transported or induced women to travel to far-flung markets, further burdening sex workers who encountered the extinction of vice districts.

Importantly, these policies occurred as the nation's moral compass oscillated between rigid mandates on sexual behavior and the approval of a more sexually provocative culture. This dissertation is concerned with the larger arenas in which vice operated, but it is the closing of the red-light districts and the efforts to restrict prostitution that leads this work into the smaller southern towns where one might assume rural southerners avoided the dangers, like prostitution, that accompanied urban growth. Yet, prostitution thrived away from the glare of city lights. Migratory vice networks developed in rural communities, often operated by men and worked by women seeking a less restrictive environment to ply their trade. In other cases, the rural migratory patterns provided the operators with the means to keep women chained, metaphorically, to sex work as traffickers evaded law enforcement through constant movement along a geographically extended circuit.

While sex work was certainly not a new invention in the 1950s United States, the social and cultural environment of the period influenced the dynamics of the operation and shaped the experiences of the women involved in the business. The United States prepared for war by promoting alternative gender ideals such as Rosie the Riveter who exemplified working women, strengthening the nation's war effort through personal sacrifice. The government activated a number of military bases and training centers throughout the country to prepare male soldiers for their new role as the defenders of the United States and its ideals and values. Southern cities such as Jacksonville, Panama City, and Pensacola, Florida hosted new military installations that trained and housed soldiers, while other cities such as Galveston, Texas, Miami, Florida and Birmingham and Phenix City, Alabama already had bases in or near their cities. Many of these communities experienced massive in-migration because their war industries increased economic

opportunities for civilians. Coastal cities drew a number of merchant seamen to their ports and reaped the financial benefits from visitors who spent their money in these communities.

In these cities, commercial vice existed or developed as the population changed. Some coastal communities, with growing urban populations, had established red-light districts that catered to the military, merchant seamen, and tourists in town. Other non-coastal towns like Phenix City and Birmingham had an equally active sex trade before, during, and after the war. Federal officials agonized over the number of prostitutes that operated in these diverse military towns. The concern over the interactions between sex workers and their soldier clients included morality, but was eclipsed by the concern over health. Officials feared that prostitutes would infect enlisted men with venereal disease. National campaigns warned soldiers about the dangers of unsanitary prostitutes and “victory girls” through wartime pamphlets, flyers, and films. During the war, city and federal authorities worked diligently to close down the districts, but they only succeeded in containing, rather than eradicating, the activities.

In the post-war era, commercial sex districts reopened or resumed prewar activity. Local authorities faced a citizenry that decried the existence of prostitution, arguing that its presence indicated a broader problem with morality within the community. Pressure to cleanup vice in these southern cities, which many believed had manifested in myriad other ways such as a visible gay community and questionable moral activities by local authorities, led to eradication campaigns, raids of vice districts, and new city codes aimed at vice activities. Sex workers all over the South encountered these cleanup campaigns, which affected their profits, their ability to work, and their sexual independence. Some chose to operate clandestinely, hoping to make a successful living on the social and legal margins, while others left, migrating to new markets where regulation had not yet emerged, finding mobility a possible solution to repression efforts.

Mobility is thus an important theme in the discussion of commercial vice. Sex workers in the South engaged in a mobile sexual market that offered a solution to closing vice districts. Some prostitutes found independence on the highways as they controlled their movement, their work, and their earnings. Mobility was a double edged sword however; where it offered freedom and independence for some women, it ensnared others into sex trafficking rings where panderers took advantage of a woman's mobility to boost their profits and their power, and women themselves were unable to assert their independence. The existence of multistate sexual circuits, whether worked freely by prostitutes or as places of sexual slavery, however, would not escape policing. The Federal Bureau of Investigations exercised its power through the enforcement of the Mann Act, which criminalized the transportation or inducement of women across state lines for immoral purposes. The 1910 legislation granted the FBI the power to terminate these migratory vice rings, irrespective of women's willing or unwilling participation. The Mann Act originated out of a growing concern about white slavery rings that forced young, white women into prostitution. Despite evidence to the contrary, the act passed, fueling the development of one of the most powerful agencies in the U.S., the FBI. The Mann Act's broad scope allowed agents to use it to police sexual activity involving interstate travel. Consensual interracial relationships, primarily those involving famous black men and white women, were subject to the reach of the legislation, but even non-interracial consensual sexual relationships between unmarried couples experienced scrutiny.

While migratory sex work and sex trafficking have become popular areas of interest in the fields of American Studies, Women's Studies, Anthropology, and Sociology, the focus is relatively new in the field of History. For several reasons, historians have overlooked the 1950s as an era in which sex work proliferated. First, many historians concentrate on the effects of the

Cold War on the family, assuming the domestic focus made sex work unprofitable by reducing demand. Historian Elaine Tyler May's groundbreaking study on family, domestic containment, and sex dynamics in the 1950s illustrates the lens through which historians have viewed the era. In her work, May noted that many Americans in the Cold War era feared communism, the atomic age, and the social upheaval of the Civil Rights movement, leading families to create a culture of conformity as a barrier to the calamity of the outside world. Historians have engaged in the study of 1950s gender culture by examining the changing familial structures, including sex, and the emphasis on the new ideal of what was expected from family life. In this view, the dominant ideology that confined sex to marriage largely reflected reality as well.

Critical to this idealized image was the traditional role of women, particularly their sexual roles. Historians argue that American socio-cultural norms in the 1950s dictated the strict construction of traditional gender roles. Societal expectations of a female homemaker and a male breadwinner included satisfying sexual relations within marriage and reflected the effort to isolate and protect the family and the country from an insecure and unpredictable world.⁴ Concerns about social and cultural changes in the U.S. and the threat of communism led Americans to "turn inward" and focus on their families. Women who transgressed the sexual boundaries of the 1950s "weakened the country's moral fiber," therefore, containing sexual expression to marriage provided women and men an appropriate sexual outlet that simultaneously served to defend against subversive behavior.⁵

⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York Basic Books, 1988), xvii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 84-90 and 107.

This domestic image of women, duplicated in the plethora of television programs and books that depict the 1950s, reflected the desire of Americans to construct family life and traditional gender roles as the foundation of the moral and social order. Although the image of women as homemakers and caretakers, like many stereotypes, contains some truth, it did not reflect the lives of all Americans. The 1950s was an era of contradictions. As both society and the media promoted the idea of a sexually conservative era, sexuality also entered the public arena disconnected from family and marriage. In 1953, Hugh Hefner began publishing *Playboy* bringing nude women into the homes of any consumer willing to buy the magazine and paving the road for a growing pornography industry. The popularity of the magazine reflected a different vision of sexuality, one in which extramarital pleasure was characterized as a male prerogative. In this view, sexual desire outside of marriage confirmed heteronormative masculinity, even if it came at women's expense.⁶ At the same time, the burlesque industry also underwent profound changes, which reflected popular culture's acceptance of sexual entertainment. The traditional burlesque performance focused around the tease, in a dance in which a woman slowly removed clothing. In the late 1950s, burlesque evolved into stripping, which focused more on nudity rather than the art of dancing and teasing. And in the 1960s, topless go-go dancing gave audiences a chance to see a woman already undressed rather than endure the "strip tease" act. The new commercialized sexuality targeted young, middle-class women and men, removing some, but not all, of the stigma of engaging in openly sexual entertainment. Thus, while containment appeared to be the norm, a commercial sex culture flourished, and countered the image of sexual conservatism. Those women who engaged in a

⁶ See Lisa Lindquist Dorr, "The Perils of the Back Seat: Date Rape, Race, and Gender in 1950s America," *Gender and History* 20 no. 1 (April 2008) and Elizabeth Fratterigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

sexual dynamic involving the commercialization of their sexuality defied feminine ideals in the 1950s. Their actions subjected them to regulation and, often, to condemnation by society and legal authorities. Consequently, May's depiction of the sexual domestic containment ideal obscured hotbeds of sexual tension that created the need to enforce the ideal. Those hidden tensions appeared in the arena of sex work, which both supported the status quo by providing men a sexual outlet, and threatened it by sexualizing women outside of marriage.

A second, and equally significant lens through which to examine the 1950s comes from the Civil Rights movement in the South. African Americans during World War II adopted the "Double V" campaign to win victory abroad and victory at home. They began to challenge segregation and the fallacious concept of separate but equal using boycotts, protests, and marches. The historians that address women's sexuality outside marriage and family in the Civil Rights movement typically explore the role of women's sexuality in the context the era's racial tension, especially the sexual victimization of black women by white men, who viewed African American women as an outlet for their sexual desires.⁷ In the South, greater regulations on women's sexuality and desire were matched by fewer regulations on men. The Civil Rights movement complicated these regulations as white men faced growing taboos on sexual interactions with black women. Although some consensual relationships between blacks and whites occurred, the power dynamic of white supremacy and patriarchy obscure the nature of these relationships. Ideas about chivalry, white women's role in maintaining white supremacy,

⁷ See Endesha Ida Mae Holland, *From the Mississippi: A Memoir* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1997); Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance – A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream* (New York and London: W W Norton and Company, 1994); and Timothy Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004).

and the concern about white women's interactions with black men exacerbated the regulation of sexual behavior in the South. White women endured stricter regulation of their sexuality because whites feared that if uncontrolled, it would attract the attention of black men, thereby, threatening the stability of white culture.⁸ Whites assumed African-American women were sexually immoral, desired white men's advances and thus, required less regulation, unless it conflicted or threatened the ideas of white supremacy.

Another area that scholars of 1950s sexuality explore is the rising anxiety over homosexuality in the post-war era. Scholars John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman suggest that concern about the national security risk posed by homosexuals led to concerns about overall post-war stability. These historians contend that the nation viewed homosexuality as a "contagious disease" that threatened democracy and stability.⁹ Likewise, historian David K. Johnson illustrates how gay men symbolized the larger concern about national moral decline. Any weakness in the country provided an opportunity for communist infiltration. Government purges of homosexuals from federal employment represented a way to safeguard the country.¹⁰ Homosexuals eclipsed the prostitute in the media and the national discourse in the post-war era as the new public enemy and sexualized threat to national security.

Lastly, some historians examine changes in sexuality in the 1950s through the lens of the seeds of the sexual revolution – pointing to the creation of bikinis and shifting dating rituals as

⁸ See Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁹ D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 292-294.

¹⁰ For a broader discussion of the purge of gay men and women from government employment see David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

the key to understanding changes in the era's sexual dynamics. May argues that changing sexual mores regarding premarital sex played a significant role in shifting Americans' view of deviant or immoral sexual practices. Some engaged couples broke with their parent's sexual values and had sex prior to marriage. Younger adults believed that sexual intercourse was acceptable as long as they intended to marry. Scholar Beth Bailey's study of coed sexual relations at the University of Kansas in Lawrence in the 1950s revealed how students engaged in a struggle with local and school officials over the control of their sexuality. Women, in particular, fought against the rigid sexual standards of the era, and sought to establish their own codes of morality.¹¹ Based on Alfred Kinsey's breakthrough studies on human sexuality in 1949 and 1953, scholar Timothy Gilfoyle also points to a post-war increase in premarital sex. He adds that Kinsey's findings indicate a decline in commercial sex between men and prostitutes and notes the increasing number of women engaging in premarital sex for non-commercial reasons.¹² Kinsey's findings influenced a generation of scholars to conclude that the occurrence of sex work declined because more socially acceptable avenues for sexual contact were available. The assumption that a sex trade waned because demand declined loses sight however of the ever-present potential of sex work as a form of wage work for women.¹³

Attentive to changes in sexual mores, scholars nevertheless often neglect to examine the commercialization of women's sexuality, which obfuscates the picture of the 1950s. Often missing is the basic examination of the shifts in the sexual economics of women's lives and the

¹¹ Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1989).

¹² Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 312-314 and May, *Homeward Bound*, 101-102.

¹³ See Miriam G. Reumann, *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Report* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005).

sexual economy of the South. This oversight denies the complexity of this polemical period. Socio-economic changes stemming from the Great Depression, the New Deal, and World War II led to the migration of young people, particularly women, to larger Southern cities in search of work. The lack of economic opportunities for women contributed to the choices they made regarding their sexuality and labor. In addition, the South's unique race-based social and legal system created a dynamic that disadvantaged African-American women's labor and sexual choices. Therefore, race and economic limitations, coupled with gender, provide a distinctive post-war sex work industry in the South.

While historians have ignored prostitution in the 1950s, local and federal authorities in the United States did not. Much like the homosexual, prostitutes posed a weak link in the moral defense of society – one that had to be eradicated in the name of patriotism and American values. The persistent regulation connected to larger issues such as the corruption of local officials who overlooked prostitution in exchange for a percentage of the profits. On a national level, the FBI vigorously and diligently pursued vice traffickers associating moral lapses with potential communist subversion. Communism could seep into the country through homes and weak marriages, but perhaps worse through the moral failings of those most susceptible – those who did not conform to accepted standards of sexual behavior.

The official scrutiny of prostitutes and of sex work pre-dated the 1950s. The commercialization of women's sexuality has met with myriad forms of regulation and criticism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reformers and social workers tried to convert “fallen” females, whose immoral activity, they believed, resulted from predatory men and the perils of urbanization. Women's participation in a leisure culture that seemed increasingly sexualized disconcerted reformers who believed that channeling young women's desires for fun

and adventure into middle-class notions of respectable behavior might resolve the problem. By the to Progressive Era, medical authorities produced a growing literature that defined normal and abnormal sexual expression. Both groups sought to influence lawmakers to close down red-light districts and create a path for prostitutes to re-enter society as socially respectable women. Indeed, the Mann Act of 1910 provided a federal basis for authorities to regulate women who violated appropriate sexual boundaries, under the guise of protecting them from predators. Its inception and application was predicated on the belief that women could not have autonomy in sexual matters. Reformers and legislators defined women as victims and pursued sexual regulation as protection rather than punishment. Periods of social and national crises like those that led to the creation of the Mann Act in 1910 illustrate how women's sexual behavior experienced the most severe scrutiny when their sexual independence tested American social and sexual values.

During World War II and the immediate post-war era, the American family, the backbone many believed of the country, provided shelter from communism, racial tension and the threat of nuclear war. As May suggests, critical to the protection of the country and the family was the prescription of traditional gender roles that encouraged women to marry, raise families, and contain their sexuality to marriage. Yet in the midst of post-war conformity, many women rejected this ideal. Sexually independent women sought work in the sexual black market that existed in American society, and as authorities engaged in repression, the market shifted operations and locations. Prostitutes engaged in a vice market that moved to a bar culture as brothels closed. In these establishments, other forms of sexual commerce took place. B-girls, women who earned money from soliciting drinks at bars, drew the attention of local authorities because they also exchanged sex or the possibility of sex for economic gain. Their activities

encountered legal prohibition based on what authorities argued was their duplicitous means of earning a living. Unlike prostitutes though, these women were not victims needing protection, but predators who fleeced men. The arena in which all of these women operated reveals a shifting social and sexual economy in the post-war United States for both men and women.

Closing down red-light districts in the post-war era occupied local officials, but as sex work began to take the shape of migratory labor, federal authorities assumed this responsibility through the Mann Act. Court cases in the 1950s onward reflect the rise of organized vice networks that transported numerous women across state lines for commercial purposes. The growth of sex work migration correlated with a new directive that agents concentrate on targeting commercial, rather than non-commercial violations that had made up a significant portion of the cases in the decades before. The new edict illustrated the conflicts between the era's ideas of sexual containment and the increasing social approval of non-marital sexual engagements. The prostitute, though, could not escape the condemnation that commercial sexual labor, even if consensual, attracted. The Mann Act then was a means to regulate women's sexuality, making it visible to historians.

This dissertation examines the contradiction between the image of 1950s sexual containment and the existence of a widespread sexual black market. My work will demonstrate the shifts in social, legal, and medical approaches to addressing prostitution and promiscuous sexuality in the South and answer larger questions about women's agency in the sex work industry in the 1950s. The role of sex work in this history of American women indicates broader social and cultural shifts affecting their economic opportunities and obstacles. The South, where traditional gender roles at least appeared to be more entrenched, serves as a unique and important region to witness change. I intend to illuminate larger cultural conflicts over women's roles and

essential nature that often remain obscured by dominant discourses about femininity and masculinity.

This dissertation will address how repression campaigns during World War II and the post-war era changed the operations of sex work. It will examine the closing of red-light districts and the effect the closures had on prostitutes in the sexual black market. It will explore the episodes of violence and force that kept women enslaved and trafficked in sex work, but it will also uncover the circumstances where women experienced freedom and independence, whether as a way to subvert socio-cultural standards, to survive economically in a region with few economic opportunities, or as a livelihood that suited an adventurous and perhaps protofeminist view of sexuality. Finally, this dissertation will question the Mann Act's insistence that all women were victims. The blanket application of the act implies that sex work was a form of labor in which women were forced to participate, or at the very least, assumed to submit, based on their lack of power in a patriarchal society, notions the Mann Act records suggest was untrue.

The sources used in this dissertation reflect the challenges presented in studying sex work. Women's voices are often muted on the subject and their words and thoughts undocumented. Scholar Ruth Rosen postulated that periods of heightened regulation of sex work provide historians the greatest amount of formal records on sex work such as arrest dockets, court cases, and legislation.¹⁴ This work, then, concentrates on examining the records of federal agencies and national organizations that lobbied for stricter prostitution regulation to uncover the methods and reasoning authorities used in the repression of commercial sex. More importantly,

¹⁴ Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), xv.

the records include the voices of women in the sex trade, sometimes missing in studies of sex work reform. Using their characterizations of their experiences allow for a fuller examination of the commercial sex market.

The first chapter in this work lays out the history of the regulation of sex work in the United States, affording especial attention to social movements and federal efforts to eradicate prostitution. The creation of the Mann Act empowered the FBI to suppress prostitution when it crossed state lines providing what reformers believed was a necessary measure to protect women from predatory white slavery rings. Prostitution, typically regulated on a local level, endured tremendous federal scrutiny at times of national crisis, stemming mostly from the fear of venereal disease. Federal legislation during both World War I and II targeted prostitutes as carriers of disease and sought to protect soldiers from women's immoral sexual activity that threatened the war effort. Chapter two examines how prostitution evolved from a public health threat during World War II to a moral threat in the post-war era. By concentrating on the cities of Birmingham, Galveston, and Miami, we witness how local officials addressed the problem of venereal disease and the commercial sexual market. Each city approached the issue distinctly, but shared similarities in their end goal – eliminating prostitution to reduce the threat of disease. The American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), an organization concerned with public health issues, surveyed cities in the U.S. to determine the extent of their commercial vice and pressured local officials to close down districts. In the post-war era, when red-light districts flourished once again, a struggle ensued in each city between authorities and residents who challenged officials to enforce legal and moral codes in line with the Cold War era's emphasis on a moral citizenry and government.

The third chapter explores the case of Phenix City, Alabama, and how the efforts to eradicate vice left one state official dead and others on trial for his murder. Like other southern towns, Phenix City struggled to control the threat of venereal disease during the war and worked to close its vice district. The success achieved during the war, however, was short lived and vice returned to the city, larger and more organized. Citizens' efforts to eliminate the city's thriving sexual black market resulted in bloodshed and a state-wide repression campaign. The result of the crack down on prostitution reveals some initial forays into sex work migration that women embarked upon to counter the narrowing of sexual vice markets in the South. Migratory sex work provides the focus for the fourth chapter, analyzing a ring based in North Carolina in 1958. Forced out of sexual black markets across the South, women found a degree of freedom and independence through mobility and maintained an element of control over their movement and their sexual labor. These women actively engaged in a commercial sex ring that catered to long haul truck drivers. By controlling their own movements and floating in and out of the life as they chose, these women challenged narratives of victimization and expose the effects of closing down red-light districts on women who engaged in sex work to earn money. The use of the Mann Act in this case also provides an opportunity to scrutinize the wholesale application of the term "victim" to a group of women that did not define themselves as such.

The fifth chapter tackles the case of a vice circuit based in rural Louisiana in 1953. This circuit operated in seven different states using modern forms of transportation to move women between locations. The case reveals an early manifestation of sex trafficking that predates the current concern over the issue. Investigating how trafficking operated and how the men who ran these rings used coercion, deception, and violence to force women into the trade and exploited their sexual labor. The dynamics of the relationship between victims and their traffickers reveal

how notions about marriage, gender, and violence in the 1950s shaped the interactions between the women, their traffickers, and the network itself.

Rather than focus on regulators and reformers, this work strives to place sex workers at the center. Too often in works that examine commercial sex, women's voices and perceptions about their labor become lost in the records. The problem originates from the sources themselves, not the scholars who ask the questions. Police records, court transcripts, and FBI investigations reveal the efforts to repress prostitution, but not always the effects it had on its targets. The cases that I use to explore sex work during the war and the post-war era contain women's statements, which I have tried to make central to this work. Determining whether women's participation in sex work is willing or coerced is sometimes challenging. The records do not always indicate women's choices and in some cases women were untruthful in their statements because they feared prosecution, losing custody of their children, or social condemnation. Therefore assessing the veracity of their characterizations of their work and their experiences requires approaching the records with a critical eye to discern the underlying motivations for their statements. I borrowed anthropologist Gayle Rubin's measures for interpreting what constituted victimization and what constituted agency in this work. Rubin's proposal for evaluating sex work suggests "A democratic morality should judge sexual acts by the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and the quantity and quality of the pleasures they provide."¹⁵ Some women in the cases I examine freely discussed their lifestyle in interviews with authorities, some women denied engaging in any form of prostitution, some women expressed embarrassment and fear at

¹⁵ Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes from a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in Carol S. Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 283.

being “outed” to family and friends, and others experienced genuine victimization through sex trafficking.¹⁶ I used the presence of violence, coercion, and duplicity to determine which women were victims, rather than the implication of victimization as laid out in the Mann Act or by reformers throughout the twentieth century.

Women’s motivations to enter sex work are complicated and their choices are influenced by their access to economic benefits. The myriad paths that women followed into this work left me with a dilemma as to whether to name these women. In the cities of Birmingham and Miami, repression efforts targeted well-known madams and prostitutes in each respective city. The women’s names were listed in full numerous times in the local newspapers and I opted to use their full names in this work. The two Mann Act cases that make up chapters four and five were accessed through Freedom of Information Act requests. The names of the women in the cases are sometimes redacted and sometimes not. Their ages vary, but several of the women were under the age of eighteen. Additionally, there is a likelihood that a few women are still living and their commercial sexual labor may not be something they have disclosed to others. Therefore, I chose to identify women in the Mann Act cases by their first names only. Some women used numerous aliases and I have used the name that the FBI listed as their real name. In cases where there was more than one woman with the same name, I used the first initial of their last name if necessary for differentiation. The FBI convicted only the operators, or “subjects” in these rings on Mann Act violations, therefore their identity is a matter of public record and I use their full names throughout this work.

In the 1950s was an era in which women confronted new ideals about their roles in the family and society, and tested the boundaries of sexual confinement. Studying sex work

¹⁶ May, *Homeward Bound*, 117.

provides a place to witness how women challenged conventional notions about control over their sexuality and how society responded. The lives and experiences of sex workers in the 1950s are diverse. By examining repression efforts and Mann Act cases, the intricacies and complexities of their lives can be parsed out to present a more complete and rich depiction of women's lives in the 1950s.

CHAPTER 1

PROSTITUTION REFORM AND ERADICATION EFFORTS FROM COLONIAL AMERICA TO WORLD WAR II

The response to sexual commerce in the United States is a complex story. Religious values, legal mandates, and personal morals have shaped American attitudes about sexual behavior. Perhaps one of the most contested areas of commercial sexuality was prostitution. Changes in social and sexual behavior in the United States precipitated a constant process of defining and redefining sexual commerce. Adding further complications, the authorities on sexual deviance shifted in America from community and religious leaders, to reformers, to medical professionals, and the government. Establishing a system of law based on moral ideology guided much of the efforts to address the issue. At the center of sexual commerce, the sex worker came to be characterized simultaneously as victim and vixen. This chapter surveys the perceptions, arguments, and remedies surrounding prostitution and examines the efforts to regulate, eliminate, and define it from the colonial era through World War II to illustrate how reformers, medical professionals, and the government modified their stance against prostitution as American society and culture changed. Over this period, anxiety about prostitution revealed broader concerns ranging from individual morality, to urbanization, and finally to public health. Reformers and government re-imagined the prostitute to suit the climate of the country, and thus changed how they sought to remedy the problem itself.

Although the self-proclaimed authorities differed over time and took different forms throughout American history, they all had in common the desire to regulate and control those who challenged the boundaries of appropriate sexual expression. In the colonies, religious authorities determined moral codes and with the establishment of the republic, local and state officials crafted legal mandates to codify models of expected behavior. Middle-class women led reform efforts in the middle to late nineteenth century to eradicate prostitution and reform women involved in sexual vice. The federal government assumed responsibility in the twentieth century as a public arbiter of morals by enacting legislation that addressed the sex trade. The government's concerns addressed controversies over immigration and new citizens' moral behavior. Over time, however, a shift occurred about the concerns over the moral ramifications of prostitution. By the First World War, public health and safety had replaced reforming or rehabilitating sex workers in the discussion. The medical community comprised of physicians and psychiatrists influenced both the discourse about and the legal remedies proposed for the sex trade, by establishing their authority over sexual behavior. They expressed considerable concern over the matter of public health when the threat of venereal disease posed great risks to Americans and specifically to American troops.

When the British colonists established settlements in North America, they brought their families, lives, and their morals across the Atlantic. In an unfamiliar environment, they endeavored to create a moral landscape and a legal structure in the new world similar to the old one. Colonists wanted to construct their lives in a manner that made sense of their surroundings and they did so by transporting their traditions and rules to ease the transition of moving to North America.

Colonists enacted laws governing work and play, and designated which acts they considered illegal and punishable. The establishment of rules and regulations that monitored behavior in the colonies originated from British law and Protestant religious convictions. Protestant religious tradition, which emphasized the importance of the family, served as the foundation for beliefs about appropriate forms of love and sexual expression imported from England. Close quartered communities in turn facilitated supervision over one another. Community members expected each other to abide by certain standards of behavior. Legal and religious mandates deemed adultery, pre-marital sex, bastardy, and “crimes against nature” – sodomy, bestiality, and buggery – immoral and punishable under the law.¹

Changes resulting from the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, the growth of cities, and the increase in maritime trade led to increasing numbers of prostitutes. Colonists began to address the issue in the mid-eighteenth century. Prostitution potently symbolized the breakdown of community and family control over sexual behavior, and between 1750 and the early 1800s presented one of the most perplexing problems to city officials. They responded by

¹ John D’Emilio and Estelle B Freeman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 3-5 and Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 7. Godbeer notes that colonists did not always conform to the legal mandates that religious and civil authorities implemented. While not common, men and women did engage in sexual relationships without the formal pronouncement of marriage. The concept of marriage differed among colonists and the clergy, who at times were unavailable to perform ceremonies to legitimize a couple’s relationship. The term “marriage” then was somewhat negotiable. Godbeer cites examples of sexual encounters between unmarried individuals where it seemed marriage, regardless of the meaning, was not a goal of the relationship. However, colonists typically adhered to the accepted social beliefs about sexuality confined to committed heterosexual relationships.

arresting, whipping, and fining prostitutes, and closing down brothels. To the dismay of city officials, prostitution persisted.²

During the 1830s and 1840s, in response to perfectionism associated with the Second Great Awakening, reform movements arose that began to address the issue of sexual deviance and in particular, prostitution. White, middle-class women, active in social reform, sought alternatives to the law in dealing with sexual vice. Rather than regulation and punishment, reforming women's sexually deviant behavior became the goal of reformers.

Women reformers rose out of the ranks of the evangelical religious movements that occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Religious doctrine prior to the Great Awakening insisted that women possessed a weaker moral character than men. Women's supposed weaker character, therefore, prohibited their participation in social and religious reform. However, as middle-class women joined the wave of religious revivals, they achieved a more esteemed status within the church and society. Women exported their "natural" proclivity for maintaining morality within the home from the domestic to the public sphere. The problems resulting from the rise of industrialization and urbanization – depravity, poverty, and immorality – became the targets of white middle-class women reformers.³

Protestant ministers called on middle-class white women to engage in reform efforts to save the Christian sensibilities of their "fallen sisters." The growing voice of women in the discourse surrounding morality influenced theories about sexual behavior. In the 1830s, moral

² D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 50 and Claire 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 Press, 2006), 188.

³ Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 2.

reformers argued that prostitution resulted from male lust, rather than female poverty or immorality.⁴ Reformers contended that men's pursuit of sexual satisfaction through seduction often left women with no other choice but prostitution. Male lust thus drove women to enter the occupation. Moral reformers, subscribing to a sexual double standard, embarked on campaigns to eliminate prostitution by reforming the women who once worked as prostitutes.

While local authorities and benevolent women adopted methods for addressing the issue of prostitution, the federal government remained largely disengaged from the issue of commercial sex. In times of national crises, though, federal officials undertook the task of regulating commercial vice. During the Civil War, concern developed over prostitution as it would during subsequent wars as well. The visibility of prostitutes increased with war and many cities struggled to house, provide medical care, or jail the women that followed the soldiers or established brothels near encampments. Historically, prostitution developed in areas where large groups of young men gathered, away from the moral influence of families and wives. The cities that hosted Civil War camps provided just such circumstances. Many areas grappled with the onslaught of prostitutes near encampments and after repeated attempts to rid the area of prostitutes, eventually resorted to a system of reglementation.⁵ The city of Nashville, Tennessee, for example, witnessed a rise in the number of prostitutes near soldier's camps during the war. Seeking a solution, military officials in charge of the occupied city shipped sex workers to

⁴ D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 43 and Nancy F. Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Signs* 4, no. 2 (Winter 1978): 219-236.

⁵ Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Women and Prostitution: A Social History* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1987), viii. Reglementation is a term used to describe the system used in some European cities that subjected prostitutes to health exams and confined the women to specific districts or houses. The term is applicable to certain circumstances in the United States.

neighboring port cities in July 1863. The ship, however, returned to Nashville with its passengers still aboard, rejected from every city port at which it tried to dock. Realizing the futility of their efforts, officials instituted a licensing and regulatory system for prostitutes. After a thorough medical check that cleared them of any venereal disease, prostitutes could ply their trade with a license from the city.⁶ The system provided a temporary solution to the issue of prostitution. After the war, Nashville city codes reestablished prostitution as a crime and officials abandoned the licensing policy.

After the Civil War, the activities of moral reform societies grew often in response to the changes brought both by the end of the war and increased urbanization. Post-war reformers endeavored, as they had before, to assist fallen women. Much of society continued to assume that prostitutes were victims of male lust, which resulted in their compromised morals. While this notion was not new and was one to which reformers clung, they reinvented their approach concentrating on prevention rather than rehabilitation. They targeted young working-class women, with no connection to commercial sex, whom they assumed might succumb to immoral temptation, for their brand of reform.⁷ The move by young women to urban environments in the late 1800s in search of work and adventure created a new class of women – single and

⁶ James B. Jones, Jr. “Municipal Vice: The Management of Prostitution in Tennessee’s, Part 1: The Experience of Nashville and Memphis, 1854-1917,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 50 (Spring 1991): 35. After the end of the Civil War, Nashville embarked on a campaign of suppression. Jones argues that Nashville only regulated commercial sexual activity when pressured by reformers and citizens.

⁷ D’Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 151. Reformers continued the practice of mission homes to transform fallen women into productive members of society, where, ideally, after their rescue women would eventually adopt the attributes of respectable womanhood, marry and devote themselves to the care of home and family. At the very least, reformers hoped the women would engage in more seemingly respectable forms of paid labor such as sewing and domestic work.

economically unstable, therefore, susceptible to becoming prostitutes.⁸ Some of the women that migrated to the cities found they could not survive on the meager wages paid in factory or domestic work and turned to occasional prostitution to make ends meet. Others, who had engaged in pre-marital sexual intercourse, whether by force or consent, found they were “ruined,” preventing them from seeking a respectable life.⁹ Prostitution then became one of the few occupations open to them. For these reasons, some women turned to prostitution, either as their sole source of income or to supplement other wages. In response, reformers established clubs and homes for new migrant and immigrant women in large cities hoping to offer safety from panderers and thus prevent women’s path to prostitution.¹⁰

In the 1880s, reformers also took the precarious step of criticizing the sexual double standard. They enacted social purity campaigns aimed at curbing immoral male sexual behavior in hopes of eradicating prostitution.¹¹ Middle-class reformers espoused a single sexual standard that would confine sexual expression to the private sphere, the home, and more specifically to marriage. Men's behavior was held as much accountable as women’s. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) for example, an organization that viewed alcohol as the source of many of society’s ills, saw reforming male lust as part of their larger goal. It created the white

⁸ Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 61-62. In the west, concerns about Chinese women immigrants unable to secure legitimate work concerned middle-class reformers as well. See Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁹ Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 152.

¹⁰ D’Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 151.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 150-156.

ribbon campaign encouraging men, devoted to sexual purity, to wear white ribbons as a sign of their commitment.¹² The efforts of the WCTU and similar social organizations demonstrated a shift in how reformers understood the etiology of prostitution and its solutions. By implicating male sexual behavior as a contributing factor to women's "fall," reformers created an image of the prostitute as a victim of men, and by extension, of a perilously changing society.

While addressing male sexual behavior was critical, Gilded Age reformers also began to focus on urbanization as a contributing factor in prostitution. The shift did not cast aside the belief that male lust played a role, rather it acknowledged that working women were vulnerable to poverty, as well as the opportunistic male procurers active in sexual commerce. An 1891 study conducted by the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in Chicago claimed that young working women, away from the watchful eyes of parents, encountered abject poverty and fell victim to licentious men, exploiters and clients alike.¹³ Benevolent motivations led reformers to craft mission homes for prostitutes in the late nineteenth century that aimed to redeem fallen women by offering instruction on how to live a moral life. Although the missions first targeted prostitutes, moral reformers soon broadened their concern to include unmarried mothers. Evangelical women theorized that addressing this group would serve as a preventative measure deterring unwed mothers from eventually turning to prostitution to support their children. A mixture of womanly benevolence, religious teaching, and domestic work provided

¹² Ibid., 153.

¹³ Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 61-62.

unmarried women with the structure that evangelical reformers believed was necessary for their redemption.¹⁴

Gilded Age reformers' efforts to eradicate prostitution had a significant, and likely unintended, consequence. Reformers succeeded in reducing the visible element of prostitution, but the vice trade did not disappear. Rather, sexual black markets boomed, and an organized system of red-light districts replaced the individual streetwalkers that had come to characterize earlier forms of prostitution.¹⁵ In their zeal to clean up urban spaces and eliminate vice, reformers forced prostitution to retreat to segregated districts, typically outside of the view of the middle class. Famous red-light districts such as Storyville in New Orleans, created by an 1897 ordinance, and the Post Office District in Galveston, Texas, an unofficial, but tolerated district that had existed since the 1850s and solidified after a devastating hurricane in 1900, were two in particular that allowed prostitution to flourish away from respectable neighborhoods.¹⁶ Both cities segregated vice as a result of pressure from reformers and local authorities to reign in sexual black markets. Although the commercial sex trade shifted its operations and locations, the resulting districts displeased reformers who held steadfast to the belief that prostitutes were victims, an axiom that continued to guide reformer's policies and actions into the early twentieth century. Perhaps ironically for the women prostitutes themselves, the vice district's system of brothels and madams provided some security from the scrutiny of local authorities and the

¹⁴ Ibid., 10-26.

¹⁵ D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 181.

¹⁶ For an in-depth examination of New Orleans and the creation of a segregated vice district see Alecia Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

dangers of streetwalking. Nevertheless, the new system of red-light districts outraged reformers who refused to see a confined sexual black market as a solution to the problem of prostitution.¹⁷

The existence of prostitution, not merely its visibility, lay at the heart of what troubled reformers. Undeterred by the creation of vice districts, reformers began to demand that state and federal governments tackle the issue of commercial vice. Engaging the government in regulating the lives of its citizens was a central tenet of the Progressive Era. And in fashion similar with other types of Progressive reformers, the anti-vice movement appealed to state and federal authorities for help with their cause. Persuaded by reformers' appeals, state governments began to pass red-light abatement laws, which provided private citizens with power to shut down brothels through a complaint system. The first state, Iowa, enacted this law in 1909.¹⁸

Segregated vice districts ultimately provided no barrier then from reform efforts. Reformers continued their efforts to fix the problem, sometimes utilizing religious revival methods such as marching through red-light districts and singing to and holding prayers meetings with prostitutes.¹⁹ Most importantly, though, they established committees such as the Committee of Fourteen in New York and the Chicago Vice Commission to investigate the extent of the

¹⁷ D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 181 and Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 29. In England, reformers and officials argued segregated districts might counter the problem of venereal disease, in addition to serving as a place to segregate prostitutes from respectable women and respectable areas of a town. See Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 211. For a larger discussion on Iowa and the reform efforts that occurred, particularly in Davenport, see Sharon E. Wood, *Freedom of The Street: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Katherine Aiken, *Harnessing the Power of Motherhood: The National Florence Crittenton Mission, 1883-1925* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 3-5.

commercial sex trade. Reformers succeeded in building movements in local communities and with local authorities. Cities such as New York, Chicago, and Nashville closed down red-light districts during the Progressive Era. Between 1910 and 1917, the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), a public health organization that would gain significant influence in subsequent years, claimed sixty-seven communities fostered movements that closed down segregated sex-districts.²⁰

The efforts to repress prostitution on the local level met with some success, but the most notable of Progressive Era policies to suppress prostitution was the passage of the federal Mann Act in 1910. The act embodied the notion of victimization as espoused by reformers and incorporated longstanding concerns about immigration and morality. The act's origin is rooted in an exposé published in *McClure's* magazine in 1907 that uncovered rampant criminal activity in Chicago, Illinois. The author, George Kibbe Turner, exposed underground traffic in alcohol, cocaine, and prostitution in the city and his findings shocked residents. He claimed that gangs of organized criminals ostensibly sold women for fifty to seventy-five dollars each for use in brothels and on the streets and identified rings of Russian Jews among the trade in Chicago, as well as the cities of New York, Boston, and New Orleans.²¹ Crime riddled the city of Chicago in this era and many blamed the large influx of immigrants for the rise in criminal activity. A local prosecutor, Clifford G. Roe, seized upon the issue when he claimed to have found a note tossed from the window of a brothel stating the writer was being held against her will as a "white

²⁰ Bascom Johnson and Paul M. Kinsie, "Prostitution in the United States," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 19, no. 9 (December 1933): 469.

²¹ George Kibbe Turner, "The City of Chicago: A Study of Great Immoralities," *McClure's* 28, no. 6 (April 1907): 601-602 and David J. Langum, *Crossing Over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1994), 27.

slave.”²² As a result, Roe embarked on a series of investigations and prosecutions of white slavers.

The white slavery scare in Turner’s findings provoked a national response. Newspaper and magazine articles appeared all over the country with stories of white slavery and traffic in young women and girls. Despite a congressional investigation that determined that white slavery was not as ubiquitous as Americans believed, a moral panic ensued. And while two more congressional studies later reported the same findings as the first – essentially, that innocent young women were not transported to the United States for the purposes of prostitution – the hysteria brewing over the fate of vulnerable young women subject to the predatory whims of licentious men did not dissipate.²³ Instead, the fear over white slavery led to the creation of one of the Progressive Era’s most enduring pieces of legislations: the Mann Act.

Prior to the 1910 act, concerns over immigration and morality influenced earlier legislation regarding commercial vice. In the middle and late 1800s, the United States witnessed a new wave of immigrants on the West Coast, many originating from Asian countries. These new immigrants imported value systems, religious practices, and cultural beliefs that perplexed many Americans who saw Asians as foreign, different, and importantly, not white. Fear of the new tide of immigrants, at heart, stemmed from concerns over economic competition and moral values antithetical to white Protestant beliefs. Some pushed for federal legislation limiting immigration.²⁴ In 1874, President Ulysses Grant urged congress to address the growing concern

²² Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*, 27.

²³ Bullough, *Women and Prostitution*, 279.

²⁴ For a larger discussion on ideas of immigration and citizenship see Martha Gardner, *The Qualities of a Citizen: Women, Immigration, and Citizenship, 1870-1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

over the supposed importation of Chinese prostitutes into the country. Congress passed the Page Act of 1875 that prohibited the importation of any woman, not just women from China, for the purpose of prostitution. The law called for a fine of five thousand dollars and a potential five-year jail sentence for violating the new act.²⁵ Amended in 1903, the act went further, denying entry to both prostitutes and their procurers. Congress amended the act yet again in 1907 mandating the deportation of immigrant women found to be engaged in prostitution in the United States as well as the procurers who imported women. While the preoccupation with women and immoral activity appear the impetus for the act, it reflected widespread concern about immigration and the growing nativist trend in the country rather than a sincere concern about the victims of prostitution or sex trafficking. A study conducted by the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization to determine the scope of the problem concluded that “innocent women and girls are rarely imported into this county for the purposes of prostitution.”²⁶ Moreover, the commission found that the women entering into the United States for the purposes of prostitution were not duped young women, but rather experienced prostitutes “living in poverty and dire squalor.... only too eager to embrace the opportunity of living comfortably in a life of shame in this country.”²⁷

Proposed by Representative James R. Mann of Illinois, the Mann Act took effect in 1910. While containing elements of concern about foreign-born women imported to the United States for the purpose of prostitution, it concentrated on the domestic interstate transportation of

²⁵ *Page Act of 1875*, (No public law number), *U.S. Statutes at Large* 18 (1875): 477.

²⁶ “Suppression of the White Slave Traffic,” 1910 Senate Document No. 214 9 (Serial 5657), Part 2, 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

women. In doing so it addressed the dual concerns about women being sent to the U.S. for prostitution and the forced prostitution of women already in the country by organized criminals. The act made it illegal for any person to transport or induce the transportation of a girl or woman across state lines for immoral purposes and outlined the punishment for violating the law.²⁸

Enforcement of the Mann Act fell to a group of detectives within the federal government.²⁹ The use of federal detectives had its roots in the Reconstruction Era with a small band of agents charged with investigating violence in the South carried out by the Ku Klux Klan. Despite the success it had in infiltrating the Klan, the group of detectives lacked a name and a formal mission. Without a defined purpose and hierarchy, government officials engaged in heated debates about the appropriate use of and funding for the detective group.³⁰ The ambiguous mission and unclear chain of authority resulted in questionable actions and investigations on behalf of the group that scholars, since, have characterized as corrupt.³¹ In 1908, at the behest of United States Attorney General Charles Bonaparte, President Theodore Roosevelt formalized the detectives into the Bureau of Investigation. The bureau focused on federal crimes, many related to the U.S. Treasury, but by 1912, Mann Act violations dominated the bureau's agenda, leading to increased funding and staff. The Mann Act legislation would

²⁸ *The Mann Act of 1910*, Public Law 277, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 36 (1910): 825.

²⁹ Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *The FBI: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 49 and 55.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 and 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 57. See Jeffreys -Jones for further information on loss of mission.

help to refocus the agency and contribute to its growth. In 1935 the agency would be renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation.³²

While the Mann Act's language and intentions to criminalize trafficking invoked fears that predators lured young white women into sexual slavery, most cases involved one woman and one man traveling across state lines for consensual, non-commercial sexual activity. Enforcement of the act, moreover, took on racial overtones and became a vehicle for targeting wealthy, visible African American men for violating racial boundaries. The 1913 investigation and conviction of Jack Johnson for transporting a white woman epitomized the use of the act as a tool to enforce social customs.³³ In perhaps equally significant ways, the application of the Mann Act shifted between 1912 and 1916. In 1915, the U.S. attorney general found that prosecutions involving commercial cases were decreasing.³⁴ Although the transportation of prostitutes constituted many Mann Act prosecutions, cases involving young, white unmarried couples in consensual relationships helped define the early character of the act. These cases illustrate the extent to which the act denied women sexual agency.³⁵ One case, *United States v. Holte* in 1915, involved a married woman, Clara Holte and her younger extramarital lover who crossed state lines not for the purpose of commercial sex, but rather to engage in an adulterous affair. The Justice Department charged Holte with conspiracy for participating in her own

³² Ibid., 91.

³³ For an account of the Jack Johnson and the racial application of the Mann Act see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

³⁴ Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*, 75.

³⁵ See Langum for a more detailed account of the early years of the Mann Act and the debates regarding its scope.

transportation. While the trial court acknowledged Holte's role in her own transportation across state lines, it stated, "she was no party to it, but only the victim" and dismissed her indictment.³⁶ The Department of Justice appealed the decision to the United States Supreme Court, which overturned the lower court's ruling. The justices ruled that women could be more than just victims in these cases, indeed they could be complicit in their own transportation.³⁷ The ruling appeared incongruent with the act's intention, but Holte's case revealed a flaw in the act's assumption that transported women were always victims.

The ruling coincided with a growing concern that the Mann Act could be exploited for personal monetary gain. Accounts of "professional prostitutes" associated with criminal gangs who extorted money from wealthy men by threatening them with Mann Act charges appeared in newspapers across the country. The concern about blackmailing was not new, it had been discussed when Congress debated the act.³⁸ However, the fear had now made its way to the public. The Holte case compounded a belief that not all women were victims in Mann Act cases, some were willing participants, and others, deceptive schemers. Perhaps more telling, the case revealed that women's sexuality was at once something in need of protection and something to be protected from. Yet, many believed that the women involved in these cases were simply tools of organized vice syndicates. Newspapers reported stories of syndicates in Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia that operated Mann Act scams. Ultimately, though, the United States Supreme Court rulings, while allowing for the prosecution of women in their own transportation, still

³⁶ As quoted in Frederick K., Grittner, *White Slavery: Myth, Ideology, and the Law* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990), 99.

³⁷ *United States v. Holte*, 236 U.S. 140 (1915).

³⁸ Langum, *Crossing the Line*, 77-78.

confirmed the image of prostitutes, and perhaps all women, as victims of men, which would shape how the public and the government viewed prostitutes who travelled across state lines in the future.³⁹

While the courts shaped the scope of the Mann Act and the image of the women it allegedly sought to protect, the medical community also contributed to public perception of prostitutes, and indeed any women deemed sexually immoral. Increasingly over the twentieth century, middle-class Americans' reliance on religious values to determine sexual norms began to succumb to the influence of medical professionals and sexologists. The establishment of the psychiatric and sociological professions greatly influenced the discourse concerning, and the dissemination of information on, sexual deviance. Progressive Era reformers looked to the medical field to provide explanation for human defects that contributed to lewd and morally disreputable behavior. While reformers sought to reform and restrict sexually deviant women, the medical community attempted to define and pathologize women's sexuality, without sympathy or accommodation. The newer medical discourse revised the way people viewed sexual deviance, the language used to describe that behavior, and the means by which reformers and the law addressed it.

As medical beliefs surrounding the evils of prostitution proliferated, it shaped reformers' views of prostitutes. They continued to perceive prostitutes as victims, utilizing sociological and

³⁹ A number of Supreme Court cases helped to define the boundaries of the Mann Act. In *Hoke v. United States* 227 U.S. 308 (1913), the court upheld the federal government's police powers in interstate commerce. The case of *Caminetti v. United States* 242 U.S. 470 (1917) upheld the application of the act to non-commercial, consensual sexual encounters. The *Caminetti* case also established a link between women's non-commercial sexual activity with prostitution, reinforcing the axiom that any immoral sexual behavior was a stepping-stone to prostitution.

psychological terms such as feeble minded, pathological, and deviant to denounce them.⁴⁰ This shift occurred in conjunction with the rise of the social work profession. In their attempt to legitimize the field, social workers felt that by disassociating from the feminized benevolent undertones of organized reformers, they would establish themselves as distinctly different, rational, scientifically-driven experts. The shift did not occur without a struggle. Reformers resisted relinquishing their esteemed place as leaders in the solution to the problem of prostitution and their access to the public sphere. By adopting the language and theories of the medical profession, reformers hoped to retain control over the dominion that they had created.⁴¹ Over time however, the medical discourse succeeded in influencing reformers who came to view prostitutes not as victims, but rather as degenerates. Reformers abandoned their previous effort to rescue victims of male lust, and increasingly adopted the dominant medical model that relied upon psychiatric treatment, incarceration, and sterilization of deviant women rather than their reform. Sex workers were still victims, but now the perpetrator was their own physiology and mental state.

In the early and middle nineteenth-century, the medical establishment had viewed prostitution as a necessary evil; one that relieved respectable married women of their sexual obligations to husbands and excessive child bearing, while providing men a necessary outlet for baser instincts. However, medical professionals also saw a paradox in the institution of prostitution.⁴² While providing a glint of social benefit for respectable women, many argued

⁴⁰ Karen Tice, *Tales of Wayward Girls and Immoral Women: Case Records and the Professionalization of Social Work* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 27.

⁴¹ See Tice, *Tales of Wayward Girls* for a detailed account of the struggle between reformers and social workers.

⁴² D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 140.

prostitution posed a far worse threat to society through the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

Medical research had revealed more about disease, its origins, and its transmission, but cures still eluded the medical community. Two important international conferences on the topic of venereal diseases in Brussels, Belgium in 1902 and 1904 confirmed the pressing need to develop adequate hospital and dispensary facilities for treatment. Imperative to a treatment program was “to replace as quickly as possible the policy of silence which had become a serious obstacle to all rational efforts to prevent these diseases.”⁴³ Public perceptions of venereal disease tended to associate the affliction with poor health, filth, and perhaps worse, sexual licentiousness. Victims of the disease often withheld their status from sexual partners – some out of embarrassment and shame, and others out of ignorance of its origins and pathology. Whatever the reasons, lack of disclosure contributed to the spread of the disease. Seeking to end this “policy of silence” surrounding venereal disease, physician Prince A. Morrow founded the Society for Social and Moral Prophylaxis in 1905 as the “first systematic medical approach to gonorrhea and syphilis in this country.”⁴⁴ Morrow claimed that venereal disease was more than a problem in the red-light districts, pointing out that it plagued middle-class households too. He argued that more middle-class women suffered from the disease than did prostitutes, likely a result of marital infidelity. Reluctance within the community and within families to address the problem compounded it. Morrow believed that education was necessary to address the issue and

⁴³ “National Budget Committee 4-16-1946: Historical Statement,” Records of the Office of Community War Service, Social Protection Division – General Records, 1941-1946, RG 215 folder American Social Hygiene Association, Inc., box 1, 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid. D’Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 204.

that while prostitution was certainly a problem, he argued that “masculine unchastity” was the origin.⁴⁵

Morrow’s organization concentrated its efforts on educating the public about venereal disease and teaching practices that individuals should incorporate in private behavior to prevent these afflictions. Societies similar to Morrow’s formed in eleven states and merged into one of two umbrella organizations: the American Federation for Sex Hygiene and the American Vigilance Association. By 1914, these societies combined to form the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA).⁴⁶ The ASHA’s mission was to “promote health and public morality” by publically addressing the issue of sexual vice and venereal disease.⁴⁷ The ASHA was part of a broader national effort called the Social Hygiene movement, which sought to eliminate venereal disease by reforming private sexual practices. Members of the movement disseminated information on the principles of prevention, identifying the source of disease and educating the public on disease transmission. The ASHA undertook similar methods and enumerated four tasks it assumed in its mission. First, the ASHA planned to study the conditions of vice in America to assess the scope of the problem. Second, the organization would examine shortcomings in the laws and enforcement efforts in order to reevaluate the nation’s approach. Based on its findings, the ASHA then could “devise and advocate” what it deemed effective

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ There is some discrepancy over the date that the ASHA formed. In *Intimate Matters* John D’Emilio lists the date as 1913, but the *Journal of Social Hygiene* dates the formation to 1914 in an article by Charles W. Eliot, “The American Social Hygiene Association,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 1, no. 8 (November 1926): 463.

⁴⁷ Charles W. Eliot, “The American Social Hygiene Association,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 1, no. 1 (December 1914): 1-2.

legislation against vice. Efforts to educate the public served as its last task, which included instructing parents, teachers, adolescents, and then children about social hygiene.⁴⁸

One particular goal of the ASHA was the eradication of prostitution, primarily through the closure of red-light districts, with which they experienced tremendous success before World War I. The origins of venereal disease, in the ASHA's view, appeared indisputable: illicit sexual intercourse through prostitution.⁴⁹ The desire to eradicate red-light districts and thereby reduce or eliminate venereal disease led to local and national efforts. Combining education regarding disease with the older notions about social purity from Gilded Age reformers, members of the Social Hygiene movement reintroduced the problems of the sexual double standard. The ASHA's approach to sexual behavior and disease differed greatly however from current medical opinion. Whereas Morrow had believed that the "chief malefactor" in the spread of venereal disease was male behavior, most medical doctors believed that young women's "immoral" response to their developing sexuality, with their child-like nature and lack of sexual self-control, posed the greater problem. As noted by many scholars, this belief provided the justification for the medical community to target women's sexual behavior rather than men's.⁵⁰ By contrast, the ASHA focused on all adult sexual behavior, while its educational format placed the prostitute as the point of contact in venereal disease. The ASHA's successes at education were mixed. Many physicians still held beliefs that discussing venereal disease publically was in poor taste and Social Hygiene movement members found few supporters for educating minors in school about

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 143.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Lunbeck, "A New Generation of Women: Progressive Psychiatrist and the Hypersexual Female," *Feminist Studies* 13 (Fall 1987): 517.

the dangers of sexual transmitted diseases. However, state officials took notice about the growing concern over venereal disease, and passed new laws requiring blood tests before marriage and mandatory reporting in several states.⁵¹

Social hygienists may have sought to focus more clearly on education, but Progressive Era reformers continued with their focus on vice repression. Their efforts accompanied renewed emphasis on the sexual behavior of the working class. While the Mann Act appeared the solution to rescue victimized women from a criminally and sexually exploitative element in society, it also served to legislate women's immoral activities. Scholar Frederick Grittner has asserted that the act, influenced by reformers, was part of a larger moral panic "involving women, sexuality and the family."⁵² The rise of urban spaces and a growing consumer culture had created anxieties about moral boundaries, particularly those crossed by women. What began as a movement to reform prostitutes and to save women from licentious men turned into an effort to safeguard women from the dangers of the big city and targeted working women's choices of leisure, in hopes of also reforming their sexual choices.

Working-class women, many of who were second-generation immigrants, looked to construct identities and values different from their parents and enjoyed evenings at dance halls, amusement parks, and movies. Seeking work and fun, young women molded new ideas about morality and sexual exchange. Some engaged in sexual relationships with men for economic gain that challenged the traditional understandings of commercialized sex. The meager earnings of many young, single working women precluded them from some forms of leisure and led to the adoption of a practice known as "treating," which was a system of exchange in the working-class

⁵¹ D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 143.

⁵² Grittner, *White Slavery*, 128.

community whereby young women traded sexual favors with young men, who in exchange “treated” the women to evenings of leisure and, in some cases, material goods.⁵³ While not always overtly sexual in nature, the leisure activities of the working class, nonetheless, appeared sexually charged to middle-class reformers, as these young women and men adopted more heterosocial practices in their amusement choices. The shifting sexual norms within the working class began to influence young women in the middle class who started to imitate their working-class sisters by engaging in the commercial amusement opportunities urban cities offered.

By asserting their sexuality, women defined themselves as independent adults differentiating themselves from the child-like images created by reformers. These behaviors disconcerted middle-class women who endeavored to reform these women. In lieu of the amusement choices that young woman sought, reformers instead offered working-class women access to clubs that provided alternative activities such as libraries, sewing, child-care, and socializing with other working women.⁵⁴ Some women rejected these activities and the efforts of the reformers, and continued to engage in heterosocial activities. By World War I and continuing in the post-war years, shifting sexual norms among America’s youth would make defining commercial sexual practices difficult.

While the efforts to reform women's sexual behavior, commercial or otherwise, preoccupied middle-class reformers, the country’s leading organization in venereal disease education found a receptive ear in the federal government. By World War I, concern over the

⁵³ For more information in the practice of treating see Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986) and Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁵⁴ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 51, 163-171

fighting capability of men in service precipitated another shift in the perception of prostitution. The conceptualization of prostitutes as victims of urbanization or male lust no longer dominated the debate. The ASHA, the military, and federal government instead expressed concerns about the increasing rates of syphilis and gonorrhea among soldiers and the deleterious effect on the war effort.⁵⁵ The need for healthy troops created a new role for the federal government as an agent in defining moral sexual behavior and as a new authority in the fight against venereal disease.

