

the myths of sex trafficking:  
a reader on law enforcement and carceral feminism

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“ [T]he correlation between global sporting events and sex trafficking is, at best, severely overblown and, at worst, a near total fabrication. It is the product of a discursive alliance between anti-prostitution feminist organizations and sympathetic celebrities like Ashton Kutcher and America Ferrera ... on the left, evangelical Christian donors and lobbyists ... on the right, and a bloated state security sector of police, international security specialists, and legislators scrambling to funnel resources to themselves during an era of austerity and neoliberal reform.

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This reader was put together in the shadow of the 2018 Minneapolis Superbowl. With a major sporting event like this there is—among other things—an intensified deployment of law enforcement, a rapid push to “clean up” neighborhoods, and a purported increase in sex trafficking, used in part to rationalize the increased policing.

For two centuries moral panic and reformist policies around sex trafficking have been used to abuse, imprison and control sex workers, women of color, immigrants and so-called deviant women. The term “traffic in women” emerged in the U.S. as a replacement for “white slavery,” a racist myth proliferated by white politicians who were panicking about the abolition of slavery and “racial impurity.”

In the 20th century, social-purity reformers (or moral hygienicists) used anti-trafficking campaigns for their eugenicist projects to “clean up” American cities of criminals and the unruly and to lock women into reformatories and prisons—of course categories like “criminal” have always been racialized and therefore have always most affected women of color.

Anti-trafficking campaigns have consistently conflated prostitution with trafficking, which has furthered the criminalization and stigmatization of sex work. Today, actual victims of trafficking are often most harmed by the work of anti-traffickers who rely on police and state intervention. Even when portrayed as a victim (such as Cyntoia Brown) those who are trafficked are treated as prisoners and their stories largely go untold. They are pushed through victimization to criminalization to institutionalization.

What if the humanitarian words we are so used to hearing don't mean what they claim? What if those being rescued don't need rescuing? What if the options of rescue are doing more harm than good? What does it mean to align oneself with the white supremacist legacy of anti-trafficking?

What follows are three articles tracing the history of anti-trafficking through social-purity reformers to the cooperation of evangelical Christians and liberal (white) feminists to moral panics around major sporting events. These texts are intended to demystify some of the misunderstandings and misconceptions that exist about sex trafficking. In an attempt to make the articles somewhat

more digestible, they have been abridged (indicated by [...] where content has been removed). The citations and footnotes have also been removed as these seem like academic conventions that most readers probably don't care about. It should also be noted that the term "women" is used throughout as the subject/object of inquiry, in which we would unquestionably include transwomen—with race further structuring levels of harm. Moreover, all sex workers, no matter their gender identity, are targeted in some regard by anti-trafficking campaigns.

"Surveillance and the Work of Antitrafficking" follows the early history of anti-trafficking, specifically in the context of colonialism and "social hygiene" movements. The article examines the shift away from the term "white slave traffic," replaced by the more "universal" and "neutral" term "traffic in women," and the explicit and implicit white supremacy of this mythology. The article looks at the international body the League of Nations and their various reports related to their efforts to surveil and control the bodies and movement of women.

"Militarized Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism" looks at anti-trafficking movements in a contemporary setting and ways in which evangelical Christian groups and liberal feminist organizations have merged since the 1990s. The author shows how evangelicals have swung to the left to take up the cause of anti-trafficking while liberal feminists have at the same time swung to the right and how both have committed to state and carceral solutions. The connections between anti-trafficking campaigns and criminalization are shown as well as the negative effects on sex workers and people of color.

"Evangelical Ecstasy Meets Feminist Fury" provides specific examples of anti-trafficking campaigns around large scale sporting events. The article shows how from World Cup to Superbowl to Olympics, sex trafficking is touted as a central problem but time after time the outcomes are the same: little to no evidence of trafficking, increased complaints of police brutality and arrest of sex workers, and moral panic based on a racist legacy of unsubstantiated claims. The article also emphasizes the important rhetorical move in anti-trafficking ideology conflating trafficking with prostitution.

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## Conclusion: Whore Assemblage

[...]

Any attempt to provide redress must problematize discourses of sex trafficking and the concomitant manufacture of a moral panic around it, as these also mask class-based and racial prejudices as well as anti-immigrant and xenophobic modes of governance. One ought to understand this situation as an example not only of the revalorization and rebalancing of an ethics of sexuality but of a new kind of governmentality that is creating and destroying particular sexual ontologies, reshaping what it means to be a whore—that is, always and already becoming a victim—while promoting and producing homonormativity as essential to the reinvention and rebranding of Brazil.

Global sporting events are especially important and fleeting moments to study because it is during such events that otherwise skeptical audiences delight in nationalist narratives and propagandizing performances. The World Cup and Olympic Games represent moments when nation-states are free to remake their citizen-subjects in relationship to the state. [...]

## Surveillance and the Work of Antitrafficking: From Compulsory Examination to International Coordination

Laura Hyun Yi Kang

By hailing different configurations of women as objects and subjects of surveillance, the long history of efforts to uncover and combat the “traffic in women” offers an instructive case for feminist surveillance studies at this important moment of field formation. If a feminist critique and modification of an already existing yet discernibly unfeminist surveillance studies through a focused attention on women under surveillance is the task at hand, we might attend to how public outcry against the traffic in women has activated and rationalized state scrutiny and control over female bodies when it comes to disease, sexuality, morality, and labor. The Contagious Disease Acts (1864, 1866, 1869) in England created a “morality police” and authorized officers to subject women suspected of prostitution to compulsory “surgical examination” for venereal disease and forced confinement in a “lock hospital” if they were infected. This example reminds us to bear in mind the historical layers of targeted material corporeal violence that conditions more contemporary technologically mediated and disembodied modes of surveillance.

The history of antitrafficking compels attention to the transnational and racist dimensions of the surveillance of