The effort to curb venereal disease among enlisted troops during World War I reflected the comingling of reform, the medical community, and government efforts to tackle the issue of prostitution. On the suggestion of Progressive Era social reformer Raymond B. Fosdick, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker created the Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) in 1917.⁵⁶ The CTCA embraced a “two-pronged attack” against venereal disease. Under the first-prong, the CTCA offered activities such as sports, bible studies, and social clubs to “distract” the men from immoral activities. The second prong of the CTCA’s plan involved “coercion and repression.”⁵⁷ The CTCA established a Social Hygiene Instruction Division, headed by Dr. Walter Clark, the director of the ASHA, to educate soldiers about venereal disease. Assistance from the ASHA helped Fosdick create programs that emphasized the

⁵⁵ One statistic claimed venereal disease accounted for 100,000 more U.S. deaths than all war casualties and wounded combined. “She Looked Clean, But,” Federal Security Agency, Office of Community War Services, Social Protection Division, (1945), np, Office of Civil Defense section, Amelia Gayle Gorgas Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama (hereafter designated as UA).

⁵⁶Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 59.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

importance of staying healthy, both for one's country and those he characterized as innocent victims – wives or brides-to-be – of venereal disease. Lastly, the CTCA aimed to reconstruct the idea of masculinity and sexual abstinence. Refraining from overt moral judgments, though still laced with attempts to recast sexual norms, CTCA lecturers contended that abstinence, not sexual prowess, reflected strength and virility; the soldier who exercised sexual restraint and kept his country safe from venereal disease epitomized American masculinity.⁵⁸ It was an unsuccessful effort. Evidence demonstrates that soldiers ignored the attempt to reconstruct the ideals about American masculinity, patriotism, and sexual control. Soldiers continued to contract venereal disease and the government continued to issue prophylaxis in monthly ration packets, rather than rely on the moral appeals of the CTCA and the reformers.⁵⁹

However, the military had not conceded defeat in its efforts to challenge the association of masculinity and sexual virility, and relied on long standing axioms about the perils of sexual contact with immoral women. The CTCA presented lectures and educational materials about women who transgressed the lines of accepted sexual behavior. The literature provided to soldiers contained two images of women: the “pure” woman and the “subversive” woman. The pure woman embodied the patriotic ideals for which American soldiers fought. These women were the soldiers’ “mothers, sisters, and sweethearts patiently waiting for their heroes to return home.”⁶⁰ The other woman, the subversive one, represented America’s enemy. Her sexuality threatened the health of the soldiers and the safety of the country by refusing to conform to ideals of marriage and reproduction. Films and lectures emphasized the importance of soldiers’

⁵⁸ Ibid., 60-65.

⁵⁹ D’Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 213.

⁶⁰ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 67.

restraint from sexual activity with “loose” women and educational materials linked such women and their alleged venereal diseases with the threat from America’s enemies abroad. The film “Fit to Fight,” for example, warned servicemen that “women who solicit soldiers for immoral purposes are usually disease spreaders and friends of the enemy.”⁶¹

Just as Gilded Age and Progressive Era reformers had tried to chip away at the sexual double standard by reigning in male sexuality, government sponsored educational literature attempted to disconnect masculinity from promiscuous sexual activity and instead associate it in dialog with more appropriate interaction with women. Scholar Alice Elizabeth Clement argues that “by redefining masculinity as protective (rather than exploitative) of women’s sexuality, the War Department sought to change behavior and extend men’s protective feelings about the women in their families to the women of America as a whole.”⁶² World War I posters and pamphlets reinforced the rhetoric of the sanctity of pure womanhood by juxtaposing it with the risks posed by immoral women. One poster posited, “Your mother has been unselfish and devoted to you. Will you be worthy of her? Protect the honor of all women and girls.”⁶³ Educational materials used language and images to place responsibility for maintaining the social and physical health of “pure” women at home squarely on the shoulders of men and encouraged them to avoid sex with prostitutes. A poster picturing three females – a grandmother, mother, and daughter – baking in the kitchen epitomized scholar’s findings. The poster stated,

⁶¹ Ibid. and D’Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 212.

⁶² Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 157.

⁶³ Ibid., 156.

“Remember the folks at home . . . Don’t allow a whore to spoil the reunion.”⁶⁴ Other posters simply showed the faces of two soldiers and a face of a woman in between and asked “Friend or enemy?”⁶⁵ Although the propaganda noted the risk posed by soldiers’ spreading venereal disease to their families, the subversive woman (the prostitute) was clearly identified as the origin of disease. All the efforts reinforced the socially constructed image of the prostitute or promiscuous woman as an enemy to all, casting these women as a broader threat to what America held dear.

As for the ultimate goal of reformers and the government, the eradication of prostitution, they failed. Many red-light districts closed before the war, and those near military installments that remained open succumbed to federal law when the Selective Services Act of 1917 created “moral zones” forbidding alcohol and prostitution around military bases.⁶⁶ But prostitution did not disappear. Prostitutes merely became the enemy, who faced legal and social condemnation for the vice trade. Authorities arrested and detained women suspected of venereal infection during and immediately following the war, while male patrons experienced minor consequences for soliciting women. In 1918, Congress passed the Chamberlain-Kahn bill that allocated one million dollars to establish detention centers for infected civilians. The funds created eighteen new facilities and assisted in the maintenance of four existing centers. Most of the facilities were located in the South, because of the over 500,000 men stationed in the region. Administering the funds and operating the facilities was the newly created Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board. Bureaucratic problems preventing full access to the funding resulted in just over one-tenth of the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 162.

⁶⁶ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 71.

one million dollars funneled into these facilities. Nonetheless, over 18,000 women suspected or confirmed as having a venereal disease were detained in the centers between 1918 and 1920.⁶⁷

The arrests and the closure of the red-light districts though, only drove prostitution out of brothels and onto streets, where sex workers had to rely on pimps rather than madams to ply their trade and protect them from police harassment.⁶⁸

The close of World War I and the arrival of the 1920s signaled a shift in sexual norms. Sexual expression moved further beyond the confines of marriage and women's sexuality entered a new, very public and very visible phase. The sexually alluring flapper of the 1920s embodied women's new freedom and pushed the boundaries of appropriate public and private behavior beyond those established by single working-class women of the Progressive Era. Flappers smoke, drank, and dressed provocatively. More importantly, these women solidified changing sexual norms that had begun with working-class women, but now appealed to the middle-class.

Young, middle-class women enrolled in institutions of higher education at increasing rates and were no longer under the watchful eye of parents. College campuses, parties, and speakeasies provided young women the opportunity to explore the boundaries of their newly found freedom. The automobile's popularity afforded young couples the chance to challenge previous dating norms as they moved from the front porch of their parent's homes to the backseat of the automobile.⁶⁹ Young Americans engaged in sexual activities ranging from

⁶⁷ Ibid., 88-89.

⁶⁸ D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 212.

⁶⁹ For further information on changes in dating patterns in the 1920s see Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1989).

“petting” to premarital sex in greater numbers and their mores were increasingly becoming the norm.⁷⁰ While petting did not necessarily lead to intercourse, sexual activity outside of marriage was no longer confined to the world of the sexual black market.

The closure of red-light districts and the new behavior and changes in courtship pushed concerns about white prostitution to the margins in the 1920s though sexual categories differed for black prostitutes.⁷¹ The Great Migration of African Americans from the American South to the north and from rural to urban locations correlated with an increase in the numbers of black prostitutes in northern cities. Black women entered sex work at higher rates than white women, perhaps due to economic limitations accompanying migration.⁷² A pervasive belief among whites about black women’s hypersexuality led to differences in how white and black women’s sexuality was categorized and contextualized. Flappers, overwhelmingly pictured as white and middle class, drew the ire of parents and college administrators as they crafted new models of sexual norms. According to authorities in the psychiatric and legal professions, however, African American women’s sexuality only reinforced preconceived and racist axioms about their supposedly immoral behavior. Whether as flappers, sexually experimental teens, or sex workers, black women’s supposed sexual pathology was “normal,” and authorities took less interest in reforming them.⁷³ The racialization of the prostitute and changing dating norms may account for

⁷⁰ Perhaps most informative about the changes younger Americans underwent is the study of youth in Muncie, Indiana conducted by Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959).

⁷¹ Clement, *Love for Sale*, 4.

⁷² Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 94.

⁷³ Lunbeck, “A New Generation of Women,” 535-536.

why organizations such as the ASHA and the *Journal of Social Hygiene*, a periodical published by the ASHA, rarely addressed prostitution during the 1920s, but rather, espoused the need for educating young women and girls about the dangers of promiscuity and venereal disease; likely they imagined their intended targets as white.

The federal government too turned much of its attention in the 1920s away from venereal disease and prostitution. In 1921, Congress failed to renew the Interdepartmental Social Hygiene board, which had managed the distribution of federal funds to operate disease testing and treatment facilities. Influential in the decision was the American Medical Association, which felt the board had overstepped its mandate by regulating morality.⁷⁴ In regards to suppressing prostitution on a national level, Mann Act prosecutions increased throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, but the Bureau of Investigation (BOI) focused heavily on organized criminal activity in the illegal alcohol trade, believing that many former organized brothel operators had moved to bootlegging for its higher financial rewards.⁷⁵ The BOI still investigated Mann Act violations but the head of the bureau, J. Edgar Hoover, espoused little concern about sex workers. Scholars have described him as “lukewarm” towards the issue of prostitution and he was known to have expressed doubts about the possibility of rehabilitating experienced prostitutes. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), renamed so in 1935, investigated Mann Act violators not out of concern for the women “victims,” but rather the criminal elements that orchestrated the transportations. Often the bureau engaged in coercive tactics to encourage women in the cases to assist in prosecutions, threatening them with conspiracy prosecutions. Cases in this era, however, were still overwhelmingly non-commercial sexual encounters, suggesting the bureau

⁷⁴ Brant, *No Magic Bullet*, 123.

⁷⁵ Grittner, *White Slavery*, 145.

engaged in a morals campaign, as some scholars have noted, rather than a campaign against prostitution or even the organized prostitution rings.⁷⁶

While the federal government focused on interstate travel and organized criminal activity related to non-sexual offences, prostitution seemed to flourish locally. Across the country, according to members of the ASHA there was an increase in prostitution in the 1930s and brothels re-emerged, peaking in popularity in 1939.⁷⁷ In 1933, the ASHA conducted a study of prostitution in fifty-nine cities within forty-eight states and compared the findings with a previous study conducted between 1927 and 1928. They found that prostitution had decreased in eighteen of the cities, but increased in forty, concluding that overall prostitution had increased in “volume and flagrancy.”⁷⁸

Some reformers felt that the Mann Act had contributed to the rise in brothels, especially in vice districts that experienced a reinvigoration in the 1930s.⁷⁹ In addition, two other factors influenced the growth of prostitution. First, the repeal of Prohibition resulted in a rise in taxi halls and taverns, places many believed were hot spots for commercial vice. Second, the country’s economic woes pushed larger numbers of women into prostitution, some entering the sex work industry the first time. Some reformers believed that older women married to unemployed husbands and widowed women sought out the profession as a way to earn money to

⁷⁶ Ibid., 146-147.

⁷⁷ Charles Winick and Paul M. Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce: Prostitution in the United States* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 158.

⁷⁸ Bascom Johnson “A Current View of Prostitution and Sex Delinquency,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 22, no. 9 (December 1936): 389.

⁷⁹ Alida C. Bowler, “Social Factors Promoting Prostitution,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 17, no. 8 (November 1931): 481.

ease their families' financial strains during the Great Depression.⁸⁰ While they recognized that there was no way to verify their contentions, reformers also worried that sexually active women working in taxi halls might fall prey to the lifestyle and engage in prostitution.⁸¹

The conditions were worse in the southeast and southwest, particularly Galveston, Texas and New Orleans, two cities with notorious reputations for commercial vice.⁸² Problems in Jacksonville and Miami, Florida as well as Mobile, Alabama also disconcerted reformers. Bascom Johnson, an associate director at the ASHA, believed that the voracity with which state and federal officials had closed down districts during World War I had disappeared. In the ASHA's view, city officials had become lax in enforcing the law and lamented that some officials considered re-establishing red-light districts.⁸³

Johnson noted that in addition to negligent enforcement, state laws against prostitution were weak and legislatures had little authority to enforce the laws already in place. On the local level, most authorities had adequate laws, but little effort and incentive to enforce them as citizens, some of whom Johnson referred to as "people of good standing," believed that a segregated vice district would allow cities to regulate and monitor venereal disease.⁸⁴ In most cities during the Depression, law enforcement concentrated its efforts elsewhere, and even used

⁸⁰ Virginia Murray "The Relation of Prostitution to Economic Conditions," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 18, no. 6 (June 1932): 315-318.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁸² Bascom Johnson "A Current View of Prostitution and Sex Delinquency," 390.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 392.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

graft in vice to supplement poor salaries.⁸⁵ National reformers, however, continued to push for eradication. The WTCU, the National League of Women Voters, and the ASHA appealed to the federal government to again address the issue. They argued that prostitution contributed to the bootlegging industry and that the two vices led to organized crime. Their beliefs drew few followers, but eventually concern over venereal disease, once again gained attention.⁸⁶

Thomas Parran, appointed as U.S. Surgeon General in 1936 by Franklin D. Roosevelt, played a significant role in returning venereal disease to the forefront of public health concerns. The ASHA, despite its mission to educate and inform the public about venereal disease, had employed tactics that cast moral aspersions on promiscuous women and prostitutes. The relationship between the ASHA and the CTCA during WWI had led some in the medical profession, those most notably affiliated with the American Medical Association, to question the tactics. Parran, a former New York State Health Commissioner, agreed with the need to remove the moral tone that dominated earlier venereal disease discussion, and argued that public health experts and physicians were best suited to address the issue accurately and successfully. Invoking New Deal ideology, Parran lobbied Congress for funding to treat infected citizens. By 1937, Gallup polls showed the public supported the idea and believed that the issue was indeed a public health concern the government should address. At Parran's behest and campaigning, in May 1938, Congress amended the 1918 Venereal Disease Control Act (now known as the LaFollette-Bulwinkle Act for its sponsors Senators Robert LaFollette from Wisconsin and Alfred

⁸⁵ Ibid., 395

⁸⁶ Ibid., 398.

Bulwinkle from North Carolina).⁸⁷ The amended version provided funds to states to create venereal disease education programs, establish treatment programs, and train local public health officials. As part of the broader New Deal legislation, the act positioned the government as responsible for the sexual health of its citizens, and by extension, as a moral authority over sexual activity. In addition, the act granted the federal government authority over states that failed to maintain adequate disease testing centers and treatment facilities.⁸⁸

America's impending entry into World War II renewed the focus on venereal disease among servicemen. In many ways, the era reflects some continuity with how officials addressed prostitution and venereal disease during World War I. Government officials expressed concern about the threat of venereal disease to soldiers and they located that threat on the body of the prostitute. As U.S. involvement in the war in Europe looked increasingly inevitable, public health organizations and agencies formulated a plan to address the problem. Despite efforts to divorce moralizing from public health campaigns, prostitutes took center stage. In 1940, the ASHA, the U.S. Public Health Service, and the Conference of Territorial and State Health Offices drafted a plan called the Eight-Point Agreement. The plan involved venereal disease education, treatment – including involuntary detention of uncooperative infected persons – contact tracing (of infected sexual partners), as well as the repression of prostitution.⁸⁹ They received minimal cooperation, however, from the military who failed to craft an adequate

⁸⁷ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 142 and 143, and Pippa Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia, 1920-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2006), 97.

⁸⁸ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 142-144. The debate over the best approach to eradicating venereal disease is a complicated narrative involving discussions over the role of the ASHA and the AMA and the even the use of the word “venereal.” See Brandt for a larger examination.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 162 and Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control*, 151.

program. In response, U.S. Surgeon General Parran and the Chief of the Venereal Disease Division, Raymond Vonderlehr, condemned the military in a pamphlet entitled “Plain Words About Venereal Disease.” Particularly disconcerting to Parran and Vonderlehr was the lack of emphasis on prevention and clear evidence of increasing prostitution activity near military camps.⁹⁰ Public officials continued to link the origin of venereal disease to prostitution and pushed for a plan to address vice. Congress responded in July 1941 with the May Act – named after its sponsor, Representative Andrew J. May of Kentucky – which made prostitution near military bases a federal crime. Described as an “emergency measure” the act empowered the federal government to step in if local authorities failed to enforce anti-vice laws and ignored the problem of prostitution.⁹¹

The May Act, in conjunction with National Venereal Disease Control Act of 1938, symbolized the increasing role of government in the social and sexual lives of its citizens. The National Venereal Disease Control Act provided states the funding and authority necessary to enact ordinances that criminalized citizens suspected of venereal disease infection in order to detain them for testing and treatment, essentially enabling state regulation of sexual activity.⁹² The May Act granted the federal government the right to intervene in state and municipal prostitution problems when local officials lacked the resources (or motivation) to do so

⁹⁰ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 162.

⁹¹ “Meet Your Enemy,” Social Protection Division, Office of Community War Services, Federal Security Agency pamphlet (circa 1940), UA. The federal publications regarding prostitution and venereal disease originated from the Federal Security Agency. Each pamphlet lists publication information differently. To maintain accuracy, the publication information for each pamphlet is documented in a manner consistent with the individual publication. The federal government evoked the May Act twice during World War II once in Tennessee and again in North Carolina. See Clement, *Love for Sale*, 243.

⁹² Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 145.

themselves. Taken together, both laws located the prostitute at the center of what officials believed was a public health crisis.

In May 1941, the Federal Security Administration, a government entity that administered public health programs, authored pamphlets and posters educating soldiers and the community about the risks of venereal disease and the threat of prostitutes. The content of the literature shared a commonality with the publications during World War I – the prostitute served as the origin of venereal disease. The inside cover of a pamphlet entitled “Meet Your Enemy” pictured a relatively crude drawing of a woman on a park bench, with a line drawn from her to a man in a suit, with a line drawn from him to a woman dressed in a kitchen apron, and a line drawn from her to a child. The final line drawn from the child, ends with an arrow pointing at the words “VENEREAL DISEASE.”⁹³ The publication explains what constituted venereal disease, possible treatments, and prevention. In its presentation, the Social Protection Division appropriated military language such as “mobilize,” “enlist,” and “fight” to appeal to the home front as it explained how to prevent infection. However, the illustration on the inside cover reflected the ultimate means in which to prevent infection: avoiding sexual contact with prostitutes.

The agency’s labeling of the prostitute as a disease carrier thusly, designated her body as the site for moral and physical corruption, and epitomized the shift from victimization to perpetrator of disease. Several government publications used analogies referencing other forms of disease to illustrate the danger posed by the prostitute. The pamphlet “Meet Your Enemy” warned “Venereal diseases, like malaria or yellow fever, cannot be controlled by the treatment of infected cases alone. Always the major sources of disease, whether they are swamps,

⁹³ “Meet Your Enemy,” np.

contaminated wells, or red-light districts must be cleaned up.”⁹⁴ After linking red-light districts with festering pools of contagion, the pamphlet stated, “Prostitution and sexual promiscuity are the main sources of gonorrhea and syphilis.”⁹⁵ The bacteria that actually caused venereal disease, though known by scientists by this point, escaped notice entirely.

The Federal Security Agency’s educational materials characterized prostitutes as diseased and malicious individuals who choose profit over patriotism. A pamphlet entitled “She Looked Clean, But...” focused on the diseased nature of the prostitute’s body. This pamphlet emphasized the number of clients that the “average” prostitute served. According to the publication, prostitutes had sex with twenty men a day. The pamphlet claimed that the prostitute spent little time cleaning herself between clients since that would detract from her earnings. Elaborating further, the pamphlet explained, “A thorough douche, according to medical authorities, takes at least 20 minutes. Does a prostitute ever take that much time between patrons? No!”⁹⁶ The agency believed that profit, not pleasure, fueled a prostitute’s sexual activity therefore, she took no precautions regarding the health of others.

Although the pamphlet located venereal disease in prostitutes, it extended a warning about promiscuous women as well. The pamphlet noted that “The sexually promiscuous girl or woman who is not a commercial prostitute is another fertile source of venereal disease . . . some people claim that she grew out of the repression of prostitution. But she was always there . . .

⁹⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ “She Looked Clean, But,” Federal Security Agency, Office of Community War Services, Social Protection Division (1945), 11, UA.

Strictly and realistically speaking, she is a prostitute.”⁹⁷ Regulating promiscuous women required more than repression of commercial vice. In “Techniques of Law Enforcement Against Prostitution,” the Federal Security Agency offered information on the threat that promiscuous women posed, the conditions that created these women, and how to regulate promiscuity. The manual posits that promiscuous girls are products of “broken homes,” “employed mothers,” or “a misguided sense of patriotism and believes she is contributing to the war effort by giving herself to the man in uniform.”⁹⁸ Historian Marilyn E. Hegarty argues that promiscuous women and girls, often called “khaki-wackies,” “victory girls,” and “good-time Charlottes” acted on cues from the media about sexuality and patriotism.⁹⁹ Hegarty contends that the media, playing upon women's desire for a patriotic role in the war, suggested women make themselves available to soldiers for “‘morale’ maintenance.”¹⁰⁰ Although government and medical authorities deemed promiscuous women as dangerous, pamphlets indicate that these women's actions grew out of unfortunate circumstances such as “previous environmental or personal circumstances, because of poverty, low mentality, emotional distress, or many other deeply imbedded causes.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁸ “Techniques of Law Enforcement Against Prostitution,” Federal Security Agency, Office of Community War Services, Division of Social Protection Division (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), 54-55, UA.

⁹⁹ For a larger discussion see Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008). Civilian women’s sexuality was not the only threat to success of the United States in the war. Authorities expressed concern about women in the military, specifically the Women’s Army Corps. See Leisa Meyer’s *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women’s Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 121-122.

¹⁰¹ “Meet Your Enemy,” 7.

Nevertheless, the “professional” still posed the greatest threat since promiscuous women were temporary residents in the commercial sex trade, the prostitute, however was a permanent blight.

As U.S. engagement in World War II neared an end, medical breakthroughs in the use of penicillin and local efforts to curb vice reduced the rate of venereal disease cases among the American military. As venereal disease no longer threatened the health of soldiers, prostitution lost its place as a public health enemy raising concerns for national security. Historians of women and sexuality argue that several other factors contributed to this shift as well. Historian Elaine Tyler May suggests the country returned to the construction of traditional gender roles in the 1950s. The pattern reflected the effort to isolate and protect the family and the country from the disruption of accepted race, class, and gender roles the war and the fear of communism caused.¹⁰² Those concerns led Americans to “turn inward” and focus on their families. By locating the family within a larger political framework, May connects Cold War ideology with a new emphasis on the domestic ideal, which sought to contain white, middle-class women's sexuality.¹⁰³ Women who transgressed moral or sexual boundaries “weakened the country’s moral fiber.” Marriage alone provided women and men an appropriate and non-threatening sexual outlet.¹⁰⁴ May and others have argued that changing sexual mores regarding premarital sex played a significant role as well. In the 1950s, Alfred Kinsey’s breakthrough study on human sexuality (*Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* published in 1948 and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953) revealed a rise in the occurrence of premarital sex and a decline in

¹⁰² Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), xvii.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, xxi.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 84-90 and 107.

the numbers of men soliciting sex from prostitutes.¹⁰⁵ The correlation implied that as couples engaged in premarital sexual relations, prostitution became less necessary.

Other historians of sexuality see the fading interest in prostitution in the post-war era in relation to the rising fears of homosexuality. Concern about the national security threat posed by homosexuals led to concerns about overall post-war stability as the nation viewed homosexuality as a “contagious disease” that threatened democracy and stability.¹⁰⁶ Homosexuals eclipsed the prostitute in the post-war era as the new public enemy and threat to national security.¹⁰⁷ These trends pushed national alarm about prostitution to the margins.

Diminished national attention on prostitution certainly did not indicate a demise in prostitution activity however. While the public became increasingly more concerned about communism and the sexual activities of homosexuals, there was a steady growth in commercialized sex in many American cities between 1945 and 1948. There is evidence that local governments continued to address the issue of prostitution even as public scrutiny dissipated. In municipalities across the country, and specifically in the South, communities worked to suppress vice around military bases and close down red-light districts reinvigorated after the war.

¹⁰⁵ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York and London: WW Norton & Company, 1992), 312-314, and May, *Homeward Bound*, 101-102.

¹⁰⁶ D’Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 292-294. Historian David K. Johnson follows the historiographical trend in viewing homosexuality as a post-war threat to security. Johnson illustrates how gay men symbolized a larger concern about moral decline. Any weakness, even moral, in the country provided an opportunity for communism to infiltrate the US. Many believed government purges of homosexuals from federal employment prevented a potential breach of U.S. security. See *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁷ See Estelle B. Freedman, "Uncontrolled Desires": The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960, *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (June 1987): 83-106.

While the communist scare and Civil Rights demonstrations dominated headlines and influenced social and cultural trends in the 1950s United States, concerns about prostitution remained. The move to repress prostitution demonstrates larger issues concerning organized crime, local public officials vying for power, and a citizenry at odds with one another as to the best approach to eradicate the oldest profession. The efforts to repress prostitution across U.S. history indicate broader concerns about women's sexuality as well. Prostitutes symbolized changing societal mores connected to the national culture, urbanization, gender norms, accepted sexual behavior, and public health concerns. At times seen as depraved and immoral, many also viewed these women as victims of their environment, the economy, and pernicious male exploiters. Reformers, mostly well intentioned, sought to lift women out of the sex trade so they might participate in the gender norms that guided American beliefs about family and sex and led to women's safe enclosure in domestic order. Prostitutes often seemed like pawns between reformers, the government, the medical community, and individual citizens in negotiations over appropriate sexual behavior. Their voices and experiences are often muted in these struggles.

Although some authorities continued to express a concern about prostitution and venereal disease in the late 1940s, the federal government took on a smaller role. It declined to reauthorize funding for the Social Protection Division of the Office of Community War Services, an agency created "to carry out the responsibilities of the Eight-Point Agreement and the May Act" and dismantled the division in 1946.¹⁰⁸ Yet the ASHA and the FBI did continue their efforts to educate and regulate, respectively: one continued to study the problem and alert the public to the threat of prostitution and the other focused on eradicating it within the powers

¹⁰⁸ "Teamwork in Community Services, 1941-1946: A Demonstration in Federal State and Local Cooperation," U.S. Office of Community War Services, Federal Security Agency (1946), 44, UA.

contained in the Mann Act. Each had a critical effect on commercialized sex work. The ASHA through public campaigns pressured local governments to address the reopening and operations of commercial vice districts, continuing to focus most of its attention on the health risks posed by commercial sexual interaction, rather than moral risks; and the FBI would work to enforce the Mann Act and close down multi-state vice rings, but its motivations seemed singularly situated in the dismantling of organized crime. In the post-war era, the efforts to regulate prostitution would manifest mostly from local officials and residents who decried the resurgence in prostitution in their cities. Their anxiety turned away from concerns of public health and concentrated on the immoral effect prostitution had on their communities, their local authorities, and on their image in the nation as a haven for sexual vice.

CHAPTER 2

TURNING OFF THE RED-LIGHT: SOUTHERN EFFORTS TO ERADICATE SEXUAL VICE IN THE POST-WAR ERA

The impetus behind closing down brothels and ridding cities of vice in the early 1950s marked a shift from the regulation of prostitution a decade earlier. During World War II, public health authorities and police worked diligently to curb prostitution. Fear that venereal disease would harm the health of servicemen, thereby impeding the war effort, prompted a national campaign against vice. Many cities experienced population growth during the war and government and public health authorities perceived the situation as ripe for commercial prostitution and the spread of venereal disease. National, state, and local authorities worked in concert to cleanse cities of the public health problem posed by prostitutes, whom they viewed as public enemies infecting servicemen with diseases. In most cities, local police, sometimes assisted by federal agencies, closed down commercial sex markets. The concern about prostitution and the spread of venereal disease persisted throughout World War II, but faded in the post-war era when widespread use of penicillin reduced the threat; it did not mean, however, that prostitution had disappeared.

Between 1945 and 1948, America experienced a “rebirth in prostitution.”¹ In some cities, brothel districts simply reopened; in others, sex workers relocated to bars, taverns, hotels, and the streets. During the post-war years, cities in the South succumbed to mounting pressure from the

¹ Winick, Charles, and Paul M. Kinsie. *The Lively Commerce: Prostitution in the United States* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 264.

American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) to again close down sexual black markets. The closing of districts accompanied a shift in the perception of the prostitute among reformers, the government, and citizens. Formerly a health concern during the war, communities now eyed prostitution as a danger to the overall morality of their city and community. The prostitute, previously equated with disease and physical bodily corruption, became linked to the moral corruption in society, much of which had little to do with prostitutes themselves.

National and local pressure, with assistance from the ASHA, provided the impetus to close down red-light districts and brothel operators. The ASHA supplied evidence that forced officials to address vice within their cities and towns. Adhering to its mission's tasks, the ASHA observed cities throughout the country during the war and in the post-war era and collected evidence that sexual vice had returned full force in America. In cities across the country, the ASHA surveyed and filed reports about prevalence, type (brothel, bar, hotel, and streetwalking), and procurement of prostitution. Many of the reports included detailed accounts by field investigators documenting the environments where women worked, whether on the street, or in brothels, bars or hotels, and the use of "go betweens," such as bell boys and cab drivers, who procured clients for prostitutes in the sex market. Armed with this evidence, the ASHA pressured local officials to eradicate vice.

Commercial sex markets in Birmingham, Alabama, Galveston, Texas, and Miami, Florida, in the 1940s and early 1950s embodied the change occurring in the post-war era and indicated how local officials and residents responded to the designation of their cities as vice dens. Efforts to purge prostitution in those locales provide historians with a microscope to examine not only the policies that caused vice districts to crumble, but also the effect the

closings had on sex workers.² Each city illustrates how prostitution transitioned from a national health concern during the war to a local concern about morality. Eradication efforts varied in each city, but they each symbolized how local officials and residents reacted to the threat of venereal disease during the war, which shaped their approach to the issue of commercial vice and post-war efforts to redefine their cities as “clean.” Each struggled to contain venereal disease infection during the war and took measures to reduce infection rates to soldiers and citizens. Instances of venereal disease decreased in Birmingham due to local laws focused on prostitution and the city’s embrace of a statewide mandate to reduce the threat. The approach showed a willingness to conduct a mass cleansing of the city’s public health problem and demonstrated continuity in their approach to resolve vice and morality issues after the war. A scandal in the police department led to an internal restructuring that ushered in a new guardian of public morals who embarked on a cleanup campaign to oust prostitution, in particular, a long-established madam who symbolized the corruption in the department. Closing down her operation served, in and of itself, to cleanse the city of vice.

During the war, Galveston officials’ reluctance and occasional defiance regarding federal disease control efforts almost led to a federal takeover of the local police. Local authorities and residents tolerated a thriving but illegal red-light district during and after the war because they regarded it as a vehicle for the city’s economic success. Only after a small, but steadily growing vocal opposition influenced by the ASHA sought to change the city’s deep-seated beliefs and deconstruct their image as a vice destination did Galveston relent. The final city, Miami, complied with federal efforts during the war and waged a successful campaign against

² “American Social Hygiene Association, Inc,” National Budget Committee 4-16-1946, Records of the Office of Community War Service (ROCWS), Social Protection Division (SPD)—General Records, 1941-1946, RG 215, box 1F, National Records and Archives Administration, College Park, Maryland (NARA).

commercial vice, demonstrating its tenacious approach to closing down sexual markets. After the war, the city experienced incredible growth in its economy and its population. Sex work in the city endured constant regulation. Yet, Miami's commercial sex trade, perhaps more than Birmingham and Galveston, experienced significant changes in the post-war era primarily resulting from its policy of relentless repression, which unwittingly, created a clandestine commercial sex market, and shifted the dynamics of the market and its physical location. The focus on regulating commercial prostitution allowed for a thriving B-girl racket and a gay culture in the city's bars and taverns, which many in Miami perceived as far more threatening to public morals than prostitution.

Although each city differed in the approach and methods it used to address commercial sex work in the post-war era, they shared some similarities. The ASHA remained a vigilant monitor of the commercial sex trade after the war conducting surveys of each city on multiple occasions. The organization used their findings to convey to officials the extent of prostitution, as well as other forms of sexual immorality, in each respective city. Often the ASHA sought allies in the local community to help impress upon authorities the need to eradicate vice. National attention on sex work in these particular cities influenced the success of the campaigns as officials and authorities found themselves forced to acknowledge that a problem existed. Although a few dismissed the alarming articles and reports, local residents took exception to the depiction of their cities as vice havens and enacted campaigns to eliminate sexual vice.

The Magic City: Birmingham, Alabama

“If I can’t operate, nobody else can!” screamed Thelma Ward, a suspected brothel owner and prostitute as detectives from the Birmingham, Alabama, Police Department raided her home in May 1954.³ Charged with operating a disorderly house, aiding and abetting prostitution, and visiting, residing, or resorting to a house of ill-fame, Ward’s arrest affirmed recent studies by the ASHA and *Redbook* that claimed Birmingham suffered from a serious prostitution problem.⁴ Director of Police Colonel Paul L. Singer disputed the studies, arguing that Birmingham was once a “sucker trap,” but that the city now was “as clean as any city I have ever known for servicemen.”⁵ Singer was right; prior to his appointment as police director in November 1953, prostitution seemed rampant in Birmingham. Once appointed to the position, however, Singer strengthened the vice squad and implemented a series of raids culminating in the closure of Thelma Ward’s brothel in 1954.

Ward’s arrest resulted from a growing concern by local citizens about corruption in Birmingham’s Police Department. Incidents involving the abuse of citizens, theft, mistreatment of women held on vagrancy and venereal disease charges, and bribery by a local madam had plagued the department in the early 1950s. The department’s close interaction with local sex workers cast a pall on the ethics of the local authorities. Despite efforts to redress the instances of poor behavior, the police department seemed only to achieve a thorough house cleaning by

³ Transcript, *City of Birmingham v. Thelma Ward* (no. 36287-G), 1954, Civil Rights Files and Related Materials (987), folder 36a, box 2, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library (BPL), Birmingham, Alabama.

⁴ “Col. Singer Disputes Report on Vice Here,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 25 December 1953, Subject Files: Prostitution, BPL and Ernest Leiser, “Sex Traps for Young Servicemen,” *Redbook* (January 1954): 87.

⁵ “Col. Singer Disputes,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*.

demonstrating its willingness to curtail vice activity in the city and dismantle the close-knit relationship between police and the city's most notable madam in the 1950s.

Founded in 1871, Birmingham quickly grew as a result of its fortunate location. The surrounding region had the world's largest deposit of coal, iron ore, and limestone, the key ingredients to produce iron. The industrial output of steel and iron led to the city's growth. The path to economic prosperity was difficult, especially during a deadly cholera epidemic that killed over five hundred residents and a brutal depression in 1873. Yet the city rebounded, and in the 1880s money from northern investors in local industry, new residents, railroad access, new businesses and a newspaper made the city boom. Birmingham became a symbol of industrial progress and earned the nickname the Magic City to describe its economic vitality.⁶

The city's iron industry drew young male miners and steel workers to the city. Not surprisingly, a red-light district developed. One of its madams, Louise Wooster, was famed for her kindness to those stricken with cholera during the outbreak and also for her claim to have been the lover of John Wilkes Booth.⁷ Wooster's brothel catered to the wealthy class in Birmingham and she faced little police interference. The more visible women in the city's sex trade, those who worked as streetwalkers, however endured arrests and police harassment.⁸

In the South, race played a significant role in the regulation of prostitution, and particularly in the response to venereal disease. In Alabama, venereal disease laws dated back to a 1919 act, which established testing and treatment for those afflicted. Treatment for disease was

⁶ Bertha Bendall Norton, *Birmingham's First Magic Century: Were You There?* (Birmingham, AL: Lakeshore Press, 1970), 7-12 and James L. Baggett, *Louise Wooster: Birmingham's Magdalen*, *Alabama Heritage* 78 (Fall 2005): 27.

⁷ No substantiation besides Wooster's exists to support the claim.

⁸ Baggett, *Louise Wooster*, 28.

affected by Jim Crow social and legal segregation policies, as well as ideas about the biological differences between the races. Public health officials established the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, a forty-year project spanning between 1932 and 1972.⁹ The study promised health care to four hundred African Americans suffering from syphilis, but withheld treatment for the disease, even after penicillin was identified as a cure, to document the pathology of the disease in African Americans. Health experts believed that blacks were more prone to syphilis because of a supposed proclivity for sexual promiscuity; and some health officials believed African Americans lacked an understanding of the serious implications associated with contraction making it more difficult to treat them successfully.¹⁰ In Birmingham, race determined where clients received treatment. Statistics indicate that Alabama's African-American population suffered from higher rates of infection than whites confirming to some in the medical field that southern blacks were a "syphilis-soaked race."¹¹ According to the Alabama Board of Health annual reports, approximately two percent of whites and twenty percent of blacks in Alabama

⁹ The study began as a response to a Swedish experiment that traced the progress of untreated syphilis in those in Sweden. In Tuskegee, the study sought to prove or identify differences in the disease's pathology based on biological racial differences. After, the introduction of penicillin, some began to question the ethical nature of continuing the study and a whistle blower divulged the study's practices to the media in the early 1970s. For a closer examination of the study, the ethical implications, and the aftermath see Susan M. Reverby, *Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and Its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 157.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

were infected with venereal disease in 1940.¹² The reports indicate that in Jefferson County in 1941, 942 whites and 5,773 black suffered from venereal infections.¹³

Despite the racist assumptions about venereal disease, Alabama state and Birmingham municipal codes reinforced assumptions about women's misbehavior, not African American immorality as the significant factor in presumption of venereal disease infection. Beginning in 1923, the Alabama state legislature addressed the issue, stressing a connection between disease and prostitution. The title of the 1923 code made the connection plain: "Prostitution as source of venereal disease; prostitution presumptive evidence of venereal infection; suppression of prostitution declared public health measure."¹⁴ The act stated:

Prostitution is hereby declared to be a prolific source of syphilis, gonorrhea.... and the suppression of prostitution is declared to be a public health measure. All health officers shall cooperate with the proper official whose duty it is to enforce laws directed against prostitution and otherwise use every proper means for the suppression of prostitution. It is further declared that prostitution is presumptive evidence of venereal disease infection, and whenever or wherever apprehended, prostitutes and other persons whom the county health officer has probable cause to believe infected with venereal disease shall be examined for said infection by the health officer or his assistants.¹⁵

¹² Alabama Board of Health Annual Reports (1941), 221-224, Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), box SGO21668, Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), Montgomery, Alabama.

¹³ National Health Honor Roll, file: American Medical Association through American Social Hygiene Association (1944), box SG0007151, ADPH.

¹⁴ Venereal Diseases, Code of Alabama 1975, Sec. 22-16-18. The section dates back to the 1923 code. Minor changes in language were made to clarify the act's intent, which remained unchanged until repealed in 1987.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Presumably pleased with their far-reaching authority, the state medical organization endorsed the legislation.¹⁶ Alabama municipalities also enacted local ordinances to address venereal disease.

A 1930 Birmingham city ordinance reinforced the state and national trend of associating venereal disease with prostitution. The code states:

Whenever any person charged with the violation of any law or ordinance relating to prostitution, luteness [sic], street walking, soliciting, for prostitution, keeping or setting up a house of ill fame, brothel, or bawdy house, or vagrancy, is arrested.... It shall be the duty.... to order an examination of such person by the Health Officer for the purpose of determining whether or not such person is infected with a venereal disease.¹⁷

Although the city code specified no gender, arrest records indicate that women comprised more than ninety percent of the individuals detained and tested for venereal infection.¹⁸

Most of the women held for venereal disease testing were arrested on vagrancy charges.¹⁹

The Birmingham city code identified thirteen different types of persons who could be arrested on vagrancy charges. The descriptions included “any person who is a prostitute” and “any person

¹⁶ “Amendments to Venereal Disease Laws,” *Journal of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama*, no 4 (October 1939), 135, box SG022071, ADPH.

¹⁷ The General Code of the City of Birmingham, Alabama 1930, Title 20 Health and Sanitation, Sec. 5181(a and b) Venereal Diseases.

¹⁸ Southside Jail Docket and Ensley Jail Dockets 1941, 1943, 1947, 1951, 1955, BPL. A sample of months ranging from two to six were taken for each of the years listed. Southside and Ensley were the city jails in Birmingham. The dockets list the name, address, age, sex, race, and charge of persons arrested. A notation of whether the individual was administered a “doctor’s exam” was noted along with the criminal charge. In some cases a release date and signature of the health officer indicated when the women were released. Some cases also listed whether the individual was “infected.”

¹⁹ A few men were arrested on vagrancy or on a charge of venereal disease were also detained of testing. The men made up approximately ten percent and with one exception, were identified as African American. Author looked at three or more months in the years 1941, 1943, 1947, 1951, and 1955. Of all people tested in 1943, eighteen percent were infected, Report conducted by Works Progress Administration under Commission of Jefferson County for Coordinating Council of Social Forces (1943), section “Vagrancy in Birmingham in 1943,” W. Cooper Green Papers, folder 5, box 15, BPL.

who is a keeper, proprietor or employee of a house of prostitution.”²⁰ Though not all women arrested on charges of vagrancy were tested for venereal infection, arrest records indicate police detained and tested only women charged with vagrancy. The campaign in Birmingham differed little from those in other southern cities.²¹ Health and government officials believed the prostitute spread venereal disease.

Oddly, during World War II, Birmingham was a relatively vice free city. The American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) conducted seven observations of the city during the war years and concluded that prostitution was not the problem, rather chippies and pick-ups – women who engaged in promiscuous sexual activity for non-commercial gain – were the sexual threat.²² Whether the ASHA presented those findings to city officials is unknown.

Other communities in Alabama, especially those located near military bases experienced high rates of commercial sexual activity such as such as Anniston, Huntsville, Mobile, and Phenix City. In 1943, Alabama distinguished itself from other states and moved away from the venereal disease-prostitute nexus by instituting a universal venereal disease testing law requiring every person between the ages of fourteen and fifty to be tested for syphilis.²³ According to the

²⁰ The General Code of Birmingham 1930, Title 47 Vagrancy, Sec. 6028 (9) and (10). The General Code of 1944 contains identical language in defining what constitutes vagrancy.

²¹ For information on Norfolk and Richmond, see Pippa Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia, 1920-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2006).

²² Note cards on Birmingham, Alabama surveys, (Nov. 1940-Aug 1945), box 105 Legal and Protective Surveys, American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Their role in the sex trade will be discussed in detail in the examination of Miami.

²³ “Studies of Law and Law Enforcement,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 30, no. 3 (March 1944): 114.

president of the city commission in Birmingham, public response to the program in the city was “most encouraging” and “Syphilis and gonorrhea have become rather common words.... people are more willing and anxious to respond to diagnosis and treatment and to render public support for control measures.”²⁴ Public support appeared positive for the program and residents took the mandate seriously; in at least one case, a city resident reported a woman for not following her treatment plan.²⁵

The new law prompted changes in Birmingham’s city code in 1944. The amended municipal code granted sweeping authority to the city’s health officer to detain anyone suspected of having venereal disease. The ordinance stated that if “the health officer has reasonable grounds to believe that any person is infected with, or has been exposed to, a venereal disease, the health officer is authorized to cause such person to be apprehended.... detained and examined.... to protect public health.”²⁶ Furthermore, the health officer could detain a person until the officer determined that the infected person was no longer “a source of danger to public health.”²⁷ Although the 1944 law neglected any mention of prostitutes, the majority of those persons held for a doctor’s exam continued to be women arrested on vagrancy charges.²⁸ Most women were detained until the results of the blood test came back, and if found infected, the

²⁴ Letter to Hon. J. Albin Anderson, Jr., Mayor Springfield, Massachusetts from W. Cooper Green, President, City Commission, 2 August 1945, folder 7, box 26, W. Cooper Green Papers, BPL.

²⁵ Report dated 16 January to 1 February 1945, folder 5, box 15, W. Cooper Green Papers, BPL.

²⁶ General Code of Birmingham Alabama 1944 Division IV. Venereal Disease sect. 661.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, sect 662.

²⁸ In some instances, men were arrested on vagrancy charges and a doctor’s exam was noted on the arrest docket, but the vast majority of those tested were women.

women would be held until treated for the disease. Detention lengths were difficult to discern because in addition to testing positive for a venereal infection, the women also faced charges of vagrancy. Treatment for venereal infections had improved remarkably in the early 1940s; treatment time had been reduced to less than two weeks from the 1930s where it could last between three months and one year.²⁹

In March 1944, Birmingham opened a Rapid Treatment center that used penicillin to reduce the treatment time to less than ten days, and often to only five days.³⁰ To comply with the state law, Jefferson County implemented a forty-five day campaign in May 1945 to test county residents between the ages of fourteen and fifty as established by the Alabama law. The operation, a first in the country for a city Birmingham's size, administered over 300,000 tests for syphilis and gonorrhea.³¹ The campaign provided centers for testing around the city so residents could easily access the sites, such as the one in city hall that officials established to test employees.³² Local officials from cities such as Paulsboro, New Jersey, Springfield, Massachusetts, Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Eureka, California, lauded Birmingham's efforts and

²⁹ Walter Clarke, M.D., "Working Together to Stamp Out VD," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 32, no. 9 (December 1946): 432; Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 170-171; and Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control*, 244.

³⁰ J. R. Heller, Jr., "The Postwar Syphilis Control Problem in the United States," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 31, no. 8 (November 1945): 538 and Clarke, "Working Together to Stamp Out VD," 432.

³¹ Teamwork in Community Services 1941-1946, 52, and Kenneth R. Miller, "Headlines and By-Lines," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 31, no. 7 (October 1945): 486. Birmingham's population in 1950 was 326,037. United States Census Bureau, Population Statistics, 1950.

³² Various letters of inquiry, folder 7, box 26, W. Cooper Green papers, BPL.

inquired about the program's implementation in order to establish similar measures in their respective communities.³³

Incidents of venereal infection decreased throughout the war, which the ASHA believed resulted from aggressive national and local campaigns bringing awareness to the problem, but rates of infection remained high in Birmingham for both white and black residents. Even as the city's blood testing stations were extolled as successful in identifying venereal disease, infections rates in 1946 in the city were 338.3 per 100,000, while the U.S average was 100.8.³⁴ One report dated in 1943, found that seventy-seven percent of those arrested for vagrancy, which were mostly women suspected of prostitution, tested positive for venereal disease.³⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising that police in the city continued to see prostitution as the source of disease. The Birmingham police conducted vice raids and stings locally even as national attention on prostitution faded. One vice drive in Jefferson County attempted to punish "go between," who linked clients with prostitutes. City and county law enforcement targeted taxi drivers who "haul[ed] women for immoral purposes."³⁶ Cab operators had played an important role as go between in the commercial sex industry in many cities. Drivers acted as go between in urban

³³ J. R. Heller, Jr., "The Postwar Syphilis Control Problem in the United States," 541-542.

³⁴ Steve Yates, "VD Control Agency to Close this Month Due to Lack of Funds," *The Birmingham News*, 10 June 1954, 25.

³⁵ "Related Facts, Birmingham's Recorder Court," folder 5 box 15, W. Cooper Green Papers, BPL.

³⁶ "County's Vice Drive Making Headway," *Birmingham Post* (Birmingham, Alabama), 22 July 1948, Subject file: Prostitution, BPL.

cities such as New York and Chicago.³⁷ They provided information to customers looking for prostitutes and developed business partnerships valuable to sex workers or operators of sex work rings for ferrying clients to the women. While individuals who assisted the operations of the commercial sex market experienced regulation, the physical location of the market also encountered scrutiny. An editorial in *The Birmingham News* covered an investigation conducted by the Health Department that found prostitutes used local tourist camps to conduct business.³⁸ The opinion piece lamented that there was a “moral and physical danger” posed by the camps and that “a great deal of immorality [was] practiced daily and nightly.” Furthermore, the tourist camps were believed to “corrupt the morals of our young people, disrupt homes and spread venereal disease.”³⁹

Although the health department’s observations and the opinion piece suggest that venereal disease was still a county and city concern, the issue of morality began to eclipse the health concerns of local authorities. The city continued to arrest women for vagrancy and even detained them for testing, but the numbers of those tested decreased. In a four-month period during 1947, forty-nine of the fifty-three women arrested on vagrancy charges were detained for

³⁷ Taxi drivers’ role in procuring prostitutes for customers has been explored briefly by Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York and London: WW Norton & Company, 1992) and Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). In the city of Miami, authorities struggled to convict drivers who assisted procuring sex workers for patrons because of lacking evidence and laws. Luther Voltz, “Blame Shifted for Failure to Win Vice Cases,” *Miami Herald*, 12 March 1954, 1-C.

³⁸ “A Scandalous Situation,” *The Birmingham News* (Birmingham, Alabama), 22 January 1947, Subject file: Prostitution, BPL.

³⁹ Ibid.

testing. In 1955, seventy-three of the one hundred sixty-eight women arrested on vagrancy charges were detained, nearly a fifty percent decrease.⁴⁰

The reasons for the decreasing number of women tested resulted from local concerns about the ramifications of the law and reduced national funding for local disease facilities. Some questioned the legal and ethical implications of targeting, almost exclusively, women vagrants, or prostitutes. The practice made local headlines in 1951 when a recorder court judge chastised a police lieutenant for holding a woman in jail through the weekend after she was arrested on a Friday evening. Health officers only conducted blood tests on weekdays, therefore the woman remained in jail until Monday. The judge found the detention, without the option of bail, violated the woman's rights, and hinted that perhaps the blood test did as well. The police commissioner, Eugene "Bull" Connor, defended the officer's actions and suggested that the judge be removed from office. A local columnist, writing under the pen name "Vulcan," published a series of opinion pieces about the "row" between Connor and the judge. Vulcan argued that the law was not applied equitably and cited one of Connor's recent statements. Connor acknowledged that Alabama law required the testing of all residents, but he stated the city only tested vagrant women because "we don't have the facility" to test everyone.⁴¹ The claim that the city lacked the funds and the facility to detain and test all citizens was likely true.

The Venereal Disease Act of 1938 that appropriated federal money to the states for education, detection, and treatment experienced funding cuts in the years after the war. The act's funding peaked at 17.8 million dollars in 1949, but was cut every year after. By 1954, congress

⁴⁰ Southside Jail Dockets, Birmingham, Alabama, BPL.

⁴¹ Vulcan, "Connor-Parker Row May Bring Some Good to Our Town: From Where I Stand" *The Birmingham News*, 27 July 1951, 1.

appropriated only three million dollars.⁴² The decline in funding forced many states and cities to reduce budgets for venereal disease testing after the war, resulting in Birmingham's selective testing. The cuts were visible in the focus of health organizations as well. In 1950, an Alabama state health conference held in Birmingham contained no sessions on venereal disease.⁴³ Likewise, reports from the Association of State and Territorial Health Officers, an organization created in the early 1900s, addressed the issue with less frequency. In 1951, 1952, and 1954 none of the reports from the conferences noted the issue and in 1953 and 1955 the subject typically accompanied a brief statement acknowledging the need for studies and evaluations of venereal disease to continue. The subject may have been part of the conferences, but was not deemed significant enough to be addressed in the overall reports.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, other issues attracted the attention of health departments. The Alabama Department of Public Health addressed blood testing for marriage licenses, but concerns about rabies, milk programs, and mental health issues dominated the correspondence in 1952. The state of Alabama and the city of Birmingham, like the federal government, had turned its focus away from venereal disease in the post-war years.

Discontinuing or reducing detention and testing reflected a shift in disconnecting prostitution with a public health threat and while simultaneously connecting it with a public moral threat. After the war, eradication efforts continued locally. In Birmingham, the city still

⁴² Odin W. Anderson, "Syphilis and Society: Problems of Control in the United States, 1912-1964," Research Series 22 (Health Information Foundation: University of Chicago, 1965), 24 and 33.

⁴³ Various conference documents, folder County Health Work no. 1 1950, box SG 0007139, ADPH.

⁴⁴ Annual Reports, folder Conferences and Reports from the Association of State and Territorial Health Officers, box SG007116, ADPH.

grappled with the existence of prostitution. As the 1947 opinion piece in the *Birmingham News* about trailer court prostitution noted, the threat from prostitution was a physical and a moral danger. The moral danger, however, was not the same one that perplexed reformers in the early twentieth century when both sex workers and clients faced questions about their individual morality. In Birmingham, the danger became tied to a concern about the community's ethics, and particularly the ethics of the legal body charged with enforcing morals legislation: the Birmingham Police.

By the end of 1951, prostitution became inextricably linked with police corruption, rather than with the corruption of the public's health. The limited amount of commercial sex activity in the city in World War II influenced this shift. During the war, the greater risk of venereal disease infection had resulted from casual pick-ups, not commercial vice, and even as the war ended, venereal infections did not. Local and state laws, however, linked disease with prostitution, not promiscuity, arresting and detaining sex workers as vagrants for testing.⁴⁵ Even as infection rates remained high, the city reduced its policy of detaining prostitutes after the war.⁴⁶ As residents learned of the increase in commercial sex activity and the complicit behavior of local police in allowing it to flourish, it sparked a concern about the community's morality not its public health. Just as they had agreed to restore their city's purity through voluntary blood testing, when faced with an embarrassing public scandal, residents would push to purify the city

⁴⁵ Although it is likely that the city arrested chippies under the vagrancy law because other cities used it to catch a wide array of individuals they felt violated appropriate social behavior, the law's language, nonetheless, targeted prostitutes.

⁴⁶ Note cards for Birmingham, Alabama reveal that commercial prostitution increased and experienced periods of excessive availability countered with repression campaigns. The records indicate this continued in some measure through the early 1960s. Box 105 Legal and Protective Surveys, ASHA.

once again, only this time it was through a morals campaign that targeted the police department and prostitution.

The shift from viewing prostitution as a public health concern to one of morality is reflected in the case of Thelma Ward, a well-known white madam operating in the city's commercial vice trade since 1930. Closing her down as a madam would simultaneously close down police corruption, and perhaps lead to stronger law enforcement of all commercial sexual vice. Ward's criminal history dated back to 1930, when she was first convicted of vagrancy.⁴⁷ Between 1930 and 1944, officials arrested Ward nine times on either vagrancy or disorderly conduct charges. The court found her guilty all but once and fined her five dollars for each conviction. However, the court suspended all jail time except for a conviction in 1935 in which she served thirty days in jail.⁴⁸ Ward escaped serious punishment because she developed relationships with high-ranking police officials and she paid them to protect her business. She operated with impunity for a number of years, until a public scandal precipitated a sincere move to end her operations.

On November 15, 1951, seven years after her last arrest, police detectives raided Ward's home on 13th Street South after her neighbor complained of "loud noises coming from the home continuously day and night."⁴⁹ The police charged Ward with maintaining a nuisance and violating section 812 of the city code, an infraction targeting suspected houses of ill-fame.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Transcript, *City of Birmingham v. Thelma Ward*.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "Mrs. Ward Acquitted in 'Bawdy House' Case," *The Birmingham News*, 6 December 1951, 27.

⁵⁰ *The General Code of the City of Birmingham, Alabama, 1944*, chapter 34 Nuisances, sect. 812.

After a short trial, the court acquitted Ward; the judge argued that there was no solid evidence in the case and that he would not convict Ward based on the “whim” of others. The raid and the hearing attracted very little attention when it first occurred, consisting of a small paragraph on page twenty-seven of *The Birmingham News*.⁵¹ In fact, only five months before Ward’s arrest, the police department claimed that the city had no prostitution problems.⁵² However, by the end of December, the raid, the court’s verdict, and the corruption of the police force would come into question as a series of scandals rocked the department in which police were accused of receiving bribes in return for allowing Ward to operate

The Chief of Police at the time, Marcus Hancock, faced accusations, by Ward’s complaining neighbor, that he visited Ward’s house before the trial, and that Ward’s close relationship with the chief led to her acquittal. Hancock admitted that he visited Ward’s home but explained that his visit was purely for inspection purposes.⁵³ He produced several officers as witnessed who confirmed that Hancock directed them to observe Ward’s house, which Hancock believed served as proof of the official capacity of his presence at her home. The officers reported that they had found no unusual or suspicious activity when they watched the house between October 17 and November 12.⁵⁴ Yet, unbeknownst to Hancock, another detective had observed the home and revealed that an unspecified “steady stream of visitors” spent time at

⁵¹ “Mrs. Ward Acquitted in ‘Bawdy House’ Case,” *The Birmingham News*, 27.

⁵² “No Organized Crime Here, Says Chief of Police,” *The Birmingham News*, 26 July 1951, 3.

⁵³ “City Police Row Simmers Inside Own Department,” *The Birmingham News*, 14 December 1951, 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Ward's home.⁵⁵ In addition, information leaked to the press that Hancock had tried to solicit one hundred dollars a month in bribe money from Thelma Ward.⁵⁶ Testimony in a related case revealed that Hancock entertained Ward at his fishing cabin, and that she had broken her leg while there.⁵⁷ Amid these accusations, Hancock took a leave of absence citing health issues on December 18, 1951 and he never returned to full duty as the Chief of Police.⁵⁸ However, the scandal caused concern among Birmingham's citizens about the inner workings of the department, and local residents formed The Citizen's Committee on Birmingham Police Department to investigate the "morale and efficiency" of the police. The committee met in 1952 between January 21 and February 8. They tackled several issues including the accusations of criminal conduct on the part of Chief Hancock and a Detective, Henry Darnell, also accused of accepting bribes from Ward. The committee issued a report on February 19, 1952, calling for an investigation into the charges against Darnell and Hancock. It hoped that the investigation would confirm or clear the allegations against both men putting an end to the scandal, but neglected to pursue the matter further.⁵⁹ Neither Hancock nor Darnell ever faced formal charges connected to Ward's operation.

⁵⁵ "Chief Hancock, Henry Darnell on Sick Leave," *The Birmingham News*, 18 December 1951, 1.

⁵⁶ "Prosecution Sidetracks New Morals Charges," *The Birmingham News*, 5 January 1952, 1. The source for the information was unknown.

⁵⁷ Glen T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 97.

⁵⁸ "Chief Hancock Reduced to Rank of Police Captain," *The Birmingham News*, 8 January 1953, 1.

⁵⁹ "Report of the Citizen's Committee on Birmingham Police Department, February 19, 1952," 1, folder 4, box 22, Jimmy Morgan Papers, BPL.

The committee also investigated the lengthy detention of prostitutes for blood testing. They concluded that the city's prostitution problem was "outstanding compare[d] to other cities," but they believed that the Birmingham needed to approach the issue of venereal disease and its connection with prostitution more efficiently and humanely.⁶⁰ After interviewing suspected prostitutes, the citizen's committee opined in its report from February 1952:

We are not entirely convinced that the system runs as smoothly as was indicated and that there are no improper delays and no cases of mistreatment. We are informed of the terrible difficulties dealing with prostitutes, but we recommend that the superior officers give the handling of these cases constant supervision to the end that there may be a minimum of cases of justified complaint, delay, or mistreatment. Zeal for the suppression of prostitution does not in any way excuse mistreatment of the prostitute or suspected prostitute.⁶¹

In the aftermath of the committee's report, only minor changes – related to salary and career advancement of the force– occurred in the police department. No evidence was found indicating that the policy of testing and detaining prostitutes changed.

The committee's findings cast a shadow on law enforcement in Birmingham, and over the next few years only contributed to the suspicions that the department was morally corrupt. While the committee was still meeting, a scandal involving Commissioner of Police Bull Connor occurred when a reporter and a police detective found Connor, a married man, and his secretary in a hotel room.⁶² A local court convicted Connor on four morals charges including engaging in disorderly conduct, having sexual intercourse with person other than his wife, and registering and occupying a hotel room with a woman other than his wife, a law that criminalized sexual

⁶⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

⁶¹ Ibid., 11.

⁶² "Warrants Sworn Out for Conner, Woman Secretary," *The Birmingham News*, 26, December 1951, 1.

relations between unmarried couples. Connor dismissed calls for his resignation and survived two impeachment trials, and went on to fight his conviction in the Alabama State Supreme Court, which reversed his conviction.⁶³ In addition to Connor's questionable moral behavior, the department was beset with allegations of criminal behavior including graft, improper detention of suspected criminals (other than prostitutes), and the physical mistreatment of local citizens. Focus, however, continued on the sexual market.

Despite the committee's insistence that the improper relationships between police and prostitutes undergo investigation, commercial sexual vice continued in Birmingham in 1952 and 1953. According to the ASHA, interviews with servicemen indicated that sex workers were available in almost every local hotel. The ASHA found that in fifteen city hotels, bellboys "without hesitancy offered" to procure prostitutes for patrons.⁶⁴ In late 1953, a change in administration would propel a city-wide cleanup. Birmingham residents elected Robert E. Lindbergh as commissioner of public safety in November, and the new commissioner, inheriting a department plagued with moral offences, appointed retired army Colonel Paul L. Singer to the position of director of police, a position designed exclusively to cleanup the police department.⁶⁵

Singer went to work addressed internal departmental issues of morality and ethics, and he focused on eradicating commercial sexual vice, which had become intertwined with the department since the Thelma Ward case in 1951.⁶⁶ Shortly after his appointment, Singer

⁶³ Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 100-101.

⁶⁴ Note cards on Birmingham survey (June. 49- Sept. 52 and Jan. 1953-Aug. 1953), box 105 Legal and Protective Surveys, ASHA.

⁶⁵ Connor had declined to seek reelection, but he would run again, and win, in 1957.

⁶⁶ For a full account of the scandals in the Birmingham Police Department see Glen Eskew's *But for Birmingham*.

embarked on a series of vice raids on local hotels in December 1953. Singer's detectives arrested and charged fourteen people with either vagrancy or aiding and abetting prostitution.⁶⁷ Hotel prostitution was rampant in city, and given the ASHA's findings, it is no surprise that Singer initiated his attack on that element of the sexual black market. Singer expressed hope that the hotels would cooperate with him, but minced no words when he threatened that he would "be drastic with those who don't."⁶⁸ In January 1954, *Redbook* ran a story about sexual vice in the nation that they had investigated over the previous months. While the article did not go into detail, it pointed out conditions in Birmingham as well as other cities, were "shocking."⁶⁹ Singer disputed the study arguing "it was a sucker trap here once.... but Birmingham is as clean a city as I have ever known for servicemen."⁷⁰ However, having served in the position only a month, the raids that he orchestrated occurred after the ASHA's studies and observations. Singer's actions though were making a difference. In January 1954, the ASHA upgraded the city from a "D" ranking, the lowest, which called for immediate attention to a "B" rating, which meant that the situation was "fairly satisfactory" but suggested occasional "check-ups" to assess the conditions of the commercialized sex market.⁷¹ The improvements in the sexual black market,

⁶⁷ "Police Arrest 14 Women, Bellhops in Vice Raids," *The Birmingham News*, 12 December 1953, 2.

⁶⁸ "Hotels' Aid Asked Erasing Prostitution," *The Birmingham News*, 21 December 1953, 1.

⁶⁹ Leiser, "Sex Traps for Young Servicemen," 87.

⁷⁰ "Col. Singer Disputes," *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 25 December 1953, Subject files – Prostitution, BPL.

⁷¹ Note card on Birmingham (Jan. 53-Nov. 56), box 105, Legal and Protective Surveys, ASHA. The note cards that the ASHA constructed were based on surveys of commercialized prostitution in selected cities. Each card contains the name of the state, city, and nearby military base, if applicable, and provides remarks and ranks of each observation on scale from A to D. The respective letter corresponds with an assessment: A- Good: Situation satisfactory; B-Fair:

especially the one that took place in the city's hotel industry, however, represented only part of the problem though. Singer intended to stamp out all prostitution and he set his sights on Thelma Ward's operation, which he believed reflected the moral corruption of department and damaged its reputation.

On May 5, 1954, Birmingham Police detectives peered through a rear window into Ward's 13th Street South residence. Inside stood two nude women on either side of a clothed man seated at a table.⁷² Armed with a vice warrant (for gambling), detectives knocked on the door and, without waiting for a response, broke down the door and entered the residence. The nude women, Deloris Clancy and Eloise Brown, dashed out of the room. Detectives arrested the man at the table, Ellis P. McDonald, who claimed he was just having the women sign and update insurance forms.⁷³ Meanwhile, in the living room, Ward screamed and cursed at detectives. An elderly blind woman and a seemingly intoxicated young man were also present in the home's living room. When detectives went upstairs, they discovered two men in separate rooms in various states of undress. One man, Vester L. Causey, had on only his underwear, and the other, Edward J. Slaven, was putting on his pants. In the basement, detectives discovered Clancy and Brown, half dressed, hiding in a coal bin.⁷⁴ Detectives rounded up the group and brought all but the elderly woman to the police department. Police charged Ward with operating a brothel, and charged Clancy and Brown with disorderly conduct and visiting a house of ill-fame. All three

Situation fairly satisfactory, occasional checkups needed; C-Poor: Attention needed, but not urgent; D-Bad, immediate attention needed.

⁷² Transcript, *City of Birmingham v. Thelma Ward*, BPLDAH.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

women also faced vagrancy charges. Detectives charged the men with a mixture of disorderly conduct, visiting a house of ill-fame, and drunkenness.⁷⁵

On June 8, 1954, Recorder Court Judge Ralph E. Parker, presided over the city's case against Ward. Although only transcripts of the detectives' testimony exist, the records reveal that a commercial sex market operated in Birmingham despite statements to the contrary from former Chief of Police Hancock years earlier.⁷⁶ The two women taken into custody at Ward's home had extensive history of arrests with the Birmingham police. Brown's record contained twenty-two charges between 1948 and 1953 – mostly for drunkenness and a few vagrancy charges.⁷⁷ The detectives knew of Brown, but were much more familiar with Clancy and Ward. Detectives testified that Clancy had a reputation as a prostitute. Her criminal record listed nine arrests between 1942 and 1949 on drunkenness and disorderly conduct charges, and one charge of vagrancy.⁷⁸ Two detectives who testified against Ward in the case, she once considered her friends. These detectives now turned on Ward. One, Abe Goldstein, stated under oath that Clancy had previously worked as a prostitute for a brothel operated by Edna Duncan. His conclusions were the subject of some debate in court between the women's attorney, Roderick Beddow, Sr., and detective Goldstein. Beddow claimed Clancy had not worked for Duncan as a

⁷⁵ "Thelma Ward Swore When Police Raided," *The Birmingham News*, 8 June 1954, 1. The General Code of Alabama defines disorderly conduct as "lewd, immoral or indecent conduct. . . . [and] any person who is found in a house of ill-fame. General Code of the City of Birmingham, Alabama, 1944, chapter 13 Disorderly Conduct and Indecency, sec. 311 Disorderly Conduct defined.

⁷⁶ "No Organized Crime here, Says Chief of Police," *The Birmingham News*, 26 July 1951, 3.

⁷⁷ Transcript, *City of Birmingham v. Thelma Ward*, BPLDAH.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

prostitute, but, rather, as a waitress in her husband Jack's restaurant the Black Café. The trial also disclosed that Ward had once worked in a house of prostitution run by the elderly blind woman, Louise Waters, present at Ward's house the day of the raid. By 1954, Ward no longer worked for Waters, but cared for the ailing woman. Detectives countered that Edna Duncan's brothel was one of those mentioned by Ward as she questioned why detectives targeted her house when four others existed in the neighborhood.⁷⁹

The court found all three women guilty; Ward for operating a bawdy house and aiding and abetting prostitution and Clancy and Brown for visiting a house of ill fame. The court also found Clancy guilty of disorderly conduct. The men, Causey and Slaven, were both convicted on visiting a house of ill fame and drunkenness, and the court acquitted McDonald, the man found surrounded by the two unclothed women. It appeared that he indeed had visited the home for a legitimate purpose, and was the victim of bad timing.⁸⁰ Ward's conviction also included the designation of her house as a brothel for the first time, paving the way to issue a legal mandate against her operation. Ward appealed the verdict, and while awaiting the decision, Singer orchestrated another raid on the house in July 1954. This time, Clancy and Brown were found nude in the house and police arrested the women and Ward again.⁸¹ In November 1954, the court ruled against Ward's appeal, enabling the city to declare Ward's house a brothel and issue an injunction that prohibited Ward, Clancy, and Brown from operating a "house of

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ "Thelma Ward Fined \$50, Gets 180-day Suspended Jail Sentence as Outgrowth of May 3 Vice Raid," *The Birmingham News*, 9 June 1954, 10.

⁸¹ "Mrs. Thelma Ward Faces New Charge of Vagrancy," *The Birmingham News*, 3 July 1954.

prostitution, bawdy house, house of ill-fame or call house.”⁸² Application for an injunction required that either three householders in the city or an officer of the city submit in writing and under oath a complaint charging a person with keeping a bawdy house. Despite complaints in previous years, the requirements for the abatement went unmet or the complaints ignored.⁸³ Singer’s determination to stamp out vice, along with Ward’s conviction, armed the city with the evidence it needed to pursue the injunction. Ward would now have to vacate her home. The changes in the leadership in the Birmingham Police Department, particularly with Hancock’s sick leave and his eventual removal as Chief of Police in 1952, and Singer’s mandate to cleanse the department, ultimately impeded Ward’s ability to operate. The raid, and court testimony by two detectives who had once been her friends, and perhaps her protectors, left her without any other friends in high places.

Singer declined to renew his contract a month prior to the court’s issuing of the injunction. He had completed his mission to “clean up and reorganize the department.”⁸⁴ He succeeded in expelling officers and officials that had corrupted the department’s ethics, and cleaned up the immoral activities that the department had condoned, particularly the commercial sex trade. Ward’s activities and her house had presented a physical and symbolic location in which to cleanse the city. Although Ward evaded public scrutiny for twenty years, under Singer’s leadership the department shut down her operation and ended her connections in the police department that had allowed her operation to function. The police department's zeal to

⁸² “Permanent Ban is Agreed on to Restrain Mrs. Ward, Others,” *The Birmingham News*, 19 November 1954, 24.

⁸³ Code of Birmingham 1944.

⁸⁴ “Police Director Singer Not to Extend Contract with City,” *The Birmingham News*, 9 October 1954, 1.

close her down reflected prostitution's threat to police ethics, and therefore, its status as a public enemy.

Birmingham's vice problems faded into the background by the mid 1950s, when racial tensions flared up in the city and across the South. Connor defeated Lindbergh in the 1957 election for Commissioner of Public Safety, successfully capitalizing on racial fears by exploiting Lindbergh's moderate racial stance.⁸⁵ As the Civil Rights movement intensified, racial purity trumped moral purity as the primary concern of Birmingham's citizens. The police scandals and corruption in Birmingham revealed a morally and ethically corrupt department. By targeting prostitution, Birmingham officials demonstrated their eagerness to cleanup the city by purging its primary moral threat. However, police corruption continued and as the old guard, such as Connor, regained positions of power during the civil rights era, Birmingham's police gained a reputation for corruption far beyond the brothel. Other cities in the South would face similar issues with commercial prostitution, however, Birmingham's zeal to eradicate vice was not always found in other cities. Galveston, Texas, neglected to hide its support of prostitution nor its desire to see it operate with minimal regulation. Where Birmingham had sought to eradicate the moral offences that plagued the city, Galveston would embrace them.

⁸⁵ Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 118-119.

*Galveston, Texas: "A Clean, Open City"*⁸⁶

Galveston was long considered the most wide open city in the southern United States. Envisioning commercial vice as a vehicle through which the small port city could thrive economically, most residents and officials either supported or ignored by allowing vice in a segregated district. These districts protected tourists and residents seeking to engage in other forms of amusements such as the coastal beaches, creating a city where pleasure seekers and people seeking legitimate forms of tourism could co-exist. By the 1950s, however, residents sought to eliminate commercial vice and to divest their town of its reputation as "America's liveliest, naughtiest, least-inhibited city."⁸⁷

Founded in the early nineteenth century, Galveston almost immediately developed a thriving vice market. Purportedly settled by pirates, the city attracted a rowdy community from its inception. The city's first saloons opened in the 1830s near the waterfront and these establishments attracted sailors, seamen, and soldiers, as well as prostitutes, who set up shop in the first vice district near the city's port.⁸⁸ In the late 1860s, the vice district relocated approximately five blocks inland from the city's port facilities, after many residents deserted or sold their opulent homes and businesses fearing city-wide destruction from encroaching Union soldiers during the Civil War. Commercial vice operators moved into the empty homes and businesses residents left behind turning the neighborhood known as the "Post Office district,"

⁸⁶ "A Report on Galveston" *Lake Charles American Press* (Lake Charles, Louisiana), 22 May 1955, 18 and Jean Brown, "Free Rein: Galveston Island's Alcohol, Gambling, and Prostitution Era, 1839-1957" (Thesis, Lamar University, 1998), 2-3.

⁸⁷ Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer, *U.S.A. Confidential* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1952), 213.

⁸⁸ Brown, "Free Rein," 3.

into the city's new commercial vice district.⁸⁹ Madams, many emigrating from New Orleans, purchased the property and established the first brothels in Post Office. The district did well, boasting a former confederate nurse as its most successful madam. While a devastating hurricane in 1900 destroyed many parts of the city, residents rebuilt Galveston, including the vice district. Although prostitution was officially illegal in the city, it operated with very little legal interference, which lead some to conclude that Galveston did not become an open city, but rather had always been one.⁹⁰

The Post Office District operated relatively unchallenged until World War I. In an effort to curtail venereal disease during the war, the federal Selective Services Act of 1917 created "moral zones" forbidding alcohol and prostitution within five miles of a military base.⁹¹ The act's parameters prohibited brothel houses in Galveston because of their proximity to Fort Crocket, a U.S. army artillery training facility located three miles away. Despite military objections, city authorities allowed prostitutes to remain in the houses and sex work continued. Rising rates of venereal disease infections originating from Galveston, however, alarmed military officials. A 1918 Texas law had required that persons infected with venereal disease receive free treatment, but city officials claimed they could not fund the law's requirements. Although the Selective Service Act should have precipitated the district's closing, it had not and military officials threatened to place the city off limits.⁹² Galveston officials eventually

⁸⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁰ George McComb, *Galveston: A History* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1986), 151.

⁹¹ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 71.

⁹² It is unclear why Galveston's district remained open.

conceded and opened a free clinic to treat venereal disease, serving 116 persons in its first month.⁹³ The move appeased military officials' concerns.

After the war, brothels reopened with the same vigor they had before and Galveston's vice district thrived once again. Indeed, prostitutes were more numerous relative to the general population in Galveston than in any major city in the world.⁹⁴ The wide-open operations of the sex trade in Galveston did not go completely unregulated, however. In the 1930s, the city required prostitutes obtain health certificates proving they were free from venereal disease and the city implemented a vice curfew for houses of prostitution limiting operating hours between 6pm and 2am.⁹⁵ Officials kept a card file that documented the prostitutes who had been tested and they conducted periodic raids in the Post Office district primarily to check that sex workers were on file as disease free.⁹⁶

While Galveston welcomed the resurgence of prostitution in the interwar years, the federal government did not. Even before U.S. entrance into World War II, military officials in Fort Crocket and Camp Wallace, a training facility for anti-aircraft units, threatened to place the city off limits. In April 1941, the city submitted to federal pressure and closed down the district. The mayor announced the closing and gave the inmates of the district six days to "settle their

⁹³ McComb, *Galveston: A History*, 155.

⁹⁴ A 1934 study of prostitution worldwide listed the ratio of clients to prostitutes in different cities: London: 1:960, Berlin: 1:580, Paris 1:481, Chicago 1:430, Tokyo 1:250, Shanghai 1:130, and in Galveston it was 1:62. See McComb, *Galveston: A History*, 156.

⁹⁵ Brown, "Free Rein," 96.

⁹⁶ McComb, *Galveston: A History*, 157.

affairs and move out.”⁹⁷ Although the mayor neglected to speculate what would happen to the district he did state that it would remain closed for the duration of the national emergency. The move, however, did not eliminate prostitution, but rather pushed it underground. The move also did little to reduce the rates of venereal disease rate as well. Galveston’s rate of infection in 1942 was 48 to 1000, whereas the national rate was 148 to 1000. In May that year, the city continued its repression campaign and conducted raids, one that led to the arrest of 206 women, fifty-three of whom were infected with venereal disease.⁹⁸ There were eleven houses still operating in 1943 and despite the city’s efforts, one journalist compared the repression campaign and rounding up of prostitutes to “trying to hold water in a sieve.”⁹⁹ The military threatened to invoke the May Act, which would have placed the city off limits to military personnel.¹⁰⁰ Congress passed the May Act in 1941, and like the Selective Service Act of 1917, the May Act made prostitution a crime near military bases. The procedural steps involved in placing a city under the May Act entailed issuing warnings, conducting surveys, and enacting a period of probation.¹⁰¹ However, the act’s language was less specific than the 1917 legislation; the 1941 act prohibited prostitution from operating within a “reasonable distance” of military installations, and the ambiguity would result mainly in threats of closure and plans to address vice, rather than

⁹⁷ “Local Red Light District Will Be Closed Saturday following Army Ultimatum,” *Galveston Daily News*, 6 April 1941, 13.

⁹⁸ McComb, *Galveston: A History*, 158.

⁹⁹ Carlton Keedy, “Venereal Disease is Still Problem for Military Authorities in Galveston Area,” *Galveston Daily News*, 9 January 1943, 10.

¹⁰⁰ “Bill Against Prostitution Expected to Pass,” *Galveston Daily News*, 4 April 1943, 2.

¹⁰¹ Kathryn Close, “In May Act Areas,” *Survey Midmonthly* 79, no. 3 (March 1943), folder Mailing Lists, box 7, SPD General Records 41-46, RG 215 ROCWS.

using the act to shutter commercial sex markets.¹⁰² The military warned the city and expressed its frustration over the continued operations in the district, but ultimately it settled on a compromise that involved efforts to address the sex trade's role in the high rate of venereal disease contractions. In March 1943, military authorities suggested a program of vigilant repression that included monitoring streetwalkers, taxi cabs that acted as go betweens, hotels and roadhouses, and using female police officers to assist in repression.¹⁰³ The city stepped up enforcement efforts, but whatever dent was made in the operations of the commercial vice trade ended after the war. Like most cities in the country, the introduction of penicillin and the end of the war resulted in diminished anxiety over venereal disease, and Galveston's sex market made a come back.

In the post-war era, Galveston's red-light district flourished. Indeed, the city's vice problem was so well known that it was the subject of several studies by the ASHA to determine the extent of the problem and to convince officials to fix it. In 1950, a study conducted by the organization declared Galveston to be a wide open city in which prostitutes catered primarily to the merchant seamen associated with the city's port, but it attracted soldiers as well, mostly on weekends and paydays, stationed at nearby military facilities.¹⁰⁴ The eleven brothels that were open during the war years doubled in number by 1950.¹⁰⁵ The ASHA classified the city as having a "flagrant" commercial sex trade, where women openly solicited on the streets, but there

¹⁰² *May Act*, Public Law 163, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 55 (1941): 583

¹⁰³ McComb, *Galveston: A History* 158 and "Fort's Commander Submits Program for Control of Prostitution and Disease" *Galveston Daily News*, 31 March 1943, 1.

¹⁰⁴ "Commercialized Prostitution Conditions in Galveston, Texas October 1953," box 106 Prostitution, Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency (SJCSIJD), 1953-1961, NARA, Washington, DC.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

was a “semi-flagrant,” character at some of the houses, in which women waited for clients to enter the residence and greeted men in parlors, rather than merely calling them off the streets.¹⁰⁶ The district was racially segregated and the flagrant behavior was practiced by both black and white women. From brothel windows and doorways, white prostitutes beckoned to passersby, “Come in daddy.... nice girls.”¹⁰⁷ The ASHA noted that black “prostitutes were observed to be bold and brazen as their white counterparts.”¹⁰⁸ The organization documented several instances of black women calling out to men as well.

The results of the surveys led the ASHA to designate Galveston as the “nation’s most wide open city.”¹⁰⁹ However, the designation and the findings appeared to have little impact on the city’s vice operations. Raids occurred periodically, but most were associated with charges of forced prostitution or Mann Act violations.¹¹⁰ Most residents accepted the town’s vice and were “proud of its sobriquet.”¹¹¹ One resident told the ASHA “If it were not for the whores, gamblers,

¹⁰⁶ “Code Galveston, Texas, April 1950, folder Crime -General Prostitution-White Slavery (Geographically), box 41, Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce (SCIOCIC), United States Senate 81st-82nd Congress RG 46, NARA, Washington, DC.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. and “Commercialized Prostitution Conditions in Galveston, Texas April 1950, box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD.

¹⁰⁸ “Commercialized Prostitution Conditions in Galveston, Texas April 1950, box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ “Talks are Point of Attack in White Slavery Case Here,” *Galveston Daily News*, 27 June 1952, 13 and “Vice Charges Hearing Today,” *Galveston Daily News*, 20 August 1952, 1.

¹¹¹ “Commercialized Prostitution Conditions in Galveston, Texas April 1950, box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD.

and racketeers there wouldn't be anything else to the town.”¹¹² An editorial in the *Galveston Daily News* in July 1950 did not deny the city's vice problems, but pointed out that other cities suffered from similar commercial vice too. The newspaper editor acknowledged the need to repress vice and noted that some residents, as well as citizens in other parts of the state, believed that a cleanup campaign was necessary. An anti-vice organization from La Marque, a nearby city on the mainland, called Galveston the “nation's no. 1 vice city,” perhaps echoing the ASHA's report. However, the editor of the *Galveston Daily News* took umbrage to with assertion arguing the city “certainly is no Sodom or Gomorrah. It is a city of churches and a city of fine citizens—as fine as can be found anywhere.”¹¹³ Clearly, some residents did not see the vice trade in the same stark terms as the ASHA.

Galveston's Post Office district continued to house a vibrant and flagrant vice market in the early 1950s. Its reputation gained national attention when in 1952 two journalists who investigated vice in numerous cities in the United States published their findings in a book entitled *USA Confidential*. The authors deemed Galveston “America's liveliest, naughtiest, least-inhibited city.”¹¹⁴ Perhaps emboldened by the concurring proclamation, the ASHA renewed its efforts to convince city residents and officials to cleanup Galveston. In June 1953, the ASHA conducted another survey reconfirming the findings in *USA Confidential*. Their investigation revealed the commercial sex trade had expanded yet again. The study noted that the number of brothels had increased from twenty-two to forty-two in less than three years.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ CE McClelland, “Even Anti-Vice Campaigns Should Stick to the Facts,” *Galveston Daily News*, 6 July 1950, 1.

¹¹⁴ Lait, *USA Confidential*, 213.

Perhaps more troubling than the volume of brothels in the city was the discovery that local authorities played a crucial role in the vice district's success.¹¹⁵ An ASHA investigator, Howard Slutes, believed that Galveston Police Commissioner Walter L. Johnson protected the district by taking bribes in return for lax regulation.¹¹⁶ The collusion that allowed the vice district to operate, though, was only part of the problem. Residents continued to support the wide open town and the ASHA expressed frustration over their lack of interest and cooperation in eliminating commercial sexual vice in the city. Slutes met with local businessmen and women in Galveston and the vast majority politely refused to associate with the "so called reform movement."¹¹⁷ No explanation accompanied their refusals, but the city's somewhat tacit approval of the vice district likely influenced their decision. Slutes did identify a small group of concerned residents, including a state representative, William H. Kugle, and discussed ways to shut down vice proponents, arguing that in a town with so little to do, that town leaders were stifling Galveston's tourism potential, losing legitimate business to other coastal towns.¹¹⁸ His words influenced six community members to devise a strategy to address the vice problem. One of the members was an owner of a radio station and the group engaged in a vocal public campaign using radio spots, as well as the newspaper, to promote a cleanup.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Letter to Mr. Van Hyning from Mr. [Paul] Kinsie, 18 June 1953, Minute Books April-December, 1953, box 13 Corporate Minutes, 1951-1955, ASHA.

¹¹⁶ Brown, "Free Rein," 125.

¹¹⁷ Letter to Mr. Van Hyning from Mr. [Paul] Kinsie, 18 June 1953, ASHA.

¹¹⁸ Report on Galveston, Texas October 1953, box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD and Brown, "Free Rein," 126.

¹¹⁹ McClelland, "Even Anti-Vice Campaigns Should Stick to the Facts."

Following the meeting, local clergy and their congregants formed the Galveston County Citizens Committee for Law Enforcement (GCCC) and sought state assistance through representative Kugle in their undertaking to purge commercial vice.¹²⁰ Spurred by the ASHA's scathing report, the GCCC started a petition to present to the city that would force them to close down the brothels. In August 1953, under pressure from the GCCC, police commissioner Johnson reluctantly closed the district.¹²¹ The mayor, Herbert Y. Cartwright, however opposed the cleanup. He claimed that the majority of residents supported the district and, therefore, it should be allowed to operate. However, his protests were unsuccessful and law enforcement conducted raids, arrested prostitutes, and essentially closed down Post Office's commercial vice district.¹²²

The ASHA followed up on the closings and surveyed the city again in October 1953. It found that initial efforts succeeded and almost all of the houses indeed, had been shut down. ASHA investigators observed houses that were unoccupied or others that posted signs that read "no girls."¹²³ The closure of the Post Office district, though, did not eliminate prostitution; it pushed it outside the boundaries of the district. The ASHA found eleven brothels in operation, but they had moved outside of the Post Office Street district to conduct business. Those still in operation utilized "sneaking" tactics according the ASHA and engaged in less aggressive

¹²⁰ "Galveston County Citizens Committee for Law Enforcement," *Galveston Daily News*, 27 June 1953, 1.

¹²¹ "Galveston House Target of Suits Filed Saturday," *Corsicana Daily News* (Corsicana, Texas), 15 August 1953, 6.

¹²² "Galveston Mayor Changes His Mind about Resigning," *Evening Journal* (Lubbock, Texas), 24 September 1953, 1.

¹²³ "Commercialized Prostitution Conditions Galveston, Texas October 1953," box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD.

measures to entice clients, no longer openly calling them off the streets. Sex workers remained inside the homes and when a client knocked at the door, the housemaid greeted them and directed them to a parlor where sex workers met the clients. Brothel operators charged more than they had when the district was wide open.¹²⁴ The closure ended the city practice of testing and treating sex workers for venereal disease, a policy that contributed to Galveston's decreasing rate of transmission. At the city's behest, local doctors no longer issued certificates verifying prostitutes as disease free. However, many houses required their sex workers to continue regular venereal disease testing. One madam stated, "Girls here have to keep clean.... if the docs find anything wrong.... the girls can't hustle."¹²⁵

The closure affected sex workers' operations. Faced with repression and raids on brothels, many of the sex workers had turned to more clandestine means to ply their trade. Some women began to operate out of hotels and bars, both in and outside of the district and some took to the streets.¹²⁶ In addition, they encountered new forms of competition. Prostitutes noted that by operating out of bars, they now found themselves competing for clients with casual pick-ups and legitimate dates or girlfriends. Some local bars began to show X-rated films to their patrons to compensate for the brothel closings, adding a commercial vice rival as well. The ASHA viewed the films and reported that they included fully undressed men and women engaging in sexual intercourse and in one movie, a nude woman engaging in "various acts of sexual perversion."¹²⁷ The film showings reflected one creative means to cater to a population that still

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

sought sexual pleasure in the city. When interviewed, one sailor noted, “you can get action inside mate.... the boss is going to show some pictures...cost a dollar.”¹²⁸ The new cheap form of sexual entertainment in the city disadvantaged sex workers, who now charged more to compensate for the fewer clients that resulted from the heightened repression.

One sex worker postulated that the district would re-open by the end of the year.¹²⁹ She was wrong about timing, but correct that the closing was not yet permanent. It is difficult to ascertain exactly when the district reopened, but it did. The reopening of the district became more likely when William Kugle, the GCCC’s state ally in the legislature, was defeated in his 1954 reelection bid. The year also witnessed the election of a new mayor, George Roy Clough, who took office in 1955. Galveston’s former mayor, Herbert Y. Cartwright, had believed that an open and regulated city was the best avenue for Galveston’s economic growth and fought the closings in 1953. His support for the Post Office district, however, was not the reason for his loss. Both Cartwright and Clough supported an open city; the election instead came down to citizens’ concerns about accusations against the mayor for graft and missing funds in the city’s water department for which Cartwright seemed responsible.

Clough took office in May 1955 and immediately expressed his desire for what he deemed a “clean, open city.”¹³⁰ When asked what Clough meant he replied, “Keep the chippies (juveniles) out of the place. Don’t handle dope in any way, shape or form. No showing of lewd

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Max B. Skelton, “A Report on Galveston: The Gulf Coast’s ‘Wide Open’ City,” *Lake Charles American Press* (Lake Charles, Louisiana), 22 May 1955, 18.

sex movies.”¹³¹ In Clough’s opinion, the problem with the district was not its existence, but rather the corruption that accompanied it. A clean, open city would allow visitors who chose not to partake in the city's vice to avoid it.¹³² Clough further elaborated his ideas in a *Time* magazine article that shed a national light on the city’s vice. In regards to prostitution, Clough suggested "In a seaport town... prostitution is a biological necessity. Christ tried to stop prostitution and failed," he said, "so why should I?"¹³³ In his view, vice was apparently an essential and inevitable aspect of a seaport economy.

Clough wanted to recreate an open, segregated district and to do this he needed to move the prostitutes that had infiltrated bars and hotels outside the district back to the Post Office brothels. He did not elaborate why he felt a district was better than the hotel and bar system, but to create his “clean, open city,” segregating commercial sex work to one district would provide the means to make it invisible to other residents and manageable to local authorities looking to regulate it for both legal and health reasons.¹³⁴ The exact motivations behind creating a segregated sex district are not always clear in the records, but the move to separate commercial vice from other forms of legitimate entertainment was a topic of concern in other cities. In New Orleans, the move to segregate sexual vice from the rest of the city in the 1890s was one connected to ideas about respectability and the proper physical location of vice. Discussion about commercial vice in the city hinged on the idea of who would engage in these forms of vice

¹³¹ "Sin In Galveston," *Time* 65 no. 21 (1955): 28.

¹³² Skelton, “A Report on Galveston: The Gulf Coast’s ‘Wide Open’ City.”

¹³³ “Sin In Galveston,” *Time*.

¹³⁴ “Mayor Plans Honor System for Galveston’s Gamblers,” *Lake Charles American Press* (Lake Charles, Louisiana), 12 May 1955, 1.

and how it might effect the city's physical and moral landscape. By confining prostitution to one location, residents who did not want to partake in this form of entertainment could avoid it, thereby evading its moral implications as well. The physical location served as a buffer for legitimate businesses as well as residential dwellings that wanted to maintain a distance between the respectable and less than respectable locations in town.¹³⁵ In Galveston, the mayor claimed that city residents, locals, and tourists understood that the history of the city was closely connected to its vice reputation. Perhaps if "prostitution was here to stay" as the mayor suggested, segregating sexual vice away from the respectable parts of the city was a smart solution.¹³⁶

Not all residents agreed with the Mayor though, and a group of local ministers with the support of the ASHA vowed to intensify its efforts and close down vice permanently.¹³⁷ By September that year, the anti-vice elements of the city successfully influenced Galveston's Chamber of Commerce to pressure local officials to close down the district again. Police Commissioner Walter L. Johnson, once a proponent of the district had since changed his position and stood firmly in support of a cleanup campaign. Clough, on the other hand, scoffed at the efforts claiming the cleanup would only last a month.¹³⁸ The Chamber complained that commercial vice was having a negative effect on Galveston's economy and tourism. However,

¹³⁵ For a larger discussion of New Orleans and the segregated vice districts that developed see Alecia Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

¹³⁶ Skelton, "A Report on Galveston: The Gulf Coast's 'Wide Open' City."

¹³⁷ "Ministers Will Intensify Efforts to Close Houses," *Galveston Daily News*, 25 May 1955, 1.

¹³⁸ "City Closed Tightly after Chamber Edict," *Galveston Daily News*, 25 September 1955, 1.

the mayor countered that the number of visitors to the city had increased in the previous year by 8.6%.¹³⁹ His protestations fell on deaf ears and police raided houses, arrested prostitutes, and closed down the district. The cleanup's effects continued into the next year with periodic raids and arrests. However, by November 1956, the ASHA found that eighteen brothels had reopened. Galveston's commercial sexual vice had again re-emerged and it seemed primed to establish itself in the district once more.¹⁴⁰ In 1957, local and state politics, however, influenced the district's fate. Clough won reelection that year, but his popularity waned. He was accused of mismanaging city funds and in a bizarre incident, apparently drove a local resident from city hall at gunpoint. On the state level, Clough encountered a formidable enemy to the vice district in the newly elected attorney general Will Wilson.¹⁴¹ Once in office, Wilson directed the Texas Rangers to shut down the Post Office district. On June 10, 1957, Wilson and the Rangers filed injunctions to shut down forty-seven clubs and brothels. The Rangers then went into the district "armed with search warrants, axes, and sledgehammers," to physically close down Post Office street vice.¹⁴² Rangers arrested members of the commercial sex market and those associated with gambling. They confiscated and destroyed gaming devices – and in some cases, threw them into the Gulf of Mexico. Clough lost the next election in 1959 to former mayor Cartwright who appeared to support an open district, but never garnered enough sponsors to reopen it.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ "'Unsatisfactory' Rating Given Island After Investigation," *Galveston Daily News*, 21 November 1956, 16.

¹⁴¹ "V for Vice," *Time* 73 no. 21, (25 May 1959): 19.

¹⁴² "Disaster Warning Wrong: Galveston: Decade After Crackdown," *Big Spring Daily Herald* (Big Spring, Texas), 16 July 1967, 2.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Galveston's Post Office district had finally closed. What was once the most defining characteristic of the city was cast off and instead the seaport town redefined itself as a beachfront community and vacation destination. The vice district had reflected its origins, but neglected to represent the future that local residents wanted for the city. The national spotlight embarrassed citizens, bringing national attention to city's tolerance for vice. Despite efforts to create a "clean, open city" where tourism and vice coexisted, Galveston residents sought to redefine their city as something other than a legalized commercial sex trade. Like Birmingham, the city embarked on a cleanup campaign to improve its national reputation and cleanse the city of its public reputation for immorality. Galveston represented one of the last tolerated districts. While Galveston struggled to decide its city character, Miami, Florida, chose to regulate its vice vigorously, but its eradication efforts prompted a change in commercial sex operations and pushed sex workers to find alternate ways to ply their trade.

Miami's Three Vices

Miami, like Birmingham and Galveston, had commercial prostitution during World War II in the city, but officials vigorously regulated it. Although the sex market experienced periods of flagrant activity, police raids and repression prevented vice from dominating the city's landscape and reputation. However, in the post-war years commercial sex work increased in the city. Miami pursued a persistent campaign of eradicating prostitution through raids, as well as the creation of city and state codes that clearly defined prostitution as a criminal offence. The city's unswerving efforts, while successfully ridding Miami of flagrant commercial sex work, had unintended consequences. The constant repression changed the dynamic of sex work. Brothel prostitution decreased and sex workers used the city's numerous hotels and bars as the

venues in which to ply their trade. The commercial sex market that developed in Miami's hotels contributed to a growing call girl business that operated more clandestinely, relying on established clients and word of mouth references. In addition, Miami's bar culture took on an increasingly sexual context as B-girls, drink solicitors who earned a percentage of each drink they convinced a patron to purchase, used the promise of sexual contact to earn a living. The city's diligence in eradicating commercial prostitution overlooked B-girls in its initial regulation efforts until national attention on Miami's sex trade and complaints from fleeced patrons forced officials to address this type of sex work. The sexualized culture in Miami's bars disconcerted local officials who found, that in addition to B-girls, an increasingly visible gay community took to bars as well to meet and mingle. Whereas, Galveston and Birmingham focused on raids and laws targeting only commercial prostitution, Miami enacted ordinances against other forms of supposedly deviant sexual behavior. The national concern about a growing sexualized culture and particularly one that involved homosexuals, led to a repression campaign against all three – prostitutes, B-girls, and homosexuals – who challenged the heterosexual norms expected in the Cold War America.

The city of Miami had a far less sensational beginning than did Galveston. Prior to the twentieth century, the city was little more than a frontier town. Miami grew with population flows sparked by the Homestead Act of 1862, the development of railroad lines, and the Spanish American war.¹⁴⁴ Most critical however to Miami's early development was Henry Flagler, an industrialist who promoted the structural and economic growth of the city around the turn of the

¹⁴⁴ Melanie Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami: A Social History* (University Press of Florida: Gainesville and Tallahassee, 2009), 11-13.

twentieth century.¹⁴⁵ The city was founded in 1896 after Flagler extended the Florida Coast Railroad from Palm Beach to Miami. Flagler's efforts to create a sunshine paradise attracted wealthy residents and investors. Thirty years later, a devastating hurricane in 1926 followed closely by the Great Depression left Miami in dire economic straits. However the city bounced back, and World War II brought about significant change in the city's image and character.¹⁴⁶ Hollywood celebrated Miami's nightlife and sunbathing, helping to turn the coastal town into a tourist destination.¹⁴⁷ The war and the creation of military bases in the city added yet another element to its character. The U.S. government trained hundreds of thousands of military personnel in Miami. Because of persistent housing shortage for military personnel, the government asked coastal hotels to accommodate soldiers while they trained, even though tourism continued during the war.¹⁴⁸ By the fall of 1942, more than three hundred hotels served as quarters for military personnel, changing the makeup of Miami residents.¹⁴⁹ The glamorizing of Miami, the influx of enlisted men and perhaps more importantly its tourism presented a setting in which prostitution would thrive.

As with other cities in the U.S. during World War II, Miami also embarked on a campaign to decrease venereal disease infection rates by targeting prostitution. Assisting

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 28-30.

¹⁴⁶ Fred Fejes, "Murder, Perversion, and Moral Panic: The 1954 Media Campaign against Miami's Homosexuals and the Discourse of Civic Betterment," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, no. 3 (July 2000): 308.

¹⁴⁷ Gary Mormino, "Midas Returns: Miami Goes to War 1941-1945," *Tequesta* 57 (1997): 7.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 11-12.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 12, 17.

Miami's eradication efforts was a vast and detailed new state law in 1941. Similar to laws in Alabama, the new code gave sweeping power to state and local health officers in determining who might be infected and who should be detained for testing. The law expanded categories of those detained to include any person reputed to be a prostitute, any person known to associate with prostitutes, any person convicted of a sexually immoral offense such as operating a house of ill fame, or anyone who had been previously named as a source of infection. Beyond those suspected of engaging in illicit sexual relations, the law also targeted individuals who operated boarding houses or managed hotels allowing the state to quarantine infected persons found living in those dwellings.¹⁵⁰ There was serious cause for concern in the nation over high rates of infection given that a 1941 Selective Services examination found that 3.2 million Americans had syphilis – one out of forty-two, and that in two years of war “the Japanese killed 36,000 Americans; but in the same period syphilis killed 33,000.”¹⁵¹ In 1942, Florida had the highest rate of venereal disease in the nation. Federal officials urged the state to seek federal assistance in creating two hospitals where infected individuals could receive treatment and be held until cured.¹⁵² Accompanying the laws that enforced venereal disease treatment was a crack down on prostitution, believed to be the source of the high infection rates. After a failed effort in 1941 to

¹⁵⁰ “Fl Health Rules Expand to Aid Drive,” *Panama City News-Herald*, 14 October 1941, 1.

¹⁵¹ “Teamwork in Community Services, 1941-1946: A Demonstration in Federal State and Local Cooperation,” U.S. Office of Community War Services, Federal Security Agency, (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946) Office of Civil Defense Section, Amelia Gayle Gorgas Library, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama (UA).

¹⁵² “State to Open Drive Against Prostitution,” *Panama City News-Herald*, 20 April 1942, 1.

repress prostitution, the state launched another campaign to address the issue in April 1942.¹⁵³ The ASHA conducted a survey of Miami in April and May that year.¹⁵⁴ The survey revealed that along with open houses of prostitution and streetwalking, prostitutes also utilized taxi services, bars, and massage parlors to conduct their business.¹⁵⁵ The undisputed prostitution activity and the cleanup campaign that followed, led to large numbers of women arrested and detained for venereal disease testing and treatment. Illustrating the sheer number of women caught in the law's web, in November 1942 Florida received almost four hundred thousand dollars in federal funds to turn three former Civilian Conservation Corps camps into detention centers to house six hundred women for testing and treatment of venereal disease. In addition to treatment, the women housed at the camps received instruction in unspecified "useful occupations" for rehabilitation.¹⁵⁶ The camps were part of the larger effort to create centers around the U.S. that quarantined individuals with venereal disease and segregated them from non-infected members of the community. Not uncommon during the war, these centers detained thousands of women.

Wartime efforts to repress prostitution in Miami had been highly successful. The ASHA surveyed the city seven times between November 1940 and March 1945, and with the exception of a D rating in November 1940, and occasional evidence of commercial prostitution activity, the city received positive marks. What disconcerted ASHA officials about the city, however, was not the professional prostitute, but other promiscuous women. In the surveys of Miami, the

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ The exact date is unknown so it is indeterminable if the clean up campaign occurred prior to the ASHA surveys.

¹⁵⁵ "Region VII Survey," folder Re: Houses of Prostitution, box 2 Statistics, SPD, General Record 1941-1946, ROCWS, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

¹⁵⁶ "Florida Camps to be Opened," *Panama City News-Herald*, 9 November 1942, 2.

presence of non-professional prostitutes, “chippies” or “pick-ups,” were evident and, at times, highly visible.¹⁵⁷ The ASHA defined these women as those “who indulge in sexual intercourse or other lewd and indecent action chiefly for their own gratification, neither expecting or receiving remuneration or other things of value for their favors.”¹⁵⁸ The women were often described as young, ranging between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, but the ASHA acknowledged that age was not the defining characteristic. In fact what seemed to define the chippie was that she sought “affection, recognition, security and new experiences.”¹⁵⁹ Although prostitution was typically depicted as the source of venereal disease transmission, the ASHA and the Federal Security Agency had issued warnings that chippies posed a danger as well. The pamphlet “Meet Your Enemy,” issued by the agency, cautioned that these women “strictly and realistically speaking” were prostitutes and as such were also “prolific in the spread of venereal infections.”¹⁶⁰ Non-commercial sexual encounters proved more difficult to regulate. The state legislature had enacted laws that specifically addressed prostitution and connected it with venereal disease in order to reduce rates of infection, and while there was room in the law to

¹⁵⁷ Note cards on Miami (Nov. 40-Jun. 46), ASHA.

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Paul M. Kinsie, Consultant on Field Studies to Mr. Allen J. Teske, Social Science Analyst from, dated 11 January 1943, folder ASHA, box 1, SPD, Statistics, ROCWS.

¹⁵⁹ United Service Organizations, Inc., Community Planning for Adolescent Girls, Field Service Bulletin no. 34, 2 August 1943, folder Juvenile Delinquency box 5, SPD, General Records, 1941-1946, ROCWS.

¹⁶⁰ “Meet Your Enemy,” Social Protection Division, Office of Community War Services, Federal Security Agency pamphlet (circa 1940), Office of Civil Defense Section. Amelia Gayle Gorgas Library, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

confine all persons infected, it did not specifically mention chippies, or any variation of the designation.¹⁶¹

Continuing high rates of venereal infection and bad press involving commercial vice in cities with large numbers of stationed navy troops such as those in Panama City, Jacksonville, Key West and Miami, led Florida legislators to tighten up state regulation. In May 1943, the state assembly formally outlawed prostitution defining it as “licentious intercourse, whether for hire or not” and applied the criminal activity to both men and women.¹⁶² Florida’s efforts were part of a national drive led by the ASHA to lobby state legislatures for changes in state and local ordinances. State laws regarding prostitution in the country varied and many did not criminalize the act other than through charges of vagrancy in municipal codes. In 1925, laws in nine states neglected to make engaging in prostitution, by either the prostitute or the client, illegal.¹⁶³ Like many state and municipalities in the country, local authorities in Florida formerly arrested prostitutes on charges of vagrancy, which covered a broad range of violations such as being homeless or loitering, as well as prostitution. The ambiguous language of vagrancy laws meant that while prostitution was considered a crime, the law did not define exactly what activities constituted it. By 1944, the ASHA’s lobbying was successful and it considered only two states,

¹⁶¹ Other scholars have found that these women were also called “victory girls” and “khaki wackies.” See Marilyn Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008).

¹⁶² “Prostitution is Outlawed in Florida,” *Panama City News-Herald*, 2 May 1943, 10.

¹⁶³ George Gould, “Twenty Years’ Progress in Social Hygiene Legislation,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 30, no. 8 (November 1944): 458.

Nevada and Arizona, as well as the District of Columbia, as having insufficient laws regulating prostitution.¹⁶⁴

While Florida's new law made promiscuity illegal, it had a minimal effect on the "chippie" problem in Miami. During its surveys, the ASHA often noted the ubiquitous presence of these women in bars. Insisting states or municipalities pursue criminal prosecution of chippies, though, was not the focus of groups like the ASHA. Instead, national organizations and federal agencies proposed crafting alternative recreational activities for young women to deter non-commercial sexual encounters. The United Services Organizations, Inc. (USO) suggested increasing girls' and young women's participation in wartime activities such as the Junior Red Cross and Victory Corps, organizing youth activities at churches, and providing after school recreation. Additionally, the USO proposed cities solicit assistance from parents and community members to engage in youth activities and monitor behavior.¹⁶⁵ It is unknown whether Miami implemented any of the suggested methods of eliminating the venereal disease threat from chippies.

Miami's economic growth and mild winter weather made it an attractive city to new residents in the post-war era, and the city would face challenges in regulating the sex trade that developed as a result. After the war, new industries moved into Miami as part of a concerted effort on the part of the city's Chamber of Commerce to spur post-war economic growth. Particularly contributing to the post-war economic development of the city was clothing manufacturing. By 1951, over 251 apparel manufacturers established factories in the city and

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 460.

¹⁶⁵ United Service Organizations, Inc., Community Planning for Adolescent Girls, Field Service Bulletin no. 34, 2 August 1943, ROCWS.

employed approximately five thousand residents. Additionally, the city hosted 150 furniture factories and a number of light machining operations and publishing companies. Miami became the state's most important manufacturing center.¹⁶⁶ The economic development in the city was accompanied by a population increase. Between 1945 and 1955, Miami's population increased by 126%.¹⁶⁷ The city attracted wealthy tourists and seasonal residents seeking to escape the brutal winters of the north. The dependence on tourism dollars led Miami officials to turn a blind eye toward vice activities of many of its visitors. Unsurprisingly, gambling and the commercial sex trade thrived under these conditions.¹⁶⁸

In 1948, a group of Miami citizens met to address the problems of increasing crime and changing character. In an effort to tackle the development of a growing organized criminal element, the group sought assistance from a former FBI official, Daniel P. Sullivan, to investigate crime in Miami.¹⁶⁹ As early as 1940, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover identified Miami as a bastion of criminal activity and expressed his concerns to the Florida State Attorney General. Hoover wrote, "the Miami area has been and is at present time a mecca [sic] for criminals, gangsters, racketeers, and federal fugitives from justice during the winter season.... because of the wide open manner in which various illegal enterprises are operated."¹⁷⁰ By 1950, a full senate investigation took place, which examined the problem of organized crime across the

¹⁶⁶ Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 140-142.

¹⁶⁷ Fejes, "Murder, Perversion, and Moral Panic," 308. Miami's population in 1950 was 306,292, which included the city, North Miami, and Miami Beach. U.S. Census Statistics.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 312.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 313.

¹⁷⁰ Mormino, *Midas Returns*, 28.

nation. Chaired by Senator Estes Kefauver from Tennessee, the Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce held hearings in Miami. The committee focused primarily on gambling and racketeering, but discussed the growing presence of organized crime in narcotics manufacturing and distribution. Specific to Miami, the committee determined that a syndicate known as “S&G,” controlled bookmaking and racing wire services, which was a quick means to pass along critical information pertinent to the outcome of horse races. The committee made overall recommendations that income tax violators tied to organized crime should receive tougher penalties, that a need for stronger federal laws against organized criminal activities was necessary, that the nation should reinforce immigration restrictions as a means to deny foreigners with ties to U.S. organized crime entrance into the country, and finally, that further investigation was needed.¹⁷¹ Miami responded by engaging in a full-scale campaign against organized crime in the city aided by tougher state anti-gambling laws aimed at curbing gaming in Miami. In December 1951, just as the tourist season was beginning, Miami increased its police force by one-third to help enforce laws against criminal activity.¹⁷² A suspected connection between organized crime and prostitution was never fully explored nor proven by the committee. However, there was a correlation between Miami’s successful campaign against gambling and the decrease in prostitution.

¹⁷¹ “The Interim Report of the Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce,” folder New Orleans, box 134, SCIOIC.

¹⁷² “Miami Area Police forces Getting Ready for Migration of Con Men and Other Criminals,” *Anniston Star* (Anniston, Alabama), 15 December 1951, 10.

An ASHA survey in 1948 revealed that commercial prostitutes, as well as chippies, were “easily accessible.”¹⁷³ The ASHA noted the absence of commercial vice in the city, commenting that for a city its size, Miami was “remarkably free from commercial prostitution” in 1951.¹⁷⁴ The survey found some commercial sex activity in a few bars and hotels, but overall, it issued the city an “A” rating.¹⁷⁵ Over the next few years, ASHA surveys continued to reveal that commercial prostitution remained limited, and interviews with those in the sex market confirmed the minimal activities in the sexual market. A go between for prostitutes and clients interviewed in 1953, complained to the ASHA that, “The cops are hot on everything around here.... when they ran out the gamblers they took all of the fun out of Miami.... [there] used to be several good whorehouses around here too, but every week they’re getting closed.”¹⁷⁶ Miami’s vigilant efforts to expel organized crime from the city had inadvertently reduced the sex trade as well. Through much of the 1950s, the ASHA encountered similar complaints by members of the commercial sex market, revealing a city engaged in continuous repression campaigns that left little room for commercial vice to flourish. However, even with successful campaigns, prostitution had not completely disappeared.

A study conducted in June 1953 found that some form of sexual vice existed in much of the city and in Dade County, especially around military bases however, the vigilance of local police had changed the dynamics of the commercial sex market. Near the Opa-locka Marine

¹⁷³ Note cards on Miami (Dec. 46-May 51), box 105 Legal and Protective Surveys, ASHA.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ “Commercialized Prostitution Conditions in Miami, Florida June 1953,” box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD.

Base, the ASHA interviewed go between and local servicemen, who commented that police efforts to eradicate illegal gambling had affected the prostitution business. Many brothels had closed and local cab drivers only knew of one house operating in the city and one other in business located outside of Miami proper, but still in Dade County.¹⁷⁷

Rose Miller, a woman locals referred to as Madam Sherry, operated one of the brothels that experienced police repression. When an investigator asked about Miller's place, one cab driver relayed that recently the police had closed down her operation. He believed that normally she moved her operation around the city, possibly as a means to avoid raids and police harassment. The driver stated that Miller was "knocked off plenty" but that she paid protection, although he did not specify to whom, and that she would likely reopen. At the location that she had operated, the driver found the building unoccupied except for a man who provided an address outside the city where women employed by Miller had moved. When they arrived at the "suburban cottage" a woman explained the price was twenty dollars for a sexual encounter and when the investigator balked at the price, she replied, that she had plenty of potential clients in the parlor, reiterated the price and exclaimed, "don't waste my time."¹⁷⁸

Miller's operation was one of only two brothels operating in Miami. The limited number of houses of prostitution led many sex workers to ply their trade in hotels. Cab drivers assisted city visitors to locate hotels offering access to commercial prostitution. One driver took a patron to the Demetree Hotel, which operated like a brothel, renting rooms by the hour rather than the night. When the hotel manager introduced the client to the sex worker she stated her price was

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., and Codes for Miami, Florida, box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD. The codes were a series of letters or numbers that corresponded with a name or a location. In the reports, the ASHA use these letters or numbers to identify people and places in the report.

twenty dollars, which she admitted was high but explained that the town was “hot” and that her price was in line with current rate; she ensured the purchaser was getting a “good clean girl.”¹⁷⁹ In some of the city’s hotels, bellboys served as go betweens for prostitutes and clients, which the ASHA observed at three establishments. However, the hotel operations proved just as challenging for some prostitutes because of the gambling raids. Some bellboys declined to act as go betweens.¹⁸⁰ One reasoned that even without an interest in vice, tourists were good tippers and he did not want to risk his job.

Vice in Miami, while it had declined, was still the subject of local and national complaints. In January 1954, Chief of Miami Police Walter Headley refuted an expose by the *Miami Herald* that indicated gambling, specifically a lottery game called “bolita,” and organized criminal corruption within labor unions, plagued Miami.¹⁸¹ Also that month, the *Redbook* article that cast aspersions on the claims that Birmingham was a clean city, noted that Miami too suffered from a “shocking” prostitution problem.¹⁸² Chief Headley refused to comment on the conditions in the city but indicated his forces had not found the city ripe with vice.¹⁸³ Miami had enacted a strong campaign against criminal activity, one that had tremendous success in curbing commercial prostitution too, as documented by the ASHA.

¹⁷⁹ Codes for Miami, Florida, box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD.

¹⁸⁰ “Commercialized Prostitution Conditions in Miami, Florida June 1953,” box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD.

¹⁸¹ “Crime Buster Here Puts Spotlight on 3 Major US Rackets,” *Miami Herald*, 21 January 1954, 1.

¹⁸² Leiser, “Sex Traps for Young Servicemen,” 87.

¹⁸³ Luther Voltz, “Headley Ordered to Clean Up Vice, Gambling in City,” *Miami Herald*, 2 May 1954, 1B.

In fact, there had been no real change in the rating that the city received from the ASHA between 1953 and 1954. A survey of vice in the black community in February 1954 revealed similar complaints made by members of the white vice trade a year earlier. African Americans in the commercial sex market told ASHA investigators that business suffered from recent acts of repression by police.¹⁸⁴ Black women sex workers echoed statements made by members of the white sexual market that the town was “too hot” to conduct business openly. A serviceman told an ASHA investigator that houses had closed in the area and a local resident confirmed the observation adding that most women who engaged in sex work had left town or practiced their trade clandestinely because of the vice raids.¹⁸⁵ Like white prostitutes, black sex workers that remained in the city worked primarily out of hotels. One sex worker claimed that she had to operate out of a hotel because she lived with a white family whom she worked for and could not take her patrons to her home.¹⁸⁶ The cost of a date in the black community was considerably lower, typically around five dollars, the small return for prostitution was compounded by the three-dollar average it cost to rent a room, although some women passed on the cost to the client.

Although commercial prostitution had moved underground, and the few brothels that existed did so precariously, further vice raids targeted the remaining operations. However, it was the FBI, not the city of Miami that conducted new raids. In February 1954, Rose Miller’s

¹⁸⁴ The ASHA conducted separate surveys based on race and likely did so in different parts of the city. Vice and leisure in Miami seemed segregated by race as it was in many southern cities. While the ASHA only divided race by black and white, it is important to note during the late 1940s and early 1950s a growing Cuban population in Miami would complicate the black and white racial binary. See Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami* for a closer examination of the racial makeup and dynamic of the city in this era.

¹⁸⁵ “Negro Commercialized Prostitution Conditions Miami, Florida February 1954,” box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

brothel, known as Rancho Lido was the subject of an FBI inquiry. Federal agents believed that two male pimps had transported three women across state lines, a violation of the Mann Act, to work in Miller's brothel. Police and FBI agents arrested Miller, along with ten others on various charges related to prostitution. Miller, who was not arrested on Mann Act charges, but rather for operating a brothel, claimed she was out of the business and had no idea why she was targeted.¹⁸⁷ In March, Miller tried to flee the country and was arrested by the FBI as she attempted to board a plane for Venezuela.¹⁸⁸ The city filed an injunction to close down her operation, but she appealed the decision and in May, a judge overruled the lower court saying that police had neglected to prove their case and that an injunction had not been warranted.¹⁸⁹

Miller's arrest, while not initiated by the Miami police, marked a shift in the city's methods for addressing the commercial sex market. Shortly before the judge's opinion overturning the injunction, the mayor, Abe Aronovitz, demanded to know why recent prostitution related cases escaped prosecution in the city's courts. Aronovitz pointed to the release of several taxi drivers arrested for aiding and abetting prostitution and questioned whether a local judge was negligent in convicting the defendants or if the problem lay with inadequate municipal codes or lax police enforcement.¹⁹⁰ His vocal, and public complaints

¹⁸⁷ David Kraslow, "FBI Swoops Down on Madam Sherry," *Miami Herald*, 15 March 1954, 1A.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* The article neglected to explain what Miller was fleeing from or why the FBI detained her. She may have been issued a material witness warrant in the Mann Act case, a common legal maneuver to force witnesses to testify under threat of perjury or contempt of court; both offences were punishable with jail time if convicted.

¹⁸⁹ J.L. (Dixie) Smith, "Madam Wins Appeal to High Court," *Miami Herald*, 15 May 1954, 1B.

¹⁹⁰ "Vice Hearing Today May Fix the Blame," *Miami Herald*, 18 March 1954, 1C.

spurred a vice drive that resulted in the arrest of twenty persons on various prostitution related charges, including four who would face Mann Act charges as well.¹⁹¹ The city council, the mayor, police, and a local judge lobbied insults and accusations at one another for the remainder of the spring and into the summer, each blaming the other for the city's vice problems.

The acrimony between city officials over vice continued, but they found a common ground in a new enemy during the summer that would precipitate a major cleanup in Miami. In July 1954, an unknown assailant kidnapped, sexually assaulted, and murdered a young girl in the city. The case was Miami's first child abduction and residents worried that a sexual predator was on the loose, but fears reached a fever pitch because of the broader national climate of fear. That summer, the nation had endured the McCarthy Hearings that sought to root out suspected communists in government employment. The hearings bemoaned the weakness in the country's moral fiber, suggesting sexual subversives were infiltrating government service and potentially undermining national security.¹⁹² That same moral panic was rampant in Miami. The death of the seven year-old girl was particularly brutal and police concluded that it could have only been at the hands of a "sex pervert."¹⁹³ Scholar Estelle B. Freedman has examined the country's fear and preoccupation with "sexual psychopaths" that had originated in the 1930s, but rose to new

¹⁹¹ Bert Collier, "Far Reaching Probe into Vice Continues," *Miami Herald*, 10 April 1954, 1B.

¹⁹² David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 9. The hearings implied that homosexual men and women posed a national threat. Historian David K. Johnson explored the attack and purges of gay men and women and noted that it "sparked a moral panic within mainstream American culture."

¹⁹³ The crime and moral panic that ensued leading to campaign against homosexual is explored by Fred Fejes in "Murder, Perversion, and Moral Panic: The 1954 Media Campaign against Miami's Homosexuals and the Discourse of Civic Betterment."

levels in the Cold War era. The panic over depraved, potentially violent sexual criminals in the era often corresponded with incidents of sexual crimes against children.¹⁹⁴ The response by officials was to raid bars and arrest “perverts,” who were often gay men with no connection to the crime, or others who had committed minor unrelated offences. State and municipalities also implemented laws aimed at homosexuals. Gay men served as the targets of authorities’ legal wrath because their sexual behavior operated outside heterosexual norms, challenging conventional ideas about gender and sexuality. The codes and ordinance passed by officials, however, usually did not criminalize a specific activity, but rather made “a kind of personality” or identity illegal.¹⁹⁵ In Miami, in the months following the young girl’s murder, police raided clubs patronized by gay men and enacted a series of ordinances aimed at criminalizing what they perceived as homosexual behavior. Suggested ordinances included preventing people of the same sex from embracing, caressing, or dancing in public places; preventing persons from adopting mannerisms, makeup, dress, or gestures of the opposite sex; and prohibiting bars and nightclubs from serving anyone that acted contrary to accepted gender norms. Some debate ensued over the issue of embracing and kissing, as it was seen as a legitimate cultural tradition of heterosexual women who “frequently embrace[d] or kiss[ed] when they me[t] on the streets,” but overall, the ordinance criminalized behavior the public associated with homosexuals.¹⁹⁶ In

¹⁹⁴ Estelle B. Freedman, “‘Uncontrolled Desires:’ The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960,” in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons, eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 206.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁹⁶ Luther Voltz, “City Votes Funds for Vice Probe,” *Miami Herald*, 16 September 1954, 1C. Targeting perceived “gay” behavior in public spaces, such as bars, was a common tactic among municipal authorities in regulating homosexuality. See George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

addition to pursuing homosexuals, the city sought to tie the young girl's murder to all forms of sexual behavior it deemed immoral, which included commercial sex. A new probe was begun in conjunction with the ordinances against homosexuality, and this time B-girls were the targets.¹⁹⁷

Similar to the gay culture that developed in bars and taverns in Miami, a commercial sexual vice culture had developed in bars as well, resulting from moves to suppress vice during the war. Beginning in the World War II era, bars and taverns had replaced brothels as the arena for sexual commerce.¹⁹⁸ This transformation, of course, followed the closing of red-light districts because of the concern about venereal disease. The Social Protection Division and the ASHA, who both monitored venereal disease infections in the country in the Second World War, reported increasing incidents of exposure between soldiers and sex workers in taverns, nightclubs, and hotels, whereas venereal disease exposure in brothels declined.¹⁹⁹

Traditional sexual commerce flourished in bars and taverns after the war, but the move to the bar culture changed the dynamics of the sex trade. Accompanying the shift from a brothel to a bar culture was the growing presence of B-girls, a development that defined the commercial sex industry in Miami. B-girls were women who used their charm and sexuality to entice men to buy them drinks and then profited from each cocktail purchased. Unbeknownst to the purchaser, the drinks they bought for B-girls were sometimes liquor free, although some cocktails contained a small amount of alcohol so as not to arouse suspicion. The success of a B-girl's efforts was

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ For more information on the shift from a brothel to a bar culture see Amanda Littauer, "Unsanctioned Encounters: Women, Girls, and Non-marital Sexuality in the United States, 1941-1963," Ph.D., diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 2006).

¹⁹⁹ The ASHA often noted that contact between sex workers and patrons occurred in bars and this shift increased throughout the war as red-light districts closed.

predicated on the implication that sexual intercourse or some form of sexual intimacy was possible in exchange for the alcohol beverages. The more flirtatious and the more available a woman appeared, the more drinks the patron bought.

Drink solicitation was not specific to the post war era, and the practice has been traced to the middle nineteenth century, when the women were called percentage girls or pretty waiter girls.²⁰⁰ Herbert Asbury, writer of noted lurid and semi-historical events in American history, explored the history of San Francisco's Barbary Coast, a red-light district that grew out of the gold rush on the West Coast. He found that the women drank cold tea at whiskey prices alongside their pick-ups date who inevitably paid full price for both his and her spirits.

In Miami, the preferred drink for most B-girls was scotch, which typically accompanied a chaser of water. Most B-girls did not consume the scotch but poured it into the water chaser when the patron was distracted. The ASHA witnessed other women pretending to drink the scotch, but then spitting the shot into the water chaser. When asked why she did so, one B-girl stated that drink hustling was illegal in Florida, and that "no girl could stand drinking the real McCoy all night."²⁰¹ The overall earnings in Miami were not recorded in the records, but women made approximately \$1.50 for each drink, which was priced at \$3.60. The bar kept the

²⁰⁰ Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933), 108.

²⁰¹ "Commercialized Prostitution Condition Miami, Florida November 1954," box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD. The B-girl ordinance enacted in Miami did not go into effect until December 17, 1954, but it had been passed in November. The B-girl that believed it was illegal was likely referring to the recent passage of the ordinance.

other \$1.50 and the remaining sixty cents was used for taxes.²⁰² Other B-girls indicate that they made less, ranging from eighty-five cents to \$1.25 a drink.²⁰³

Although B-girls were considered part of the sex trade, they did not necessarily engage in sex for money. However, law enforcement viewed the activity as sexual in nature, and as part of illicit commerce that thrived in vice areas. In 1913, a Mann Act case involved the transportation of a seventeen-year-old girl from a small town in Georgia to Tampa, Florida to work as a drink solicitor. The defendant who transported the girl was convicted and the court ruled that the transportation was a violation of the Mann Act since drink solicitation fell under the law's language that designated transportation across state lines for "immoral purposes," and was illegal. The court reasoned that the behavior would lead to future immoral acts.²⁰⁴ However, the United States Supreme Court would repudiate this idea about B-girl activity in a 1954 case, but the link between B-girl's immoral sexual activity and commercial prostitution persisted.²⁰⁵ The reason is twofold; some B-girls did engage in commercial sexual activity. In Phenix City, discussed later, prostitution and B-drinking often overlapped. The second reason why the link remained was because of the implied sexual availability of B-girls, often created by their own methods of drink solicitation.

The specific practices of Miami B-girls was not explored in ASHA records or the newspaper coverage in the *Miami Herald*, but in San Francisco, the practice was common and

²⁰² "Mayor Intervenes In Vice Tug-of-War," *Miami Herald*, 14 March 1954, 1B.

²⁰³ Code Miami, Florida November 1954, box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD.

²⁰⁴ David J. Langum, *Crossing Over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 72.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

Ernest Lenn, a journalist with the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote a lengthy multi-piece exposé on B-girls that provides insight into their solicitation methods. Lenn found that B-girls in the town's bars cajoled and charmed men, often, military personnel, to buy them drinks. Companionship continued as long as the customer bought the B-girl drinks. He witnessed B-girls flirt and bat eyelashes, and then propose to her male companion they move to a dark booth where the B-girl sat close to the patron all the while ordering more drinks on his tab. Some B-girls suggested the two make plans for a future date that rarely materialized. Once a patron ran out of money, the B-girl changed her demeanor quickly, typically making an excuse that she had to meet someone and then moved on to the next target. One male bar patron in San Francisco, described the scam as akin to having his teeth extracted with novacaine [sic].²⁰⁶ The women would sometimes shame their target pointing to the amount of money they witnessed in a billfold or how many drink they had already purchased. If a man refused, a B-girl might counter with protestations such as "I thought you were nice. I didn't think you were so cheap."²⁰⁷ For their efforts, B-girls in San Francisco earned fifteen to twenty dollars an evening.

While the ASHA gave Miami high marks for its repression of commercial prostitution, it bemoaned the high volume of B-girls openly operating the city, finding their presence in eleven of the city's bars.²⁰⁸ However, the investigators never witnessed B-girls offering any other immoral activity and noted that they did not make dates with their customers. In Miami, customers purchased companionship, not necessarily sex, from the women. When they received

²⁰⁶ Ernest Lenn "Visitor Described How Slick B-girl Took His Bank Roll," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 January 1953, 1.

²⁰⁷ Ernest Lenn, "Swindling B-Girl Secret Tricks Told," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 January 1953, 1.

²⁰⁸ Code Miami, Florida November 1954, box 106 Prostitution, SJCSIJD.

the bar tab though, not all patrons felt the interaction was worth the price. In October 1954, two National Guardsmen complained to the mayor about a \$280 bar tab they owed from drinking with a B-girl.²⁰⁹ In response, Aronovitz proposed an ordinance to curb B-drinking. He suggested requiring that the drinks purchased for B-girls, or any other employee, must contain the ingredients they ordered and that the drinker must “down the drinks.” The ordinance also limited the number of drinks ordered by a B-girl to ten. Aronovitz speculated, “after that, any of them would be roaring drunk anyway.”²¹⁰ The B-drinking ordinance that passed outlawed female employees from mingling or fraternizing with customers and consuming alcoholic or non-alcoholic beverages purchased by patrons. Although the B-girl ordinance passed, debate over the bill divided the city council because members believed that the bill would face a constitutional challenge. The members were right. In December, shortly after the ordinance took effect, Miami resident Irwin Kayfetz, proprietor of the Jungle Club, challenged the law in court. Mayor Aronovitz refused to admit defeat and stated, “We’ll try again and again and again.... There’s no industry in this city that’s going to pipe the tune for the morals of the rest of this city.”²¹¹ Ultimately, in 1957 the Florida Supreme Court ruled that the ordinance violated women bar employees’ constitutional right to equality under the law by restricting their purchase of alcohol.²¹² The city of Miami rewrote the ordinance in 1967 to prohibit purchasing “a female

²⁰⁹ “Mayor Wants to Call a Halt to Tea Parties for B-Girls,” *Miami Herald*, 22 October 1954, 2B.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ Ronald York, “B-Girl Law Blocked by 11th Hour Action,” 10 December 1954, 1B.

²¹² *City of Miami v. Irwin Kayfetz*, 92 So. 2d 798 (1957).

employee's time by a customer or dancing with a female employee in an alcoholic beverage establishment.”²¹³

Miami officials continued to struggle with commercial sex trade problems in the 1950s, and as it eradicated brothels and B-girls, it encountered commercial sex in a new format, the call girl. An FBI report found that by November 1962 there were no brothels in Miami, but in its place was a flourishing call girl system that had been developing since the 1950s.²¹⁴ While Miami consistently received high marks from the ASHA indicating that commercial prostitution had been declining steadily through the 1950s, several former brothel madams transitioned their operations into call girl services. The operators exercised caution by requiring referrals for new clients and they established a complicated phone call system to root out police intervention. In addition, they sometimes switched the locations of their operations or ceased operating temporality when police seemed close to shutting down their services. According to an ASHA annual report in 1956, call girl services had developed as U.S. cities engaged in cleanup campaigns to raid their municipalities of red-light districts, but the Office of Community War Services identified the problem much earlier and provided information and techniques to local law enforcement in dealing with the rise the call girl.²¹⁵ The OCWS believed that taxi drivers

²¹³ Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco, Miami, Florida Code of Ordinances, sect.4-4. The state of Florida also enacted a B-girl code in 1961 that prohibited bar all employees to beg or solicit drinks from patrons. Alcohol Beverages, and Tobacco, Florida Statutes 2012, title 34, sect 562.131.

²¹⁴ “Crime Conditions in the Miami Division, Report 15 November 1963,” folder HSCA Subject: Criminal Intelligence Program Miami 1/1/62 to 12/31/63, box 7 HSCA: Subject Criminal Intelligence Program HQ Main files 62-9-29 Section 15 Serials 599, JFK Collection, NARA, Washington, DC.

²¹⁵ “American Social Hygiene Annual report 1956,” folder Minute Books, January- June 1957, box 14 Corporate Minutes 1956-1960, ASHA and Federal Security Agency, “Techniques

and bellboys served as go betweens for call girl operations and while a 1943 publication recommended ways for law enforcement to tackle the issue, in Miami in the 1960s, the call business operated in a more sophisticated manner. Women charged anywhere from twenty-five to \$100 a date.²¹⁶ Call girls were not unique to Miami, but were linked with urban, rather than rural, sex markets. Women demanded higher fees than bar prostitutes or streetwalkers and Miami's tourism and business growth in the 1950s drew wealthy businessmen to the city who could afford a call girl's prices. Harold Greenwald, a prominent psychoanalyst in New York studied call girls and wrote the era's definitive book on the subject in 1958, entitled *The Call Girl*. Greenwald's book, which included interviews with call girls, clients, and pimps, sold over a million copies worldwide and was translated into several languages.²¹⁷ He described call girls as the "aristocrats of prostitutes," noting that they charged between fifty and one hundred dollars a date, earning approximately \$30,000 a year.²¹⁸ Less experienced call girls charged less, closer to twenty dollars a date.²¹⁹ The women typically worked out of hotels or their apartments, and many operated without pimps. They did, however, rely on their trusted clients to act as go

of Law enforcement Against Prostitution" (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1943), 19.

²¹⁶ "Crime Conditions in the Miami Division, Report 15 November 1963," JFK Collection.

²¹⁷ Nick Ravo, "Harold Greenwald, 88, Expert On Psychology of Prostitutes," *New York Times*, 2 April 1999, accessed 2 November 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/02/us/harold-greenwald-88-expert-on-psychology-of-prostitutes.html>.

²¹⁸ Harold Greenwald, *Elegant Prostitute: A Social and Psychoanalytic Study* (New York: Walter and Company, 1970), 3. *The Elegant Prostitute* is a revised and updated edition of Greenwald's 1958 work *The Call Girl*.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

betweens, who recommended new clients to the call girl's services.²²⁰ Greenwald observed that many call girls refused to mingle with women of "inferior status" or those "chipping around," suggesting the commercial sex trade was stratified, with call girls at the top of the hierarchy and bar prostitutes and streetwalkers at the bottom.²²¹ Call girls prided themselves on their attractiveness, their upper-class tastes, better style of dress, financial standing, and broader knowledge of culture – all characteristics their wealthy clientele preferred.²²²

In addition to the development of call girl services, the influx of Cuban refugees after the Cuban Revolution in 1959 into Miami and other areas of South Florida added to the increasingly class stratified sex market. Cuban prostitutes infiltrated the commercial sex scene and non-Cuban prostitutes resented their presence. American prostitutes complained that Cuban women charged significantly less for dates, only three to five dollars, leading to competition among women at the lower end of the hierarchy. In addition, Cuban born prostitutes faced fewer arrests than Americans sex workers in Miami. The American prostitutes believed it was due to the language barrier. Miami officers' inability to speak Spanish inhibited their capacity to make dates with Cuban sex workers in order to arrest them for prostitution. English speaking prostitutes complained that the new wave of Cuban prostitutes were brazen, approaching male customers on the streets and causing American prostitutes to be targeted more in raids and undercover busts. In 1963, American prostitutes were leaving the city in search of new places to ply their trade.²²³ The shifting dynamics in location and the makeup of the members of the sex trade indicated its

²²⁰ Ibid., 16-17.

²²¹ Ibid., 25.

²²² Ibid., 4.

²²³ "Crime Conditions in the Miami Division, Report 15 November 1963," JFK Collection.

tenaciousness, but also its increasing competitiveness and the continual challenges that Miami would face in its effort to eradicate sex work.

Miami had vigorously pursued a policy of repression of commercial sex work in the city during World War II and the post-war era. It remained relatively free of prostitution, which resulted from its constant repression. However, in its zeal to cleanse the city, Miami inadvertently caused a shift in the ways sex work operated, creating perhaps a more clandestine and sophisticated sex market. Sparking more concern though, were B-girls and homosexuals, whose activity while not necessarily sexual in nature, was seen as deviant, and subversive.

* * *

The closure of the red-light districts and the increasingly repressive culture of the 1950s had a profound impact on the nature of sex work in Birmingham, Galveston, and Miami. The conservative sexual culture of the 1950s viewed prostitutes as a threat to the social and sexual order. Locally and nationally, authorities fixated on eradicating prostitution by eliminating red-light districts, especially in communities that had long tolerated brothels. Repression and closing districts, however, it only created shifts in its operations. Miami reflected those shifts most with the transition in the physical location of commercial vice from a brothel to a bar culture. In Galveston and Birmingham, sex work did not cease, but it significantly decreased in the 1950s; the repression campaigns sent a signal to those in the industry that certain cities would no longer tolerate its existence. In all of these cities residents, police, and city officials debated the role of sex work and whether it would come to define their respective city's culture. The three southern cities, however, were not alone in their struggles. Other communities in the South encountered similar problems with vice and enacted cleanup campaigns. While the sex markets in

Birmingham, Galveston, and Miami, even if still operating clandestinely, peacefully complied with the crackdowns, some vice operators responded with hostility to the measures. In the small town of Phenix City, Alabama, mere talk of repression would create a powder keg and demonstrate the sometimes violent methods the vice industry would adopt to maintain its existence.

CHAPTER 3

PHENIX CITY, ALABAMA'S SEXUAL BLACK MARKET

The response to sex work during World War II and post-war era in the South demonstrates the struggles of local and national authorities to eradicate prostitution, which they believed was a blight on the American social landscape. Reformers focused on venereal disease, corrupt local officials, and a broader mission to direct the moral compass of the country, while extolling the importance of cleanup campaigns to eradicate vice districts. Sex workers, rather than submitting to the repression campaigns, adapted by moving to new venues and engaged in new forms of sex work to compensate for the relentless efforts to eliminate their labor market. The story of Phenix City, Alabama, reflects similar motivations and results, but the circumstances and events in the city make it unique. Indeed, in Phenix City, the leaders of the city's organized vice operations wielded a significant amount of power and influence over every facet of the town. Phenix City was similar to Birmingham, Galveston, and Miami in that it endured regulation from both federal and local authorities, experienced scrutiny for its culpability in the high rate of venereal disease infections among U.S. troops training nearby during the war, resumed a vice market in the post-war era, and underwent a cleanup campaign that gained national attention. What differentiates Phenix City, however, is the highly organized character of its sex market and the violent measures the criminal element undertook to maintain the status quo.

On June 18, 1954, the democratic nominee for Alabama State Attorney General, Albert Patterson, was murdered on the street outside of his law practice. After the assassination, Alabama governor Gordon Persons issued a warning to all “gamblers, prostitutes and croupiers” in the city.¹ He advised them to leave the town he scornfully called “Little Reno” as National Guard troops moved into the city to restore order. Troops closed down all bars and taverns, even padlocking some establishments, and state officials proceeded to conduct an investigation and interview the town’s residents to root out those responsible for the crime. The aftermath of the murder led to a complete dismantling of the local vice trade and a reinvention of city’s identity.

Phenix City, located on the Alabama-Georgia border, embodied an organized vice district complete with gambling, liquor, and a commercial sex market. The response to the murder attested to longstanding concerns about the extent of vice in the city. Years of efforts and complaints by residents about the criminal activity had finally led to a shakeup in local and state politics. Local attorney Albert Patterson, once a frequent defender of the criminal element in court, now joined with a local anti-vice group to address the rampant crime in the city. Patterson decided to run for the state attorney general position in 1954 on an anti-vice platform believing that Phenix City’s vice problem was contagious and that it threatened to spread throughout the state. Patterson, promising to “stamp out organized crime wherever it exists,” was gunned down less than a month after he secured the nomination.² Phenix City’s corruption, vice, organized crime, and murder made national headlines; retold and embellished in film and print. Focused on the murder and the organized crime responsible for it, these depictions often overlooked the

¹ *Washington Post and Times Herald*, “Vice Mecca Cleanup Vowed by Governor,” 22 June 1954, 3.

² As quoted in Alan Grady, *When Good Men Do Nothing: The Assassination of Albert Patterson* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 2003), 23.

town's sizeable commercial sexual market. The city boasted dozens of bars and clip joints – bars that were known to fleece men, often members of the military – that served as the site for a dynamic and vast sexual market. Sex workers in Phenix City participated in a finely-tuned vice scheme designed to extract as much money as possible from its clientele. City officials and police participated in the market and benefited financially from the illicit activities and the significant revenue such activities generated. The operations in Phenix City, the large-scale investigation that followed Patterson's murder, and the hundreds of women sex workers provide one of the most detailed accounts of how a vice economy operated in the 1950s. A loosely organized but highly structured syndicate controlled a multi-million dollar black market that involved hundreds of individuals. The market catered to servicemen stationed nearby and relied on the labor of women to sustain the lucrative black market economy. Sex workers in Phenix City used their charms, their wits, and the promise of sex to earn a living, and when these tactics failed they employed more devious means. The women in Phenix City's sexual black market fleeced male patrons, but only kept a portion of what they earned because they labored in a system under the strict control of the crime syndicate and corrupt local authorities. Despite being a key factor underpinning the entire system, female sex workers who participated in the market experienced only a modicum of financial or personal independence. They bore the brunt of the changes after the cleanup, as it became known, which displaced the city's women who toiled in the vice industry. Many were forced to leave, creating a sex worker migration, indicative of larger trends throughout the southeast vice districts and the country in the 1950s. Despite these drawbacks, many chose to remain in sex work, migrating to cities with seemingly less enforcement.

Once called “Lively” by locals because of the numerous saloons frequented by mill workers, Phenix City developed an early reputation for raucousness and alcohol.³ Despite a state prohibition law that left Alabama dry in 1915, selective enforcement resulted in Phenix City’s ability to thrive on income from liquor. State and local authorities made several attempts to cleanup the city, and the efforts might have had long lasting implications had it not been for Phenix City’s location. The city rested on the banks of the Chattahoochee River, just across the border from Columbus, Georgia. The establishment of the Fort Benning army base there in 1918 brought in thousands of troops, many of whom flocked to Phenix City to enjoy liquor, gambling, and prostitutes.

When the city faced bankruptcy during the Depression, it began to rely on legal alcohol sales for solvency.⁴ Additionally, the state started to license gambling, leveling a hefty fee on those without permits. The fees and fines from gambling and the alcohol sales provided the city with a significant source of revenue. By 1945, the annual collection of fines and fees was \$228,000.⁵ The troops at Fort Benning added a significant amount to Phenix City’s vice revenue. During World War II, over 600,000 troops trained at Fort Benning, one of the largest bases in the country, and at one point the number of troops on site was as high as 100,000.⁶ Those men traveled the ten miles across the state line to drink and play in Phenix City.

³ Grady, *When Good Men Do Nothing*, 3 and 6; and Margaret Anne Barnes, *The Tragedy and the Triumph of Phenix City, Alabama* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1998), iv.

⁴ Alabama reverted to local option laws after the repeal of Prohibition.

⁵ Lauren Wiygul, “Phenix City,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama* <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-2133>, Accessed 2 May 2012.

⁶ Sharyn Kane and Richard Keaton, *Fort Benning: The Land and the People* (Fort Benning, GA: U.S. Army Infantry Center, Directorate of Public Works, Environmental Management Division) <http://www.nps.gov/seac/benning-book/benning-index.htm>, Accessed 3 May 2012.



Figure 1. Map of Phenix City, Alabama, Columbus, Georgia, and Aiken, South Carolina.

Georgia's prohibition law between 1908 and 1935, combined with the Selective Services Act of 1917 and the May Act in 1941, both of which prohibited alcohol and vice near military bases, likely contributed to Phenix City's appeal. Fort Benning troops spent their earnings on gambling and sex, leading military officials to place the city off limits on several occasions during the war. Yet, soldiers continued to venture into Phenix City, frustrating military brass. In 1941, Secretary of War Henry Stimson called the town the "wickedest city in America" and General George Patton, commander of the Third Army, formerly stationed at Fort Benning, threatened to drive tanks across the bridge to Phenix City to flatten it.⁷

The frustration that Stimson, Patton, and other military officials felt about the region surrounding Columbus likely stemmed from the dismal reports documenting high incidences of venereal disease among Fort Benning troops. Approximately seventy percent of the infections originated from sexual encounters occurring in Phenix City; over half of those encounters took place in the city's numerous taverns and bars.⁸ In 1942, infections at Fort Benning were the highest in the Fourth Service Command, which included military facilities in the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.⁹ That same year, military officials met with representatives from Columbus and Phenix City, and their respective

⁷ Grady, *When Good Men*, 6; Barnes, *The Tragedy and the Triumph*, iv; and "The Odds Were Right," *Time* 63 no. 26 (1954): 24.

⁸ "Report on Columbus, Georgia War Area Sept 30, 1944," folder Records of the Office of Community War Services, Richard H. Lyle Regional Director 1941-44, 1945, box SG0014434, Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), Montgomery, Alabama and "Special Studies Relative to Venereal Disease in 10 Selected Cities," folder Public Assistant Statistics, box 3, Records of the Office of Community War Service, Social Protection Division (ROCWS), RG 215, National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, Maryland.

⁹ "Report on Columbus, Georgia War Area Sept 30, 1944," ADPH, 22.

county leaders to address the issue. The military had placed Phenix City off limits, as well as places in Columbus, in an effort to reduce the infections. Phenix City officials cooperated with the military and agreed to an active approach to repression. Their compliance reduced the number of exposures by fifty percent in the city. Those reductions however, were primarily among white troops. In 1943, rates of infection continued to remain high for African American troops and Columbus, not Phenix City, accounted for the most significant number of infections for six months during that year. The disparate infection rate resulted from the racial makeup of each city's vice trade. Phenix City catered to white troops, whereas African American troops sought their sexual pleasure at the bars in Columbus. A 1944 report noted Columbus officials seemed unwilling to address the vice issue. The report criticized civilian authorities in Columbus for "refus[ing] to become interested in the problem" suggesting that their response was "fairly typical" in the South. However, any serious attempt at repression may not have worked, as the same report found that it was not prostitutes, but rather "clandestine pickups" that resulted in the high infection rates and any decrease in infections occurring among troops was likely the result of prophylaxis use, not vice repression.¹⁰

The ASHA conducted studies of Phenix City during and after the war to determine the level of vice. It believed that commercialized prostitution had in fact disappeared in the city after 1942.¹¹ However, vice returned just as the war ended. In August 1945, the ASHA

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Note card on Phenix City, Alabama survey, (Dec. 39-Nov. 44), box 105, Legal and Protective Surveys, American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota. The note cards that the ASHA constructed were based on surveys of commercialized prostitution in selected cities. Each card contains the name of the state, city, and nearby military base, if applicable, and provides remarks and ranks of each observation on a scale from A to D. The respective letter corresponds with an

conducted a survey of vice in Phenix City and gave the town a “B” rating, which meant the situation was “fairly satisfactory” but investigators should conduct occasional “check-ups” on the conditions of the commercialized sex market. They reported “Gambling and drink rustling ha[d] been resumed. When the number of soldiers at Fort Benning has been reduced, local underworld characters maintain that pros[titution] will be reestablished.”¹² Surveys of the area in the immediate years after the war revealed a fluctuation in commercial sexual activity, which the ASHA hoped military brass at Fort Benning might counter. Dashing their hopes, however, was the discovery that the sexual black market resumed operations sometime before 1949. The end of the war, troop reductions, and the widespread use of penicillin as a treatment for venereal disease led some cities around the country to ease enforcement of commercial vice regulations. In response, red-light districts reopened, and Phenix City did as well. The ASHA gave the city a “D” rating in August 1949 and noted that the city was wide open and they observed that “pros[titutes] and chippies peopled many bars and cafes” and “Many soldiers from Ft. Benning visit the resorts to contact sexually promiscuous women and girls.”¹³ Vice was back in Phenix City and despite an ASHA survey in 1950 that found the city in better condition, investigators commented that they knew their findings were not indicative of a long-term change. By 1951, Phenix City had resumed all vice activity and welcomed troops from Fort Benning.

assessment: A- Good: Situation satisfactory; B-Fair: Situation fairly satisfactory, occasional checkups needed; C-Poor: Attention needed, but not urgent; D-Bad, immediate attention needed.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Note card on Phenix City survey (Aug. 49-Jan. 50), ASHA. This card mistakenly lists “Arizona” rather than “Alabama.” The error is likely related to the similar spellings of Phenix and Phoenix.

The vice market that had developed over decades had become a cornerstone of Phenix City's economy. Despite military brass placing the city off limits on numerous occasions, troops continued to travel across the Dillingham and Fourteenth Street bridges, which connected the two cities. About eighty percent of the soldiers, referred to by journalists as "suckers in the clip joints," spent at least some of their earnings on gaming, alcohol, and sex.¹⁴ As early as 1945, the ASHA proffered that in Phenix City "liquor and gambling interests are waxing rich from Ft. Benning soldiers' spending."¹⁵ Some estimated that the combined income of the vice racket was one hundred million annually, and the profits bolstered not just the pockets of the racketeers, but the city as well. Municipal tax revenue collection in 1952 had grown to almost six hundred and fifty thousand dollars, half of which was collected from the vice market.¹⁶

The economy that thrived in Phenix City was a black market or an underground economy. Defining a black market economy is challenging, and within the field of economics, even academics well versed in economic theory struggle to agree on a single definition. Economic scholar Edgar Feige argues that there is no one single underground economy, but rather many forms of it. There are however characteristics that constitute all underground economies. Feige submits that they share a commonality through their evasion of government oversight in terms of regulation and taxes that typically monitor other market exchanges of goods. By avoiding fiscal scrutiny and commercial regulation, their activities, whether gambling, the illegal trade in alcohol, or the operation of commercial sex markets, place these

¹⁴ Strickland, *Phenix City*, 199.

¹⁵ Note card on Phenix City, Alabama survey (Aug. 45-Nov. 48), ASHA.

¹⁶ "Wave of Desperation Sweeps City After Crackdown," *Lake Charles American Press* (Lake Charles, Louisiana), 25 June 1954, 1.

economies in a similar category, that of the black market.¹⁷ In Phenix City, the black market generated formal revenue for the city and thus was officially included in the accounting by the government, but it did so only through penalties and fines for its illegal operations. The actual earnings of city officials, the syndicate, sex workers, and the myriad others associated with the black market, however, was undeclared income, and hence within the understood definition of an underground economy. Arguably, the visibility of the illegal goods, services, and activities, the financial rewards that it produced, and the openness with which Phenix City included some of the illegal market revenue in its balance sheets appear to defy the idea of a clandestine black market. Visibility however, does not negate the economic characteristics that define an underground economy, and additionally, the activities occurring in Phenix City, while well known among local residents and military officials, was not common knowledge outside of the region. Therefore, the openness with which the vice market operated does not contradict its status as an underground or black market economy rather, it is the mere skirting of the rules that merit the application of the term.

“This machine is big, you don’t know how big,” confided one woman to her neighbor as state investigators descended on Phenix City to probe the intricacies of the vice market.¹⁸ Upon examination, they discovered a large, organized crime syndicate. The criminal element that ran Phenix City had crafted an extensive vice trade, however, the operators defied traditional

¹⁷ Edgar L. Feige, “Defining and Estimating Underground and Informal Economies: The New Institutional Economics Approach,” *World Development* 18, no. 7 (July 1990): 991. Feige differentiates types of underground economies based on the operations and illegal benefits gained in the economy and on the legal rules disregarded into the categories of illegal, unreported, unrecorded, and informal. An underground economy will have elements of one or more of these characteristics.

¹⁸ Lucile Walls, Investigator’s Book 1 June –November 1954, folder 13 box SG01372, Albert Patterson Case Files (APCF), ADAH.

assumptions about members of organized crime. Often the image tends to stereotype the members as Italian Americans, armed with machine guns and involved in bootlegging in urban settings. Federal investigators, typically those associated with the FBI classify organized crime not by its member ethnicity but by its system of operations, defining it as a highly organized, structurally stratified, group of individuals that engage in the “supply of illegal goods and services” such as liquor, narcotics, prostitutes, and gambling.¹⁹ The structural stratification, which the FBI determined indicative of organized crime, fails to apply to Phenix City’s black market, but the goods and services traded in its system do place it within the definition. Studies of criminal syndicates in the 1950s, specifically syndicates involved in the sexual black market broaden the definition. Specialists on criminal organizations find that these syndicates were not defined by its hierarchy run by a “single overlord,” but rather its “loose confederation” of individuals within a less defined power structure.²⁰ Phenix City’s operations contained elements of both types of characterizations. Internal operations were highly organized and extensive, but Phenix City’s black market itself was more loosely structured. A series of leaders, some who operated either a gaming or a prostitution racket as well as those who dabbled in both. While one man was seen as the godfather of Phenix City's gambling syndicate, but he did not control all aspects of the city’s vice only the largest share in the number of establishments he owned.

Investigators identified three individuals as the leaders in the commercial sex market, but these

¹⁹ Michael D. Matlz, “Defining Organized Crime,” in Robert J. Kelly, Chin, Ko-Lin, and Schatzberg, Rufus, eds., *Handbook of Organized Crime in the United States* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 9.

²⁰ Robert Y. Thornton, “Organized Crime in the Field of Prostitution,” *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 46, no. 6 (March - April 1956): 775.

individuals also engaged in gaming, and there existed several other operators of prostitution rings.

Phenix City's commercial vice market operated out of approximately forty establishments. In many of these establishments, patrons could watch a strip tease act, purchase sex, and enjoy the company of a B-girl. Gaming also occurred within many of these places, and there was no clear distinction in some ways between Phenix City's gambling operations and the sex market. Women often earned money from the gambling losses of men they convinced to participate in a dice or card game. Therefore, the sexual black market in Phenix City was broader than prostitution or other forms of commercial sex. Almost all of the commercial sex activity took place in bars or taverns, or facilities located on the establishment's property. The move to a bar culture resulting from the eradication of brothel prostitution during World War II had broad implications for the city's sexual black market. In bars, men held power as tavern and bar owners and thus, were the key operators of vice rings.²¹ Through bar ownership, these men controlled the black market itself.²² In Phenix City, the shift from brothels to bars as the primary locations for the sex market relegated women almost exclusively to laborers rather than procurers or operators.

²¹ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York and London: WW Norton & Company, 1992), 310. Gilfoyle notes the shift from brothels to a bar culture began to take place in the 1920s. Access to public space, specifically drinking establishments was a contested right for women. Amanda Littauer discusses how sex work allowed women access to bars but also how their presence led to stereotypes about women patrons. See *Unsanctioned Encounters: Women, Girls, and Non-marital Sexuality in the United States, 1941-1963*, Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 2006).

²² Exceptions, of course, existed in the predominant male owned bar culture. Two women operated bars in Phenix City; their operations will be noted later.

Approximately 341 women worked in the commercial sex industry in Phenix City. Typically, they were between the ages of sixteen and forty, and had various marital statuses.²³ All of the sex workers interviewed after the cleanup were white. There were very few, if any, black sex workers in Phenix City.²⁴ Although some records indicate the existence of black women in the commercial sex trade, surveys of the area by government and private organizations noted that black sex workers operated mainly in Columbus, Georgia.²⁵

The women who worked at the establishments relayed different experiences in the interviews conducted by the National Guard during the cleanup. While the guard interviewed or compiled information on over one hundred women, not all of the information gathered was equally revealing. In many cases, investigators muted the women's voices by neglecting to ask questions about their experience; and private organizations such as the ASHA sometimes only gathered demographic information. Finally more often than not, the records simply do not exist. Consequentially, the sex workers noted in this chapter serve to illustrate the broader internal dynamics of the black market and the general experiences of the sex workers within it.

²³ "America's Wickedest City: They Had a Hot Time in Phenix City Until Martial Law Put Damper on Vice," *Kingsport Times News* (Kingsport, Tennessee), 8 August 1954, 8 and Jack A. Warren Papers, Phenix City Investigation Papers, 1954, Department of Archives and Manuscripts (DAM), Birmingham Public Library (BPL), Birmingham, Alabama. General Major Walter J. (Crack) Hanna, commander of the Alabama National Guard estimated there were 341 women in the sex work industry. Others suggested the number was closer to 1000. I have only identified 130 women in the sex trade.

²⁴ McCann's Place note card, Warren Papers. McCann's Place (aka Mack's Café) a gambling joint that catered to African Americans was reported to have black B-girls and Phenix City note cards compiled by the ASHA also noted the presence of black prostitutes, however, only interviews with and information about white sex workers exist in the records.

²⁵ "Report on Columbus Georgia War Area Sept 30, 1944," 22, ADPH.

Some of the women in Phenix City originated from the town or neighboring cities in Alabama and Georgia, while others had moved to the area from diverse locations such as Oklahoma, New Jersey, Louisiana, and California.²⁶ Those who migrated to the city did so for various reasons. While it is difficult to determine why each woman came to work in the city's sex market, a 1942 study by Travelers Aid, an organization dating to the mid-nineteenth century designed to assist travelers, especially women and children, shed light on the reasons why women migrated to the Columbus, Georgia, area. Of the 157 women, between the ages of twelve and twenty-five, interviewed in the 1942 Travelers Aid study, one-quarter reported that they moved to Columbus seeking employment. Both Columbus and Phenix City housed several factories and mills that employed women.²⁷ Many of the mills contributed products to the war effort such as tires and tent twill.²⁸ Ten percent of the women had joined their husbands stationed at Fort Benning, while another twenty-one percent of the women were "following soldiers." Curiously, three women were listed as migrating for the reasons of "wanderlust" or "transient – no apparent reason."²⁹ While the survey does not explore the move to Columbus further, the migrating women reflect a larger trend in the country. A 1945 *Time* magazine concluded that women "are more widely traveled; hardly a woman under 40 has not seen new sections of America while visiting a husband, sweetheart or brother. They are more self-

²⁶ These are women that migrated and remained in the city through the cleanup. There were numerous other women rumored to have migrated to the city to work in the sexual black market briefly. These incidents are addressed more fully later in this chapter.

²⁷ "Study of Girls Between the Ages of 12 – 25 Years Inclusive, Handled by the USO – Travelers Aid Service, Columbus, GA from June 23, 1942 to March 29, 1942," folder Statistics, box 3, ROCWS.

²⁸ "Report on Columbus Georgia War Area Sept 30, 1944," 5 ADPH.

²⁹ "Study of Girls Between the Ages of 12 – 25," ROCWS.

reliant.”³⁰ The study then explored the idea of settling down and the loneliness that some women felt because of their partner’s overseas service. Some women went to bars or parties to pass the time while they waited for their loved one’s return.³¹ The idea of adventure brought on by boredom has been explored by scholars of the WWII era.³² For young women, travel and mobility based on the idea of adventure was a common theme. In a study on juvenile delinquents conducted in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1943, thirty percent of the study’s participants listed “adventure” as a motivator in migration, especially for women between the ages of thirteen and seventeen.³³

For the women in Phenix City, there was no study conducted in the 1950s that addressed where they originated and why they migrated to Phenix City, but based on the war era studies it is likely that many of these young women in Phenix City migrated for similar motivations as women during the war years. Some of the women in Phenix City's vice market were married to soldiers stationed or previously stationed at Fort Benning. Some women had divorced from their soldier husbands only to remarry a different Fort Benning soldier. Other women appeared to have had very little connection to Fort Benning or to a relative in the area and why they chose Phenix City remains a mystery. While many of the women were from other Alabama towns, some migrated from other states. In the Traveler’s Aid study, forty-five percent of the women

³⁰ “They Think Of The Moment,” *Time* 45, no. 9 (1945): 20.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² See Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008) and Littauer, *Unsanctioned Encounters*.

³³ “Study of Juvenile Sex Delinquency, Memphis, Tennessee, 1943,” folder Juvenile Delinquency, box 5, General Records, 1941-1946, ROCWS.

had moved to the area from states other than Alabama or Georgia.³⁴ The women in Phenix City were not asked with any consistency about their towns of origin.

The sex workers in Phenix City participated in a vibrant sexual black market that included prostitution, typically defined as the exchange of money for sexual intercourse or other sexual acts including fellatio or manual stimulation. Yet the market was broad in scope and encompassed more than the conventional format of a sexual exchange between men and prostitutes. In Phenix City, B-girls, or drink solicitors were a significant part of the sex trade. In a popular drinking establishment called Boone's Café, the bartender, Henry G., coached women on the practice. Specifically, Henry G. taught his daughter, Johnnie, the art of B-drinking the first night she began work as a B-girl.³⁵ Married eighteen-year old Johnnie did not divulge her specific techniques, but in other cities, B-girls sat on patron's laps, engaged in kissing, and sometimes "permitted pawing."³⁶ B-girl practices, no matter the location, shared a similar goal, which was to convince men to buy them drinks.

In Phenix City, B-girls added to the illusion of a potential sexual exchange by making "dates" with customers. At the Riverside Bar, an establishment owned by Ernest and Glenn Youngblood who were considered two of the most prominent sexual vice operators in town, B-girls requested a fee in advance of the proposed date. After the cash transaction, the B-girl would agree to meet her date at a local motel. However, she would never meet her obligation. If the patron came back to the bar demanding his money returned, the bartender would claim

³⁴ "Study of Girls Between the Ages of 12 – 25," ROCWS.

³⁵ Henry G. statement, Warren Papers.

³⁶ Ernest Lenn, "Widespread Use of B-girls in S.F. Gyp Bars Exposed," *San Francisco Examiner*, 22 January 1953, 1.

ignorance of the scam. B-girls at the Hi-Lo, also owned by the Youngblood brothers, revealed similar practices. Carolyn R., a thirty-six year old B-girl from Columbus, told investigators that the proprietors instructed her to arrange dates for twenty dollars. Once she received the money, she was told she did not have to fulfill the commitment.³⁷ Although some B-girls did engage in prostitution, for many the objective was to solicit as many cocktails as the patron would buy and when he exhausted his night's finances, the B-girl moved on to another patron. Over a single evening, one B-girl told investigators that she might consume up to 115 B-drinks.³⁸

Phenix City B-girls earned eighteen dollars a week for their efforts as well as a percentage of the cost of each drink the patron bought. The percentage differed at each establishment but typically the women earned half the drink cost, which was fifty cents. Bartenders kept the earnings of B-girls separate from the bar's other profits. At Boone's, Henry G. placed the money in a cigar box near the cash register. To note the number of drinks each B-girl consumed, he put a mark next to her name on a sheet of paper.³⁹ Some women kept their drink straws from each drink to ensure that at the end of the night, the bartender's count was accurate.⁴⁰

The perceived sexual availability of B-girls in Phenix City also played a role in the gambling racket. Bar owners relied on women to entice men to participate in gaming. One woman explained a scam called "putting the hat on." Game operators instructed B-girls to bring

³⁷ Carolyn R. statement, Warren Papers.

³⁸ "B-Girl Reveals Tricks of the Trade," *News Tribune* (Fort Pierce, Florida), 29 August 1954, 2.

³⁹ Henry G. statement, Warren Papers.

⁴⁰ Virginia D. statement, Warren Papers.

male patrons to the establishment's back rooms under the pretense of sex. When the pair entered the room they would find it occupied with men playing cards. Once the patron was in the back room, one card player would ask the man to sit in for a round while another player answered a phone call. The dealer fixed the game so the new player would win and feel confident to play again, but with his own money, the goal of the scam.⁴¹ If the man refused to play or expressed disinterest, the proprietors told women to take the patron back to the bar and "feed him more whiskey."⁴² The women complied since they earned a percentage of the patron's losses to the house.

Vivian, a B-girl at Boone's Café described another scam called the "pawn racket." A B-girl would concoct a story about her financial woes that resulted in her pawning a valuable item such as her watch. She would convince the patron to give her between five and ten dollars to get the watch out of pawn. Vivian explained, "that we were told by Mr. Boone to give our watches to the bartender, then get some soldier to pay them out of pawn for us. If they paid... we would get one half."⁴³

By far the most duplicitous means of earning money involved the "rolling" of soldiers. This was the practice of stealing a patron's wallet, watch, or other possession after the patron became intoxicated and passed out. B-girl Johnnie told investigators that E.V Boone, the proprietor at Boone's Café, warned that she should "always be sure the customer was passed out before I took any money off him to be sure there wasn't any trouble."⁴⁴ The practice sometimes

⁴¹ Sheila H. statement, Warren Papers.

⁴² Earline H. statement, Warren Papers.

⁴³ Vivian K. statement, Warren Papers.

⁴⁴ Johnnie G. statement, Warren Papers.

took on a nefarious component. In Phenix City, rolling sometimes involved drugging a patron's drink with "knock out drops."⁴⁵ Typically the bartender or the proprietor would administer the drops and the B-girls would wait for the drug to render the patron unconscious. The B-girl then pilfered through the patron's pocket for valuables, such as watches, rings, and cigarette lighters, as well as cash.⁴⁶ Bartenders took care to note what items or amount of money the women earned from B-drinking or from rolling and the various rackets they employed. Some owners encouraged the practice more than others. The Youngblood brothers informed B-girl Arlene to "get money anyway she could" from patrons, including rolling. However, Arlene was warned that if she did not share the goods she found from the fraudulent practices that she would encounter negative consequences.⁴⁷ Women turned over whatever they took from the patron and received half of the amount back at the end of the evening. Some women made a substantial amount of money rolling patrons. Sheila, a nineteen-year-old B-girl from Atlanta, stated that women could earn as much as one hundred and fifty dollars a night from rolling patrons.⁴⁸ Women sometimes learned techniques for rolling from other B-girls, particularly one named Earline, Sheila's mother, whom investigators considered a "known roll artist."⁴⁹ After moving to Phenix City from Atlanta, Sheila began working as a B-girl at the same establishment as her mother. Likely, Earline taught her daughter the intricacies of the B-girl trade.

⁴⁵ The drug used is unknown, but may have been chloral hydrate. One B-girl noted the same drug was also used as an abortifacient. Sheila H. statement, Warren Papers.

⁴⁶ Sheila H. statement, Warren Papers.

⁴⁷ Arlene D. statement, Warren Papers.

⁴⁸ Sheila H. statement, Warren Papers.

⁴⁹ Earline H. note card, Warren Papers.

Often times, B-drinking and prostitution overlapped. Shelia told investigators that most of the women she worked with could be “bought” for twenty dollars.⁵⁰ The specifics of filling dates with customers differed depending on the establishment. Some bars had facilities on site and women filled dates in back rooms or trailers located on the property. Other women had to meet dates at local hotels in the city. One establishment, Cliff’s Fish Camp, was likely the closest thing resembling a brothel in Phenix City. Cliff’s, operated by Cliff Entrekin, had six rooms upstairs and twelve booth type stalls on the first floor where the women conducted business.⁵¹ One woman, who collected the payments for sexual liaisons that prostitutes arranged, stated that approximately five sex workers entertained between thirty and forty customers an evening. She noted that the number of women who worked at Cliff’s differed depending on the day of the week and stated that an average of eleven women worked on the day that soldiers received their monthly pay.⁵² Fort Benning troops told ASHA observers, “On paydays the joints are so crowded we got to stand in line.”⁵³

The commercial sex system at Cliff’s worked similarly to that of the B-drinking racket. Prostitutes at Cliff’s arranged their own dates and clients paid the fee in advance to the women who would turn over the money to the bartender prior to filling the date. The bartenders wrote the information in a notebook and kept a record of how many dates each woman filled. At Cliff’s though, the women did fill their dates. Cliff’s was located approximately six miles

⁵⁰ Sheila H. statement, Warren Papers.

⁵¹ “Details of Prostitution Ring of Prostitution Ring Found by Guardsmen,” *Kingsport Times* (Kingsport, Tennessee), 24 September 1954, 6.

⁵² Ruth Faulkner note card, Warren Papers.

⁵³ Note card on Phenix City survey (Aug 50- July 51), ASHA.

outside of the city. The men who patronized the establishment often arrived by taxi and the drivers played a crucial role in the sex work industry. The owner of Cliff's entered into a business relationship with the local cab services to encourage the drivers to bring patrons to his establishment. He hosted a fish dinner for cab operators where he proposed an arrangement that involved paying drivers two-dollars for each patron they taxied to his place.⁵⁴ The agreement between Entrekin and the cab drivers was similar to arrangements created by other bar owners, as were the events that led to the partnership.

Rudene Smith who operated the 431 Club, also hosted a dinner for cab drivers in Phenix City.⁵⁵ Smith, one of only two women out of dozens of bar owners to operate her own establishment, proposed a two dollar payment to drivers that taxied patrons to her place. Other establishments devised comparable business relationships with local cab drivers. The establishments that worked with these drivers were located outside of town and the transportation of patrons contributed to the success of the sexual black market. The ASHA had long complained about the use of taxicabs as conduits to procure a prostitute and observed in their surveys the use of this method for discovering the locations of brothels, bars, or hotels where sex workers operated. In a 1951 observation of commercial vice activities in Phenix City, the ASHA reported that ten drivers volunteered to "act as go-bet[weens] for the 3 brothels."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Robert Smith note card, Warren Papers.

⁵⁵ Although National Guard notes suggested that there were four women that employed prostitutes in their establishments, the overall records indicate that only two women did this successfully. Rudene Smith was the sister of one of the syndicate's leaders and her family connection may have contributed to her success. The other woman, A.J. Parr ran a successful strip club. Parr's role will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁵⁶ Note card on Phenix City survey (Aug 50 – Jul 51), ASHA. The three brothels that the ASHA referred to were not specified.

Cab drivers confirmed the rumored business partnership with vice leaders. One driver stated that over fifty drivers attended the dinner at the 431 Club and that drivers were from both Phenix City and Columbus, and he confirmed his busiest evenings were on soldiers' paydays.⁵⁷

The money paid to the cab drivers made earning a living tougher for sex workers. At Cliff's, twenty-seven-year-old Virginia charged twelve dollars a date but made only eight dollars for her efforts – Entrekin kept two dollars and the cab driver received two.⁵⁸ Arlene, who worked for the Youngbloods stated she only made four dollars after the brothers and the cab drivers took their share.⁵⁹ Yet, during one of the many trials that occurred after the cleanup, two women who worked at Cliff's claimed they earned as much as six hundred a week and one speculated that some women earn as high as eight hundred. The earnings stemmed from their combined labor as B-girls and prostitutes.⁶⁰ The trials, though, showed that most women did not earn six hundred dollars a week and those who did only took home three hundred and fifty after they split the earnings with the establishment's proprietor.⁶¹ However, the wages were better than what women earned in one of the most common forms of labor in the South, factory work. On average women earned \$1.50 an hour in factories. In the South, earnings were less, with

⁵⁷ John Henry Lisle Jr. statement, Warren Papers.

⁵⁸ Virginia D. statement, Warren Papers.

⁵⁹ Arlene D. statement, Warren Papers.

⁶⁰ "Phenix City Vice Trail Jury Told of Prostitution Racket," *Lake Charles American Press* (Lake Charles, Louisiana), 16 November 1954, 1.

⁶¹ "Phenix City Probe Finds Big Vice Ring," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 25 September 1954, 3.

some estimates as low as fifty-five cents an hour.⁶² While sexual labor was not consistent and in many ways an unreliable form of income for women, it paid more than other jobs open to working class women.

Bar owners in Phenix City controlled the dynamics of the sexual black market. In addition to creating the scams to fleece patrons, they subjected women to rules, although each place differed and some owners set stricter policies than others. When the National Guard raided Cliff's Fish Camp during the cleanup they found a written set of rules that dictated the women's shift hours, which began at eight each evening and ended at three in the morning, and a code of behavior that prohibited becoming or arriving intoxicated at work. Accompanying each rule was a fine for violating the restrictions. The proprietor docked \$12.50 from women's earnings for arriving late or inebriated, as well as for not showing up for a shift.⁶³ The rules expressly forbade rolling patrons.⁶⁴ Women were also not allowed to leave prior to the end of their shift without incurring a monetary penalty. Other proprietors instituted similar rules, but the establishments that lacked facilities on site for women to fill dates allowed women to leave the premises to do so.

While the women lacked control over the operation, they exerted some control over their movements. Many of the women in Phenix City migrated between establishments. In Phenix City, prostitutes worked at an average of four places in five years, sometimes returning to one place several times. Arlene worked at seven different bars after moving to Phenix City in 1949.

⁶² "Report on Columbus Georgia War Area Sept 30, 1944," ADPH, ADAH.

⁶³ "Rules Told of 'Girls' at PC Camp," *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, Georgia) 17 August 1954, 1.

⁶⁴ Ruth Faulkner statement, Warren Papers.

Another sex worker, Lola, began working in Phenix City in 1950 and worked at eleven places between her arrival and the 1954 cleanup.⁶⁵ Mobility was a characteristic of prostitution in the post war-era, but it was evident earlier in the twentieth century. Sex workers often moved from brothel to brothel to avoid law enforcement or because of work place conflicts.⁶⁶ The mobility provided women with some control over their sexual commerce. While neither Lola nor Arlene noted why they left one establishment for another, women in other cities indicated arguments with proprietors, staff, or other sex workers led them to seek work elsewhere. One bar, the Blue Bonnet, seemingly took measures to ensure that the sex workers remained there. Four women reported having their initials tattooed on the inside of their lower lip by the bar's owner, Frank Gullatt, a powerful individual in the vice syndicate. Although two previous works on Phenix City concluded that Gullatt branded the women with the tattoos as a signifier that they belonged to him, the records on the sex workers with the tattoos, as well as other women in Phenix City do not indicate that this was, in fact, the case.⁶⁷ Sex worker Mary Lois who worked as a B-girl beginning in 1949 for Gullatt and quit in 1953 when the establishment's bartender pressured her to prostitute. Mary Lois found work at Boone's Café, but returned to the Blue Bonnet after two weeks. The circumstances surrounding her return are unknown.⁶⁸ Sex worker Ila worked as a B-girl at the Blue Bonnet intermittently for several years. She told investigators that she had been

⁶⁵ Lola L. statement, Warren Papers.

⁶⁶ Littauer, *Unsanctioned Encounters*, 40.

⁶⁷ Barnes, *The Tragedy and the Triumph*, 95 and Strickland, *Phenix City*, 44. These two works conclude that tattooing women at Gullatt's establishment signified the women working for him were "kept" and part of larger system of branding sex workers in Phenix City. Neither work provides citations and there is no way to discern on what basis the authors made these claims.

⁶⁸ Mary Louise note card, Warren Papers.

fired twice and secured work at another clip joint in Phenix City.⁶⁹ The tattooing of women does imply a disregard for their value as humans. Branding individuals as a sign of ownership conjures images of practices employed by slave owners in the American South. Yet, none of the women stated that they were tattooed by force, and other women that worked for Gullatt reportedly had no tattoos and were not prevented from working at different establishments if they so desired.

Although Gullatt's tattooing of women is not indicative of a sex market culture in which women were forced to engage in sex work, other incidents do suggest that some women experienced violence and coercion. Violence and threats, although not employed often, were used as a means to maintain control over women whom the syndicate feared might reveal information about their operations. After the National Guard began to close establishments and investigate vice in Phenix City some women endured threats made against them if they talked with investigators or revealed details of the syndicate's operation. One proprietor of several bars that employed sex workers told his former employee, Virginia, that if she talked with the National Guard she would "not get off with just a few bruises."⁷⁰ Of particular concern to some vice leaders was Sheila's diary. Before she worked as a B-girl, Sheila visited the bars where her mother, Earline, was employed. Sheila said that she wrote notes, "just to pass the time." Her diary documented the rolling of patrons, payoffs to local police, and the specifics of vice operations. After the cleanup, Ernest Youngblood asked Sheila if she still had the diary. She

⁶⁹ Ila B. note card and statement, and Diamond Horseshoe note card, Warren Papers. Two other women with their initials tattooed on the inside of their lips also worked at several bars in town other than the Blue Bonnet, but the dates of their employment are not specified making it difficult to determine if their employment at the Blue Bonnet occurred before or after the other establishments.

⁷⁰ Virginia D. statement, Warren Papers

replied that she did, but that there was nothing to write about anymore. Youngblood informed her that it was “not healthy” for her to keep that diary. A fearful Sheila burned it that evening.⁷¹

Sex workers mentioned very few experiences with violence before the cleanup, but B-girl Louise disclosed an incident where she challenged the authority of a vice leader, which resulted in a physical assault. One evening, Louise visited another B-girl named Judy who was working at the Haytag for Glenn Youngblood. Upon arrival, Louise reported that officers were on site after having broken up an altercation between several soldiers. Louise asked Youngblood if Judy could end her shift early since the bar was likely to close for the evening due to the commotion. Like Cliff’s, the Haytag also had rules that prohibited sex workers from leaving work before the end of their shift. Youngblood told Louise that Judith could not leave and that if she did she would forfeit her evening’s pay. Louise protested, stating that, “he [Youngblood] couldn’t beat her [Judith] out of her wages.”⁷² Youngblood left the bar and shortly thereafter a police officer informed Louise that Youngblood wanted to speak with her at the Riverside. When Louise arrived, she asked Youngblood why he wanted to see her. He replied, “I just wanted to kick your ass.”⁷³ Youngblood slapped Louise with considerable force and she fell through the front door and landed on the sidewalk. The officer witnessed the account, but Louise stated that he turned around and walked away after she was hit. The altercation continued after Louise left when Youngblood followed her back to the Haytag. After Youngblood called her a “bitch” Louise broke a glass and threatened to harm him. She was arrested and charged with public drunkenness. Louise paid an \$11.50 fine, and asked the judge if she could swear out a

⁷¹ Sheila H. statement, Warren Papers.

⁷² Louise H. statement, Warren Papers.

⁷³ Ibid.

warrant for Youngblood's physical assault against her. She told investigators that the judge advised her against getting a warrant reminding her "Glen had ways to get even with her."⁷⁴

Incidents of violence were also noted at the Hilltop, owned by Wilson McVey. In an exposé on the gambling and commercial sex market in Phenix City, *Birmingham News* journalists Ed Strickland and Gene Worstman indicated that violence against women occurred at the hands of a bouncer employed by the proprietor. The pair wrote that women who engaged in behavior considered "out of line" encountered violence, but they neglected to identify specific incidents.⁷⁵ No women indicated they experienced violence at the Hilltop or at the hands of McVey or anyone employed by him. However, these incidents were likely unreported to local police and may not have been of particular interest to investigators who focused on solving Patterson's murder and breaking up the gambling racket.

While Louise's experience with Glen Youngblood demonstrated the capacity for violence against the women in the sex work industry, most women indicated that violence played no role in their experiences at all. Several noted that while they worked as B-girls, they refused to prostitute or would engage only in "French dates" (fellatio). Although vice leaders tried to convince the women otherwise, none reported physical assaults or threats over their decisions not to engage in prostitution.⁷⁶

Investigators considered Cliff Entrekin, Wilson McVey, and Glenn Youngblood the main leaders in the sexual black market. Youngblood's brother Ernest played a smaller role in the

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Strickland, *Phenix City*, 28.

⁷⁶ Lola L., Carolyn R., and Dorothy W. all refused to engage in traditional prostitution involving sexual intercourse for money or any form of sexual exchange, but none revealed that they encountered threat or violence as a result.

syndicate and authorities did not indicate he was an individual of significance in their investigation. The three men controlled a substantial portion of the sexual black market and they employed the majority of Phenix City's sex workers. However, there were six others who owned or operated establishments that offered commercial sex services. Notably, two of the proprietors were women. A.J. Parr, also known as Beechie Howard and often referred to as "Ma Beechie," owned a popular strip tease bar in the city that opened in 1937.⁷⁷ Parr was sixty-four years old at the time of the cleanup, had five adult children, and at least two former husbands. Her business, Beechie's, was successful, even drawing in college men from Auburn University. At Beechie's, patrons watched strip shows and prostitutes and B-girls plied their trade. Several interviews with women in the sex market indicated they had worked at Beechie's at one point. After the cleanup, Parr only faced gambling charges though.⁷⁸ Her age and bespectacled face made her a frequent subject in local newspapers, but investigator notes on the cleanup in Phenix City mentioned few details on her operation.

Another woman, Rudene Smith, operated an extensive prostitution ring in town and while investigators believed that Entekin, McVey, and Youngblood were the major operator, others believed it was Smith.⁷⁹ She had interests in three Phenix City establishments: the 431 Club, the Silver Dollar, and the Silver Slipper. The 431 Club was part of a larger property that contained four tourist cabins and a house. Also located on the property was the Circle Motel. In addition to these properties Smith co-owned a 198-acre farm. Her partner in most of these properties was

⁷⁷ Strickland, *Phenix City*, 32.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 47-519 and "Outside Aid Eyed To Nab Missing 25," *Columbus Ledger*, (Columbus, Georgia), 1 September 1954, 1.

⁷⁹ Strickland, *Phenix City*, 30. Strickland and Worstman believed that Smith was the largest prostitution operator in town.

a man named Harris Edwards. Their relationship was unclear, but several sex workers interviewed by National Guardsmen indicated that the two were intimate, as well as business partners. At the time of the cleanup, Smith was thirty-nine years old, divorced with two adult children and had lived in Phenix City for seventeen years. During her time in the city, Smith moved up the ranks in the vice market, likely due to her male siblings who played a significant role in the gambling racket in the city. Smith began as a bartender in 1937 or 1938 at the Blue Bonnet. She earned seven dollars a week, but by the time she left the establishment approximately eight years later, she was earning thirty-five dollars a week.⁸⁰ While employed at the Blue Bonnet, Smith earned a reputation for recruiting of sex workers.⁸¹ She opened the Silver Dollar in 1949 with Edwards where she employed women. Despite operating three clubs and her property ownership, Smith claimed she earned very little money and denied any involvement in prostitution. Investigators disagreed and believed that she employed women as B-girls and/or prostitutes at the establishments that she operated; they also concluded that the Circle Motel served as the headquarters for her prostitution ring.⁸² Facing the possibility of criminal charges, Smith denied involvement in the sex trade. Her success however, is undeniable. Many sex workers implicated her and claimed they worked at Smith's establishments. Journalists Strickland and Worstman noted that Smith became one of the only women in the sex market to hold a position of power and authority.⁸³ Her property ownership

⁸⁰ Information on Rudene Smith, Warren Papers.

⁸¹ Blue Bonnet note card, Warren Papers and Barnes, *The Tragedy and the Triumph*, 252.

⁸² Rudene Smith note card, Circle Motel note card, and Wyley Newton McWaters statement, Warren Paper.

⁸³ Strickland, *Phenix City*, 30.

and her family connections suggest that Smith was indeed an influential woman in the black market.

The women in Phenix City that engaged in intimate commercial sexual contact faced the possibility of contracting a venereal disease. Venereal disease infection rates across the country had steadily declined after the war, and government funding for clinics had also waned in correlation with the lower rates of infection. The ASHA bemoaned the lack of funding and continued to plead its case for education, prevention, and treatment in the post-war era. In Phenix City, the records do not indicate a significant problem with venereal disease in the 1950s, perhaps because of improved treatment and prevention efforts as well as the measures that bar owners and women took to address the issue. At Cliff's Fish Camp, women underwent monthly venereal disease checks administered by a local doctor.⁸⁴ Records indicate that some women were detained after the cleanup for testing positive for a venereal disease and others were designated as venereal disease "contacts" but little else was noted about the issue.

While leaders and women in the sex market took measures to prevent venereal disease contraction, investigative records did not indicate if the women or the vice operators worked to prevent pregnancy. Women who became pregnant, whether from commercial sexual labor or noncommercial sexual liaisons, could seek abortion services from at least two providers in the city. Louise Malinoski, a long-time resident of the area, provided abortion services for women in Phenix City.⁸⁵ The National Guard arrested her during the cleanup on charges of inducing an abortion, illegal in the state of Alabama except in cases where the pregnancy would harm the

⁸⁴ Ruth Faulkner note card, Warren Papers.

⁸⁵ Malinoski is sometimes spelled "Malinosky" in the records.

mother's health.⁸⁶ Initially, Malinoski, told investigators that she performed "eight or nine" abortions over a three-year period. After intense questioning, Malinoski admitted that she had performed more "abortions than she could keep track of."⁸⁷ Malinoski, a forty-five year old former nurse, performed the abortions in her home, where she sterilized instruments "by pouring hot water over the them."⁸⁸ She charged the women between ten and seventy-five dollars for her services. During the investigation, guardsmen believed that Malinoski's services were tied to a larger racket that involved numerous abortion providers.⁸⁹ Some B-girls had told investigators that a high ranking local official had performed abortions and that the same knock out drops used on soldiers were also administered to women seeking to terminate a pregnancy.⁹⁰ The National Guard questioned several other individuals on suspicion of providing abortion services, but Malinoski endured the most press and scrutiny for her actions. She was rumored to be a former prostitute and had a prior arrest in 1948 on charges of fornication, a law sometimes used to regulate prostitutes, but more often applied to adulterers and unmarried couples living together. Investigators and newspapers reported that she provided abortion services to earn money to

⁸⁶ 1940 Code of Alabama Titles 14-18, section 9. The law criminalized providing or inducing an abortion for a woman unless "necessary to preserve her life and done for that purpose." Alabama added "or health" in 1951. The law originated in 1894, but used the term miscarriage instead of abortion.

⁸⁷ "Guard Reveals Evidence of 3 Abortion Cases," *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, GA), 30, August 1954, 1.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ "Guard Breaks Abortion Ring as Woman Cites Operation," *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, GA), 25 August 1954, 8/25/54, 1 and 2.

⁹⁰ Sheila H. note card, Warren Papers.

support her alcohol habit, specifically an addiction to whiskey.⁹¹ Her police record contained nineteen arrests for drunkenness between March 1948 and February 1954. During the cleanup, Malinoski was the first person to go to trial in connection with the anti-vice prosecutions in Phenix City. She pleaded guilty to five counts of inducing an abortion and was sentenced to thirty-nine months in jail.⁹²

While most of the women involved in Phenix City's vice did so in the sexual black market, some women participated strictly in the gambling racket in ways unrelated to commercialized sex. Women gamers earned a living in a racket called the "bug." The bug was a lottery in which players picked three numbers between zero and nine to win a certain pool of money, typically based on the amount amassed in one day's game. Winning numbers were not drawn or chosen at random, but rather bug writers used a daily stock exchange number. Often times the stock number was seven digits and bug operators picked the second, third, and fourth number in the sequence. Players could bet as much or as little on these numbers and a new game occurred daily. The allure of the "bug" was that unlike some games in Phenix City, it was not fixed and players had a fair chance at choosing winning numbers.⁹³

While numbers rackets have a long history in the U.S., bug games seem to have originated in the American South in the 1930s in and around Atlanta, Georgia. The game attracted both white and black players and operators, but African Americans played the game in greater numbers than whites. In 1936, Atlanta police embarked on a series of raids to eliminate

⁹¹ "Guard Breaks Abortion Ring as Woman Cites Operation," *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, GA), 25 August 1954, 1 and 2.

⁹² Strickland, *Phenix City*, 103 and Barnes, *The Tragedy and the Triumph*, 287.

⁹³ Strickland, *Phenix City*, 54.

the bug, which had recently invaded the city. They arrested hundreds of “bug writers,” those who wrote the tickets and tallied the bets, in an effort to expunge the game from their community.⁹⁴ The earliest references to the “bug” in Phenix City occurred in 1951 during a cleanup campaign spearheaded by the newly formed Russell Betterment Association (RBA).⁹⁵ The RBA pressured local authorities to enforce gambling laws, but found that city officials expressed little interest in addressing the issue. The revenue generated from gambling fees and licenses, and fines charged for non-compliance contributed greatly to Phenix City’s income; money from the gambling racket was credited with pulling the city out of bankruptcy in 1948. Gambling interests accounted for ninety-four thousand dollars of the city’s 495 thousand dollar city revenue in 1950.⁹⁶ Governor Gordon Persons pursued stricter policies during his tenure and supported RBA efforts to close down the bug and other illegal gambling operations in 1951. By 1952, though the gambling racket had reemerged with a vengeance and the syndicate attacked an RBA member’s home for speaking out against gambling racketeers. Local elections that year also turned violet when a riot broke out in which several RBA members were assaulted. The 1952 election resulted in syndicate friendly candidates retaining positions of authority that would fuel Albert Patterson’s political campaign to end vice in Phenix City and result in his assassination.

⁹⁴ “Bug 'Winners' Lose as Police Keep 1,200 Tickets Seized in Vice Drive” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 11 February 1936, 12 and “Scores are Arrested in Police Vice Drive,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 9 February 1936, 10A.

⁹⁵ Grady, *When Good Men do Nothing*, 15.

⁹⁶ “Alabama City 'Sweats Out' Gambling Ban,” *The Washington Post*, 21 January 1952, 10.

There were six lotteries in Phenix City and over four hundred bug writers resulting in approximately seven thousand dollars a day generated by the bug.⁹⁷ While the bug attracted both white and black players, in Phenix City, like Atlanta, African Americans accounted for a significant number of the players. Indeed, journalists deemed the bug a “vicious racket” and believed that most of the victims of the bug were black.⁹⁸ The games often took place at the gambling establishments that catered to black patrons and many of those who worked in the bug were also black. Particularly, some of the bug writers were black women. Working in the bug as “bug writers” provided African-American women an opportunity to earn in a capacity outside of domestic labor, the predominant employment option for black women in the south. The number of African American women who participated is unknown. During the 1954 cleanup campaign, however, the National Guard arrested several black women for bug writing and several others were identified as having participated in the bug or other lotteries.⁹⁹ Little information is known about these women, but most were forty years or older and some of the women had previous arrests for gambling in Phenix City or in Columbus.

A number of the gambling clubs located on the Dillingham Street Bridge catered to African American patrons. One particular establishment, the Cotton Club, was owned by two white individuals, one of whom was a woman named Fannie B. Green.¹⁰⁰ Green’s story, like Rudene Smith’s, indicates the few positions of importance that women attained in Phenix City,

⁹⁷ Barnes, *The Tragedy and the Triumph*, 118.

⁹⁸ Strickland, *Phenix City*, 55.

⁹⁹ See files titled “Photographs and Information on Suspects,” Allen Investigative Reports July 1954, APCF.

¹⁰⁰ Alternate spellings include “Fanny.” Green was married several times and her name also appears as Fannie B. Chance or Fannie Bell Chance Green.

and shows how connections to powerful males in the racket likely helped paved the path to success. Green had moved to Phenix City in 1950 and worked as a B-girl earning fourteen dollars a week.¹⁰¹ During the cleanup, newspaper accounts always noted the striking contrast between the paltry earnings in her B-girl days and the diamonds, furs, and cars that she had accumulated by 1954. The thirty-three year old Green was referred to as the “Queen of Hearts” because of her reputation as a “heartbreaker.” Green dated, married, and divorced several soldiers while living in Phenix City. Newspaper accounts of her affairs claimed that soldiers fell “madly in love with her” and reportedly gave her portions of their monthly allotment checks. She remained in contact with many of her former boyfriends and husbands, fueling the belief that she spellbound men and that they continued to assist her financially. The belief had an element of truth. After her divorce from her second spouse, a Las Vegas career gambler, Chance and her former husband remained in contact and made joint investments together. During the cleanup, she may have been in the process of marrying her fifth husband, a soldier formerly stationed at Fort Benning. The soldier bought her a home and a parcel of land in Columbus in anticipation of their nuptials. Although Green seems to have been married or in the process of marrying during the cleanup, a National Guard raid of her residence indicated what may have been the true object of her affections. Throughout her home, picture frames encased images of Phenix City Assistant Chief of Police, Buddy Jowers, also her business partner at the Cotton Club. The two were rumored to be lovers.¹⁰² With Jowers as her partner, Green had little fear of police raids. She denied any role in gambling activities, but slot machines were found in her club during the National Guard raids. She left town after the raids but she was tracked down in Mississippi.

¹⁰¹ Strickland, *Phenix City*, 89.

¹⁰² “‘Queen of Hearts’ on Bond, Jowers Still Eludes Arrest,” *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, GA), 29 August 1954, 1 and 2.

After authorities brought her back to Phenix City, they tried her for gaming, and ultimately sentenced Green to one year in jail.

The close relationship between Jowers and Green reflected the instrumental role Phenix City law enforcement played in maintaining the vice market unabated. The police protected the market's existence by taking bribes to deter raids and in some cases officers procured sex workers. Most businesses paid a protection fee to members of the police force, including Jowers and the city's highest-ranking deputy, Albert Fuller. National Guard members questioned dozens of sex workers and bar employees about what role local authorities played in the vice racket as they tried to solve Patterson's murder. What the Guard discovered was a complex and well-organized system of graft. Interviews with the city's sex workers revealed that members of the police force visited clubs on a weekly basis. When asked if they witnessed payoffs or bribes, numerous B-girls, prostitutes and bartenders conveyed similar stories about backroom meetings and sealed envelopes. Many women noted that Fuller or other police department members collected payments from bar owners. B-girl Sheila told investigators that Fuller visited a number of the bars where either she or her mother, Earline, worked. According to employers at Cliff's, Entrekin paid Deputy Fuller one-third of the earnings from prostitution at his place.¹⁰³ Investigators estimated Fuller earned approximately six thousand dollars a week from his vice protection racket.¹⁰⁴

Profiting from the labor of sex workers was a lucrative venture in Phenix City, which makes the unscrupulous means sometimes involved in procuring prostitutes unsurprising. Several women relayed stories about police harassment, detainment, and coercive sexual

¹⁰³ Ruth Faulkner statement and William Bryant Fuller statement, Warren Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Grady, *When Good Men Do Nothing*, 37.

interactions stemming from coercion. Earline, the thirty-two year old mother of Sheila moved to Phenix City with three friends in search of work. All four women were arrested the first night they arrived in town in January 1952 – the charges are unknown. Earline told investigators that while she was detained Ernest Youngblood, whom she did not know, visited her in jail and suggested she work in one of his establishments in exchange for her release. Earline refused. She and the other women spent three days in the Phenix City jail before the police released them. The three unnamed women left town, but Earline remained in Phenix City. She searched for legitimate work, but had no success. She eventually consented to work as a sex worker after a chance meeting with Ernest Youngblood on the street where he again offered her a job.¹⁰⁵ Earline appears to have worked only as a B-girl for the Youngblood brothers and her daughter Sheila stated that she was not aware of any dates that her mother filled. Earline was arrested quite often in the town. Sheila first came to Phenix City to post bail for her mother's arrest on a drunk and disorderly charge and many of Earline's subsequent charges also were related to alcohol.¹⁰⁶ The arrests were costly, and Sheila noted that Earline was in debt to the Youngbloods, which made it impossible for her to leave their employment even if she so desired. No other women mentioned being in perpetual debt to vice leaders, but Earline's circumstances may indicate another aspect of the arrangement that leaders had with local police.

Nineteen-year old Virginia told investigators a similar story to that of Earline's. Virginia and her friend Anna, also nineteen, were detained by Buddy Jowers in February 1954 after a traffic stop involving a vehicle in which they were passengers. The young women were not charged with any illegal act, but they were told that they would have to pay a fifty-dollar fine and

¹⁰⁵ Earline H. statement, Warren Papers.

¹⁰⁶ Sheila H. statement, Warren Papers.

submit to a strip search. The women did not have the funds and refused to consent to the search. Virginia told investigators that Jowers and another individual (presumably an officer) proposed “that if we would go back into a cell with them for an hour they would let us out.”¹⁰⁷ Both women refused. Shortly thereafter, while detained in a cell, the Youngblood brothers visited the women. The brothers offered to get the women out of jail, buy them clothes, and find them a place to live if they agreed to work as prostitutes. Ernest and Glen Youngblood explained that each woman would earn eight dollars for every date she filled (four dollars less than the actual price of twelve dollars for each date). The women refused this option as well, but noted that a woman sharing their cell agreed to the proposal and the police released her. After several hours in the cell, a different officer took pity on the women and allowed them to leave. Anna left Phenix City, but Virginia stayed and when she could not find legitimate work she turned to prostitution.¹⁰⁸

The black market in Phenix City was hugely profitable. The members of the syndicate had constructed a well-organized and lucrative system that operated with the assistance or compliance of countless individuals in the city. When Albert Patterson challenged the system the specter of reform loomed large and some leaders met the threats to their livelihood with violence. The night that Patterson was murdered the city and the state quickly responded. Governor Persons ordered Adjutant General of the Alabama National Guard, Walter Hanna to the city with orders to dismantle vice operations in the city.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Virginia D. statement, Warren Paper.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ “Alabama Murder Calls Out Troops,” *New York Times*, 20 June 20, 1954, 88L and Grady, *When Good Men do Nothing*, 63.

In the aftermath of the murder, residents witnessed National Guard troops conduct raids on many of the city's vice establishments. Images of guards with machine guns patrolling the streets or smashing gambling machines appeared in newspapers across the nation. After realizing the extent of the vice market and how deeply involved local authorities were in its operations, Governor Persons declared martial law on July 22, 1954. The state revoked all privately held weapons licenses and police weapon permits were canceled too. In an audacious response, the city's mayor, later indicted for a willful neglect of duty, declared that Phenix City was "one of the quietest places in Alabama."¹¹⁰ The governor's declaration of martial law was unprecedented; the Officials for the Councils of State Governments in Washington, DC, believed that in no other time in U.S. history had civilian officers been stripped of power by the military in peacetime.¹¹¹

General Hanna conducted a series of raids in July and investigators scrambled to identify the responsible party or parties in Patterson's murder. Rumors ran rampant as investigators struggled to find what they believed was a connection to the vice syndicate. The *Columbus Ledger* reported that two B-girls had links to a "national terrorist" youth group called the Pachucos.¹¹² Each woman had a tattoo in the web of one of their hands between their thumb and index finger. The symbol, a cross surrounded by five short lines, indicated membership in the group. Pachucos were a working-class Mexican-American youth group typically associated with the southwest. The term originated in El Paso, Texas and those who identified as Pachuco lived

¹¹⁰ "Troops take over Phenix City, Ala," *New York Times*, 22 July 1954, 34.

¹¹¹ "Troops Tighten Phenix City Martial Rule; Occupation Called Unique in US History," *New York Times*, 24 July 1954, 6.

¹¹² "Phenix Girl Admits Link to Pachucos," *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, Georgia), 31 August 1954, 1 and 2.

primarily in states that bordered Mexico. The group was often described as working class and associated with immorality and criminality. However, the Pachucos were not the organized “terrorist” group that authorities believed it to be and criminality was not necessarily indicative of those that identified as members.¹¹³ In the post-war era, the Pachuco mark was a common tattoo on young women who identified with this subculture. The B-girls that had the tattoo, Arlene and Mary, shared different accounts for its presence. Arlene admitted she was indeed a Pachuca. She told investigators that a Pachuco gang initiated her while she lived in California, her home state, and she acknowledged that the process was violent, but Arlene denied being affiliated with any Pachucos in Alabama, nor was she part of any local gang.¹¹⁴ A Los Angeles police expert on Pachuco gangs believed that the mark had come to symbolize toughness and “unsocial youth” accounting for its growing popularity among ethnically diverse teens and young adults across the country.¹¹⁵ Mary, an eighteen-year-old white woman, had seen the tattoo on patrons at the bars where she worked and found the mark “mysterious.”¹¹⁶ In Mary’s case, the Pachuco mark served to convey a certain image, unlinked from any context of its cultural underpinnings. The Guard quickly put to rest rumors that Patterson’s murder had a Pachuco connection and turned their focus on local culprits.

As the inquiry continued, investigators began to focus in on three individuals. The first was deputy Albert Fuller, whom investigators had discovered operated the widespread sexual

¹¹³ Laura L. Cummings, *Pachucas and Pachucos in Tucson: Situated Border Lives* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), xvii.

¹¹⁴ Arlene D. note card, Warren Papers.

¹¹⁵ Herbert D. Wilhoit, “Pachuco Mark Sweeps Nation,” *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, Georgia), 2 September 1954, 1 and 9.

¹¹⁶ “Phenix Girl Admits Link to Pachucos,” 1 and 2.

black market protection racket. Investigators learned that the vice community viewed Fuller as hot headed and reckless. The cash amount he demanded for protection rose frequently and the syndicate viewed him increasingly as a threat to their livelihood. Yet, as much as Fuller was a menace, Patterson was far more menacing, especially to elected officials considered syndicate-friendly. As a Phenix City resident and attorney, Patterson had once represented members of the syndicate in various criminal cases, but the RBA successfully influenced Patterson and he shifted his alliance away from the criminal element in town. With the encouragement of the RBA, Patterson chose to run for attorney general. The position in Alabama is quite powerful and Patterson's campaign promised to rid Phenix City of the vice influence that had corrupted local and even state officials. Particularly disconcerting was the power that the state attorney general had to remove or replace county circuit solicitors. In Russell County, the circuit solicitor was Archer Ferrell, a syndicate-friendly official and coincidentally, a political enemy of Patterson's resulting from a draft board conflict.¹¹⁷ The current Attorney General, Silas Coma Garrett, III, also perceived as friendly to the criminal element, worked with Ferrell to choose a contender against Patterson to keep him out of office. The election for the attorney general Democratic nomination was contentious and riddled with fraud. Ultimately, Patterson won the nomination but Garrett and Ferrell had been accused of vote tampering in Jefferson County in an attempt to fix the election in favor of their preferred candidate. Investigators soon determined that Garrett and Ferrell, along with deputy Albert Fuller conspired to murder Albert Patterson.

In addition to murder charges, Fuller faced several bribery counts for his protection racket involving Cliff's Fish Camp. He attended the trial in a hospital gurney, claiming he had sustained injuries from a horseback riding incident in July. Rumors in Phenix City indicated that

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 15 and 21.

Fuller's injuries were the result of a severe physical assault inflicted by Buddy Jowers. Patterson's murder had occurred in the midst of a "turf war" between Assistant Chief of Police Jowers and Deputy Fuller.¹¹⁸ Jowers had planned to curtail some of Fuller's power in the vice community, likely stemming from Fuller's drive for more power and money. Before Fuller's arrest on the murder charge, Jowers, as well as leaders in the syndicate suspected that Fuller had a direct connection to the murder and they were furious at him for what they saw was going to be an irreversible setback to the entire vice operation in Phenix City. They were right about their suspicions. Fuller was charged and convicted for shooting Patterson. In March 1955, a judge sentenced him to life in prison. Prosecutors charged Ferrell and Garrett as well. The court acquitted Ferrell, and Garrett suffered a mental breakdown and never faced trial.

The black market in Phenix City ceased operations quickly after the assassination on June 18, 1954. All but one bar was closed by the following day. Many of the women, displaced by the cleanup, left town. Military officials estimated that as many as 1000 prostitutes and gamblers departed Phenix City.¹¹⁹ Some women moved back to other parts of Alabama after the cleanup, while others moved out of state. Three sex workers moved to New Orleans and another to Florida. One was found in Chattanooga, Tennessee where she was arrested for vagrancy. Others only traveled as far as Columbus, Georgia, where city authorities worked quickly to stave off the development of a sexual market on par with Phenix City's and arrested the migrating sex

¹¹⁸ Grady, *When Good Men Do Nothing*, 147.

¹¹⁹ "Phenix City Vice Clean Up End Seen Near," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 14 August 1954, 3.

workers. One raid on a Columbus hotel netted thirteen individuals and detained six of them, all women, for venereal disease testing.¹²⁰

The largest migration of women and others in the vice syndicate by far involved a move to Aiken, South Carolina. Beginning in August, many individuals in the vice market explored the possibility of opening up several drinking establishments in Aiken. During the investigation, no one offered an explanation as to why Aiken became the destination of choice, but the city's population had changed dramatically with the development of the Savannah River Plant, a nuclear power facility that opened in 1953. The plant had attracted approximately 40,000 temporary workers and another 6000 permanent ones, many of whom were young men, which created a ready made clientele for migrating sex workers.¹²¹ Aiken was also forty miles away from Camp Gordon, a principal army training facility in World War II, located outside Augusta, Georgia. Members of Phenix City's sexual black market were not the only individuals to recognize the potential profitability of a vice market Aiken. The ASHA expressed concerns that the area's industrial development, combined with the growing U.S. presence in Asia would create disruption in familial patterns similar to those that occurred during World War II. They issued a report on the Savannah River Area concluding that,

“Commercialized prostitution, still a mighty source of VD, (and a sad commentary on any community's concept of civic dignity, respect for law enforcement, and respect for individual rights and dignity – even if it were not a pool of infection), can be expected to increase. The racketeers who thrive on the earnings of prostitution can hardly be expected to fail to see in the Armed Forces and in the heavy industrial concentrations, (many of

¹²⁰ “13 Nabbed in Vice Raid As City Keeps Guard Up,” *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, Georgia), 12 July 1954, 1.

¹²¹ Kari Frederickson, “Confronting the Garrison State: South Carolina in The Cold War Era,” *The Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 2 (May 2006): 352.

which will consist of migrant, and hence, uprooted personnel), splendid sources of revenue.”¹²²

The ASHA’s observations proved accurate. According to bartender Henry G., who had worked at several locations in Phenix City including Boone’s Café, the Riverside, and the Cotton Club, some of the city’s vice market members sought to establish operations in Aiken, and had tried to convince many sex workers to accompany them. One bartender asked Henry’s daughter, Johnnie to travel to Aiken, though Henry disapproved. Johnnie agreed to move as did several other sex workers. Members of the Phenix City vice market opened at least three establishments in Aiken. Operations functioned similarly to those in Phenix City; each place employed B-girls and offered gambling, and one establishment had prostitution. A former Phenix City bartender operated one of the new places, the El Morocco, which, similar to establishments in Phenix City, had trailers on site and rooms in the back where women filled dates.¹²³

Henry G. traveled to Aiken with the intention of retrieving his daughter, Johnnie. When he arrived, he was informed that his daughter owed money for her transportation and the vice leaders would not allow her to leave until she had paid her debt. Dejected, Henry G. returned to Phenix City and Johnnie remained in Aiken.¹²⁴ Traveling with Johnnie was B-girl Sheila.. After Sheila arrived in Aiken, she began to work at one of the newly opened bars. She told National Guard investigators that she recognized numerous Phenix City residents in Aiken. City officials and police in Aiken moved quickly to purge the Phenix City vice element. In July, Aiken police

¹²² “Proposed American Social Hygiene Services in the Savannah River Area (1952),” file: Military Correspondence, Savannah River Project, 1952, box 131, ASHA.

¹²³ Johnnie G. statement, Warren Papers.

¹²⁴ Henry G. and Johnnie G. statement, Warren Papers.

raided the city's bars and arrested fifty-three people on charges stemming from operation of a nuisance, selling beer on Sunday, gambling, and prostitution.¹²⁵ The ASHA and Aiken officials' suspicions were confirmed; many of those arrested were from Phenix City.¹²⁶

The governor of South Carolina, James F. Byrnes, contacted the FBI about his concerns that the vice element had moved into Aiken and he, along with Alabama Governor Persons, asked the FBI for assistance in both cities. Vice activities in Aiken were a local matter, and the FBI declined to become involved. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, however, wrote to Byrnes informing him that he had directed investigators to look into possible violations of the Mann Act.¹²⁷ Federal agents determined that three persons had violated the Mann Act by transporting women across state lines for immoral purposes. Sheila's mother Earline had complained to the National Guard in Phenix City that her daughter (in addition to Henry's daughter), only seventeen at the time, had been forced to go to Aiken. Officials in Aiken and Phenix City began detaining individuals on suspicion of white slave trafficking. Alabama National Guardsmen arrested Rudene Smith who they believed had enticed young women to travel to Aiken. Like other vice operators, Smith had visited Aiken and contemplated opening up a business in the city. Others detained included several bartenders from Phenix City that authorities thought had transported young women to the Aiken area. Ultimately the FBI charged only two individuals –

¹²⁵ "Officials Probing White Slave Ring Said Interstate," *Anniston Star* (Anniston, Alabama), 17 August 1954, 1.

¹²⁶ "Two State Probe Opens on Prostitution Racket," *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, Georgia) 17 August 1954, 1.

¹²⁷ Letter dated 13 August 1954 to Governor James F Byrnes from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and letter dated 17 August 1954 to Governor James F Byrnes from FBI Special Agent in Charge J.M. Lopez, folder: State Law Enforcement Division, 1952, box: Gov James F. Byrnes (1951-1955), State Agencies File, 1951-1954, State Law Enforcement Division – W, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.

a B-girl and her husband – for transporting Sheila between the two cities.¹²⁸ National Guard officials questioned Sheila about the Mann Act violation and realized they had stumbled upon a cooperative witness with incriminating information against Phenix City’s vice leaders. Although Sheila had destroyed the diary she kept detailing Phenix City’s vice operations, she provided specific accounts about the inner workings of the vice market to the investigators and her testimony was critical in the prosecution of many individuals in Phenix City for aiding and abetting prostitution, vagrancy, and gaming violations.

The closing of Phenix City's vice district and the investigation that followed revealed more than the migration of women out of Phenix City, it uncovered that before the cleanup women from across the South moved to Phenix City to work in the sex trade. The investigation turned up telegrams from vice leaders in New York and Florida that revealed a prostitution circuit. Women traveled among the cities of New Orleans, Pensacola, Florida, Mobile, Alabama, Augusta, Georgia, and Aiken, South Carolina in addition to the district in Phenix City to work as prostitutes. Some federal agents speculated that the cities also included Miami and Jacksonville, Florida and Savannah, Georgia. Each of the cities within the circuit were located near military bases or defense sites. Women who traveled the vice circuit were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four and many moved with their husbands and children. The circuit was highly organized. Arrangements were made a month in advance and the women, each known only by a number, confirmed their intention to arrive through telegrams. Women charged ten dollars for a ten-minute sexual liaison and split their total earnings with the house. The circuit, although speculated to include several places in Phenix City, seemed to only involve Cliff’s Fish Camp,

¹²⁸ “Federal Bureau of Investigation Reports December 1954,” file 12, box SG013721, APCF.

which, according newspapers, was known throughout the world by American soldiers.¹²⁹ Journalists estimated that as many as thirty-five sex workers in Phenix City participated in the circuit. Little else is known about the circuit or the women that participated in it, though its existence is not surprising. As cities closed districts, vice migrations happened more often and circuits sprung up throughout the South providing steady work and a means to elude authorities.¹³⁰

Evading authorities proved elusive in Phenix City though. A grand jury ultimately indicted a total of 141 individuals on 734 criminal counts.¹³¹ Charges included gaming without a license, vagrancy, aiding and abetting prostitution, and bribery. The syndicate leaders who faced charges stemming from their involvement in the sexual black market included Glenn and Ernest Youngblood, Cliff Entrekin, and James McVey. As officers booked Entrekin for vagrancy charges and operating a bawdy house, he told a reporter covering the arrest, “There are two kinds, the caught and the uncaught.” When asked if he was caught this time, Entrekin replied, “It looks like it, don’t it?”¹³² The Youngblood brothers and McVey had fled Alabama. Authorities arrested the three men in Calhoun County, Florida in November. Each faced criminal charges

¹²⁹ “Interstate Circuit Supplied Brothels,” *Corpus Christi Times* (Corpus Christi, Texas), 24 September 1954, 14B.

¹³⁰ Strickland, *Phenix City*, 24 and “Phenix City Probe Finds Big Vice Ring,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 25 September 1954, 3.

¹³¹ Grady, *When Good Men do Nothing*, 163. Numbers have varied according to sources. Margaret Barnes writes that there were 749 indictments for 152 persons in *The Tragedy and the Triumph*, 286.

¹³² “Witnesses Testify on PC Prostitution,” *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, Georgia) 22 September 1954, 1 and 2.

related to their prostitution operations.¹³³ Buddy Jowers, the former assistant chief of police had fled as well and was arrested in Odessa, Texas. He faced a series of misdemeanors related to gaming activities.¹³⁴ The owner of the Blue Bonnet, Frank Gullatt faced a trial on charges related to prostitution in the spring of 1955, but the disposition of his case has not been found.

The number of women arrested for violations involving prostitution is difficult to determine, but few women were charged. Journalists noted that the limited charges stemmed from General Hanna's reluctance to prosecute individual sex workers, instead focusing on the vice ring's leaders.¹³⁵ However, some women were detained as witnesses and at least one was held in contempt of court for her refusal to cooperate.¹³⁶ Another woman subpoenaed to testify attempted suicide, fearing retribution for her potential testimony.¹³⁷ Some like Sheila, however, did testify and explained the daily operations of the sexual black market indicating the role of proprietors and Albert Fuller in the protection racket.¹³⁸

In the aftermath of the cleanup, the city began to restructure and attempted to rid itself of the image as America's wickedest city. The Phenix City Ministerial Alliance asked evangelical

¹³³ "Guard Jails Youngblood's Under 'Investigation,'" *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, Georgia), 11 November 1954, 1.

¹³⁴ "Jowers Nabbed in Odessa, Texas, Escorted by Gallion to Jail In PC," *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, Georgia), 2 January 1955, 1.

¹³⁵ Strickland, *Phenix City*, 30. Records of the county and city courts were unobtainable at the time of this dissertation.

¹³⁶ "Guard Enters New Phase In Probe of Lotteries," *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, Georgia), 24 August 1954, 1.

¹³⁷ Barnes, *The Tragedy and the Triumph*, 275.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 276 and "Fuller Denies; Jury Awaits Charge by Ray Jenkins," *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, Georgia), 16 November 1954, 1 and 2.

minister Billy Graham to conduct a “sin-killer old time revival reaching into every soul.”¹³⁹ State officials barred any such type of revival, probably due to the logistics required to hold such a grand city-wide cleanse. The Phenix City grand jury that had met to indict the individuals involved in the city’s vice market concluded in December 1954 and claimed that the city had undergone a “moral recovery.”¹⁴⁰ Phenix City officials had even begun to raze the area in which vice had taken place and passed a new ordinance taxing garbage and car registrations to counter the loss of vice revenue.¹⁴¹

In January 1955, Governor Persons ended martial rule, returning the city to newly elected and appointed officials.¹⁴² After the trials and the waning of public interest, Phenix City seemed to recover from its years of vice. Perhaps the fitting bookend to the story was when the National Civic League presented Phenix City with the All American City award in summer 1955. In the town where there were more churches per population than any other city in Alabama, the sexual black market had been eradicated. Vice leaders made one last, desperate attempt resume their criminal operations in November 1955. Alabama State Attorney General John Patterson, son of the slain Albert Patterson responded with a sharp rebuke and warning.¹⁴³ It seemed vice finally had been eradicated from Phenix City.

¹³⁹ “Alabama invites Graham,” *New York Times*, 27 August 1954, 11.

¹⁴⁰ “Anti-Vice Jury Quits,” *New York Times*, 11 December 1954, 8.

¹⁴¹ “PC Adopts Measures Taxing Garbage, Cars,” *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, Georgia), 28 December 1954, 1.

¹⁴² “Martial Rule to End,” *New York Times*, 9 January 1955, 32.

¹⁴³ “Phenix City Underworld Move Seen,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 24 March 1955, 24.

One B-girl told a reporter from a jail cell that in her line of work “if anyone is stupid enough to let somebody do it to them, there’s always somebody stupid enough to do it.”¹⁴⁴ While blame cannot be placed on the victims of Phenix City's vice circuit, it would be remiss not to explore how such a grand scam could be perpetrated against the residents, the soldiers in Fort Benning, and perhaps even the women sex workers. Local citizens likely were aware of the city’s vice market. Its grandiosity and, often times, brazen operations must have been known to the city’s locals. Hanna and residents differed on whom they believed patronized the city’s vice market. Residents claimed that license plates on cars parked at the numerous bars and taverns indicated patrons were from other towns in Alabama or from Georgia.¹⁴⁵ General Hanna disagreed and called the belief that all the patrons were visitors “hooley,” insisting that the money and business generated at the vice dens came from soldiers and local residents.¹⁴⁶ There was likely some truth to both assessments of the circumstances. However, there can be no denial that a significant number of the visitors who spent money in Phenix City were soldiers. The level of fleecing that occurred in this modern day sexual black market then raises the question as to why the soldiers continued to visit the town and seek the company of B-girls or the gaming table even though they likely knew they were being fleeced. Even before the cleanup, Fort Benning officials placed twenty-nine establishments off limits due to violence perpetrated against and the

¹⁴⁴ “B-Girl Reveals Tricks of the Trade,” *News Tribune* (Fort Pierce, Florida) 29 August 1954, 2.

¹⁴⁵ “Up from the Ashes: The Rebirth of Phenix City,” Produced by University of Alabama Center for Public Television and Radio, 2000.

¹⁴⁶ “Phenix City Vice Clean Up End Seen Near,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 14 August 1954, 3.

fleeing of soldiers.¹⁴⁷ Some establishments found clever and easy ways to skirt the off limits designation, sometimes by simply changing the name of the establishment as the Youngblood brothers did when they renamed Maytag, the Haytag.¹⁴⁸ While, the name change may have fooled some military authorities, the location of the bar did not change, and troops continued to visit the establishment. The practice of fleecing patrons, particularly those in the military elicited few complaints by soldiers to police, but some men did complain to bartenders about the B-girls or the fraudulent gaming. Complaints typically fell on deaf ears, and some resulted in violence. One soldier waited until a bar closed to try to get his money back from a B-girl that reneged on a date. A bartender pistol-whipped the serviceman and military police placed the bar, the Hi-Lo, off limits.¹⁴⁹ In other cases, owners and bartenders would take a “rolled” patron outside the establishment and call police to report the man as intoxicated.¹⁵⁰ Authorities would arrest the patron and charge him with an excessive fee or bond. According to investigators and B-girl Sheila, police would sometimes tow the cars of the “drunk” soldiers they arrested and would charge exorbitant fees forcing some to forego their vehicles. Friends and family of the officers or the vice leaders would keep the cars.¹⁵¹ It seems these practices would have earned a reputation among troops about B-girls, about certain establishments, and about Phenix City in general. Yet, soldiers continued to spend their money in the city. Scholar Amanda Littauer

¹⁴⁷ George McMillan, “Phenix City Discovering How Deep the Rot Ate,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 7 August 1955, E1.

¹⁴⁸ “State Draws Vice Picture from Ex-Cop by Ray Jenkins,” *Columbus Ledger* (Columbus, Georgia), 2 February 1954, 1.

¹⁴⁹ Tommy Thornton note card, Warren Papers.

¹⁵⁰ Virginia D. statement, Warren Papers.

¹⁵¹ Sheila H. statement, Warren Papers.

addresses this same issue in her examination of B-girls in San Francisco's post-war era. She concludes that patrons of clip joints were well aware of these operations.¹⁵² She points to the 1966 work by Sherri Cavan, *Liquor License: An Ethnography of Bar Behavior* that explores the sexual market in public drinking establishments. Cavan argued that indeed the patrons who bought drinks for B-girls knew they were paying for the "purchase of sociability" and the act brought no stigma.¹⁵³ The possibility of intimate sexual contact or perhaps the desire for mere heterosocial contact itself outweighed the soldiers concerns about being fleeced.

The women in Phenix City engaged in a sexual black market that they did not design or control, but they profited, albeit minimally. Many exerted what little power they had through mobility and worked within the system to earn their living. The tactics and methods imposed by the leaders of the crime syndicate redefined traditional sexual commerce in a bar culture and illustrated the broader scope of sex work in the 1950s.

The migration that occurred both before and after the cleanup, however, was indicative of larger trends in the era. Sex work migration was not new, but with growing pressure to cleanup tolerated districts, sex workers sought out new places to work and employed new strategies to remain in the commercial sex market. Some women would turn to markets that catered to men other than soldiers, where perhaps federal scrutiny seemed less invasive. Yet as women took to the roads to seek out these markets, they would encounter regulation in a different form. Although these women may have found new locations to ply their trade, away from the eyes of military commanders or ASHA reformers, sex workers continued to experience regulation of

¹⁵² Littauer, *Unsanctioned Encounters*, 216-217.

¹⁵³ Sherri Cavan, *Liquor License: An Ethnography of Bar Behavior* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1966), 198-199.

their activities and movements. The FBI, through its powers to enforce the Mann Act, targeted mobile sexual vice rings where women's independence and freedom found on the highways seemed incongruent with their assumed victimization status and conflicted with notions of sexual containment.

CHAPTER 4

HIGHWAY GIRLS: SEX WORK MIGRATION IN THE RURAL CAROLINAS

In the early months of 1958, a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent probing criminal activity in North Carolina learned of a possible white slave trafficking ring.¹ The leader of the suspected ring, Charles Lewis Williams, owned five truck stops along state highways between North Carolina and South Carolina.² The FBI alleged that Williams, along with two nephews, a stepdaughter, and two business partners operated a prostitution ring that exchanged prostitutes between the truck stops. Federal agents charged five men and one woman with violating the Mann Act because the women were transported across state lines. A federal court convicted all five individuals in the case, or “subjects” as they were called, and sentenced each to prison sentences between one and five years.

During the course of the investigation, the FBI interviewed thirty-six prostitutes and ultimately categorized five of those sex workers as “victims” in the case. The term victim has a long and complex history in both the social and legal arenas and tends to oversimplify the experiences of women in sex work. In this case, the application of the term by the FBI minimizes the diverse experiences of the women involved in prostitution rings. In Mann Act cases in the twentieth century, the FBI and federal prosecutors classified all transported sex

¹ Office Memorandum, 22 May 1958, section 1, Mann Act Case 31-86569, National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, Maryland (Hereafter designated as “31-86569”).

² Office Memorandum, 23 May 1958, section 1, 31-86569.

workers, whether they traveled consensually or by force, as victims. The courts recognized that not all of these women were victims of the subjects listed in the case. In some cases, women traveled willingly or at their own discretion, a paradox in the idea of a victim. In other cases in the 1950s, women were forced to participate in trafficking rings, and their freedom to travel independently or to leave the ring was prohibited. In the Carolina case, many of the women working the truck stops between North and South Carolina acted as independent agents, and created a migratory community detached from the influence and control of the men who managed the truck stops, effectively calling into question the blanket application of the term.

Mann Act convictions declined in the 1950s, peaking in 1955 with 332 convictions and ending in 1959 with 184. The director of the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) believed that the act had been successful in eliminating interstate transportation and that prostitution had become more of a local issue, rather than a federal one. He argued, “America is winning the long fight against commercialized prostitution.”³ Although repression efforts on the local level in the 1940s met with success, the resurgence of the sex trade in late 1940s continued to indicate that the fight against prostitution was not over. Cleanup campaigns in cities like Galveston, Birmingham, Miami, and Phenix City indicate that it was a local issue, but the repression efforts fueled sex work migration where women, who felt they could no longer safely ply their trade, moved to other cities or traveled a network of fixed locations to engage in the sex market. Federal law enforcement of the Mann Act was still relevant and the continued existence of convictions indicates that the interstate commercial sex trade was a source of concern.⁴

³ As quoted in David J. Langum, *Crossing Over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), 214.

⁴ Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*, 213.

The FBI busted several commercial sex rings in the 1950s such as one near Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina, that involved a network of black prostitutes transported from Maryland to work in a sex market that catered to black soldiers stationed at the military facility. Another case in 1950 occurred in Hawaii, where women were recruited from San Francisco to work at brothels on the island. Some of the rings involved multiple states such as one in 1953 where four men transported women to work at various bars and brothels in Atlanta, Georgia, Panama City, Florida, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Dothan, Alabama.⁵ The Department of Justice pursued over one thousand Mann Act convictions in the 1950s, and while some of the cases involved non-commercial sexual encounters across state lines, the majority of the cases involved the transportation of women across state lines for prostitution purposes indicating considerable activity in the interstate commercial sex trade.⁶

Most commercial vice circuit cases involved transporting women to work at brothels or hotels. The owners of these establishments, the prostitutes, and sometimes the pimps or procurers created an “an informal cooperative working arrangement” maintaining contact with one another to keep prostitution flowing from one location to another.

The 1958 case in the Carolinas followed a similar pattern as the cases above. It involved a circuit, or a series of locations that women worked, but the similarities end there. The suspects in the case operated a string of truck stops along state highways 301 and 401 in Scotland, Johnston, and Wilson counties in North Carolina and Darlington County in South Carolina.

⁵ “Seventeen Jailed in Vice Round Up,” *The High Point Enterprise* (Enterprise, North Carolina), 6 May 1951, 6A; “Hawaiian Crime Syndicate Probed,” *Oxnard Press Courier* (Oxnard, California), 22 June 1950, 2; and “White Slavery Charged to 3,” *Anniston Star* (Anniston, Alabama), 19 February 1953, 6.

⁶ Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*, 213.

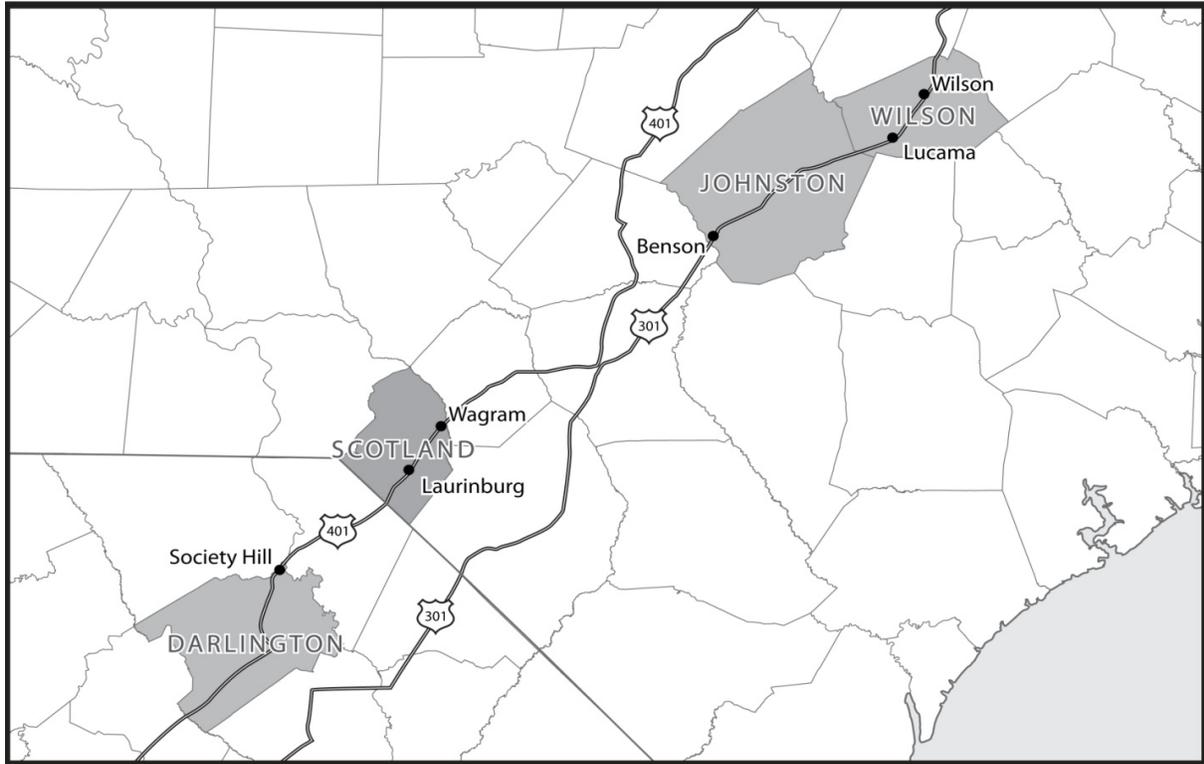


Illustration 2. Map of North Carolina and South Carolina counties and cities in the 1958 Carolina Mann Act case.

These establishments provided food and fuel for commercial and private truck drivers, but the greater part of the income generated at these stops derived from prostitution. The locations and clientele represented a shift in the typical operations of southern sex markets. Organized sex rings had previously conducted business in geographically fixed locations, often near military bases. The 1958 case, however, involved female prostitutes who migrated from truck stop to truck stop catering to their traveling clientele.

The case involved six truck stops in five cities with six individuals listed as the subjects in the case and five women listed as victims. The investigation that ensued occurred over the course of nine months, included hundreds of interviews, approximately twenty truck stops, twelve operators, and over thirty sex workers. Additionally, there were approximately sixty others involved including those that owned truck stops in neighboring towns and states, local informants, law enforcement, those employed in the stops in capacities other than owners, operators, or sex workers, and the women who worked as prostitutes in the truck stops in question. Some of the prostitutes not listed as “victims” in the case traveled the stops as well, but the FBI failed to connect them to instances of transportation by the subjects. All of the truck stop operators and sex workers in this case were white.⁷ This chapter will explore the individual experiences of sex workers to provide an alternate picture of sex work in the South that was based on mobility and independence for women. Although the FBI believed the subjects exchanged women between one another and transported them from stop to stop, evidence indicates that the women were willing participants, and may in fact have moved between stops under their own volition, which would seem to negate the key legal issue involved in Mann Act

⁷ Some of the truck stops employed African Americans as cooks and domestic workers. None worked as sex workers or in positions of management at the establishments.

violations.⁸ However, in 1915, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *United States v. Holte* that willingness to travel was not a negation of the Mann Act, therefore, under the law, the subjects were guilty.⁹ It is also important to note that the act criminalizes the mere act of enticing women to travel, and indeed in the Carolina case the evidence indicates that ring operators, most often, violated this aspect of the act.

This work seeks not to explore the legitimacy of the FBI's case, but rather argues that the women that worked the highways in the Carolinas, transported or otherwise, engaged in sex work migration and operated independently without men in roles as pimps. Working within the truck stop ring presented them with the ability to travel as they pleased. The mobility of sex workers provided a solution to the closing of red-light districts in the South that had once allowed prostitution to exist in a segregated space and remain invisible to the general public. As these districts closed, migration became the new form of invisibility for sex workers based on their fluid and continuous movement.¹⁰ In the Carolina case, women sex workers engaged in a migratory ring that they did not create, but they controlled their labor, their earnings, their travel, and their time, and they found independence and freedom on the highway.

Since the passage of the Mann Act in 1910 that criminalized the transportation of women across state lines for immoral purposes, the vast majority of violations the FBI investigated

⁸ Report, 17 June 1958, section 1, 31-86569.

⁹ *United States v. Holte*, 236 U.S. 140 (1915). See Chapter 2 as well as David Langum, *Crossing Over the Line* and Frederick K. Grittner, *White Slavery: Myth, Ideology, and the Law* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990) for a full account of the case.

¹⁰ Richard Symanski, *The Immoral Landscape: Female Prostitutions in Western Society* (Toronto, Canada: Butterworths and Company, 1981), xi.

consisted of commercial cases.¹¹ Although the FBI had pursued non-commercial cases, those not involving paid sexual labor, and even commercial cases where evidence indicated victims acted as willing participants, the United States Supreme Court narrowed interpretation of the act through a series of rulings. However, this case challenges the idea of “victimization” in terms of the women's experiences. The women interviewed by the FBI in this case overwhelmingly contradicted the pretense that women in Mann Act cases were assumed victims of sexual exploitation. Scholar David Langum notes that between 1929 and 1943, non-commercial cases accounted for fewer Mann Act convictions as commercial sex cases moved to the forefront of the FBI's pursuit.¹² One case, *Mortenson v. United States* illustrated the shift in the act's application. In the 1940 case, a couple, who operated a brothel in Utah, and two women that worked for them drove to Colorado for a vacation. Authorities arrested the couple for violating the Mann Act by taking the two prostitutes across state lines. No commercial sexual interactions occurred on the trip and the couple appealed their conviction to the United States Supreme Court. The court expressed dismay at the arrest of the couple, who while involved in the commercial sex trade in Utah, traveled for vacation and not immoral purposes that the act criminalized. In the majority opinion, the justices ruled that Mann Act cases should prove that the “dominant motive” for transportation must be for engaging in debauchery, prostitution, or other immoral purposes according to the act's language.¹³ Later cases challenged the idea of dominant motive, some successfully and others not, but the concept influenced the FBI's approach to Mann Act investigations. In 1949, a memo directed agents to focus on incidents of interstate sex trafficking

¹¹ Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*, 48.

¹² *Ibid.*, 160.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 203.

and to avoid pursuing “borderline” commercial cases that might embarrass the agency.¹⁴ Their shifting approach occurred at a time when the state of sex work was also shifting. The closing of red-light districts and the end of WWII had brought about changes in operations of the sexual black market. Although some fixed red-light districts still existed, the markets experienced regulation and raids that prompted sex workers to seek out new avenues for their trade. Often times those options involved multiple locations in multiple states encouraging sex work migration.

The case in North Carolina affirms the shift toward sex worker mobility. The series of truck stops served as a sexual black market for the women employed, the truckers who sought services, and the business proprietors. Although the FBI believed that the proprietors moved the women between the stops, interviews with the women indicate otherwise.¹⁵ By moving the focus away from the prosecution itself though, this Mann Act case reveals the reach of the socially conservative trend to contain the sexuality of independent women and the slippery slope that followed the designation of all transported women in Mann Act cases as victims. The women’s actions and interviews conducted by the FBI in this case overwhelmingly contradicted the assumption that women in Mann Act cases are presumed victims of prostitution rings. Despite the mandate to pursue serious trafficking violations, federal authorities investigated the Carolina case vigorously and disregarded the women’s claims they traveled freely and independently.

Evaluating whether a sex worker freely participates in a sex market requires a deep examination of the records. Almost none indicated the presence of coercion or violence in their work and, neither the operators or male companions restricted women’s movements. Yet it is

¹⁴ Ibid., 215.

¹⁵ Report, 17 June 1958, section 1, 31-86569.

important to treat the statements made by women to investigators with some caution. It is difficult to determine the veracity of the women's statements to the FBI with any certainty because circumstances may have shaped women's depiction of the ring and they may have had reasons to shape their statements to serve their own intentions. In some cases, fear of violence, retribution, and prosecution influence "victims'" statement to law enforcement, a reasonable motive to question the authenticity of the women's words.

Investigator questions and motives are problematic because the end goal was prosecution, therefore the choice of questions posed to the women and the choice of what information to document shaped investigator reports. Investigators were not interested in the work and life of prostitutes, but rather determined to build a case against the circuit operators. The records will not always provide all the answers historians ask, simply because, at the time, such information was not always relevant to those posing the questions. Nonetheless, the interviews are useful in showing how women articulated and framed their experiences. It is my contention that as historians, we must find a balance between accepting the words of historical characters and extrapolating from the text the underlying factors that may result in dishonesty or at the least ambiguity. The circumstances surrounding the operations and dynamic of this commercial sex ring indicate that the women involved in this sexual market engaged in it as independent participants. Additionally, the tensions between scholarly debates about victimization and empowerment tend to obscure the voices of sex workers themselves. Rather than undermining the words of the women in the Carolina Mann Act, I approach this case with the framework that their voices provide a valuable conduit to assess their experiences. The women in this case who worked the highways negotiated the challenges of a crumbling red-light

or prostitution market in the southern United States by taking ownership of their sexual labor, defining how they used that labor, and dictating the conditions in which they plied their trade.

The location of the Carolina case occurred primarily in the towns of Benson, Laurinburg, Lucama, Wilson, and Wagram, North Carolina, and the town of Society Hill, South Carolina; although women in the case also traveled to several other cities in the Carolinas as well as cities in the states of West Virginia, Virginia, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida.¹⁶ The 153-mile stretch of highways 301 and 401 served as the major transportation route for commercial and independent truck drivers between the cities. The two highways shadowed the more contemporary path of Interstate 95, whose construction did not begin to affect the path until the early 1960s.¹⁷ Some of the counties in which these cities were located, specifically Wilson and Johnston counties, were part of the agricultural area known as the tobacco belt area, a region of North Carolina that prospered from tobacco cultivation.¹⁸

The truck stops that catered to the truckers who hauled loads on this path served food, provided fuel, sometimes offered lodging, and notably, employed commercial sex workers. Demographically, the women who engaged in sexual commerce at truck stops along the highways shared similarities with one another. The prostitutes in the Carolina case ranged between the ages of twenty-one and forty, but most were in their middle thirties, on average

¹⁶ 1950 census records indicate the following population data: Benson - 2,012; Laurinburg - 7,879; Lucama - 405; Wilson - 23,101; Wagram - 397; and Society Hill - 645. United States Census Bureau, *Populations Statistics*, 1950.

¹⁷ Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 174.

¹⁸ Franklin C. Erickson, "The Tobacco Belt of North Carolina," *Economic Geography* 21, no. 1 (January 1945): 3.

around the age of thirty-four. Collectively, they were older than their counterparts in places such as Phenix City where the average sex worker was twenty-four years old. In the Carolina case, many of the women originated from the Carolinas and those who did not had roots in other southern states. The majority of these women had worked as prostitutes before working at these stops; many having engaged in prostitution for several years. As sex workers in their thirties, many of the women had been married, often multiple times, or were currently married. Some scholars have argued that lack of access to marriage or suitable marriage partners led some women into prostitution.¹⁹ Charles Winick and Paul M Kinsie, former members of the American Social Hygiene Association for example argue, “lack of access to society’s conventional opportunities may facilitate the movement of some women toward prostitution.”²⁰ However, the number of married women in this case belies the assumption that a lack of marital options leads to prostitution. For the Carolina sex workers, marriage did not offer stability, socially or economically, and a sex worker’s marital status did not necessarily preclude her from working in the commercial sex industry. Historian Anne Butler’s groundbreaking work on prostitution in the American West found that marriage did offer life stability through the creation of personal relationships, but that marriage did not mean that the couple resided together or that the women quit sex work.²¹ In the Carolina case, the FBI compiled data on forty-seven women. Although detailed information is not available on many of them, approximately twenty women indicated

¹⁹ Richard Posner, *Sex and Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 171.

²⁰ Charles Winick and Paul M. Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce: Prostitution in the United States* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 49.

²¹ Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Mercy: Prostitutes in the American West 1865-1890* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 26.

they were married.²² While in other Mann Act prosecutions, husbands or male partners acted as pimps, the women in this case denied their partners acted as such, although some partners did travel with the women. Sex worker Ruby, a thirty-three year-old from West Virginia prostituted for fourteen years. She had been married two times and had met her most recent husband, Jack, in Wheeling, West Virginia in 1953. Ruby was prostituting at the time and Jack was a taxi driver. Whether he served as a go-between for Ruby, or other commercial sex workers, is unknown. When Ruby moved to Wagram in 1958 to work at Trucker's Rest, Jack followed her with the couple's travel trailer. Over the following year the couple separated and reunited several times, until October 1958 when Jack convinced Ruby to quit prostituting. Afterwards, the couple relocated to Richmond, Virginia. Ruby assured investigators that Jack did not act as her pimp and was adamant that she handled her own money.²³ Several other women also prostituted while married and their husbands were aware of their activities. Sex worker Doris's husband, like Ruby's, was often with her while she worked at the stops. They too had a trailer and sometimes moved to tourist courts near the truck stops that she worked. Dot had worked as a prostitute before marrying, but quit after she married. Her husband was in the military and when he was shipped overseas, Dot resumed her sex work activities.²⁴

While marriage did not preclude women from prostituting, others did quit the business when their partner's pressured or asked them to do so. Ella and her husband stayed at a tourist court in Laurinburg while she worked the stops, but she eventually followed her husband to

²² Sometimes the marital status is difficult to determine from the investigators notes and questions during interviews with women. In some instances, the subject is not addressed.

²³ Interview Report on Ruby B., 22 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

²⁴ Interview Report on Dot H., 10 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

Columbus, Georgia, after he found employment in the city. In November 1958, as the investigators interviewed women in their effort to indict the operators of the ring, they met with Ella in Phenix City, Alabama, where she was then residing. She informed them she recently had quit prostituting at her husband's request.²⁵

Some of the women also had children. Little is known about the whereabouts of the offspring while their mothers' worked or migrated along the highways. Several women noted that relatives or former partners cared for their children in the Carolina region. Others told investigators that they often took time off from the commercial sex trade to travel to the town where their children resided in order to visit with them.

The women in the Carolina case worked at a series of truck stops owned by Charles Lewis Williams, a forty-five year old North Carolina native who owned seven stops along highways 301 and 401: Russell's, Tobacco Trail Truck Stop, William's Tourist Court and Bar-B-Q, Truckers Rest, the Carolina Truck Stop, the Riverside Truck Stop, and Jim's Truck Stop (formerly Dot's). The FBI specifically targeted Williams and these truck stops in their Mann Act case.²⁶ Williams had a long arrest history including charges for manufacturing untaxed whiskey, assault with a deadly weapon, and a conviction for a prior white slave trafficking violation. He pled no contest in 1951 to the charge and paid a three hundred and fifty dollar fine. In May 1958, the FBI considered Williams the "top hoodlum" in North Carolina because of his prostitution racket. The "top hoodlum" program started in 1957 in response to organized crime. The program sought to identify ten of the worst criminals in different U.S. regions and placed those on the "top hoodlum" list. After identifying these individuals, the FBI embarked on a

²⁵ Report, 26 September 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

²⁶ Office Memorandum, 23 May 1958, section 1, 31-86569.

campaign to infiltrate the criminal organization the “hoodlum” operated using methods similar to those used to investigate communist threats in the U.S. such as wiretapping, observation, bugging, and break-ins of key locations of a crime syndicate’s facilities.²⁷

Although Williams owned or leased the seven properties, he only operated one of them, the Williams Tourist Court in Benson, North Carolina. The other businesses were managed by the different members of the vice ring. Thelbert “Buster” Williams, Charles Lewis Williams’ nephew, operated the Riverside Truck Stop in Society Hill, South Carolina and Trucker’s Rest in Wagram, North Carolina over the two-year period that the ring operated.²⁸ Like his uncle, twenty-eight year old Buster Williams had a criminal record that included robbery and a former Mann Act conviction for the same 1951 case. He pled no contest and incurred a fine of one hundred dollars. Curiously, Buster Williams was serving in the army during his conviction and the charge did not lead to his dismissal from service. Eventually, he was discharged in June 1952 from Fort Bragg after four years of service. Williams worked as a truck driver after his discharge and began to manage the Trucker’s Rest truck stop in 1957.²⁹

A nephew of Charles Williams’ wife, James Pleasants managed the Carolina Truck Stop in Laurinburg, North Carolina and was a part owner, along with Charles Lewis Williams, of Jim’s truck stop in Society Hill, South Carolina. The FBI case files provided few details about the background of the twenty-eight year old Pleasants. The fourth member was relatively new to

²⁷ Office Memorandum, 14 May 1958, section 1, 31-86569 and Athan G. Theoharis, Tony Poveda, eds., et al., *The FBI: A Comprehensive Reference Guide* (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1998), 35.

²⁸ Operations and management transferred between the men over the years, often times predicated on financial difficulties or personal issues.

²⁹ Interview Report, name redacted, 23 May 1958, section 1, Office Memorandum, 18 December, 1958, section 3, and Office Memorandum 19 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

the group. Floyd McLamb was a fifty-five year old originally from Ohio, but had moved to North Carolina from California. It is unknown what served as the catalyst for his move to the South. McLamb met Charles Williams in 1958 when he inquired about purchasing the Carolina Truck Stop. McLamb and Williams entered into a business partnership involving the establishment. Another business partner in the truck stop establishments, fifty-two year old Reddin Corbett, had known Charles Williams since 1941. Corbett had a record of liquor violations and at least one charge for aiding and abetting prostitution. He once owned the Trucker's Rest but could not afford to keep the place and sold his interest to Williams. After he operated The Tobacco Trail in Lacuma, North Carolina, just outside the city of Wilson. Corbett was not a well-educated man and could neither read or write, but could sign his name. The final subject of the FBI's investigation in this case was Shirley McDaniel, the twenty-three year stepdaughter of Charles Williams. McDaniels, the only woman to face Mann Act charges in the case, operated the bus station and bar-b-q restaurant located on the same property as Williams Tourist Courts. She was the most educated of the all the individuals in the case; she had completed high school as well as a one-year college business course. McDaniels worked in Atlanta for Southern Bell Telephone Company in 1957, but returned to the Benson area in 1958. She purchased half of the business in Benson and began to manage the restaurant and bus station. Although she was married, her husband was not a subject of the case nor was his presence at the establishment mentioned in any detail.

While the case provides information about the truck stop operators and selected sex workers, the FBI investigation records offer little information about the men that frequented the truck stops; their voices and experiences are disappointingly absent from the evidence gathered to pursue this case. A few of the men served as informants and offered up details on how the

operation worked, but because informants were kept confidential, and the focus of the circuit was the not the customer, it is unknown if the men were residents engaged in local trucking or solely long haul truckers working for commercial companies involved in mass transit of goods. The culture of trucking though, has been a subject of some scholars and from their research one can glean an understanding of the business and the men involved. The trucking system has roots in the early twentieth century. Initially it was not an occupation, but rather a means for small famers to move goods to markets or railroad depots for small farmers. As farmers increasingly relied on this method of transportation, they demanded better routes to markets. The need for paved roads had become abundantly clear during World War I, when the nation reduced its consumption of goods to ship items overseas, but the country's railroads proved inadequate to fill the growing transportation demands.³⁰ The 1921 Federal Aid Road Act allocated forty percent of federal road funds for the construction of farm to market roads and between 1921 and 1930 state rural highways increased from 203,000 miles to 324,000. Much of the road construction took place through the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Public Roads, which created a network of paved rural highways between 1918 and 1940.³¹ New roads accompanied new technology in tires that reduced vibrations while driving and allowed for increased speed of the vehicle and the development of the diesel engine that improved speed and performance.³²

³⁰ James H. Thomas, *The Long Haul: Trucker, Truck Stops, and Trucking* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1979), 24.

³¹ Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 45.

³² *Ibid.*, 45 and Melanie Mills, "Without Trucks, We'd Be Naked, Hungry & Homeless," in *Dirty Work: The Social Construction of Taint*, eds., Shirley K. Drew, Melanie B. Mills, and Bob M. Gassaway (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 82.

The Great Depression reconfigured the industry. Depressed agricultural prices and New Deal policies shifted the means of production from small farmers to larger, mechanized agricultural producers.³³ These landowners with large holdings accepted cash payments through the government's 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act that paid farmers to allow fields to go unused in order to increase crop prices. While higher cotton prices are cited to show the success of the plan, tobacco produced in North Carolina also increased in price as well, doubling its value between 1932 and 1935.³⁴ The result, though, meant that large farmers benefited and small farmers and tenant farmers struggled to remain fiscally solvent, with many choosing to leave the land. Some of those depressed agricultural workers sought employment in the field of trucking. Census records in 1940 indicated that fourteen percent of truckers had lived on farms in 1935.³⁵ The occupation appealed to men whose prospects on the farm dwindled, but who wanted to retain an agrarian attachment to the "independent work" ethos of the farm.³⁶ The men that sought out the work in the trucking industry in the 30s and 40s had not only looked for economic relief, but independence as well. These men, sometimes called "asphalt cowboys," wanted to reclaim autonomy over their labor and their time that they had lost in the agricultural industry.³⁷

Government money and efforts on road construction came to a grinding halt during World War II, but resumed after the war with the passage of the 1944 Federal Highway Aid act.

³³ Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 44 and Pete Daniels, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 9.

³⁴ Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 17.

³⁵ Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 47.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

While similar to earlier road bills, this act allotted money to build an interstate system for urban areas with populations of five thousand or more. The legislation included a budget of 1.5 billion to construct 41,000 miles of road, but the budget was woefully inadequate. In 1956, the government allocated twenty-four billion dollars to complete the system by 1969. But the interstate system plan grew larger and by 1968 another 1500 miles was added to the proposed system with a new completion date of 1977.³⁸

With a growing system of paved roads and an increasing supply of willing drivers after World War II, trucking became an even more attractive method of shipping food and goods across the country leading to a boost in the industry. The number of registered truckers increased by thirty five percent between 1945 and 1947.³⁹ In 1950 approximately two percent of all workers were truckers and in 1960 they accounted for three percent.⁴⁰ White males dominated the occupation; making up for eighty-five percent of those in the industry. Although some women worked as truckers, they were rare. Truckers were on average thirty-nine years old and overwhelmingly married (eighty-three percent). They earned just over twenty-five hundred dollars a year, though self-employed drivers earned substantially less averaging just under fifteen hundred a year.⁴¹ The men who worked in the industry embodied a fiercely independent spirit, one that cultivated a working class ethos that celebrated ideas of free market, of economic independence, and of masculinity defined as a “deep resistance to becoming a ‘desk-pilot’ or a

³⁸ Thomas, *The Long Haul*, 41-42.

³⁹ Hamilton, *Trucking Country* 92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 243-244.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

‘factory hand.’”⁴² The physical requirements to operate a large truck, to control the vehicle on roads and hills, and the overwhelmingly male domination of the profession created a sense of community among drivers. A critical component of that culture was the truck stop. The stops began as “mom and pop” establishments that offered the niceties of a meal, restroom, and sometimes facilities for bathing.⁴³ The creation of the interstate limited access highway system would lead to the disappearance of the mom and pop stops, but in 1958 in the Carolinas, such places flourished.

The seven truck stops that Charles Williams owned all shared similar qualities. They each provided food and fuel services for truckers. Sex workers who worked at the stops served as waitresses as well. The dual role created an axiom that most, if not all, women who worked as waitresses at truck stops were prostitutes. When asked about women who worked truck stops in Athens, Georgia, a Georgia Bureau of Investigation agent commented that while he could not identify women by names, most women who worked the stops were “waitresses of loose morals.”⁴⁴ The FBI believed that all women who worked as servers at truck stops were sexually suspicious, denoting this through the use quotation marks around the word waitress in the records. One owner of a stop in Doswell, Virginia called the 24-Hour, explained to investigators that most truck stops were small and business was slow. Offering something other than food and

⁴² Ibid., 195. For more information on the connection between the culture of independence and masculinity in the trucking industry see Hamilton, *Trucking Country*.

⁴³ Thomas, *The Long Haul*, 111.

⁴⁴ Office Memorandum, nd, section 1, 31-86569.

fuel to attract truckers promoted their stops and the waitress-prostitute combination was the means to achieve better business.⁴⁵

At the 24-Hour truck stop in Virginia, the women received no hourly wages for their waitress responsibilities, although they earned tips, and between five and ten dollars for each date they filled, one dollar of which went to the truck stop operator.⁴⁶ Similar to the 24-Hour, sex workers at the Trucker's Rest stop in Wagram, North Carolina, waited tables and filled dates. Prostitute Ruby told investigators that she was hired as a waitress-prostitute and that in exchange for her service, Buster Williams, the operator, gave her free lodging. She charged five dollars a date. Ruby kept half of her earnings and gave the other half to Williams. Behind the counter at Trucker's Rest, Ruby placed the money in a cigar box bearing her name.⁴⁷ When Reddin Corbett operated Trucker's Rest prior to Williams buying out his share in July 1957, sex worker Dot also worked as a waitress-prostitute at the stop.⁴⁸ She earned no salary for her food service duties, but received free room and board. She also charged five dollars a date and placed the money in a cigar box with her name on it. A record of her dates was kept in a notebook with carbon copy paper and she received her half of the earnings at the end of her shift.⁴⁹ Dot explained that the women arranged their own dates and filled the dates in a room in the back of the building. The customer would go to the room from the back of the establishment and the women would go to

⁴⁵ Interview Report on Bert Mooring 22 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Interview Report on Ruby B., 22 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

⁴⁸ Interview Report (name redacted), 23 May 1958, section 1, 31-86569.

⁴⁹ Interview Report on Dot H., 10 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569

the room through a door in the kitchen.⁵⁰ Confidential informants confirmed the operation, but differed on a few details regarding the format used to record the dates. One told investigators that the women recorded the number of dates each had on a guest check placed in the box. Regardless, at the end of the shift, often twelve hours, the sex worker would receive her half.⁵¹ Neither the informants nor the sex workers indicated that the truck stop operators issued strict rules governing the women's activities or behavior. Typically, the only rules Williams and the others ordered prohibited women from discussing their sex work operations with the staff of cooks or maids, and stipulated the sex workers could not engage in commercial sexual encounters with non-trucker clients.⁵²

Poor earnings plagued most of the women at the truck stops. Sex workers earned anywhere from fifty dollars to \$260 dollars a week, prior to splitting their earnings with the stop operators.⁵³ The women also earned money from the tips they made from waitressing at the stops, but none indicated that the tips contributed anything substantial to their overall earnings. With a few exceptions, five dollars was the average rate sex workers at the stops charged, although some women charged ten dollars for what they deemed an "unnatural act."⁵⁴ However, none of the women ever defined what constituted unnatural and the records indicate investigators did not ask. Shirley P., a sex worker who eventually moved to Miami to earn more money,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., and Interview Report on Confidential Informant, 23 May 1958, section 1, 31-86569.

⁵² Office Memorandum, 3 February 1959, section 4, 31-86569

⁵³ Ibid., and Interview Report on Shirley P., 12, January 1959, section 4, 31-86569.

⁵⁴ Interview Report on Shirley P., 12 January 1959, section 4, and Interview Report on Willa Dean Williams, 10 October 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

stated that most of the sex workers engaged in unnatural acts since they could charge higher rates.⁵⁵ Shirley P. noted that there were evenings that she made as much as 130 dollars, but that twenty-five dollars (after she split her money with the stop operators) was closer to the average amount she earned. Like Dot, she also said that most of the women engaged in “unnatural acts” to earn more money.⁵⁶

Although some women moved to larger, more economically advantageous markets, many sex workers remained working in the region and accepted the poor wages. The women stayed in this minimally lucrative commercial sex market likely for several reasons. First, characteristics of the prostitutes themselves played a role. The women in the Carolina case were older than the average age of prostitutes. Charles Winick and Paul M Kinsie’s 1971 study on prostitution provided demographic information over the previous ten years. They discovered that fifty-three percent of the women arrested for prostitution were between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine. Women between the ages of thirty and thirty-nine accounted for only nineteen percent of arrests.⁵⁷ Older women accounted for far fewer participants in the commercial vice market. Because the sex trade is predicated on societal conceptions of sexual desirability, the older age of these women may have prevented them from operating in more lucrative markets such as Miami. At twenty-one years old, Shirley P. who eventually migrated to Miami, was the youngest woman in the Carolina case. Whether she fared better in Miami than thirty-four-year-old Dot, with whom she migrated, is unknown. However, Dot struggled to earn a living in Miami as we will see. In addition, desirability is also connected to attractiveness, which is rooted in societal

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Interview Report on Shirley P., 12, January 1959, section 4, 31-86569.

⁵⁷ Winick, *The Lively Commerce*, 31.

beliefs about beauty and sexual appeal. The investigators rarely commented on the truck stop sex workers' physical appearance, but when they did, they noted the "unattractive" women. Agents referred to sex worker Dot as "not attractive" and thirty-year old Virginia as "an old timey" prostitute.⁵⁸ Winick and Kinsie contend that "prostitutes tend to be physically unattractive, and some have fairly flagrant defects."⁵⁹ By contrast, in Phenix City, National Guard investigators and even journalists commented on the beauty of several of the young women. The attractiveness of the women in the Phenix City sexual black market might have been tied to their youth – the average age of sex workers in the city was twenty-four years old. In terms of desirability though, Winick and Kinise found that client's reasons for visiting a prostitute did not correlate with the physical attractiveness of the prostitute, indeed they claimed that men who visited prostitutes did not necessarily expect a pretty face. However, physical attractiveness likely played a role in the hiring of women at brothels and bars in cities such as Miami where there was more competition among women seeking work in the commercial sex trade.⁶⁰ In Miami, authorities had successfully rooted out brothels, but failed to stem the rise of the call girl. These women catered to more affluent customers, where physical attractiveness was an expected characteristic of hired company.

Perhaps a more important factor than age in the decision to remain in the commercial sex industry surrounding truck stops was the closing of vice districts after World War II. One truck stop owner told investigators "many of the houses of prostitution throughout the eastern part of the United States have been closed and these prostitutes have sought employment at truck

⁵⁸ Office Memorandum, nd, section 2 and Report, 26 September 1958, 31-86569.

⁵⁹ Winick, *The Lively Commerce*, 29.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

stops.”⁶¹ Sex workers conveyed similar sentiments to the FBI agents. Prostitute Sherry had worked in brothels in Jacksonville, Florida, in the 1950s, but when raids in that city led to the closure of brothels, she had to find work elsewhere. The thirty-one year old told investigators that “she did not usually work the truck stops” but she did not know of any open houses of prostitution. After a brief stint at a restaurant/bar in Wilson, North Carolina where business was “very poor,” a trucker driver told Sherry about a stop in Doswell, Virginia, that needed prostitutes. In November 1958, she traveled to the stop and began work as a waitress-prostitute.⁶² Ruby told investigators that she experienced similar events. She worked at a tourist court in Parkersburg, West Virginia, between 1955 and 1957 but left when the “administration changed and a crack down” on prostitution occurred in the town.⁶³

Women who migrated to truck stops for work encountered overall economic hardship that contributed to their decision to engage in sex work at the truck stops. Dot discussed the economic challenges that led her to migrate for sex work. She had engaged in prostitution as early as 1948 while working at a dance hall in Fayetteville, North Carolina, but said that after she married in 1949 she quit the business. In 1955, her husband, a U.S. soldier, was shipped overseas. Shortly thereafter, Dot struggled to earn a living and she told investigators that in April 1955 “she needed money and began to hustle again.”⁶⁴ After hearing that a place in Bennettsville, South Carolina, employed women as waitresses and prostitutes, she drove to the

⁶¹ Interview Report on Bert Mooring, 22 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

⁶² Interview Report on Sherry M., 22 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

⁶³ Office Memorandum, 3 October 1958, section 2, 31-86569

⁶⁴ Interview Report on Dot H., 10 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

truck stop and asked for work.⁶⁵ Dot stayed for approximately six weeks and met another prostitute named Barbara. The two women heard from various sources that a stop in Wagram always needed waitresses and they drove to that stop seeking work. They each remained at Trucker's Rest in Wagram for several weeks. Dot left to return to family, but in the spring of 1956 she again found she could not make a living on the meager wages she earned at various, but unspecified, legitimate jobs. She returned to the highways and the truck stops.⁶⁶ Dot would repeat this pattern many times, even briefly operating her own stop. For Ruby, the paltry earnings also influenced her constant movement as well. She explained that the rate of five dollars a date was a small amount and that she, and other women, moved frequently in hopes of finding a market where they could earn more money.⁶⁷

While the women experienced economic challenges that may have led them to prostitution and the truck stops, they sought to improve their prospects through continual movement, using mobility to improve their income. Some migrant prostitutes worked as little as a few hours at an establishment before deciding to move elsewhere. In one instance, two unnamed sex workers working in Florence, North Carolina, traveled to Laurinburg after learning that there was work available at the Carolina Truck Stop. Floyd McLamb hired both women, but they stayed only a few hours claiming they could not tolerate the place, though they specified no particular reason they wished to leave.⁶⁸ When sex worker Sherry a thirty-year-old restaurant employee in Wilson, North Carolina learned that the 24-Hour in Doswell, Virginia, needed

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Interview Report on Ruby B., 22 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

⁶⁸ Report, 30 July 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

prostitutes, she, like the women in Florence, hit the highway en route to her destination. After arriving in Doswell in November 1958, she asked for work. Sherry denied that anyone transported her and said that she drove herself. She explained to investigators that the women who worked the stops were called “floaters” because they tended to float to and from the stops at their discretion.⁶⁹

Shirley P., twenty-one, the youngest of the women who worked the truck stops, spoke with investigators in January 1959 about the case. She told them that she had started working at the stops about two years earlier. During her time on the circuit, she initially moved less frequently than the other women. Shirley worked at Trucker's Rest for approximately a year and then left. She did not explain why she ultimately chose to leave, but did tell investigators that she returned to hustling shortly thereafter, this time working at the Carolina Truck Stop in Laurinburg, North Carolina, for Reddin Corbett. She spent her time between the Carolina and Trucker's Rest until she traveled to Miami with Dot, after which she then entered a relationship with a trucker with whom she spent six weeks accompanying him on his route in New York. When she returned to the Carolina area she found work at Jim's, formerly Dot's, in Society Hill, South Carolina, which she considered “too rough.” She left and found work at Russell's in Wilson, North Carolina. She informed the investigators that the women at the stops moved around frequently. In some cases they left because of a dispute with management or other sex workers, the reason why she left the Carolina.⁷⁰ Women in this case controlled their mobility. There was no indication in the records that women owed a financial debt to the owners or

⁶⁹ Interview Report on Sherry M., 22 December 1958, section 3 and Beatrice N., 22 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

⁷⁰ Interview Report on Shirley P., 12, January 1959, section 4, 31-86569.

operators or that they agreed upon a contract, written or verbal, that prevented them from working elsewhere. Some women paid a fee for room and board, but most of the stops provided those benefits in exchange for the women's sexual labor and waitressing work. Without a financial debt or obligation to truck stop operators, women's movement was unrestricted.

While truck stop sex workers may not have earned as much for their labor in the commercial sex trade as those in urban locations, highway prostitutes nonetheless found considerable independence through the truck stop circuit. The mere possibility of mobility meant that women had the freedom to leave if the combination of meager earnings and lagging business prevented them from grossing enough money. Ruby explained that she moved from location to location because there was never enough work and that she, and other women, were always looking for a more lucrative environment.⁷¹ Similar to their trucker clientele, the women who worked the highways experienced considerable freedom in this circuit. They traveled when they wanted and worked where they pleased.

The women's frequent movements may have been economically driven, but the freedom to move was predicated on the fact that the women plied their trade without pimps. When FBI agents interviewed Dot, she discussed the numerous years of experience that many prostitutes in the truck stop circuit had, and that she knew of none that used a pimp.⁷² Ruby denied that she used pimp as well. She noted that while her husband Jack occasionally traveled with her, he did not act as her pimp and that she worked on her own and handled her own money.⁷³ By far, the majority of informants confirmed that women worked unencumbered by the presence of a

⁷¹ Ruby B. statement, 22 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

⁷² Interview Report on Dot H., 10 December 1958., section 3, 31-86569.

⁷³ Report, 16 September 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

pimp.⁷⁴ Choosing to work without a pimp, or a potentially coercive manager allowed women to experience independence. While having a pimp did not always imply a lack of control, the absence of one allowed women to manage their own movements, labor, and earnings. In contrast, women who traveled with a pimp, often an intimate partner, lost control of their earnings and their mobility.

While separated from her husband, sex worker Mary from Jacksonville, Florida, met a man named Paul Waldron, and agreed to travel with him to Virginia in February 1958 to hustle. They stayed for only a few days then left for the Carolina Truck Stop.⁷⁵ After they arrived, Charles Lewis Williams, the stop owner, and Waldron agreed upon an arrangement for Mary to work. Indicative of the absence of pimps in the truck stop circuit, Williams explained to Waldron that he could not loiter around the stop while Mary worked. Waldron agreed to leave but insisted that he, and not Mary, would collect her earnings. Williams did meet with Mary to determine if she was indeed willing to hustle to which Mary, an experienced sex worker, agreed. Mary began to fill dates at the Carolina that evening.⁷⁶ She continued to work under Waldron's control until May 1958 when Floyd McLamb took over the operations at the Carolina. After an argument with McLamb, Mary quit and returned to Florida to reunite with her husband. In late October 1958, the couple had split again and Mary returned to the North Carolina area to visit friends. In December, just before the FBI embarked on mass arrests of the truck stop operators, Mary had a chance meeting with James Pleasants, the operator of Jim's in Society Hill, at a liquor store. She asked if he needed women at his stop, to which he replied yes, and she agreed

⁷⁴ Office Memorandum, 24 October 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

⁷⁵ Interview Report on Mary R., 3 December 1958, section 4, 31-86569.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

to start work the next day. In Waldron's absence, Mary made her own work arrangements with Pleasants and would have kept her share of the earnings.⁷⁷ However, the FBI busted the ring before Mary had a chance to fill any dates. Her actions indicate however, that without a pimp, she controlled her sexual labor and her finances.

The frequent geographic movement of sex workers was a characteristic of prostitution in the 1950s.⁷⁸ And in this case, some of the prostitutes traveled in pairs. Sex workers Doris and Nettie together traveled the highway from stop to stop looking for work. The women would stay on average two weeks at one stop and then move to another. Twenty-eight year old, married Doris entered into an intimate relationship with Floyd McLamb interrupting the pair's routine. However, Doris continued to hustle when McLamb was out of town and conveyed to investigators that when she did, she kept all her earnings.⁷⁹

Other women who traveled in pairs followed a similar pattern. They drifted in and out of relationships with husbands or significant others and travelled with another sex worker when their intimate relationship experienced periods of instability. Ruby had been in the sex work field intermittently for fourteen years and although she traveled on occasion with her husband, the two often separated. During the periods of separation, she traveled with a twenty-nine year old sex worker named Virginia. In late 1957, Ruby left her husband in Wheeling, West Virginia, to work the highways with her friend. They drove to Trucker's Rest in Wagram to ask Buster

⁷⁷ Ibid. The records do not indicate what happened to Paul Waldron after Mary reunited with her husband.

⁷⁸ Charles Winick, "Organized Crime and Commercial Sex," in Robert J. Kelly, Chin, Ko-Lin, and Schatzberg, Rufus, eds., *Handbook of Organized Crime in the United States* (Westport, Connecticut, and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 297.

⁷⁹ Interview Report on Doris M., 13 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

Williams for employment. He hired the two women to work as waitresses and prostitutes.⁸⁰

Ruby and Virginia hustled at Trucker's Rest intermittently, for five months. When Ruby reunited with her husband in April 1958, Virginia entered into a relationship with a trucker from Florida. She traveled with him throughout North Carolina until Ruby again left her husband and the pair resumed their travels.⁸¹ Eventually Virginia traveled with Dot to Miami in late 1958 and both remained there until the case came to trial.⁸²

The women spent time hustling in between their on and off relationships with men. Dot explained in her interview that the women were all relatively experienced in the racket. As experienced sex workers, the women knew the stops that had prostitution opportunities and the dynamics of the truck stop sex market. In her interview with investigators, Dot insisted that women migrated unprovoked and at will, declaring that women "come and go as they please" and "employment is word of mouth and that they just show up and apply. No one forces or takes them there."⁸³ Once women tired of a place, had an argument with a proprietor or another sex worker, or in the case of Ruby, reconciled with a spouse, they left and returned when they desired.⁸⁴

The freedom to "come and go as they please" resulted from the independent nature of sex work that did not depend on the role of the pimp. The truck stop operators, while owning or

⁸⁰ Interview Report on Ruby B., 3 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

⁸¹ Ibid. and Interview Report on Willa Dean Williams, 10 October 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

⁸² Interview Report on Doris M., 3 October 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

⁸³ Interview Report on Dot H., 3 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

managing the stops and designing the sex market dynamics that took place in the stops, did not act as pimps. Women determined with whom they set dates and when they worked. They did of course share their earnings with the operators, but the arrangement did not reflect the typical pimp-prostitute dynamic that involved controlling women's sexual labor, time, and income. In addition, the absence of pimps in this sexual market allowed friendships to develop among the women. Although income was paltry and business was slow, the competition that often permeated relationships among sex workers vying to earn a living was mostly not present. ASHA investigators Winick and Kinsie noted the sometimes ruthless competition that existed among prostitutes over clients. Women might disparage one another's appearance to a client or suggest that a competitor suffered from a venereal disease to increase her own business.⁸⁵ Pimps also provoked competition among women by playing favorites if they had more than one prostitute working for them and they applied tremendous pressure on women to earn the number one position.⁸⁶

In the Carolina case, women built a strong connection with one another. Dot explained that "during the times I worked at these truck stops I was well acquainted with the other girls working these places and ran around with them."⁸⁷ Women tended not to compete for jobs, but rather would call one another when jobs opened. This pattern of mobility and networking shares similarities with other forms of migratory labor. In traditional labor migration theory, migrant workers establish a network with one another that involves creating a community and establishing friendships. Even if somewhat superficial and subject to circumstance, these

⁸⁵ Winick, *The Lively Commerce*, 43.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 118-20.

⁸⁷ Interview Report on Dot H., 3 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

networks provide assistance for those in trouble, information about employment, and help to warn one another about investigations by police and immigration officials who pose a threat to undocumented workers.⁸⁸ As with agricultural migrant workers, sex work migrants in North Carolina developed a network. The women informed one another about the more lucrative stops and the places to avoid, and they kept in contact with one another about where they were working.⁸⁹ Confidential informants substantiated the dynamic of the sex worker network and confirmed that the truck stop operators did not transport the women. One female informant stated, “the girls who work the highway know one another and they are always calling each another.... to advise of a job opportunity and to keep close tabs on one another.”⁹⁰ The informant also stated that “word is passed around among the prostitutes who work the highways that conditions are good at Williams’s place[s].”⁹¹

Informants provided the FBI with critical information about the operations and helped them craft a case against Williams and the others. While little is known about the informants, one worked at a local post office and was able to tell agents when women received mail and where their mail was forwarded.⁹² Based on the dates and locations of mailed items, agents concluded that the women operators directed the women to work at specific establishments for

⁸⁸ Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella, eds., *Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: A Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 17.

⁸⁹ Report, 3 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

⁹⁰ Interview Report on Confidential Informant, 3 October 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Office Memorandum, nd, section 1, 31-86569.

approximately six weeks at a time.⁹³ The FBI saw patterns of movement that they believed operators directed. Some informants expressed doubt that the operators physically transported women, but rather they believed that the women obtained rides from truckers. In August 1958, agents interviewed an informant from Virginia who told them that some of the women originated from the Washington, DC, and Baltimore area and that they arrived on their own or hitched rides truck drivers. The informant firmly believed that there were no pimps involved and that the Mann Act had not been violated.⁹⁴ Another informant added that he witnessed women arrive by Greyhound bus.⁹⁵ However, the Mann Act criminalized the inducement of travel across state lines for immoral purposes, something agents contended was the violation in question.

Other informants provided details about how the stops operated. One individual observed that while there were only three dining tables at one stop in Doswell, Virginia, there were always six waitresses working there.⁹⁶ Another informant provided information on earnings, speculating that some operators made seventy-five dollars per week for managing an establishment.⁹⁷ The case files never identified informants, but they seemed to include sex workers, locals living in the same town as the stops, and in some cases, truck drivers. One trucker who occasionally traveled with Ella and her husband revealed that Charles Lewis Williams's truck stops were partly funded by his mother and a business partner who owned a cab

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Office Memorandum, 3 October 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Office Memorandum, 29 August 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

⁹⁷ Office Memorandum, nd, section 1, 31-86569.

company. The trucker also provided information on the possible transportation of women, such as in the case of Nancy, whom Williams would eventually be charged with transporting.⁹⁸

The investigation focused on identifying all women working as prostitutes and determining how they were recruited into the circuit. An FBI memo outlined agents' duty to "conduct an aggressive, imaginative, independent investigation to develop evidence" for the possible Mann Act charges.⁹⁹ The FBI believed that since the women split their earnings with operators of these stops and that ultimately, Williams oversaw the operators, he benefited financially from the ring. Agents engaged in vehicle surveillance of the cars the women used to travel, and identified car ownership.¹⁰⁰ They took down physical descriptions of the individuals and then made contacts with local informants to determine the identity of those in the circuit. Agents patronized the stops and observed women solicit truck drivers. In April 1958, they witnessed a dark haired woman with glasses who was approximately thirty-five years old approach a driver eating at the Riverside in Society Hill. The agents did not hear the conversation that took place but said that it lasted about ten minutes after which both the male truck driver and the woman left the establishment through a rear door. The couple did not return before the agent left. The same day, agents at the Carolina Truck Stop in Laurinburg witnessed an auburn haired waitress approach two truck drivers eating at the establishment. Agents overheard the woman proposition the two men, but stated that both declined her offer. The following day, two agents at Truckers Rest in Wagram, observed a young blonde waitress approach a trucker and offer her services. The trucker had only two dollars and asked to borrow

⁹⁸ Office Memorandum, nd, section 3, 31-86569 .3.462:

⁹⁹ Untitled Document, 16 September 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

¹⁰⁰ Office Memorandum 23 May 1958, section 1, 31-86569.

five dollars from another trucker. They reported that first gentlemen was unsuccessful in procuring the money.¹⁰¹ In May, an agent observed a brunette woman solicit a trucker. The woman left the restaurant through a door in the back of the building and the man exited the building and entered the men's restroom through a door on the outside of the structure. The agent said the restroom door was observable at all times from his position. Neither the man nor the woman returned.¹⁰² Investigators recorded each incident as evidence in their case.

In addition to informants and observations, the FBI also relied on local authorities to help with the investigation. Police in Doswell, Virginia, informed FBI agents that they believed the 24-Hour truck stop employed prostitutes. According to local police, the truck stop was located within a few miles from a stop with better facilities for truckers. Yet, the 24-Hour was always busy and had numerous trucks parked in the lot. However, upon entering the stop, Doswell police observed that there were very few patrons present. Throughout the investigation into the Carolina case, FBI agents were unable to provide solid evidence linking the 24-Hour stop with the larger Mann Act violations, although many of the women that worked at this Virginia stop also worked at Williams' stops in the Carolinas.¹⁰³

In Bennettsville, South Carolina, local deputies informed investigators that they were well aware of the prostitution activities occurring in the trucks stops and had even attempted to conduct a sting operation. One of the sheriffs' deputies posed as a trucker and entered the Little Fingers Truck Stop, which at the time was operated by James Pleasants. The undercover officer

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Office Memorandum, 2 July 1958, section 1, 31-86569.

¹⁰³ Interview Report on W.A. Canton, Investigator, Virginia Alcohol Beverage Control Board, 8 August 1958, section 1, 31-86569.

solicited one of the waitresses working at the stop. He was unsuccessful. The local authorities believed that Pleasants and the women exercised caution in whom they chose to engage in sexual commerce and typically only arranged dates with truckers they knew or recognized.¹⁰⁴ Deputies in Darlington County, South Carolina, the location of Society Hill, assisted the FBI in locating the residences and vehicles of persons associated with the case.¹⁰⁵ However, the FBI was somewhat reticent in its dealings with local police out of concern that the truck stop operators had developed a close relationship with authorities that might inhibit the investigation. Several witnesses in the case stated to the FBI that Williams bribed local authorities, specifically Benson police and Scotland County sheriffs, to conduct a commercial sex market out of his truck stops.¹⁰⁶ Although the FBI believed that Williams and the others were unaware about the extent of the agents' inquiry, enough information had made its way to the stop operators, and someone warned Buster Williams not to let the women engage in commercial sex with soldiers because the FBI was looking into the case.¹⁰⁷ Williams's reluctance to allow women to fill dates with soldiers likely stemmed from either a misunderstanding of the law or a belief that if soldiers were not involved that federal authorities would lose interest. He failed to understand that the type of customer did not change the FBI's approach or its determination to end prostitution along the truck stop circuit.

¹⁰⁴ Report, 26 September 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Interview Report on Willa Dean Williams, 23 October 1958, section 3 and Interview Report on Alexander McDonald, 8 January 1959, section 3, 31-86569.

¹⁰⁷ Airtel to Director of the FBI from SAC Charlotte, 26 September 1958, section 2, Interview Report on Willa Dean Williams, 23 October 1958, section 3, and Interview Report on Nettie K., 24 November 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

The particulars of the operation and the supporting role of local authorities was of interest to the FBI, but mostly they wanted to substantiate that the ring had violated the Mann Act, a federal charge only possible when operators transported or enticed women to cross state lines. The FBI made several observations of the subjects in the case and based on those surveillances as well as interviews with informants, they concluded that the ring leaders had indeed violated the white slave trafficking act by either transporting women physically across state lines or inducing their travel. But they still needed corroborating evidence to confirm their suspicions.

Piecing together the incidents that violated the Mann Act required numerous discussions with local witnesses and members of the ring. In September 1958, a confidential informant told investigators that Floyd McLamb had transported an unknown woman from South Carolina to North Carolina. The investigators identified the woman as Peggy and initially hoped that she might provide the critical evidence to indict the truck stop operators.¹⁰⁸ However, investigators believed she was “still on friendly terms” with the subjects, therefore would be unwilling to divulge information if investigators approached her.¹⁰⁹ While authorities suspected operators committed an infraction, they continued to search for a cooperative witness, particularly someone within the inner circle of the operations, to make their case. Such witnesses proved difficult to obtain, but they eventually found a sex worker willing to talk. As early as August 1958 agents learned that Ella, who worked at one of the truck stops, was “dissatisfied” with her circumstances and was thinking about quitting the trade.¹¹⁰ A confidential informant had traveled with Ella and her trucker husband to gather information about the operation. In late

¹⁰⁸ Office Memorandum, 26 September 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Office Memorandum, 2 February 1959, section 4, 31-86569.

September, the informant told investigators that during a weekend spent with the couple, Ella's husband, previously unaware of her activities discovered that she prostituted at the stops. The couple engaged in a "violent argument" after which Ella agreed to quit her commercial sex work. The informant conveyed to the FBI that Ella was now in a "frame of mind" to provide information on Williams's businesses.¹¹¹ Investigators scheduled an interview, and on September 29, 1958, twenty-six year old Ella told investigators about her prostitution activities and traced her movements between truck stops in North and South Carolina, many of which were owned by Williams. Several years prior, she stated that she had contacted Williams about working for him. She traveled to Benson, North Carolina and worked at Williams's Tourist Court. After a few weeks, she traveled with Williams to the Carolina Truck Stop in Laurinburg, which was not a violation of the Mann Act because she did not cross state lines. She remained at the Carolina for several weeks, but after an unspecified surgery, briefly returned to Virginia, her home state, and the residence of her three children who resided with their father, her former husband. She then left Virginia and moved to Columbus, Georgia where her current husband worked. She recalled that in April 1958, while visiting friends in Melbourne, Florida, she phoned Charles Lewis Williams and asked if there was an opportunity for her to work and he said yes. She then traveled to Benson and began to work as a prostitute at Williams's restaurant, operated by his stepdaughter, Shirley McDaniels.¹¹² Investigators later discovered that at the time, Ella had no money to travel from Florida to North Carolina, and Williams asked his stepdaughter to wire Ella fifty dollars for a bus ticket. While such action was not a physical transportation of a woman across state lines for immoral purposes, the mere act of assisting in

¹¹¹ Office Memorandum, nd, section 3, 31-86569.

¹¹² Interview Report on Ella W., 23 October 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

Ella's transportation violated the law.¹¹³ Ella seemed relieved to talk with the agents and told them "I'm glad it's all over. I want to get away from this type of life."¹¹⁴

Ella's interview armed the FBI with evidence to charge Williams and McDaniels, with violating the Mann Act, but they soon learned of more violations. Another informant relayed information about Williams sending money to Nancy to travel from Aiken, South Carolina to North Carolina in February 1958.¹¹⁵ They also learned that in May, Williams had instructed James Pleasants to pick up Nancy from South Carolina and bring her to North Carolina to work, a clear violation of the Mann Act.¹¹⁶

The FBI also discovered more details about the operations from interviews with others associated with the ring, namely the members' disgruntled wives. According to an informant, in early summer 1958, Willa Dean Williams, wife of Buster Williams, had grown tired of Buster's involvement with truck stop prostitution and urged him to quit. Willa Dean also confronted Buster about an affair she believed he was having with one of the sex workers, Ruby. An argument ensued and Buster beat Willa Dean. After the assault, Willa Dean left her husband, but returned when he claimed he was ill. Upon returning, she believed that Buster had lied about his illness and told a friend, who unbeknownst to her was an informant, that she planned to leave

¹¹³ United States Court of Appeals, 4th Circuit, *Charles Lewis Williams, Thelbert Eugene Williams, and James E. Pleasants v. United States*, 21 October 1959, section 4, 31-86569.

¹¹⁴ Memorandum, 26 June 1961, section 4, 31-86569.

¹¹⁵ Office Memorandum, nd, section 3, and Brief for Appellants, United States Court of Appeals, 4th Circuit, *Charles Lewis Williams, Thelbert Eugene Williams, and James E. Pleasants v. United States*, 21 October 1959, section 4, 31-86569.

¹¹⁶ Interview Report on Alexander McDonald, 8 January 1959, section 3, and Brief for Appellants, United States Court of Appeals, 4th Circuit, *Charles Lewis Williams, Thelbert Eugene Williams, and James E. Pleasants v. United States*, 21 October 1959, section 4, 31-86569.

Buster again once she found employment. Willa Dean complained to the informant that Buster continued his affair with Ruby, and that she had forbid him to bring Ruby to Trucker's Rest. Ruby worked elsewhere, traveling often as many of the sex workers did, but she continued to make frequent stops to visit Buster.¹¹⁷ Willa Dean again confronted her husband on October 16, 1958 and Buster responded violently. On that night, Buster arrived at home intoxicated and when Willa Dean broached the subject of his philandering he kicked her several times. After a physical confrontation that also included shots fired into the ceiling, Willa Dean swore out a warrant on Buster for the assault.¹¹⁸ The FBI recognized the incident as an opportunity to speak with a cooperative witness. They met with her on October 23 and she offered up substantial information about the operation. Willa Dean Williams provided detailed physical descriptions of nineteen women who had worked at the trucks stops in Charles Lewis Williams's operation as well as dates they worked and their travel activities.¹¹⁹ Willa Dean stated that she knew nothing about interstate travel or the particulars of Buster's operation, but others did. Only days prior, an informant who had spent the weekend "drinking" with sex worker Barbara passed on information that Barbara had revealed while intoxicated. Particularly, significant was that Buster had traveled to Phenix City, Alabama in February 1958 to pick up Barbara and bring her to North Carolina.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Interview Report on Confidential Informant, 23 May 1958, section 1, 31-86569.

¹¹⁸ Willa Dean failed to testify against her husband and the Laurinburg police dropped charges against Buster Williams on 31 October 1958. Office Memorandum, 24 November 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

¹¹⁹ Memorandum, 28, June 1961, section 4, 31-86569.

¹²⁰ Interview Report on Willa Dean Williams, 23 October 1958, section 2 and Office Memorandum, nd, section 3, 31-86569.

Although Willa Dean did not provide specific incidents that violated the Mann Act, she did explain the financial aspect of the operation. Investigators learned that Charles Lewis Williams and Buster jointly owned Trucker's Rest. Reddin Corbett had periodically owned fifty percent, but was unable to pay his debt and Buster purchased his share in October 1957. Buster struggled to pay the five thousand dollars that he owed and all his profits went to pay his debt. Willa Dean said that they made a small profit from food and gas at the stop, but that most of the income earned derived from prostitution. In addition to his debt for the purchase of Trucker's, Buster also had to split fifty percent of the businesses earning with Charles Lewis Williams. Willa Dean speculated that Williams pocketed approximately two thousand dollars a month from these activities. She also substantiated what the FBI believed about the complicit relationship between the owners and the police. Willa Dean stated that Charles Lewis Williams collected large sums of money from each establishment twice a year to pay off the police in North and South Carolina. In addition, Buster was required to pay two hundred dollars to a recent local recent political campaign. Willa Dean expressed concern about her two young children and she confessed that she was afraid of Buster, believing that when he drank, he would shoot without provocation.¹²¹

Willa Dean offered very little about the other truck stop operators, but she did comment that Floyd McLamb was "not known to have ever been engaged in any other profession than pimping for prostitutes."¹²² McLamb's possible pimping activities encouraged the FBI to pursue him. However, it was his sexual dalliances with one prostitute that would infuriate his wife, as

¹²¹ Interview Report on Dot H., 10 December 1958, section 3 and Section 2, Interview Report on Willa Dean Williams, 23 October 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

¹²² Interview Report on Willa Dean Williams, 23 October 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

Buster's did to Willa Dean, and lead to his demise. In September 1958, an informant told the FBI that the wife of the Carolina Truck Stop owner might be willing to meet with the FBI since she was "naïve about this racket business" and the fear of prosecution would influence her to talk with agents, but more importantly, her husband was "playing around with other girls," which would make her likely to cooperate.¹²³ Rosalie McLamb had learned that Floyd McLamb was having an affair with sex worker Doris. Rosalie claimed that she was not mad at her husband, but that she considered him "lower than a snake."¹²⁴ She told her friend, an informant, that she and Floyd had an agreement and that she overlooked his infidelity, but she complained that Doris was "running things" and telling Rosalie what to do, which had irritated her. She and McLamb had an argument in October 1958 and he struck Rosalie. She left him and moved to Fayetteville. Sensing another opportunity to learn about the truck stop activities, agents interviewed Rosalie McLamb on October 24, 1958. The thirty-year-old Rosalie told investigators that she had known McLamb all her life and that the two had lived in a common-law marriage for six years. They had a son together who was approximately two years old. The two had moved to North Carolina from California in March 1958, and Floyd entered into a business partnership with Charles Lewis Williams shortly thereafter. She professed to know very little about the operations of the stops and she could not furnish any information about prostitution.¹²⁵ Investigators interviewed Rosalie McLamb again in November during which she expressed dismay about Floyd's recent departure from the area with Doris, taking the McLamb's trailer and most of their possessions.

¹²³ Office Memorandum, nd, section 3, 31-86569.

¹²⁴ Office Memorandum, nd, section 2, 31-86569.

¹²⁵ Interview Report on Rosalie Morris (aka McLamb), 24 November 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

She continued to deny any knowledge of prostitution, but offered some information regarding the women who worked at the stops. She told investigators that the Carolina earned McLamb as much as between \$1000 and \$2500 on weekends.¹²⁶

The informant that had provided information on Rosalie also communicated with investigators about Floyd McLamb. Particularly significant to agents was the fact that McLamb had become disgruntled with Charles Lewis Williams. In September 1958, McLamb told the informant that he wanted to sell his interest in the Carolina Truck stop. He complained that Williams took half his profits and required McLamb to pay five hundred dollars to give to the “man.” McLamb also complained that Williams had opened a new stop in Wilson and that every time he “got a decent looking prostitute” Williams took her to work at one of his nephews’ places.¹²⁷

A month after Rosalie McLamb’s interview, her husband Floyd, without provocation, voluntarily presented himself on November 20, 1958 at an FBI agent’s office in Fayetteville for an interview. He divulged to investigators that he purchased half interest in the Carolina Truck Stop in March 1958 from Charles Lewis Williams. His share was nine thousand dollars, but he had only three thousand to put down on the investment and had been making payments to Williams, but had only paid one thousand dollars of his debt thus far. He denied that any prostitution activities occurred at the stop, but provided information about the women who had worked there as waitresses. He did not confess to an affair with Doris, but admitted that he had taken several trips with her, which he argued were strictly for “pleasure.”¹²⁸ When asked about

¹²⁶ Office Memorandum, nd, section 2, 31-86569.

¹²⁷ Office Memorandum, nd, section 3, 31-86569.

¹²⁸ Office Memorandum, 18 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

Peggy's transportation, he claimed that she had first arrived at his establishment with a group of soldiers and asked if he needed waitresses. He hired her, but claimed she never prostituted, and in fact complained that she did not do much work of any kind while employed at the Carolina.¹²⁹

Based on information collected from informants, operator's disgruntled, and McLamb, the FBI arrested the operators Charles Lewis Williams, Buster Williams, Reddin Corbett, Floyd McLamb, and Shirley McDaniels on December 3, 1958. Each of the men had a \$5000 bond, with the exception Charles Lewis Williams whose bond was \$7500 dollars. Agents released McDaniels on her own recognizance because of her condition; she was eight and half months pregnant.¹³⁰

After his arrest, McLamb ceased denying that he employed prostitutes at his stop. But he continued to refute that any interstate transportation.¹³¹ In his interview, Reddin Corbett claimed no prostitution occurred at Trucker's Rest when he operated it or at the Tobacco Trail Truck Stop, the place he most recently managed. When arrested, however, authorities discovered hundreds of unused condoms in his establishment.¹³² McDaniels also denied any knowledge of prostitution. The case records do not indicate that Buster Williams or James Pleasants consented to an interview.¹³³

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Report, 12 January 1959, section 3, 31-86569. Information regarding some violations was not found in the case records.

¹³¹ Interview Report on Floyd McLamb, 18 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

¹³² Office Memorandum 10 December 1958, section 3 and Report, 12 January 1959, section 3, 31-86569.

¹³³ Office Memorandum 18 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

In the agent's interview with Charles Lewis Williams, Williams "categorically denied having committed any violation of the White Slave Traffic Act."¹³⁴ He told authorities he had once been employed as a laborer and a carpenter at Fort Bragg, but that a medical condition had precluded him from military service. Williams said that his mother had purchased the Carolina for his brother to operate, but that due to his brother's drinking problem he was unable to fulfill his responsibilities, and Williams operated it instead. He admitted that his mother had sold a controlling interest in the stop to McLamb, but that he failed to make payments and abandoned the establishment in October, leaving Williams to take over. He stated that he also owned the Tobacco Trail and Jim's but that he leased those properties out to other individuals. Similar lease arrangements were in place with individuals operating the Carolina, Trucker's, and the Tourist court. He identified several women who he knew had worked as waitresses at these establishments, but did not admit to any prostitution activities or transportations.¹³⁵

The agents listed Ella, Peggy, Dot, Virginia, Nancy, and Barbara as victims of interstate transportation in the case. The FBI served the women material witness warrants compelling them to testify in the case. In addition, agents issued material witness warrants for Doris, Ruby, and Shirley P., women not listed as victims, but determined to have significant information that would assist prosecutors. The FBI conducted interviews with almost all the women to confirm specific Mann Act violations.¹³⁶ Rooting out violations of the Mann Act was the purpose of the investigation, not convicting the women on charges of prostitution, and the women could admit

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Virginia S's statement was not found in the records. Sex worker Nancy, of whom little is known, was rumored to have had a breakdown and no record of her interview exists. Barbara told an informant that Nancy was living in rest home around September 1958.

their activities and name the men that transported them if they felt victimized without fear of prosecution. Almost all of the women interviewed discussed what they charged for dates, how much they earned, whom they married, how many children they had, the names of their parents, and in some cases, the names of their husbands. However, the women did not consider themselves victims, but as workers plying their trade, seeking the best work environment and pay to meet their needs. The women in the Carolina case, overwhelmingly and in a matter of fact way, disclosed details about their lives and about their sexual labor, indicating that the work, while unorthodox to some, was an ordinary part of their lives.

Some women fled when the FBI arrested the operators and issued material witness warrants. Dot traveled to Miami when she heard from a trucker that FBI agents were looking of her. Investigators found her at the Lenox Motel where she lived. Dot admitted that she worked the highways as a prostitute; however, she refuted that any of the truck stop operators transported her.¹³⁷ She explained that she intended to establish a commercial sex service in Miami and sought women to work for her, and that some of those women traveled from out of state. However, she denied transporting women or contributing to their travel in any way. Although, she solicited women to move to Miami for the purposes of prostitution, none did so, thereby preventing agents from charging her with inducing women across state lines for immoral purposes.

Doris admitted that she was a prostitute during the previous four years and disclosed which states she had plied her trade, but she steadfastly claimed no violation of the Mann Act occurred. She confirmed, however, that she knew McLamb and that the two had traveled

¹³⁷ Report, 11 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

together for “pleasure.”¹³⁸ Nettie was interviewed in Laurinburg where she was awaiting court on an appeal for a ten-month sentence she received on a prostitution charge. The charge stemmed from the report that Willa Dean had made against Buster Williams for the physical assault. When police apprehended Buster, they arrested Nettie, as well as Barbara on prostitution charges. In addition to the assault, police charged Buster Williams for permitting prostitution on the premises.¹³⁹ In her interview, Nettie, a thirty-six-year-old former Navy WAVE, admitted prostituting and told investigators that because of her arrest she decided to get out of the prostitution racket and planned to marry.¹⁴⁰ None of the women interviewed by the FBI in December and January were arrested for prostitution at the time. Prostitution was a state or local matter and not a violation the FBI was concerned about.¹⁴¹

Agents interviewed Barbara in Laurinburg in November. Like Peggy, twenty-seven-year-old Barbara denied that she worked as a prostitute and claimed that her only income while working the stops came from tips. However, she had a long record of prostitution and like Doris, was appealing a recent conviction on the charge. Barbara was expected to testify in the case against Buster Williams for transporting her from Phenix City, Alabama, to North Carolina, but on January 30, 1959, police found Barbara dead from a gunshot wound. The medical examiner ruled her death a suicide, but the circumstances are perplexing. Prior to her suicide, she lived in a cabin in the back of Trucker’s Rest. Buster claimed that on the evening of her suicide, she had

¹³⁸ Interview Report on Doris M., 18 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

¹³⁹ Office Memorandum, 27 November 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

¹⁴⁰ Interview Report in Nettie K., 24 November 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

¹⁴¹ “Sentenced of White Slavery,” 13 March 1959, *Richmond County Journal* (Rockingham, North Carolina), section 4, 31-86569.

become intoxicated and caused a disturbance inside the truck stop. Buster ordered her to return to her cabin. He later checked on her to find that she had shot herself with a gun registered to him.¹⁴²

Barbara's denial of prostitution and her suicide indicate she either feared prosecution, feared the subjects in the case, or perhaps suffered from emotional or mental distress. The records do not indicate the operators committed acts of violence against the sex workers, nor was there evidence of mental health issues. However, her denial was not an isolated case. Agents expressed some concern that the women would not testify fearing retaliation by the operators. A female proprietor of Little Fingers truck stop in Bennettsville speculated that Peggy was fearful of either James Pleasants or Charles Lewis Williams and her fear likely led her to comply with whomever transported her.¹⁴³ A local sheriff in Wilson County also believed that women in the truck stops were frightened, especially of Reddin Corbett, and that women had refused to speak with authorities in the past because of that fear.¹⁴⁴ Yet, in their interviews, none of the sex workers expressed fear of the subjects nor did they intimate that they experienced any acts of violence. While none conveyed embarrassment, some admitted concern about family or children finding out, but nonetheless admitted their actions to agents. Although Peggy, denied being a prostitute, claiming that she only worked as a waitress at both the Carolina and Jim's truck stop, she told investigators that she was married to a man living in California and a mother to several

¹⁴² Office Memorandum 24 November 1958, section 3; Interview Report on Sheriff B. P. Lytch, Scotland County, North Carolina Sheriff's Department, 4 March 1959, section 4; Office Memorandum, nd, section 3, and Memorandum 28 June 1958, section 4, 31-86569.

¹⁴³ Interview Report (name redacted), 3 February 1959, section 4, 31-86569. (4.611)

¹⁴⁴ Report, 22 October - 21 November 1958, section 3, 31-86569. 3.444

children living in Bennettsville.¹⁴⁵ Floyd McLamb, who admitted prostitution occurred at the Carolina Truck Stop while under his management, also denied that Peggy worked as a prostitute. He told investigators which women worked as prostitutes, but also named three, including Peggy, who did not. McLamb stated that Peggy arrived intoxicated at the Carolina truck stop one evening and asked for work. He hired her as a prostitute-waitress, but stated that Peggy had a change of heart and refused to engage in sex work.¹⁴⁶ The FBI ignored Peggy and McLamb's denials however, and eventually charged McLamb with violating the Mann Act for transporting Peggy across state lines.¹⁴⁷ Peggy never signed a statement and never acknowledged her work as a prostitute. She may have felt compelled to lie given that she had children in the region and may have feared her activities would adversely affect her relationship with them or her custodial rights.

Interviewed in Richmond, Virginia, Ruby initially denied, but later admitted she was a prostitute. She said she worked at Williams BBQ (Tourist court) and Trucker's Rest as well as the 24-Hour in Doswell. She too denied that she had been transported. She expressed fear about testifying in the case, but only because she worried that she might lose custody of her children.¹⁴⁸ Shirley P. was interviewed in South Carolina and she noted that she had traveled to Miami with Dot seeking work. Shirley, told investigators that she was once asked to work at Carolina while

¹⁴⁵ Office Memorandum, 2 February 1959, section 4, 31-86569.

¹⁴⁶ Interview Report on Floyd McLamb, 18 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

¹⁴⁷ Brief for Appellants, United States Court of Appeals, 4th Circuit, *Charles Lewis Williams, Thelbert Eugene Williams, and James E. Pleasants v. United States*, 21 October 1959, section 4, 31-86569.

¹⁴⁸ Report, 25 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

she worked at Trucker's by Charles Lewis Williams because the stop "needed a girl."¹⁴⁹ She also told investigators that she had never hustled prior to working at Trucker's where she says that Reddin Corbett and other sex workers coerced her into hustling.¹⁵⁰ She too denied being transported and like Ruby, expressed fear that because of her activities she would lose custody of her children.¹⁵¹ The women who denied, or initially denied prostitution did so out of concern about the effect these revelations would have on their children or their custodial rights. The women did not see themselves as victims, but as independent operators.

Despite that independence though, they understood that what they were doing was disreputable and might have consequences. The Cold War era emphasis on family and specific gender roles precluded promiscuous women, and certainly women who engaged in commercial sex work, from the role of good mother. As Elaine Tyler May argues, women who violated the expected roles as nurturing, married, sexually contained women threatened the social order. Ruby, Shirley P., and Peggy's concern about the negative consequences their work would have on their right to parent was not unfounded. Women's ability to care for children and their rights or access to federal assistance was predicated on their sexual morality that had no parallel scrutiny when it came to fathers. The potential of losing those rights was realistic and a likely catalyst for their less than forthcoming admissions about engaging in sex work.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Office Memorandum 3 February 1959, section 4, 31-86569.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² For more information on the moral demands of women with children in terms of federal benefits or social condemnation see May, *Homeward Bound*, Katherine Aiken, *Harnessing the Power of Motherhood: The National Florence Crittenton Mission, 1883-1925* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1998) and Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not*

In March 1959, most of the truck stop operators were found guilty. Charles Lewis Williams was convicted for transporting Nancy, Ella, Dot and Virginia. He was sentenced to five years in prison and faced over fifteen thousand dollars in fines. Thelbert “Buster” Williams received four years for transporting Barbara; Shirley McDaniel received two years for her role in the travel of Nancy; James Pleasants received two and one half years for transporting Nancy; Floyd McLamb pled guilty in the transportation of Peggy and received one year and one day. The FBI dropped charges against Reddin Corbett; the circumstances are unknown.¹⁵³ Charles Lewis Williams, Buster Williams and James Pleasants all appealed their convictions unsuccessfully.¹⁵⁴

Not much is known about the women’s lives after the case. Some suffered from substance abuse, Dot perhaps more than others. An informant noted that Dot drank heavily before she left for Miami, to the point that she struggled to save money to purchase tires for her car for her trip south.¹⁵⁵ Her consumption habits continued in Miami and inhibited her ability to earn. An informant in the city observed that Dot spent most of her time in Miami inebriated, and she even admitted to investigators that she struggled to make a living there because she drank “it

Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of the Welfare (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

¹⁵³ “Sentenced of White Slavery,” 13 March 1959, *Richmond County Journal* (Rockingham, North Carolina), section 4, 31-86569.

¹⁵⁴ Brief for Appellants, United States Court of Appeals, 4th Circuit, *Charles Lewis Williams, Thelbert Eugene Williams, and James E. Pleasants v. United States*, 21 October 1959, section 4, 31-86569.

¹⁵⁵ Office Memorandum, 26 September 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

up as fast as she gets it.”¹⁵⁶ Ella experienced mental illness, and like Dot, struggled with alcohol addiction. While living in West Virginia, Ella’s husband had called police in March 1958 to report that she had made threats against his life. Police dismissed the concern. Yet her behavior continued to cause alarm. In June, while living in Jacksonville, Florida police arrested her for disturbing the peace. Authorities placed her in a mental ward in the Duval County Medical Center. Later she tested positive for tuberculosis and soon thereafter, was declared mentally ill. In September, authorities transferred Ella to the Florida State Mental Hospital in Chattahoochee.¹⁵⁷ Her whereabouts later, like the other sex workers in the case, are unknown.

The five prosecutions against the truck stop operators on Mann Act charges were successful. Despite the persistent denials of sex workers that they had not been transported, the Department of Justice convicted the subjects. The implicit assumption in the Mann Act that designated seven sex workers in the case as “victims” may have propelled the FBI’s pursuit of this particular case. The language of the act presumed that women’s sexual choices were beyond their control. Whether as victims of deceitful procurers or victims of their own sexuality, women were in need of protection. Yet, the sex workers in this case presented a different story, one that insisted they were working on their own to make a living. They nonetheless risked unwanted attention from the state by profiting off of their sexual services.

Scholar Laura María Agustín argues that the migration of contemporary sex workers is often shaped by “push-pull” factors such as the economic push of better earnings, or the pull of

¹⁵⁶ Report, 11 December 1958, section 3; Office Memorandum, nd, section 2; Office Memorandum, 16 December 1958, section 2; and Office Memorandum, 26 September 1959, section 2, 31-86569.

¹⁵⁷ Report, 26 September 1958, section 2, 31-86569.

traffickers.¹⁵⁸ For sex workers, economic hardships pushed them into migration, and even into sex work itself, however, the more nefarious pull factors involving traffickers did not materialize. Rather, the women controlled their labor and their sexuality. Indeed, the ubiquitous and continual movements of the prostitutes from one truck stop to another perplexed the men who operated these establishments. Floyd McLamb remarked that he struggled to keep sex workers at his stop since many prostitutes migrated to bigger sex markets like those in Florida where they could earn substantially more money.¹⁵⁹ The women were not kept by McLamb or any of the other operators and therefore were not “victims” of traffickers in the way that the Mann Act perceived. Moreover, the assumption that sex workers must have been trafficked, and thus required rescue was absent in the discussion in the FBI memos or notes. The apparent lack of exploitation, then begs the question as to why this vice ring was targeted. The sex worker’s movement and the freedom that they experienced in their mobility made them susceptible to legal and moral regulation. The women’s freedom and independence achieved through sex work migration posed a threat to 1950s social norms. The movement of women across state borders, to engage in sex work challenged more than the federal law of the Mann Act. These women engaged in something deviant that was the antithesis of the constructed image of women in the 1950s.¹⁶⁰

In an effort to determine why consensual sexual interactions drew the scrutiny of FBI agents and federal authorities in each Mann Act case, examination of scholarly works that

¹⁵⁸ Laura María Agustin, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets, and the Rescue Industry* (Zed Books: London and New York, 2007) 17.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9 and Interview Report with Confidential Informant, section 1, 23 May 1958, 4, and Interview with Dot H., 10 December 1958, section 3, 31-86569.

¹⁶⁰ Agustin, *Sex at the Margins*, 40.

studied the published court opinions from appeals cases offers some insight. Historian David Langum explores multiple cases, primarily convictions that were appealed to the United States Supreme Court, between the act's inception in 1910 and the 1970s to trace the legal shifts in the act and its application. Initially, appeals courts struggled with the act's language and intent especially in regards to pursuing non-commercial sexual encounters of the Mann Act. While Langum focused on how this affected the court's interpretation, what he also revealed was the role of societal values and the enforcement of a particular idea of feminine morality. Federal prosecutors struggled with the direction of the act, and had made a concerted effort to avoid pursuing charges against non-commercial sexual liaisons between consenting adults beginning in the early 1950s. Yet others felt that the act was a bulwark against moral turpitude. In a 1944 case involving two girls under the age of eighteen, the desire to regulate female sexuality is evident. In the case, the two girls, who were hitchhiking to California, accepted a ride from two adult men. The foursome spent several days together and although the girls initially declined the men's sexual advances, they eventually consented to sexual relations. After a few days, the four parted ways and the two girls continuing their route to California. Prosecutors in the case argued to the jury that if consensual sexual encounters across state lines were not pursued under the Mann Act that, 'playboys' would "defile the womanhood of America."¹⁶¹ However, prosecutors also took care to note that the girls were not sexually inexperienced. The court convicted the men and the girls were sent to reformatory school. The case demonstrates a concern about the morality of American women and its potential for exploitation, but also the anxiety involving larger concerns about women's sexual choices. Scholar Frederick Grittner's work on the Mann Act illustrates how the anxiety about women crossing sexual boundaries and the threat those

¹⁶¹ Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*, 205.

sexual transgressions posed to families and society during the early twentieth century influenced reformers and the creation of the act.¹⁶² The concern was magnified in the Cold War era.

Scholar Elaine Tyler May connects the control of women's sexuality to the broader cultural theme present in Cold War ideology. She explored the role that women's sexual behavior played in maintaining domestic stability. May argued that a "sexual containment ideology" guided Cold War era efforts to control women's sexuality. She suggested that the ideology placed women's sexuality in a critical position as the pillar of the country's morality. When women expressed sexuality outside of the designated arena of marriage they exposed the country's moral weaknesses. Women's moral strength served as a bulwark against the rising threat of communism and secularism.¹⁶³ When women failed to maintain that lofty position, they put the country in potential danger, and this merited policing. In Mann Act cases, whether women consented to illicit sex or were truly victims of sex rings, regulation was necessary. It served a dual purpose to protect women from lascivious men who sought to exploit their sexuality, and to contain the threat posed to the nation by sexually independent women. Through the Mann Act, then, federal authorities could legislate and regulate women's sexual choices to enforce social codes of appropriate gender behavior, which sought to contain women's sexuality to marriage for the good of the nation. In the Carolina case, women who migrated across sexual and physical boundaries to ply their trade represented a sexual subversive. The women who challenged the dominant sexual order by refusing to comply with it threatened the stability of

¹⁶² Grittner, *White Slavery*, 128-130.

¹⁶³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound. American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 103-112.

society through their sexual actions, and police, reformers, and in this case, the FBI, scrutinized their behavior.

Perhaps most unfathomable to FBI agents was that women would chose to engage in sex work at truck stops. Sex work, like other forms of labor, is subject to stratification. There is a hierarchy that is, in part, based on earnings and environment. In Miami, the call girl system that developed catered to wealthy men and likely took place in luxury hotels. Women charged between twenty-five and one hundred dollars for their services.¹⁶⁴ In the Carolina case, women catered to a working-class clientele, earning far less than Miami call girls, and engaging in sexual encounters in the back rooms of truck stops. Therefore, the FBI presumed that morally corrupt truck stop operators coaxed or forced women into prostitution, exploiting their sexual labor for financial gain.

The closure of red-light districts resulting from concerns about public morals occurred, not coincidentally, in an era when private behavior deemed deviant – such as homosexuality and commercial sex –infiltrated public spaces such as bars in places like Miami and Phenix City.¹⁶⁵ Gendered deviance, such as prostitution, existed in contrast to expected norms of feminine chastity and threatened the constructed ideal of womanhood. Migrating sex workers, manipulating the occupation to achieve a degree of economic and sexual independence, posed a

¹⁶⁴ “Crime Conditions in the Miami Division, Report 15 November 1963,” folder HSCA Subject: Criminal Intelligence Program Miami 1/1/62 to 12/31/63, box 7 HSCA: Subject Criminal Intelligence Program HQ Main files 62-9-29 Section 15 Serials 599, JFK Collection, NARA, Washington DC.

¹⁶⁵ Although gay men and women respectively socialized publically in bars prior to the 1950s, their behavior underwent more scrutiny during the 1950s communist scare. See George Chauncey *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of Lesbian Community* (New York and London: Routledge, Inc., 1993).

greater threat to public morals than did sexual activities confined within segregated vice districts. After all, vice district contained deviancy, thereby implying the need to regulate it.

The prostitutes in the truck stop prostitution circuit, whether trafficking victims or unnervingly independent women engaging in commercial sex in seedy truck stops, represented a profound challenge to the ideal sexual role for women and thus had to be controlled and the circuit dismantled. Regulating sexuality, particularly the interstate commercial aspects of it, fell to the FBI and they pursued the case with vigor.¹⁶⁶ Yet women's sexual expression seemed more subject to economic factors than to their lack of sexual self control or exploitation by predatory individuals. For sex workers in the 1950s, economic considerations were the primary motivators in their decision to engage in sexual commerce. In the Carolina case, women moved from stop to stop, from establishment to establishment, and from state to state in order to maximize their earnings. Economics served as an impetus for migration, but in the process women found control and freedom through their mobility. Women who worked the highways did so to secure economic independence in an occupation that depended primarily on the location and available clientele.

As red-light districts closed or became subject to intense legal scrutiny, women sought to ply their trade elsewhere. The mobility of these of sex workers afforded them a level of independence not all sex workers, or working women in general, experienced. In their interviews, the women never hinted at coercion or force but some expressed a desire to leave the

¹⁶⁶ An abundance of scholarly work exists on state regulation of sexuality. Most notable of course is Michel Foucault, but important works on modern applications of state regulated sexuality, especially those connected with immigration help to inform this work. See Eithne Linheid "Looking Like a Lesbian: The Organization of Sexual Monitoring at the United States-Mexican Border," in Denise A. Segura, and Patricia Zavella, eds., *Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: A Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

racket. Whether the ringleaders were guilty of victimizing these women is debatable. Although the truck stop operators capitalized on the women's sexual labor and controlled the dynamics of the operation, the women controlled where they worked and when they worked. As migrant sex workers, they created a network with other women to communicate and establish friendships. Despite paltry wages and even a somewhat tawdry environment, these women floated in and out of this life at their own discretion. The fluidity of mobile sex markets created less visibility for these women, perhaps shielding them from the social condemnation experienced by prostitutes in more fixed locations. The Carolina truck stop case demonstrates how migratory sex workers challenged the notion of victimization. Yet, it does not necessarily seek to speak for the experiences of all migrating sex workers. In an era when districts closed or underwent significant regulation, sex workers and pimps sought new places to establish a sexual black market. While the women in the Carolinas migrated willingly, not all did. And when women were forced into prostitution and forced into migration, the assault on their right to control their sexual labor was far worse than the regulation imposed by the government.

CHAPTER 5

TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN, TRAFFICKING IN SEX: THE 1954 MANN ACT CASE IN LOUISIANA

On February 13, 1955, *The Washington Post and Times Herald* ran a headline that promised to give the inside story of the “the greatest single blow to white slavery since the arrest of Lucky Luciano.”¹ The article detailed the break up of a sex trafficking ring centered in southwest Louisiana, but whose circuit spanned across multiple southern states. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents recorded dozens of accounts of brutal treatment including physical assaults and forced prostitution connected with the case. One young woman relayed how she was held against her will and sent to work at brothels. Another recalled how she was beaten unconscious and then revived with water only to be beaten again. Still another reported how a member of the syndicate beat her with a coat hanger and then forced her to into a bath of scalding hot water. Women in the ring warned one another that if they tried to escape they would be killed.²

Investigators learned about the ring in April 1953 when an informant told an FBI agent that a prostitute had been transported from LaPlace, Louisiana, to Panama City, Florida.³ After

¹ Will Ousler, “Operation Shame: The Inside Story of “The Greatest Blow to White Slavery Since the Arrest of Luciano,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 13 February 1955, AW11.

² Ibid.

³ Report, 9 March 1954, section 3, Mann Act Case 31-80768, Federal Bureau of Investigation Records, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (Hereafter designated as 31-80768).

some investigation, the FBI determined that a man named Joseph Lovely Sonnier was operating a white slave trafficking ring out of his home in Duson, Louisiana. Sonnier, a thirty-four year old native of southwest Louisiana, was on probation for a previous Mann Act conviction he received in 1949. His home in Duson was the center for the 1953 case. Sonnier's trafficking network included over thirty women, although only ten would ultimately be listed as "victims." The FBI traced the trafficking ring back to January 1952 and presented evidence to a grand jury in September 1953. The grand jury indicted nine men whom federal agents arrested in February 1954. In March 1955, federal prosecutors convicted the final member of the multi-state sex trafficking syndicate for violating the Mann Act, bringing the investigation and case to a close. Nine men were convicted on Mann Act charges and another three were convicted for related crimes.

The network's operation was organized, sophisticated, and finely tuned, relying on fixed red-light districts or cities that tolerated prostitution where they forced women into commercial sexual labor. The network established relationships with bar and brothel owners in eight southern states where they transported women by cars, buses, and commercial and private planes. The operators, some of whom had former convictions for trafficking or prostitution-related activities, coerced, threatened, and physically forced women to work as prostitutes, reaping the monetary rewards from the victims they financially, sexually, and physically exploited.

The closure of red-light districts and the efforts to repress prostitution in large cities like Miami and Birmingham, and repression sexual black markets in smaller cities such as Galveston and Phenix City fueled sex work migration in the 1950s. Sex workers who freely participated in mobile vice networks had control over their movements and their decisions to engage in

commercial sex. They decided when and where to work. Unlike the freedom and independence experienced by the migrating sex workers in the Carolina case, Louisiana pimps orchestrated the movements of their women, controlling their migration, their labor, their income, and their freedom.

Those who operated these rings were overwhelmingly male, embraced a violent ethos in procuring sex workers and engaged in ruthless methods to maintain their positions of power and their profits. The network based in Louisiana prefigured the development of modern day United States domestic sex trafficking. The U.S. State Department's Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 defines sex trafficking as occurring when "a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age."⁴ The women's experience in the Louisiana case share similarities with modern day trafficking victims. The tactics employed by the ringleaders reflect current practices and demonstrate the deleterious effects of sex trafficking on women in the United States long before the more recent concerns about it entered into contemporary discourse. The pimps in Louisiana recruited young women and girls, who were mostly inexperienced in the commercial sex trade, by promising marriage. Once the women realized the deception, the men engaged in threats and violence to maintain their control and dominance. They deprived women of their clothes and their earnings and threatened to reveal their sexual behavior to family or friends. Perhaps most insidious, the men committed acts of violence against women to sustain the syndicate's financially lucrative criminal activities. The circuit's success was predicated on the cooperation of the women involved and the men engaged in violence and intimidation to ensure women complied. Pimps punished women for refusing to work or challenging their authority. The men

⁴ Kimberly A. McCabe, and Sabita Manian, *Sex Trafficking: A Global Perspective* (Lanham, Maryland and Boulder, Colorado: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 2.

hit, slapped, punched, and kicked women who resisted their demands and in some cases, for committing minor infractions such as lying or driving too fast. The men routinely demonstrated their power through acts of physical aggression, and overwhelmingly, the women, despite finding opportunities to leave, remained in the circuit.

The dynamics between the pimps and prostitutes in this ring reflected the mixed messages that permeated 1950s culture about marriage, sexuality, and gender roles. Popularly held beliefs constructed marriage and the home as the proper outlet for sexual relations, while simultaneously approving of men's sexual pleasure outside of those confines. Ideas about conventional masculinity that placed men in roles as the breadwinner and women as submissive caretakers appear incongruent in this case, where women, not men, were the earners. Additionally, women's growing sexual and economic independence in the era posed a threat to notions about masculinity. In the Louisiana case, these ideas played out in the struggle over women's sexual labor. Most women submitted to the men's demands to engage in sex for money, even though the requests were themselves a challenge to the dominant ideas of sexual containment. Not all women complied, however, revealing a tension between assumptions about male dominance and female submission. Those who resisted subjugation met with vicious retaliation for challenging male authority and threatening the financial rewards sought by the traffickers. While women's resistance rarely resulted in their freedom, the mere attempt illustrates that although they lacked control over their movements, their income, and their sexual labor, they struggled against the violence and the victimization they faced.

Like the case in the Carolinas, the Louisiana case involved hundreds of individuals including the ring members, the trafficked women, bar owners, brothel operators, and confidential informants. The FBI's probe into Mann Act violations followed similar patterns in

investigative methods and tactics. Agents used informants to gather information about the rings, they spent countless hours tracking down specific violations in order to present their findings to a grand jury, and they relied on legal maneuvers such as material witness warrants to compel individuals to testify, in hopes that violators would face charges.

Scholar David Langum writes that prostitution cases between 1944 and 1959 were “routine, seldom stirring up dissent or controversy.”⁵ The cases that Langum and other scholars have examined support this conclusion. By statute, all Mann Act cases involved some aspect of trafficking. However, the level of violence witnessed in the Louisiana case seems atypical. This case stirred controversy because of its brutality, spurring national headlines while other cases merely merited brief mentions in local newspapers.⁶ Although accessing Mann Act cases in this era is problematic due to the more recent nature of the crimes and the challenge in submitting Freedom of Information Act request the occurrences listed in newspapers around the country reveal some similarities in multi-state trafficking cases in the post-war era. The young ages of the victims, often chosen because of their youth and naïveté, the duplicity involved in procuring women, and the presence of violence appeared in other cases that gained media attention.⁷

⁵ Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*, 213.

⁶ Mann Act cases in the 1950s are difficult to access. Often the Department of Justice or the Federal Bureau of Investigation requires permission from the victims or documentation proving that victims are deceased before they will release the records. Thus, newspaper coverage of convictions and works by David Langum and Frederick Grittner serve as the basis for my conclusion about the networks. See Chapter 4 for a brief list of cases that received newspaper attention in the South.

⁷ Some of the Mann Act cases that shared similarities with the Louisiana case included, one in which fourteen-year-old girls were trafficked to work in brothels, “Two Charged on Mann Act, *Lubbock Evening Journal*, 25 January 1950; cases with multi-state operations, “10 Arrested Under Mann Act,” *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison, Wisconsin), 30 January 1944, 13; and one ring that may have mirrored the Louisiana case in terms of violence occurred during World

However, because it garnered national, rather than local headlines, and its scope, a network of brothels and bars in eight states, indicate it was likely one of the most complex cases the Department of Justice adjudicated in the 1950s. Although its size and operations made it unique, the story of the women and the traffickers in this case allow us explore the rise in more sophisticated, modern day, domestic sex trafficking rings prior to the alarm sounded by anti-trafficking activists in the 1990s.

The operators of the Louisiana ring were primarily southwestern Louisiana natives and part of a broader criminal element that trafficked in narcotics and engaged in other illegal activity in the region. Joseph Lovely Sonnier, who led the syndicate, owned a dairy and a lumberyard, which FBI agents believed was a front for his trafficking operation. Sonnier was on probation for a 1949 Mann Act conviction in which he had transported a fifteen-year old girl from Orange, Texas, to Lafayette, Louisiana, to work at a bar that he owned called Club 90.⁸ Sonnier's nephew, Arphy Sonnier, was also part of the ring. Investigators believed Arphy, twenty-three, had been a pimp since the age of fourteen.⁹ Another member of the ring, Louis Emery Roger, approximately twenty-six, had a violent past and a previous conviction on drug charges. He was once considered the "Acadian King Pin," dealing in illegal activities in the area known as the "77 Sunset Strip" named after Louisiana Highway 77 that ran through the state.¹⁰

Whitney Boutin, twenty-two, was originally from Mississippi but had moved to southwest

War II, "Vice Ring Expose Comes After Long Government Probe," *The Piqua Daily Call* (Piqua, Ohio), 19 August 1942, 1.

⁸ Report, 26 June 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

⁹ Report, 15 October 1954 section 6, 31-80768.

¹⁰ "Update: Louis Emery Roger," KLFY TV, Channel 10 in Lafayette, Louisiana, <http://www.klfy.com/Global/story.asp?S=9210439>, accessed 18 July 2012.

Louisiana settling in New Iberia and Lafayette. Agents believed he was relatively new to the network.¹¹ Richard Lagneaux, a thirty-one year old from Duson, was one of the most violent members of the ring. He physically assaulted his wife resulting in her hospitalization and police arrested him for threatening her life. However, Joseph Sonnier considered Lagneaux the “weak sister” of the network and the other members feared that if arrested, Lagneaux would reveal details about the operations.¹² Wilfred Elias was twenty-three years old and from Lafayette. He had prior convictions for narcotics, resisting arrest, and attempted armed robbery.¹³ Less information was known about the final three men charged in the case. The others members included Tom Marceaux who had worked as a handyman and cook for Joseph Sonnier. He was twenty-six and lived in New Orleans. Joseph Blanchard was from Rayne, Louisiana, and the last member, Duhon Burley was from Duson. Both men were thirty years old.

The men in this case acted as pimps for the women they procured. Traditionally, a pimp’s role includes finding clients or work locations for prostitutes and serving as a liaison between client and prostitutes. Their role also consists of protecting sex workers from police by either alerting them to law enforcement raids or activity, occasionally bribing police to overlook women’s commercial sex work, posting bail for a prostitute who is arrested, and sometimes securing legal council if needed.¹⁴ The pimps in this case assumed all these responsibilities. They secured locations for the women to work and they provided funds to pay bonds or fines for

¹¹ Report, 26 June 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Charles Winick and Paul M. Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce: Prostitution in the United States* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 109.

women who were arrested, although the women typically had to reimburse the member who paid the fine. Although some pimps and prostitutes were also intimate partners, the relationship was not necessarily one of commitment and respect. There is an infamous code of ethics that pimps adhere to, and it reflects the respect they hold for one another and the contempt they hold for women. Pimps generally believe that they own the women who work for them. Some of the men in the Louisiana case owned only one woman, whereas others had as many as seven. Each pimp arranged travel for the women they controlled, although they shared the responsibility for the transportation of all the women. Pimps in this case considered the women that they recruited as their property and they abided by a code that recognized other men's property. None of the men stole another's women, nor did they take their earnings. The men treated the women callously and, at times, like animals even referring to them as "horses" in a stable.¹⁵ In some cases the women were traded between members.¹⁶ If a woman became unruly or "out of line" a member would give her to another until she complied, in a sense breaking her will. In other scenarios, women were traded for monetary goods. Whitney Boutin traded a woman to Arphy Sonnier as a down payment on a Cadillac.¹⁷ This "transaction" suggested a hierarchy among pimps. Most of the men drove Cadilacs and Boutin's desire to own one may have originated from his precarious position in the ring. Joseph Sonnier found Boutin to be an "annoyance" and felt he tried to "act like a big man."¹⁸ Boutin's new vehicle symbolized his ability to profit from

¹⁵ Report, 26 June 1953, section 3, 31-80768.

¹⁶ Office Memorandum, 25 February 1954, section 3, 31-80768.

¹⁷ Report, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768 and Winick, *The Lively Commerce*, 117.

¹⁸ Report, 26 June 1953, section 1, Office Memorandum, 25 February 1954, section 3, 31-80768.

the ring and to rise in its ranks. Boutin likely hoped the purchase might establish him as a respected member of the syndicate and perhaps impress Sonnier as well.

The pimps created a sophisticated trafficking network. In the 1954 case, the circuit included twenty-three cities – the most eastern point and western point were almost a thousand miles apart – and spread over Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. Traffickers were drawn to the particular cities for a variety of reasons including the pre-existence of established vice districts or a toleration of prostitution activities. Texarkana, Texas, for example was along the path to other locations that had a large ready-made clientele at nearby military bases nearby such as Fort Smith, Arkansas, located near Camp Chaffee (now known as Fort Chaffee), an army reserve training facility. Other cities had military connections such as Pensacola, Florida, with its Naval Air Training facility. Aiken, South Carolina, was the site of the Savannah River Plant that began construction in 1951 and commenced in October 1952 and was approximately an hour from Camp Gordon (renamed Fort Gordon in 1956), an army installation center in Augusta, Georgia. Carswell Air Force Base was located in Fort Worth, Texas; Panama City was home to Tyndall Air Force base; and Biloxi, Mississippi, housed Keesler Air Force Base, an aviation mechanics training facility, and all were points along the network.¹⁹

Of the cities with military installations, three, Galveston, Texas, Port Arthur, Texas, and Dothan, Alabama, merit closer examination because they had been subjects of numerous

¹⁹ 1950 census records indicate the following populations data: Texarkana - 24,753; Ft. Smith - 47,942; Pensacola - 43,479; Aiken – 17,449; Augusta- 71,508; Panama City - 25,814; and Biloxi - 42,325. United States Census Bureau, Population Statistics, 1950.



Illustration 3. Map of southeastern cities in the 1954 Louisiana Mann Act case.

American Social Hygiene (ASHA) surveys because of the existence of rampant commercial sexual vice.²⁰ The vice markets in these cities were well-established and provided the network with a series of fixed sex markets, where men could transport women to work, rather than relying solely on their own bars or establishments to earn a lucrative profit off women's sexual labor. Galveston's Post Office district was active during the Louisiana case, but it did experience waves of repression. The FBI noted five establishments that the network used in Galveston and the women in the case were trafficked frequently in and out the city. Port Arthur, Texas housed Orange Naval Base until the mid 1960s. In March 1951, the ASHA ranked the city second in the nation for its vice trade, behind Galveston, which was ranked first. Port Arthur had fourteen open houses of prostitution at the time, many with blinking lights to attract customers. The vice district was segregated by race, with African American prostitutes "clustered" in one area.²¹ One man told the AHSA that the town needed "plenty of spots" because of the high population of navy and merchant seamen. Prostitutes who worked the houses in the black district catered mostly to white soldiers. ASHA representatives observed women calling out to passersby offering services. One call proposed interested men "come get frenched" – a euphemism for oral sex.²² Upon entering one of the establishments, men were greeted by a black maid who showed guests to a parlor where sex workers introduced themselves and suggested visitors buy them a

²⁰ Population data: Galveston- 66,568; Port Arthur - 57,530; and Dothan - 21,584. United States Census Bureau, Population Statistics, 1950.

²¹ "Commercialized Prostitution Conditions in Port Arthur Texas, March 1951," folder Crime-General 5 Prostitution -White Slavery (Geographical), box 42, Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce (SCIOCIC), National Records and Archives Administration (NARA), Washington, DC.

²² Ibid.

drink.²³ The typical rate for a date was five dollars. Observers reported that women visited a local doctor weekly for venereal disease testing. White brothels operated in a similar fashion. Port Arthur received unsatisfactory ratings by the ASHA through most of the early 1950s until its last documented observation in 1955.²⁴

Dothan, located near Napier Field and Camp Rucker army training facilities, also had extensive commercial prostitution. The ASHA conducted numerous observations of the city's vice trade focusing separately on white and black prostitutes throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Dothan earned poor marks during World War II because of its high rate of African American commercial sex workers. The ASHA reported in December 1943 that in addition to prostitutes, the city had "chippies" and "easy pick ups" – both defined as women who engaged in non-commercial sexual liaisons.²⁵ After the war, the city's vice continued and it became well known for its black commercial sex district. Black soldiers told the ASHA in January 1953 that Dothan was the "best town they had ever visited for 'trim.'"²⁶ The city's white commercial vice trade was less extensive but still present, and the Louisiana pimps capitalized on its profit potential. White sex workers operated mainly out of hotels during and after the war, and bellhops often served as go betweens for sexual exchanges. The Houston hotel in Dothan housed the women in the Louisiana trafficker's vice ring. In January 1951, white soldiers complained that casual pick-ups were not as readily available and that prostitutes charged too much, as high as fifteen dollars

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Note card on Dothan, Alabama surveys (Mar. 1942 –Jan. 1953), box 105 Legal and Protective Surveys, American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

²⁶ Ibid.

a date. The soldiers lamented that pick-ups were “scarce” in the town and that on paydays, “they got to go for the hustlers.”²⁷ In December 1955, the ASHA reported that law enforcement had enacted a repression campaign and that with the exception of a few places, Dothan’s sex trade had closed.²⁸

Southwest Louisiana served as the primary location for much of the syndicate’s network. The small city of Duson, population approximately 700 in 1950, was considered the home base. Specifically, Joseph Sonnier’s home in the city was where many of the women lived when they were first recruited. The location also served as a place where women stayed in between their transportation or as punishment for challenging the ring’s operators. The Louisiana cities in the ring, Crowley, LaPlace, New Iberia, Lafayette, Opelousas, Port Allen, Rayne, and Eunice, each had bars or brothels where commercial sex took place and served as the main locations for the circuit.²⁹ The region, known as Acadia, was primarily agricultural with crops of rice, cotton, and sugar. Saw mills and lumber companies also contributed to the region’s economic and physical landscape.³⁰ While this area of Louisiana was rural and several of the above cities had populations of less than 15,000, its roads and highways led to larger cities such as Lake Charles

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Census records indicate the following population data: Crowley - 12,784; Laplace: - 2,352; New Iberia -16,467; Lafayette- 33,541; Opelousas - 11,659; Port Allen - 3,097; Rayne - 6,485; and Eunice – 8,184. United States Census Bureau, Population Statistics, 1950.

³⁰ Donald J. Millet, “Town Development in Southwest Louisiana, 1865-1900,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Spring, 1972), 142 and Helen R. Conrad, *New Iberia: Essays on the Town and its People*. (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1979), 236.



Illustration 4. Map of cities in the Acadia region in the 1954 Louisiana Mann Act case.

and Lafayette. Sonnier operated a bar in Lafayette called Club 90 and Roger managed the TT & T. Both locations underwent changes in ownership. Sonnier ceased his proprietorship of Club 90 after his conviction on the Mann Act violation in 1949, but retained a relationship with the new management. The TT & T had closed in 1951 because of a narcotics raid. Authorities arrested both Roger and his wife, Alice, for selling narcotics in the club. Roger was later released. Informants believed that Roger was equally guilty for the drug activity but that he convinced his wife to assume all responsibility. Alice Roger received a twenty-year sentence for selling narcotics to minors in the club in 1952 as a result of the raid. During the Mann Act investigation, Roger desired to purchase or lease the club, but never succeeded.³¹ Both locations were used as part of the circuit of establishments.

Although Lake Charles and Lafayette were more populous, New Iberia was the site of much of the ring's trafficking activity.³² New Iberia had a small but vibrant red-light district that spanned two-blocks. Law enforcement required that prostitutes register with the police department before working in the district.³³ Commercial vice in New Iberia had caused concern as early as 1950 when the director of the Louisiana Moral and Civic Foundation wrote a letter to Senator Estes Kefauver, chair of the United States Senate Crime Committee. The director expressed concerns that criminal activity from New Orleans had infiltrated New Iberia, as well as the cities of Crowley, Opelousas, and Lake Charles.³⁴ The primary worry was gambling, but

³¹ Report, 26 June 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

³² According to U.S. Census population statistics, Lake Charles had a population of 41,272. United States Census Bureau, Population Statistics, 1950.

³³ Report, 5 November 1953, section 2, 31-80768.

³⁴ Letter to Senator Estes Kefauver, the chair of the United States Senate Crime Committee from W. Earle Hotalen, State Director, Louisiana Moral and Civil Foundation, dated

prostitution disconcerted the committee as well. In a report on Louisiana, undated but likely written in the early 1950s, New Iberia's town marshal noted that local prostitutes received health checks to reduce the transmission of venereal disease.³⁵ In addition, the police captain of New Iberia told the FBI during its Mann Act investigation that sex workers had to register with the police and undergo finger printing. Indeed, seven women from the Louisiana ring had records with New Iberia's police department, some dating back to 1949. The subjects in the Louisiana case established business relationships with at least four bars or brothels in the city and sent women there to work. New Iberia buckled to pressure to close its district in late 1953, and the cleanup resulted in a geographical shift toward the southeastern portion of the circuit.

Other cities along the circuit proved strategic for transportation such as Kenner, Louisiana, Houston, Texas, and Savannah, Georgia.³⁶ Each city shared one common feature; they all contained an airport. While the men transported the women on the highways via automobiles and buses, commercial and private airplanes were an important means of transportation to cities that were located hundreds of miles apart. To travel the great distances without sacrificing profit or travel time meant moving women between brothels and bars quickly; while buses and cars often sufficed, air travel comprised the quickest mode of transportation in this case. While other rings may have used air travel to transport sex workers

20 December 1950, folder LA Prostitution, box 134, Geographical files Louisiana, United States Senate Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce (SPIOCIC), RG 46, NARA, Washington, DC.

³⁵ "New Orleans," folder New Orleans, box 134 Geographical files Louisiana, SPIOCIC.

³⁶ 1950 Census records indicate the following populations data: Kenner - 5,535; Houston - 596,163; and Savannah - 119,638. Some locations such as New Orleans (570, 445), Lake Charles (41,272), and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, (125,629) and Jackson, Mississippi ,(98,271) played a role in the ring but, were not a frequent destination of the network.

across state lines in the 1950s – a ring in Hawaii who recruited women from California, likely used this method to transport women to the island – most trafficking records do not indicate air travel as a specific method of continuous movement, making the Louisiana case unique in its reliance on modern and more costly modes of transportation.³⁷ It suggests the ring’s profit level as well, indicating that its overall earnings were high enough to pay for frequent air travel.

Passenger air travel in the 1950s had become a convenient and more affordable method to trek across the country. The first passenger airline company in the United States developed in Florida in 1914. The company, St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line, ferried passengers across Tampa Bay in a sea plane. The company, like those that followed soon after, was considered a fixed based operation since it was located solely in one place. Most of the customers were those traveling for pleasure such as fishing trips or vacations.³⁸ A rise in the commercial air travel industry occurred after World War I. The United States Navy sold its surplus planes to private companies in an effort to promote the development of passenger travel. As more companies provided these services, the characteristics of modern air travel developed such as the publication of flight schedules and seat assignments.³⁹ Early twentieth-century air travel was marred by mishaps and accidents and the federal government, recognizing the need to create industry safety standards, enacted the Air Commerce Act in 1926. The act implemented criteria for obtaining a

³⁷ The two most detailed works on the Mann Act, Langum’s *Crossing Over the Line* and Grittner’s *White Slavery* indicate that interstate transportation was most often accomplished by automobile. For information on the ring in Hawaii see, “Hawaiian Crime Syndicate Probed,” *Oxnard Press Courier* (Oxnard, California), 22 June 1950, 2.

³⁸ Carl Solberg, *Conquest of the Skies: A History of Commercial Aviation in America* (Little, Brown and Company: Boston and Toronto, 1979), 9 and 31.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

pilot's license and for documenting aircraft testing.⁴⁰ In 1938, regulation of non-military flights was transferred to the newly created Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA), which regulated fares and airports, specifically exploring the creation of a national system of airports.⁴¹ World War II created a boom in aviation interest and technology.⁴² Airplane speed and size increased, as did the technology that guided landing systems.⁴³ Yet, the landing systems in particular had not been applied to all passenger planes, something the CAA sought to redress. Congress granted the CAA power to administer funds to the nation's budding civil airports, with the intention to further support and develop a national system of airports throughout the country. Federal assistance and regulation contributed to the growth and success of new airports, particularly in the South. The creation of airports in Atlanta, Houston, and New Orleans facilitated each city's development as new industries and businesses emerged as a result in the respective cities. Airport hotels and restaurants would soon follow, changing the landscape and the economy of southern cities with access to air travel.⁴⁴ In Kenner, Louisiana (just outside New Orleans), Moissant Field (now known as the Louis Armstrong International Airport) offered commercial passenger service in 1947, and by the following year it was considered one of the largest airports

⁴⁰ Solberg, *Conquest of the Skies*, 38.

⁴¹ Solberg 204.

⁴² Roger E. Bilstein, "Air Travel and the Traveling Public: The American Experience 1920-1970," in William F. Trimble, ed. *From Airship to Airbus: The History of Civil and Commercial Aviation. Volume 2: Pioneers and Operations* (Smithsonian Institution Press: Washington and London, 1995), 99.

⁴³ Ibid and Solberg, *Conquest of the Skies*, 331-332.

⁴⁴ Solberg, *Conquest of the Skies*, 376-377.

in the country.⁴⁵ The increased access to and locations of civilian airports in the 1940s and early 1950s made commercial air travel relatively affordable to the general public.⁴⁶ An advertisement for Trans World Airlines, for example, listed flights from New York to Phoenix for \$94 and between Phoenix and Los Angeles for \$18.⁴⁷ The cost in contemporary dollars for the flight between Phoenix and Los Angeles translates to approximately \$174.⁴⁸ In the Louisiana case, the FBI records indicate that the ring used National Airlines and Eastern Airlines for their commercial flights, however, it also used private air transportation services. The Paul Fournet Flying Service, located in Lafayette, was approximately ten miles from Sonnier's Duson home, the headquarters for the network.⁴⁹ Sonnier used the service often, until the owner realized that the women he flew to out of state destinations were part of a sex trafficking ring. The proprietor was aware of the Mann Act and declined to participate in the transportation of women in his planes after July 1953.⁵⁰

Women involved in the ring based in Duson were primarily single, although a few were married and had children. Many of the women had hysterectomies – although the records are not

⁴⁵ Louis Armstrong International Airport, <http://www.flymsy.com/>, Accessed 3 October 2012.

⁴⁶ Solberg, *Conquest of the Skies*, 345

⁴⁷ “Glorious Quickie Vacation in the Southwest Sun Country” 1954 advertisement, Duke University Libraries, Digital Collections on-line, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_T2086/, Accessed 10 October 2012.

⁴⁸ The calculation is based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as established by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The CPI for 1950 is 24.1, the CPI for 2012 is 232.4 and the flight cost in 1950 was \$18. The formula to compute the calculation is:
1950 Price (2012 CPI/ 1950 CPI) or 18 (232.4/24.1) = \$173.58.

⁴⁹ Report, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

clear on which women underwent the procedures or why. Those who did however, recuperated at Sonnier's Duson home.⁵¹ Most of the women were from rural communities in southern or southwestern states such as Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi. Two were from outside the region: one from New Mexico and the other from Michigan. How the women made their way South was unknown. Whether embarrassed or fearful, most women initially denied engaging in prostitution or being transported. Eventually, as the case proceeded, many admitted their prostitution and almost all indicated that they experienced violence, at times severe, while working in the ring. Several of the women had arrest records for prostitution, but many of the arrests occurred while forced to work the circuit indicating that most of the women may not have engaged in commercial sex activity before hand.

In their FBI interviews, prostitutes revealed the systematic approach the ring used to recruit women. The men targeted young women, whom they believed were easier to control.⁵² Approximately thirty-five women who worked in the network were under the age of twenty-five; several were under the age of eighteen. One of those girls was fifteen-year old Ruby L. According to Ruby L.'s statement she sought work as a prostitute in Opelousas in April 1953. An informant countered this claim and stated that Arphy Sonnier had initiated contact with her. Ruby L's older sister, however, worked for Arphy, and she may have followed her sister from their hometown of Jeanerette, Louisiana to engage in commercial sex work. Ruby L. worked in Opelousas at Kilroy's tavern, whose proprietor was part of the ring and later would serve six months in jail for his role. When he learned that Ruby L. was only fifteen-years-old, he told her

⁵¹ Prosecutive Summary Report, 2 August 1954, section 5, 31-80768.

⁵² Ibid.

she could no longer work at his establishment.⁵³ After the owner barred her from working, a prostitute at Kilroy's suggested that Ruby L. ask Louis Emery Roger to help find her work.

After Ruby L. contacted Roger, he took her to work in cities such as New Orleans and Mobile. Once she started to work under Roger's direction, she no longer controlled her earnings or her movement. Ruby L. did manage to keep some of her earnings hidden from Roger, the only female in the network who admitted doing so. After a falling out between the pair in which Ruby L. threatened to leave, Roger gave Ruby L. to Arphy Sonnier to work under his direction until "she was no longer mad."⁵⁴ Despite the apparent disagreement between Ruby and Roger, and her seeming transfer to Arphy to cool off, she did not indicate that she experienced violence at their hands or that she the traffickers forced her to work in the ring. She did, however, witness syndicate members beat other women, which may have influenced her own compliance. Ruby L.'s participation in the ring ended around June 1953, when she and several members of the ring were arrested in New Orleans. She does not appear in the case records again until February 1954, when she was arrested in Missouri for stealing a coat at a movie theater. After she paid her fine and was released, her father placed her in the House of the Good Shepherd in New Orleans, a Catholic operated correctional facility for delinquent girls.⁵⁵

⁵³ Report, 26 June 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

⁵⁴ Report dated 5 November 1953, section 2 and Report 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

⁵⁵ The facility had locations in many U.S. cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and Hartford. The mission of the homes underwent changes from its origins in the 1840s in France, but essentially the homes took in troubled girls, some remanded by the courts, some placed in these institutions by parents, and on occasion homes admitted girls who asked for assistance. The ages of the girls residing in these homes were typically between fourteen and eighteen. The institution sought to rehabilitate girls through industrial school training in conventional gender appropriate skills such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for children. Ruby L. was sixteen years old when her father placed her in the home. For more information see Jennifer Cote, "Habits of

Seeking out young women and girls to work in the network involved duplicitous methods of recruitment. One tactic involved preying on the young women's vulnerability by promising marriage or financial rewards. The victims of this ploy were often told that their prostitution activities would only be temporary. Three women told investigators that they were promised marriage, but the unions never materialized. One of the women, Rosemary met Arphy Sonnier in 1951 when she was eighteen years old. He promised to marry her, but never did. She worked in Opelousas, Dothan, and Panama City and Arphy kept all of her earnings. She later told investigators that when Arphy enlisted in the military in 1952, she was "taken over" by Joseph Sonnier. She worked under his direction, and he collected all of her earnings and sent the money to Arphy.⁵⁶

Ruby W. recounted a similar experience in her recruitment into the ring. She met Joseph Blanchard in 1946 when she was only sixteen-years old. She began to cohabit with Blanchard about six months after the two met. Ruby W. started to work as a bartender at Club 90 in Lafayette shortly thereafter. Within a week of her taking the bartending job, Blanchard persuaded her to work as a prostitute with promises to marry her and build her a "nice home."⁵⁷ Blanchard never married Ruby W., but she worked for him for several years. She recalled that

Vice' The House of the Good Shepherd and Competing Narratives of Female Delinquency in Early Twentieth Century Hartford," *American Catholic Studies* 122, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 23-45 and Nancy Marie "Phillips Education for girls in the House of the Good Shepherd in the United States, 1940 to 1980" (Ph.D. diss., Cleveland State University, 2008).

⁵⁶ Report, 5 November 1953, section 2 and Report, 2 August 1954, section 5, 31-80768.

⁵⁷ Report, 28 May 1954, section 5, 31-80768.

he beat her often and sent her to Port Arthur, Biloxi, and Galveston to work. She told investigators that the men transported her by bus, automobile, and private planes.⁵⁸

Other members initially expected marriage also. Flora met Wilfred Elias in May 1953. The couple dated for a few weeks after which Elias proposed the two marry. However, Elias told the eighteen-year old Flora that she would need to prostitute in order to earn money to buy an engagement ring. She agreed but insisted that it would only be until the couple married. Flora moved into Joseph Sonnier's residence in Duson, which was a common practice in the network as it was part of the syndicate's method to isolate the women from family and friends. After a few weeks, Elias and Joseph Sonnier drove Flora to LaPlace to work as a prostitute at the Four Leaf Clover Club. She turned all of her earnings over to Elias. A plan to take Flora to Aiken in June 1953 was thwarted by unforeseen circumstances. Elias and Roger planned to take Flora, as well as Ruby L., to work in Aiken, South Carolina, but first drove the women in Roger's car to New Orleans to look for a woman that had escaped the syndicate. Shortly after arriving in the city, the police pulled over the vehicle occupied by Elias, Roger, Flora, and Ruby L. During the encounter, the police found narcotics in the vehicle and arrested everyone. Flora and Ruby L. were released a few days later, but Elias and Roger remained in jail on charges related to possession of narcotics. Flora took a bus to Baton Rouge, presumably at the syndicate's behest, where Arphy Sonnier was there to meet her. He informed her that she was no longer working for Elias, but was now working for him. She was taken back to the Four Leaf Clover to work and forced to turn over her earnings to Arphy.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Report, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

⁵⁹ Report dated 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

Women's descriptions of their experiences and how they came to work for the ring, particularly those promised marriage, infer that they consented to work as prostitutes in exchange for the possibility of love and marriage. However, the circumstances under which these arrangements occurred are far more complicated than the records indicate. Flora and Ruby W. were teenagers who did not seek out sex work but rather companionship and love, and instead found themselves in relationships that failed to mirror the era's ideals about marriage and gender. Their naïveté and their youth made them vulnerable to the syndicate's coercion. Yet, even when marriage did occur, the interests of the syndicate overshadowed any possibility to attain marital bliss.

Twenty-two year old Edith worked under the direction of Joseph Sonnier. It is unknown how Edith met Sonnier but she told investigators that she began working for Sonnier in 1950 when she was twenty. Edith registered to work in New Iberia's red-light district in January 1951 and Sonnier placed her in houses of prostitution in Galveston and Port Arthur over the next few years, Sonnier beat Edith regularly and she stated that she had tried to leave him on at least ten occasions. In almost each incident, she returned to her mother's home in Houston, Texas, where Sonnier would then travel and convince her to return. One such incident occurred in March 1952. Sonnier followed Edith to Houston and stayed several days at Edith's mother's home after a severe freeze prevented him from returning to Louisiana. During his stay he convinced Edith to return to Louisiana. When she returned, Sonnier beat her for leaving him. Although he sometimes verbally coerced her, on several occasions he used physical force to make Edith return to the circuit. In August 1952, Edith again left the syndicate and again, Sonnier followed her. Edith's mother told investigators that she witnessed Sonnier slap her daughter several times during an argument in which Sonnier insisted Edith return to Louisiana. It seems Edith's mother

was unaware of her daughter's prostitution activities, and her statement does not indicate how she responded to Sonnier's physical assault. While the couple argued, Edith's mother overheard her daughter tell Sonnier that she did not have to return with him since they were not married. The mother told investigators she was "indignant" upon hearing the news and demanded the couple marry. That evening all three drove to Louisiana where they went to the home of a Baptist minister in Port Allen. The couple married on August 12, 1952.⁶⁰ The following day, Sonnier took Edith to Baton Rouge and put her to work as a prostitute in one of the city's bars.⁶¹

After procuring women to work in the ring, the men engaged in a systematic process to indoctrinate the women and girls commonly referred to as being "turned out." The turning out process was designed to exact complete control over the women. The methods they used to initiate the women involved restricting their freedom, isolating women from friends and family, and confiscating the women's earnings. New recruits were held at Sonnier's home in Duson and forced to work at bars or brothels relatively close to home base – typically in New Iberia, Lafayette, Rayne, or Opelousas – where the ring could keep a watchful eye on the women and their earnings. One such place was Club 90 in Lafayette, a "notorious house of prostitution" that Sonnier once owned.⁶² Another location was the TT & T Club formerly owned by Roger.⁶³ Turning out the women at young ages served to strengthen the ring's members' control over the prostitutes, as did the deceptive promises of marriage and money, but the ring also threatened to tell the women's families about their prostitution activities if they did not continue to work for

⁶⁰ Report, 28 May 1954, section 5, 31-80768.

⁶¹ Edith G. statement, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

⁶² Report, 26 June 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

⁶³ Report, 18 August 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

them. After ringleaders felt they had sufficient control, they took the women out of state to work as prostitutes.⁶⁴

The Louisiana ring was mobile and relied on movement to thrive. The syndicate established relationships with brothel and bar proprietors in the twenty-three cities that were part of the network. Although the records offered no information on the clientele, their demographics, or their role in the network, it is likely that sex worker diversity appealed to the male customers. The male syndicate members oversaw and directed the mobility of the women in this network to achieve the desired variety.⁶⁵ Every city had particular establishments where women worked in the commercial sex trade, but three places in particular involved establishment proprietors who would eventually face charges of their role. In Aiken, South Carolina, the men sent women to work at Club 39 and Club 781, operated by Ray Edge, who later would face charges of perjury and harboring Louis Emery Roger while Roger was a fugitive in another case. On the outskirts of Opelousas, women worked at Kilroy's tavern. Proprietor Frank Oliver, received a sentence of six months in jail for his refusal to testify under a material witness warrant in connection with the case.⁶⁶ In Panama City, John Prescott operated the Magnolia Beach Manor. Like the others, Prescott also faced charges in connection with the case. He was convicted for perjury.⁶⁷

The constant movement and the vast network of brothels also provided a means to compensate for poor earnings in one city by sending the women to another location in the

⁶⁴ Report, 2 August 1954, section 5, 31-80768.

⁶⁵ Report, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

⁶⁶ Report, 1 April, 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

network where demand was greater.⁶⁸ More importantly though, movement also served to compensate for cities that experienced increased repression or underwent cleanup campaigns such as those in Galveston. Twenty-six-year-old Candy, for example had met Roger in November 1951 and began working as a prostitute for him, turning over her earnings as well. While working for the syndicate in Galveston in the summer of 1953, the city began to crack down on vice and closed down brothels in August. Tom Marceaux transported Candy from Galveston to LaPlace, Louisiana, where he put her to work at Four Leaf Clover Club.⁶⁹

Vice repression also occurred in New Iberia.⁷⁰ When police raided Bruce's Bar in the city in August 1952, Lagneaux arranged for twenty-two year old Thecle to work in Texarkana.⁷¹ Thecle drove to the city, per the instructions of Lagneaux, and met with a brothel owner, with whom the ring leaders had an arrangement.⁷² The proprietor of the establishment required that Thecle be tested for venereal disease and would not allow her to work until she could prove that she was not infected. Thecle complied.⁷³ She remained in Texarkana for only a few months when the local sheriff ordered all houses closed.⁷⁴ Lagneaux then directed her to work locally in Louisiana before eventually sending her to Dothan, Alabama, and Panama City, Florida. The couple married in July 1953, but the circumstances are unknown.

⁶⁸ Report, 26 June 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

⁶⁹ Candy A., statement, 26 February 1954, section 3, 31-80768.

⁷⁰ Report, 5 November 1953, section 2, 31-80768.

⁷¹ Report, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

⁷² Ibid., and Report, 10 February 1954, section 2, 31-80768.

⁷³ Report, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

⁷⁴ Ibid

Local authorities embarked on repression campaigns of brothels and other establishments where commercial sex took place in Lafayette and Crowley beginning in November 1952. In response to the raids, several of the members directed the transportation of women to Biloxi to work. Joseph Sonnier owned a plane, but did not know how to fly. He hired a pilot who flew two women, Ruby W. and Varna, from Lafayette to Gulfport, Mississippi. The women then rented a car and drove to the Earle hotel in Biloxi.⁷⁵ The repression campaigns occurring in Texas and Louisiana led to a shift in where the men transported the women. As local districts closed, the circuit expanded into the southeast. The ring had concentrated on the southwest, but as repression campaigns worsened, men began to transport women to Alabama, Georgia, and Florida.⁷⁶

Continual movement also served as a method of control, preventing women from creating strong ties with other women in the circuit, or with women unaffiliated with the syndicate. In many of the interviews, prostitutes unrelated to Sonnier's ring could not recall names of the women in his network, and often could only provide a physical description. Twenty-three year old Varna, told agents that the syndicate directed all the movements. Men typically flew or drove them to locations and the women stayed for a week or two at a time. However, records also indicate that the movement was more frequent when it involved locations near one another, such as those in Louisiana. Women who had been in the ring longer would sometimes travel alone, like Thecle did, or with other women to the cities in the network. When traveling on their

⁷⁵ Report, 2 August 1954, section 5, 31-80768.

⁷⁶ This shift is witnessed in the timeline of when and where men directed women's movement and the charges that each eventually faced.

own, Varna explained that the syndicate would call and check on them constantly and inquire about their prostitution activities and how much they earned.⁷⁷

Although the records did not indicate how much money the traffickers made, the men reaped the financial rewards from women's sexual labor. The prices for dates in the commercial sex market in the South varied from city to city, as did the price for particular sexual acts. In all likelihood, because the network of cities took place in relatively rural areas, the rates were five to ten dollars a date. In each case, all the earnings that the women made were sent back to the syndicate.⁷⁸ Twenty-five year old Pearl, the sister of Thecle, owned by Lagneaux, turned over four hundred dollars to him on one occasion, but she explained that the amount was higher than her typical earnings.⁷⁹ Edith told agents that she turned over between \$250 and \$350 dollars a week to Joseph Sonnier.⁸⁰ In her interview, Ruby W. told agents that she sent two hundred dollars to the syndicate on one occasion.⁸¹ The women faced pressure to earn as much as possible and encountered violent consequences if they did not. During her interview, Ruby W. stated that, "Blanchard beat me on many occasions for not making enough money."⁸²

Violence against women in the Louisiana case was pervasive and frequent. It served to intimidate, control, and punish women. Compared to the other instances of commercial vice in this research, the women in the Louisiana case experienced unparalleled violence usually in the

⁷⁷ Report, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Report, 2 August 1954, section 5, 31-80768.

⁸⁰ Edith G. statement, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

⁸¹ Report, 28 May 1954, section 5, 31-80768.

⁸² Ruby W. statement, 28 May 1954, section 5, 31-80768.

form of kicking, hitting, slapping, and punching. The ring members repeatedly beat women for refusing to prostitute, for lying about their earnings or whereabouts, for challenging male authority, and for minor infractions. On one such occasion Arphy Sonnier beat Rosemary for driving over the speed limit. He had instructed her not to accelerate over sixty-five miles an hour. When she did so, he ordered her to stop the car and into the back seat and “struck her several times.”⁸³

Edith continued to experience violence after her marriage to Joseph Sonnier. She told investigators that he beat her between fifteen and twenty times while she worked for the syndicate. She showed investigators scars that resulted from Sonnier’s brutality and noted that he had threatened her with a gun on several occasions. Edith explained that if she did not do his “bidding concerning her prostitution activities” that Sonnier beat her until she did.⁸⁴

The syndicate’s existence and financial success was, of course, predicated on women’s sexual labor. If the women refused to work, the men’s profits suffered, and the women endured severe consequences. The FBI documented abuse against almost every woman they interviewed in the ring. Twenty-three year old Sylvia told investigators that Lagneaux beat her on several occasions when she refused to work.⁸⁵ One woman, whose name was redacted, revealed that she was beat by Arphy Sonnier when she refused to work as well.⁸⁶ The members relied on violence to force the women to comply and they engaged in acts of brutality and humiliation to insure their dominance.

⁸³ Report, 1 August 18 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

⁸⁴ Edith G. statement, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

⁸⁵ Report, 1 April 1954, section 4 and Report, 2 August 1954, 31-80768.

⁸⁶ Report, 5 November 1953, section 2, 31-80768.

Dalta's experience illustrated the extreme measure the syndicate took to control the women in the ring. She had married Richard Lagneaux in 1947 when she was seventeen, the couple had two children and then divorced in 1952 over Lagneaux's adultery. After their divorce, Lagneaux refused to pay Dalta child support. He pressured Dalta to work as a prostitute for him to earn her alimony and child support money. Dalta refused and continued to press Lagneaux for money to care for their children. He grew increasingly angry at her demand telling an informant that if she did not quit bothering him he was "going to kick hell out of her."⁸⁷ She told agents that Lagneaux did indeed harm her several times.

Dalta's predicament worsened in November 1952, while working as a waitress in Crowley. Lagneaux went to the apartment where Dalta resided and forced her to pack her clothes and accompany him to Duson. When they arrived, he held her at Sonnier's home against her will and took all of her clothing. He eventually gave her three pairs of pants and the following day, informed her that she was going to Port Arthur with two other women in the ring "to learn how to work as a prostitute."⁸⁸ Dalta told authorities that she did not prostitute while in Port Arthur and after three days syndicate members moved her to Rayne. She escaped and fled to her father's home. She explained to agents that she stayed in Port Arthur those three days because she feared for the safety of her children. It is unclear where the couple's children were, but they may have been in Duson. According to Tom Marceaux, Arphy's mother, Joseph Sonnier's sister, watched the women's children in Duson when they were out of town working.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Report, 26 June 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

⁸⁸ Report, 2 August 1954, section 5 and Report, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

⁸⁹ Report, 2 August 1954, section 5, 31-80768.

Any act of resistance to the syndicate's authority invariably resulted in violence, but leaving or trying to escape, a practice called "cutting out" elicited the most severe punishments. The syndicate tracked down women who tried to leave, as witnessed in the case of Edith and Joseph Sonnier. When the men found the women, they showed their anger in the form of physical punishment. Joseph Sonnier beat Pat when she left Arphy Sonnier while he was in the military. Twenty-four year old Pat, unwilling to admit what happened, told investigators that her injuries, which the records neglected to specify, resulted from a car accident.⁹⁰ When Edith and twenty-two-year-old Jean cut out on Sonnier while working in a brothel in New Iberia he followed them to Texas, likely on their way to Edith's mother's home in Houston. Sonnier followed the pair to Texas locating the women somewhere between Galveston and Port Arthur. He demanded they return to the brothel in New Iberia. They complied, and after their return Sonnier beat both women.⁹¹

Although the men tracked down women when they left and forced them back into the syndicate, other women who had opportunities to escape the ring did not. Twenty-five-year-old Pearl and twenty-year-old Sylvia worked for the syndicate in Dothan in June 1953. The two women were arrested for vagrancy. Louis Emery Roger instructed another member of the ring to bond the women out of jail. He told the women to walk out of town and down a highway where he would meet them and take them to Panama City to work at the Magnolia Manner, a commercial vice establishment that was part of the network. Authorities learned of the plan and made efforts to "cover" Roger's movement in hopes of documenting the women's interstate transportation from Alabama to Florida. The agents lost track of Roger in the process, but

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

learned from an attendant at a gas station located in a rural area outside of Panama City that Roger's Cadillac had stopped abruptly near the station and two women jumped out and ran screaming to a house nearby. They knocked on the door of the house and spoke to someone inside. Shortly thereafter, the women returned to the car, calmly, and the group continued on the route to Panama City. Later, agents learned that the women had told the owner of the home that they feared their "boyfriend" was planning to beat them and begged the homeowner for a ride to town. The man informed the women that he was a sheriff's deputy and would protect them. The women quickly changed their story and walked to the gas station, where Roger was waiting. The deputy, only six weeks on the job, said the women were "low class" but could offer no other description.⁹² Eventually agents showed the deputy pictures of Sylvia and Pearl and he identified them as the women that came to his home. Although the women had serendipitously stumbled upon a sheriff's home, they chose not to leave Roger. The three continued on to Panama City where Sylvia's attempts to resist the syndicate's authority resulted in multiple beatings, by two different members.

When Sylvia, Pearl, and Roger arrived in Panama City, Sylvia refused to work. Roger beat her and forced her to fill several dates. After several days, he took the women to Club 781 in Aiken and left them there to work.⁹³ Sylvia worked there briefly, but when she tried to leave the establishment, the proprietor, who was part of the ring's network of brothel and bar owners, took Sylvia's clothes and refused to give her the money she had earned.⁹⁴ Lagneaux drove to Aiken, picked up Sylvia, and traveled to the Four Leaf Clover club in LaPlace, where he then

⁹² Report, 18 August 1953, section 1, 31-80768

⁹³ Report, 2 August 1954, section 5, 31-80768

⁹⁴ Report on Sylvia L. interview, 23 July 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

beat her, breaking her ribs in the process. He told an informant that he had beaten Sylvia because she had “gotten out of line” and explained further that he had to “work her over” because she was “getting hard to handle.”⁹⁵ Sylvia again left the network, but this time she fled to New Orleans, where she sought out a pimp unaffiliated with the syndicate and resumed work as a prostitute. A month later, FBI agents questioned Sylvia with her attorney present about her experiences in the syndicate. She confirmed a report that agents compiled, documenting the recent violence against Sylvia and her work on the circuit, but she declined to provide any other further information stating that she would not perjure herself if called to testify, but would not be a “rat” either.⁹⁶

Although the records indicate that all the men committed acts of violence against the women, Lagneaux, perhaps, was the most aggressive. Thecle, started to “hustle” for him in November 195 and their relationship, like many of the others was marred by violence. In August 1952, Lagneaux directed Thecle to work in Texas. She refused and he beat her with a pistol. When she fell to the ground he repeatedly kicked her, breaking her ribs.⁹⁷ Lagneaux beat Thecle often, and although the couple married in July 1953, similar to the dynamics in Sonnier and Edith’s union, the violence continued.⁹⁸

Thecle had “cut out” on Lagneaux on several occasions, and he beat her and forced her to return to each time. In August 1953, witnesses observed Lagneaux beating Thecle and called the police. When the authorities arrived, they discovered that during the altercation, a matchbox

⁹⁵ Report, 26 June 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

⁹⁶ Report on Sylvia L. interview, 23 July 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

⁹⁷ Parole Report, 15 October 1954, section 6, 31-80768.

⁹⁸ Report, 5 November 1953, section 2, 31-80768.

containing marijuana and Benzedrine pills – stimulants – fell from Lagneaux’s shirt pocket. The police arrested him for possession and for his assault on Thecle, and they charged her for assault as well. Thecle received a ninety-day sentence at Parish prison in Crowley.⁹⁹ Lagneaux’s arrest and his impending narcotics conviction caused the two to separate. Afterward, Thecle wrote letters to Lagneaux’s mother begging for forgiveness and asking if she could return to him.¹⁰⁰

Although the FBI never asked the women who had a chance to escape the ring why they chose to return. One woman told investigators that in the cities of Lafayette, Duson, Rayne, and Opelousas, local authorities were well aware of prostitution activities, making the women vulnerable to arrest without the protection of the syndicate. In the cities of Fort Smith, Texarkana, and New Iberia, women had to register as prostitutes with the local authorities.¹⁰¹ In New Iberia, the Captain of police Albert Darby, took photographs, and some of the women had their images and fingerprints on file.¹⁰² Sylvia and Pearl may have felt that law enforcement was not the solution. In addition, many of the women had criminal records in other cities, mostly for vagrancy. Likely they feared that if they moved on their own to those cities they would be arrested and charged with a crime related to prostitution, since their identities were already known to authorities.

Another reason that some women stayed was related to the relationships that they developed with the traffickers. Some married their traffickers, like Thecle and Edith. Roger and

⁹⁹ Report, 2 August 1954, section 5, 31-80768. Thecle received a ninety-day sentence at Parish prison in Crowley for the assault charge.

¹⁰⁰ Report, 26 June 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

¹⁰¹ Report, 26 August, section 2, 31-80768.

¹⁰² Report 5 November 1953, section 2, 31-80768.

Boutin also were also married and their wives worked as prostitutes on the circuit. Some of the men, particularly, Arphy Sonnier were engaged in sexual relationships with several of the women.¹⁰³ Investigators uncovered letters written by one woman that indicated her affections toward syndicate members. A letter was addressed to the woman's friends in Miami and in it she discussed her feelings about Louis Emery Roger to them. She wrote:

“I have a new boyfriend and when I am at home I stay at his house.... I sure am crazy about him. More so than anyone I've gone with yet. And he sure doesn't pet me like the rest of them did. He is the boss and I guess that's what I needed for a long time. You know how I used to hate cigars! Well he smokes them all the time and I love it. So now you know I must be in love.”¹⁰⁴

The author, clearly smitten with Roger, made no mention of his violence or her involvement in sex work.

In another letter to Roger, the author, only identified by the initial “S” asked him to pack clothes that the writer needed. The letter's tone is light, and the author is concerned about getting the right clothes to impress her parents. The letter notes that business was slow and that a bellboy informed her that it would pick up later in the week. She signed the letter “See you Monday honey,” with the postscript “I'm still not happy about my black eye.”¹⁰⁵ Although intimate relationships developed between the men and the women, and the casual reference to violence above indicates the complex nature of the relations. The alternating violence and affection in these relationships were typical between pimps and prostitutes, and while couples' unions were unorthodox, not following a model of intimate relations traditionally associated with

¹⁰³ Report, 18 August 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

¹⁰⁴ Report, 26 June 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

the 1950s, they were for many of the young women, the only form of interpersonal heterosexual relationships they had experienced.

Ideas about marriage and gender in the 1950s, though, likely influenced how women understood their relationships with the men in the syndicate. Emphasis on traditional gender roles that called for women's submission and men's dominance, permeated the media and popular discourse. Gender ideology constructed masculinity as robust, domineering, and distinct from femininity, which was defined as nurturing, submissive, and sacrificial.¹⁰⁶

Overwhelmingly, media messages tasked women with the responsibility of making relationships work by insisting they make the union successful.¹⁰⁷ Women were expected to disavow their personal desires for independence and power to support their husband's ambitions and needs. The messages told women to avoid conflict and work to make the marriage peaceful and happy.¹⁰⁸

Dating advice to women took on the same tone, admonishing women who challenged male authority and instructing them to "cope with the moods" of their dating partners. The relationship was a training exercise on "how to become a good wife."¹⁰⁹ Particularly relevant to the relationships between the Louisiana pimps and prostitutes were ideas about aggression and

¹⁰⁶ For information on how the media, particularly, Hollywood, constructed masculinity in 1950s see Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁷ Francesca M. Cancian and Steven L. Gordon, "Changing Emotion Norms in Marriage: Love and Anger in U.S. Women's Magazines since 1900," *Gender and Society* 2, no. 3 (September 1988): 310.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 318.

¹⁰⁹ The Gesell Institute, "Dating's More Than a Game," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, 15 November 1959, F26. A 1958 book by Mary McGee Williams and Irene Kane entitled, *On Becoming a Woman* served as the basis for the article.

violence. While much of the literature from the era addresses male sexual aggression, coddling and normalizing it, the messages, like those about marriage, tasked women with the responsibility to stave off sexual advances, while simultaneously expecting women to uphold the boundaries of sexual containment. Negotiation over sex required women to resist, but also, to give in a little.¹¹⁰ While the focus was sexual relations, the message nonetheless normalized all male aggression and suggested women work to understand violent partners and acquiesce. Indeed, an article about the Marriage Council of Philadelphia in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1958 addressed the issue of domestic violence, and while it claimed to place no blame in the matter, it suggested that “even a wife beater may have his side of the story.”¹¹¹ In one case, a woman named Clara complained that her husband was a brute, while the husband, Tony, countered that his wife was demanding. The counselors concluded that the couple’s childhood rearing played a role in their interpersonal dynamics – Clara had a nagging mother and Tony an abusive father, which influenced how both approached marital problems. The problem was not “that Tony knocked Clara around, but that each was tearing the other down.”¹¹² In the final counseling session, Clara cried when Tony accused her of refusing to allow his friends to visit more often and Tony, rather than reacting violently, comforted his wife, leading Clara to agree that she needed to be more flexible in her demands. The counselors predicted it was a good sign that the two had found common ground.¹¹³ While the article likely did not address every aspect

¹¹⁰ See Lisa Lindquist Dorr, “The Perils of the Back Seat: Date Rape, Race, and Gender in 1950s America,” *Gender and History* 20, no. 1, (April 2008): 27-47.

¹¹¹ Emily Hartshorne Mudd, as told to Hannah Lees, “Marriage is Our Business: Husband Trouble,” *Saturday Evening Post* 230, 12 April 1958, 19.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

of the counseling sessions, the message that male violence stemmed from women's behavior – complaining and unreasonable demands – rang clear. If Clara would modify her behavior the couple would experience happiness. The therapists inferred that violence was a normal aspect of marital problems between middle-class couples, and in this case, resulted from Clara's demands.

Although the article was written several years after the Louisiana case, it illustrates the trends in marital advice in the 1950s that called on women to understand men's aggression and to recognize that resolving a violent dynamic in the relationship was their responsibility.

Understanding why the letter writer in the Louisiana case who complained about the black eye seemed to trivialize the injury likely resulted in her beliefs about relationships and gender roles. The violence that accompanied the relationships, then, may have been perceived as “normal” to women in the Louisiana case. ASHA members Charles Winick and Paul Kinsie argued that prostitutes stayed because the violence present in the relationships was the “symbolic equivalent of an argument between a middle-class husband and wife.”¹¹⁴ The relationship then between the pimp and the prostitute, particularly in this case, while not always ending in marriage mirrored the dynamics of a married couple and was subject to the era's construction of normal marital relations.

While the messages about gender roles likely played a role in how the women reacted to men's violence, it is important to understand acts domestic violence within the context of power relations between intimate couples. When violence is present it reflects a power struggle. Scholar Linda Gordon believes the struggle occurs over resources. Gordon writes, “Family violence usually arises out of power struggles in which individuals are contesting real resources

¹¹⁴ Winick, *The Lively Commerce*, 118.

and benefits.”¹¹⁵ The control over women's sexual labor and the financial reward that it produced was a contest. Whether the women were coerced into commercial sex, physically forced, or willing participants, the fruits of their labor were not their own. Nevertheless, they did attempt to control it whether by demonstrating their independence by “cutting out” or hiding some of their earnings. These challenges to the syndicate threatened male power. Violence was thus a means to reassert dominance and to insure receipt of monetary benefits of which they felt entitled. Although the women who attempted to leave met with violence, they may have presumed that violence was part of the normal conflict that existed between intimate partners. The men, however, recognized cutting out for what it was, an assertion of independence, and they methodically employed violence to quell the threat to their authority, their power, and their financial stability. When Lagneaux beat Sylvia because she tried to “cut out” on him in Aiken, he explained to a friend, he had to “belt her a few times.”¹¹⁶ Sylvia, like some of the others may have remained with Lagneaux partly out of fear, but partly out of a belief that it was a normal part of sexual relationships. However, it is important to not minimize the intention of the violence. It was not just a manifestation of an unhealthy union based on power and control, as it is often categorized in the sociological literature. It was reflective of tactics used by traffickers to control and exploit women’s sexual labor.

Several women who endured violence in the circuit successfully escaped. The women had either refused to work or cut out from the syndicate and when they returned, whether by force or consent, one or more of the men beat them. The act of resistance and survival is

¹¹⁵ Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston, 1880-1960* (New York: Viking, 1988), 3.

¹¹⁶ Report, 26 June 1953, section 1, 31-80768.

particularly telling in the story of Ruby L.'s older sister, whose name is redacted in the records.¹¹⁷ Ruby's sister met Arphy Sonnier when she was fifteen years old in February 1952. She told investigators, however, that she had been hustling since she was thirteen, while still "in school prior to the time I was expelled.... for such activity."¹¹⁸ Ruby L.'s sister worked as a prostitute for, but also engaged in an intimate relationship with, Sonnier. She, however, denied ever having given him the earnings from her prostitution activities. She explained to FBI agents in her interview that she refused "to hustle for him for the same reasons that she refused to hustle for anyone," which implied that she desired to control her movements, her labor, and her earnings.¹¹⁹ She remained with Arphy until he became violent. She recalled an evening in which she was working at a club in Duson called Leon's Lounge. Also present at the club that evening was Richard Lagneaux. The young woman and Lagneaux danced together, resulting in an angry response by Arphy. He kicked and punched her in the stomach at the club in front of patrons, prostitutes, and syndicate members. Based on his violent reaction she recalled "it appeared to me that he had assumed that I belonged to him."¹²⁰ She left Arphy after the brutal treatment and proceeded to enter into an intimate relationship with syndicate member Wilfred Elias. She continued to prostitute, but again, refused to share any of her earnings with him. She told investigators that Elias did try to direct where she engaged in commercial sex work, but she did not submit to his authority. While working in Opelousas, she wanted to travel to Lafayette, Elias refused to allow her to go, but she did so anyway. Elias followed her the city and when he

¹¹⁷ Ruby L.'s sister's name is redacted in the records.

¹¹⁸ Report, 26 March 1954, section 3, 31-80768.

¹¹⁹ Sister of Ruby L's statement, 19 February 1954, section 3, 31-80768.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

found her in the back of a cab, he pulled her out of the vehicle by her hair and kicked and punched her. She told investigators that at this point she ended her relationship with Elias. She continued to hustle, and remained steadfast in her decision not to submit to a pimp.¹²¹ Her principles, however, did not appease her father. In August 1953, her father complained that despite forcing her to quit hustling and return home, she had resumed working in the commercial sex trade in New Iberia, working at a place called the Sugar Bowl. He said that if his daughter continued to hustle he would have her committed to a home for delinquent girls as he had her younger sister Ruby.¹²²

The young woman's refusal to submit to the men's authority, and the violence perpetrated by the ring members was indicative of the dissolution of the finely-tuned network. Small cracks had formed in its foundation in the summer of 1953 with the series of arrests on narcotics charges starting in June with Elias and Roger's arrest in New Orleans and followed by Lagneaux's narcotics arrest in August.¹²³ A few days after Lagneaux's arrest, police charged Arphy Sonnier with pandering, typically defined as enticing or forcing a woman into prostitution, in Crowley where he had taken Flora and Ruby L. to work earlier that summer.¹²⁴

In early September, Joseph Sonnier learned that he and the other members of the ring were under investigation. Worried that the FBI would subpoena women in the to testify at the grand jury proceedings, the network leaders panicked and scrambled to avoid the inevitable. Sonnier took Varna and Pearl to the airport in Kenner to purchase tickets to Savannah hoping

¹²¹ Report, 26 March 1954, section 3, 31-80768.

¹²² Report 5 November 1953, section 2, 31-80768.

¹²³ Report, 2 August 1954, section 5, 31-80768.

¹²⁴ Report, 5 November 1953, section 2, 31-80768.

they would avoid being subpoenaed. They remained in Savannah until September 10 and then hitchhiked to Fort Smith, Arkansas. Sonnier had directed the women to stay out of Louisiana.¹²⁵ On September 17, Lagneaux learned that Thecle had been subpoenaed and he threatened to harm her if she testified. He warned her that if she told the truth he would kill her, and that if he could not, he would hire someone to do it.¹²⁶ Thecle perceived the threat as real, she lied to the grand jury about her involvement in the network and was indicted for perjury on September 25.¹²⁷ Lagneaux also pressured Ruby L. to lie to the authorities. He called Ruby's mother and suggested that she and her daughter concoct a story to keep Arphy Sonnier from being convicted on the pandering charge. Lagneaux told Ruby's mother that lying would prove advantageous; he offered to pay Ruby and her mother \$6000 and allow them the use of his 1953 Cadillac.¹²⁸

Meanwhile, the grand jury in New Orleans heard testimony between September 22, 1953 and February 2, 1954. Ultimately, they indicted nine individuals on twenty-four counts of Mann Act violations. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover expressed his wishes that no indictments be served prematurely for fear that syndicate members would warn each other and flee.¹²⁹ The FBI chose February 19, 1954 to serve arrest warrants to all the individuals at once to prevent any from fleeing prosecution. Joseph Blanchard, Burley Duhon, and Thomas Marceaux were each

¹²⁵ Report, 2 August 1954, section 5, 31-80768. 5.35 Sonnier only gave the women fifty-dollars, which proved insufficient for the plane fare. The women had to take a bus to Savannah.

¹²⁶ Thecle M. statement, 6 October 1953, section 2, 31-80768.

¹²⁷ Office Memorandum, 12 February 1954, section 2, 31-80768.

¹²⁸ Report, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

¹²⁹ Airtel, 12 February 1954, section 2, 31-80768.

arrested at their homes.¹³⁰ Agents arrested Joseph Sonnier and Whitney Boutin in New Iberia at a bar called the Sugar Bowl.¹³¹ The other four members were already in jail for various charges. Despite, the attempts to bribe Ruby L. and her mother, Arphy Sonnier was convicted for pandering in October 1953 and sentenced to five and half years. Wilfred Elias was convicted in November 1953 for armed robbery and was serving seven and a half years. A court convicted Richard Lagneaux in January 1954 for possession of narcotics and aggravated assault against Thecle. He received ten years for the narcotics charge and five and a half years for the assault. Lastly, Louis Emery Roger was in a federal prison in Tallahassee, Florida when the FBI made the mass arrest in February. He had been convicted for violating the Mann Act by transporting Pearl and Sylvia from Dothan to Panama City. The southeastern location of the network placed it in a different federal jurisdiction than the transportations originating in Louisiana. A federal court in Montgomery, Alabama adjudicated the case before the New Orleans grand jury had finished mulling over their evidence. The court sentenced Roger in December 1953 to two and a half years in prison.¹³²

In September 1954, all but one of the members received sentences after pleading guilty to violating the Mann Act. Thomas Marceaux received a three year suspended sentence on one count; Louis Emery Roger was sentenced to thirty months for three counts and another thirty months for a conspiracy charge to be served concurrently; Arphy Sonnier was sentenced to forty-two months on two counts; Richard Lagneaux faced three counts and Burley Duhon was

¹³⁰ Report, 1 April 1954, section 4, 31-80768.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Report, 5 November 1953, section 2 and Office Memorandum, 25 February 1954, section 3, 31-80768.

convicted on two counts, both men received forty-two months. Joseph Lovely Sonnier pleaded guilty to four counts and was sentenced to fifty-four months in jail and ordered to pay a three thousand dollar fine.¹³³ The final member of the network, Wilfred Elias, fought the charges and took his chances in a trial. A court convicted him on two counts and he was sentenced to three years.¹³⁴

In addition to the indictments for Mann Act violations that the grand jury handed down for the traffickers, the FBI sought material witness warrants for twelve women in the network. The FBI apprehended all twelve on February 19, the same evening it rounded up the syndicate members. Agents noted that the women in the case were unlikely to cooperate and had requested that material witness warrants be issued.¹³⁵ The FBI justified its approach in a memo to Director J. Edgar Hoover, claiming that “witnesses were being threatened and their potential value impaired.”¹³⁶ Indeed, the women, whether because they feared for their safety or were embarrassed by their circumstances, proved uncooperative. The FBI noted that all twenty-one victims, though only ten were listed specifically in the charges against the men, were uncooperative.¹³⁷ Initially, many of the women denied that they were prostitutes or that they had been trafficked and transported out of state and not all women complied with the warrants. However, ten women, some under mandate from the warrants, and others not, testified for the

¹³³ Teletype Message, 29 September 1954, section 6, 31-80768.

¹³⁴ Report, 10 April 1956, section 6, 31-80768.

¹³⁵ Office Memorandum, 19 February 1954, section 3 and Teletype Message, 18 February 1954, section 3 31-80768.

¹³⁶ Letter from Ray L. Faisst, Special Agent in Charge to J. Edgar Hoover, FBI Director, 23 February 1954, section 3, 31-80768.

¹³⁷ Office Memorandum, 1 October 1954, section 6, 31-80768.

grand jury. Dalta, Varna, Rosemary, Ruby L., Sylvia, Flora, Edith, Ruby W., Pearl and Thecla testified and each revealed the ring's operations, the network of cities, and the vicious treatment they received at the hands of syndicate members.

Despite the fact that the women and girls in this case suffered incredible brutality, FBI records indicated no concern for the women's well-being or efforts to assist their transition into a life removed from the violent commercial sex trade. Hoover believed that the Mann Act saved young women who had fallen victim to predatory traffickers, but he doubted that hardened prostitutes could be truly saved.¹³⁸ In some way though, these women had become hardened prostitutes. Forced to engage in commercial sexual relations with men and beaten when they refused, forced to have hysterectomies, and exposed to narcotics, these women underwent a brutal experience and lived a life far different than many of their peers. The women's desires to marry, to raise a family, and to live in a "nice home" – the very model of sexual containment in the 1950s – did not materialize while they were in this ring.

The Mann Act had no provisions to assist women who wanted to pursue a different path, nor did social service agencies. ASHA members Winick and Kinsie determined that social services only were available when women themselves were arrested, and those services were typically only found in large cities such as Washington, DC.¹³⁹ They argued that there was a reluctance to create services based on cultural notions that prostitutes were "bad" women, and therefore, treatment would be ineffective.¹⁴⁰ FBI Director Hoover confirmed the sentiment with his belief that prostitutes were beyond redemption. While the Social Protection Division of the

¹³⁸ Grittner, *White Slavery*, 147.

¹³⁹ Winick, *The Lively Commerce*, 78.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Office of Community War Services provided services such as vocational training to women arrested for prostitution related offenses during World War II, the agency disbanded shortly after the war. Rehabilitative services in the 1950s simply did not exist in any substantial way, and neither did services for victims of domestic violence. Those services would not develop until the 1970s, with the rise of the women's rights movement. The Mann Act had revealed that the government was concerned about women forced into prostitution and it sought to punish those responsible, but it provided no real solutions to the problems women faced in the aftermath of sex trafficking.

When concern about sex trafficking in the United States reemerged in the 1990s, national and international organizations aimed at assisting victims of trafficking began to develop. It was not until 2000, however, that Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which defined both human and sex trafficking as a crime, both international and domestic, implemented procedures for tracking the existence of trafficking, and addressed the specific needs of victims.¹⁴¹ Those services, of course, were not available to the women in the Louisiana case. However, the case demonstrates that the problem of trafficking existed long before national and international concern developed in the late twentieth century. Indeed, the case illustrates that the current problem has an earlier origin than what contemporaries in the field of study on trafficking believe and the operations of the Louisiana syndicate, eerily similar to the methods practiced by modern day sex traffickers, serves as a prototype for today's trafficking dynamics.

Modern domestic sex trafficking rings in the United States seek out young women to work in the networks and they utilize the same tactics to procure women as well as to force them to remain in the rings. In a 2001 report on sex trafficking in the United States, both domestic and

¹⁴¹ McCabe, *Sex Trafficking*, 53-54.

international in origin, the authors interviewed trafficking victims about how they were indoctrinated into the rings and the methods used to enslave them. The report finds:

“Many of the respondents in this study described processes of seduction and seasoning into the sex industry by pimps that begin in the recruitment and initiation stages, and continue as methods of controlling women and girls after entrance into the sex industry.... The seduction and seasoning can be quick or gradual, and is masked by a confusing mix of flattery, attention, ‘protection,’ and most often violence and exploitation. Young women and girls are particularly vulnerable to these tactics.”¹⁴²

The “wooing” process, a term used by social service providers, is designed to create an emotional and personal dependency on the traffickers, much like the men created in the Louisiana case.

The dynamics of the network – its size and operations – share similarities with modern domestic trafficking rings in the United States too. The constant movement and established series of bars and brothels that the Louisiana syndicate relied on allowed the men to move women to different locations where financial rewards were better or law enforcement was lax. Today’s traffickers move women through organized circuits which serves a threefold purpose: “to provide a change of women for the male buyers who constantly demand new women; to prevent women from establishing any contacts who could provide them with assistance, and to escape detection from law enforcement agents.”¹⁴³ Just as in the Louisiana case, when authorities engaged in active repression of commercial vice, traffickers selected new locations to move women at a moment’s notice to avoid arrests or legal entanglement. The constant and directed movement also denied women freedom to migrate as they pleased – a feature of sex

¹⁴² Janice G. Raymond, et al., “Sex Trafficking of Women in the United States: International and Domestic Trends” (Rockville, Maryland: National Institute of Justice/NCJRS, 2001), 55.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 52.

work migration enjoyed by the women in the Carolina case – and served to maintain the syndicate’s control.

The methods of keeping women in the Louisiana syndicate resemble contemporary trafficking as well. Withholding clothes or keeping women isolated and held against their will was a common practice among the ring members. The tactic was yet another way to maintain control over the women in an effort to force them to submit to the will of the syndicate. Social service providers that assist modern day sex trafficking victims report that women are also denied clothing in an effort to control the women, but also, simply, as a way to make escape more difficult.¹⁴⁴

Lastly, the use of violence as a tactic to keep women in line and to punish those that challenge authority, as witnessed in the Louisiana case, is prevalent in contemporary trafficking. The acts involved hitting, punching, and kicking, as well as sexual violence, which was not, however, indicated in Louisiana ring. Violence is used as a form of control and intimidation, and to demonstrate the authority of the trafficker. In the 2001 trafficking report, victims of sex trafficking admitted “submitting to their pimp’s wishes after being repeatedly physically and spiritually broken down.”¹⁴⁵ The FBI records do not indicate what happened to the women after dismantling the Louisiana ring and there is no way to know what emotional and spiritual effect these experiences had on the women. As often is the case, women marry and adopt their husband’s last name as their own, frustrating the efforts of scholarly researchers. The women's whereabouts and later life choices remain a mystery. For the FBI, the case ended when the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 62.

courts convicted the members or after their failed appeals, and the documentation about the individuals in case end there as well.

After they served their time, some of the members of the syndicate continued on their criminal paths. In 1959, Joseph and Arphy Sonnier, and Louis Emery Roger were arrested for peddling counterfeit treasury checks. Joseph Sonnier later faced questions for his involvement in another sex trafficking ring.¹⁴⁶ In 1976, Wilfred Elias was found guilty for contributing to the delinquency of a minor – he provided alcohol to a twelve-year-old girl.¹⁴⁷ In 1986, Louis Emery Roger, the Acadian King Pin, disappeared and police suspected foul play. Over twenty years later, in 2008, authorities found his body in a Cadillac submerged at the bottom of the Vermillion River in southern Louisiana. The police believed it was simply the result of an accident.¹⁴⁸

The Louisiana trafficking ring was an early example of the modern manifestation of domestic sex trafficking. It relied on brothels and bars in cities with lax police enforcement of vice codes and it engaged in business relationships with operators of commercial vice establishments in order to build a sophisticated, systematic, and lucrative commercial sex trade. The development of national highways and a national system of air passenger transportation afforded the traffickers a speedy and efficient means of travel and allowed them to capitalize on sexual markets that, without modern transportation, would have been beyond their reach. The ring recruited young, rural, and perhaps naïve women through duplicitous means including promises of love and marriage. Once ensnared in the ring, women faced cruelty and brutality

¹⁴⁶ “Bogus Check Ring Cracked by Two Agents,” *Victoria Advocate* (Victoria Texas) 10 July 1959, 1.

¹⁴⁷ *State v. Elias*, 357 So.2d 275 (1978) Supreme Court of Louisiana, 30 January 1978.

¹⁴⁸ Update: Louis Emery Roger” KLFY TV, Channel 10 in Lafayette, Louisiana, <http://www.klfy.com/Global/story.asp?S=9210439>, accessed 18 July 2012.

perpetrated by the ring's members who adopted an ethos of violence to force women to submit to their dominance. Although women resisted at times, they faced ruthless retaliation and not until the FBI asserted its authority as legislated by the Mann Act did the women find relief. The FBI, though, perhaps stymied by the scope of the law, or because of its lack of concern, concentrated solely on its mandate, which was to investigate and pursue criminal charges against the violators. Most of the women, while ultimately testifying truthfully, had been compelled by law to reveal their abuse. The case reveals problems with the Mann Act's supposed intention, to save women from sexual exploitation, and its tangible results. While the government indeed punished the men responsible for trafficking the young women, they never seemed to demonstrate a more profound concern for the women that they deemed "victims."

CONCLUSION

Sex workers endured national and local campaigns to evict them from cities across the South during World War II and the post-war era. Characterized as diseased and immoral, their experiences reflected the anxieties and moral mandates that competed with illicit desire surrounding sexuality in American culture. When faced with the demands that they cease their licentious activities and conform to the model of socially and sexually respectable women, sex workers chose to adapt their practices in the sex market rather than concede.

During World War II, debates about prostitution focused on its connection with venereal disease. The federal government established agencies and programs designed to counter rampant disease transmission rates and placed considerable blame on prostitutes and promiscuous women as the point of origin for infections. The American Social Hygiene Association coordinated with the federal government to educate the military and civilians about the dangers of illicit sex. Americans, particularly southerners, encountered high rates of venereal disease exposure in their communities, and taking their cue from national efforts, pursued a policy of repression of prostitution and the criminalization of those infected. By the end of the war, the mostly successful repression campaigns did make a dent in venereal infections rates, though it was the introduction of penicillin that proved more powerful than anti-vice efforts.

In their desire to create a healthy community, public health reformers and the government failed to understand the nature of the commercial sex market and its tenacity, and they were somewhat surprised, and disheartened, by the resurgence of commercial vice in the post-war era. They denounced its return, but somewhat naïvely, failed to recognize that prostitution had never

really ceased. The resiliency of prostitution was matched, however, by a resiliency on the part of local officials and residents who battled commercial vice in the post-war period. These efforts were characterized by a more profound concern about cultural morals, and mirrored national efforts to purge, or at least punish, sexual behavior that challenged the norms of the era. Heterosexual culture assigned high value to the traditional domestic role of women. The popularization of marriage and conventional gender roles through advertisements for consumer goods, magazines articles, advice books, and the adoption of the traditional domestic role by Hollywood stars established a new femininity in American culture.¹ Medical and psychological discourse emphasized the expression of sexuality only within marriage, and thus women were encouraged to express their sexual desire with their husband, thereby promoting women's sexuality as a way to fulfill men's sexual needs. Additionally, women's roles included the duty of motherhood and promoted active, but not overbearing, child caretaking and rearing. Sex workers, married or unmarried, failed to meet these standards and their rejection of the cultural mandates to conform met with repression.

Efforts to promote the 1950s family ideal failed to eliminate commercial sex. Instead, sex work surged in the communities of Galveston and Phenix City and took new forms in cities like Miami. The increased level of commercial vice, partly reflective of the repression efforts that forced sex work out of brothels and into bars, contributed to the rise of B-girls, a phenomenon with earlier roots, that reappeared in the South in large numbers during and after WWII. Repression also encouraged sex workers to change the dynamic and locations of the sexual market, in spite of efforts to eliminate it. Women sought new venues such as hotels,

¹ See May, *Homeward Bound* and Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994) for a larger discussion about the influence of popular culture in shaping gender roles.

where some began work as call girls catering to a wealthy, more selective clientele, and earning more money than streetwalkers and bar prostitutes. Other sex workers migrated to new cities, often rural locations where law enforcement regulated their trade less stringently, allowing it to operate somewhat invisibly to the larger forces desiring to eradicate it. In the Carolina case, mobility offered women the ability to work independent of pimps and procurers. Although they still relied on the overwhelmingly male operated establishments, women controlled their labor, their sexuality, and their earnings.

The shifts in the operations of sex work reflected larger cultural trends. The publication of *Playboy* in 1953, the growth of the exotic dance industry whose performers fully stripped themselves of clothing rather than the earlier practices of burlesque artists who teased the audience with brief revelations of nudity, and the development of topless go-go dancing in the 1960s pointed to an American culture that sexualized women for male pleasure. The burgeoning women's rights movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s decried the sexualized images as misogynistic. They saw prostitution as exploitative, and sex workers as victims of a commercial sex industry operated by men whose sexual desires dominated the construction of female sexuality. Feminist scholars and activists argued that women's sexuality was a commodity in a patriarchal society that only valued women as objects, offering them no real path to economic, political, or social success. The pornography industry, which some believed represented the worst manifestation of the commoditization of women's sexuality, drew condemnation for exploiting women, especially because of its graphic nature and the linking of violence with sexual desire. One feminist activist, Andrea Dworkin, criticized the industry because it contorted ideas about sexual intimacy. Dworkin suggested that violence and degradation in the films, all constructed for male satisfaction, began to influence popular notions of sexual pleasure. Also

critical of the industry was feminist and legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon who applied a Marxist critique to the sexual market, arguing that the commercial sex industry exploited women as laborers. She asserted that men dominated industry leadership and placed women in subservient working conditions, whose labor created a powerful, wealthy class.²

The condemnation of the commercial sex market, however, was not unanimous, and sparked the “sex wars” debate between feminists over the nature of women’s participation in the sex trade. Some feminists claimed sex work empowered women by offering the opportunity to control their sexuality. Sex work, they argued, was no different than other forms of labor in a capitalist economy, where all individuals toiled for a paycheck. Some of the most ardent proponents of the idea of sex work as empowering came from women themselves in the commercial sex industry. They sought to reconstruct the idea of prostitution as a legitimate occupational choice rather than a result of patriarchal dominance. They recast the image of the prostitute from that of a fallen woman to one that was sexually empowered.³ One of the loudest voices in the sex wars was a sex worker’s rights organization, Call Off Your Tired Old Ethics (COYOTE), founded in 1973. The organization was a loose coalition of women in the commercial sex industry who advocated for the repeal of prostitution laws, the recognition of prostitution as legitimate work, and the protection of the civil and legal rights of those in the sex trade.⁴ COYOTE advocated a belief that the problems associated with prostitution – drugs,

² Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 270-271.

³ For a larger examination of the feminist sex wars see Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁴ Valerie Jenness, “From Sex as Sin to Sex as Work: COYOTE and the Reorganization of Prostitution as a Social Problem,” *Social Problems* 37, no. 3 (August 1990): 403.

violence, and juvenile sex workers – were all a product of prohibition.⁵ COYOTE members argued that by making prostitution a legitimate profession, the abuses in the industry would cease to exist and the exploitation that opponents argued occurred would be remedied by offering workers in the industry the same social and cultural benefits of other forms of employment, like healthcare, a living wage, social security, and respectability.

While the sex wars between feminists in the 1970s took place, undisputable acts of sexual exploitation occurred. Sociologist Kathleen Barry's work in 1979 on sexual slavery highlighted the problem of international sex trafficking. Barry's investigation indicated that not all women in the commercial sex trade were willing participants.⁶ Her work led to the formation of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women in the late 1980s and spurred a renewed focus in the U.S. over sex trafficking. Activists and scholars recognized the contemporary problem of sex trafficking was global in scope. Post-war changes around the world had contributed to shifts in industry and production in first and third world countries. In industrialized nations, a growing sexual tourist culture had given rise to the importation of women and girls from third world countries seeking to escape the violence and poverty that accompanied global development. Many of these women, originating from Asia and Africa, fell prey to sexual exploiters who promised economic opportunity and adventure, but instead enslaved women in the sexual market. The same scenario played out in other nations, like those in the former Soviet bloc of Eastern Europe, where procurers preyed on young, naïve women forcing them to work in the sex

⁵ Ibid., 404.

⁶ See Kathleen Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979).

trade circuit throughout Europe and North America.⁷ In 2000, the United States congress passed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act to counter a steadily growing system of trafficking. The act provided funds to study the problem, laws to punish those who violated the act, and enumerated services for victims. While the U.S. did not issue legislation on trafficking between 1910 and 2000, other nations, as well as international organizations, such as the League of Nations and the United Nations, held conventions and issued resolutions throughout the twentieth century, seeking to understand and redress the issue.⁸

The alarm over sex trafficking was not a new development, but had its roots in the Progressive Era. The 1910 Mann Act grew out of a concern that young women in the United States fell prey to groups of immigrant traffickers seeking to profit from their sexual labor. The act also reflected worries about prostitutes immigrating into America, on their own or at the behest of criminal immigrant gangs, to engage in the morally corrupt sex trade system. Congressional investigations found both scenarios untrue, yet passed the Mann Act, which required a deeper examination of the motivations behind its creation. Reformers and legislators, as well as U.S. citizens, found women's growing sexual independence disturbing and threatening to the core social and sexual values of the nation. Empowering the FBI to crack down on white

⁷ See Kimberly A. McCabe and Sabita Manian. *Sex Trafficking: A Global Perspective* (Lanham, MD and Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010). There is a debate about the extent of human and sex trafficking. Some sex work activists and scholars posit that sex workers migrating across the globe independent of sexual exploitation are caught in the moral and ethical judgments of governments and anti-trafficking advocates. They believe that the women who migrate on their own are lumped into the same pool of statistics calculated to demonstrate the extent of the sex trafficking, thereby exaggerating its prevalence. See Laura María Agustin, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets, and the Rescue Industry* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2007).

⁸ An international convention addressed the issue in 1908, the League of Nations issued studies and protocols in 1921 and 1937, and the United Nations General Assembly amended and adopted the former protocols in 1948.

slavery interstate trafficking rings resulted, at least initially, in regulating and monitoring consenting non-commercial sexual relations that challenged cultural notions about women and race. While the transportation of women across state lines for commercial sexual purposes was always a component of the FBI's investigations, it refocused its efforts in the 1950s away from non-commercial incidents and exercised its authority to curtail interstate sex rings. The FBI concentrated on arresting violators and eradicating vice networks, but it failed to demonstrate any of the notions about protecting women that legislators and reformers purported as the act's intention.

The 1954 Louisiana Mann Act case reflected the limitations of the act. FBI records revealed that syndicate leaders in the case coerced, promised marriage, and often physically assaulted young women, forcing them into prostitution. The men in the case adopted tactics and methods to keep women in the network often seen in modern day trafficking networks. While not chained or locked in brothels, the women in the Louisiana case lacked power over their sexual activity and control over the monetary rewards that accompanied their sexual labor. The women complied with the men's demands, some because of fear and others because the dominant social and cultural messages in the era about gender roles and marriage normalized displays of violent masculinity and submissive femininity. While the FBI did shut down the syndicate, records indicted the agency provided women with no assistance or services to leave the sex trade and find legitimate employment. The Mann Act, while concerned with protecting women, targeted violators, and offered no tangible solutions for women in these cases.

Ideas about victimization and agency run through this dissertation. The women in the Louisiana case experienced violence and coercion, denying them a choice in whether to participate in sex work, while other women such as those in the Carolina case engaged in sex

work willingly. However, that the current debate about women's participation in the sex trade that characterize it as victimizing or empowering apply here. Women in the 1950s would not have cast their experiences in either terms. The era's construction of gender roles ignored the question of women's independence and choice in favor of submission to patriarchy. Women in the post-war era lived in a system that ingrained the idea of women as sexual suppliers, whether in marriage or in the commercial sex market. While some women objected to the system, the idea of an alternative cultural model had not yet developed in popular discourse, therefore most women who engaged in sex work, forced or otherwise, would not have used the term victim to denote the power of patriarchy over their sexual choices. Similarly, empowerment through the sex trade was likely not a common ideology adopted by women in the 1950s sexual market. The women in the southern cities that this dissertation examined often saw sex work as a form of labor, neither empowering nor victimizing, but simply as a means to earn a living in an era with limited economic choices.

In the South, urbanization and industrial manufacturing flourished during World War II. The landscape of the South changed as new business, interstates, and airports developed in the region. Yet, the physical changes that altered the southern landscape were not accompanied by parallel changes in southern culture that held deeply entrenched sexual, racial, and gender hierarchies. Women's economic and sexual independence depended on the legal codes passed by federal, state, and local governments and the popularly accepted cultural codes of behavior to which southerners were expected to adhere. The South criminalized and demonized women's sexual behavior when it challenged convention, while providing few alternative economic opportunities for women in the growing economy. Cities arrested prostitutes for venereal disease, but also for earning a living outside the norms of respectable female employment. Sex

workers in the 1950s, however, were not merely passive recipients of legal mandates and the FBI seeking to regulate them, pimps exploiting their sexual labor, or public health reformers crusading to erase them from the physical landscape of southern cities. Instead, women refused to accommodate the move to push them out of the sex trade. Southern sex workers in the 1950s modified their practices by finding new ways and new locations to ply their trade. While this could lead into systems of violence with some cases, in others, it enabled them to earn a living with some control over their lives. The inability of repression campaigns to eradicate prostitution in the post-war era reflects the failure to understand its dynamics, and the profession's longevity is testament to its ability to adapt.

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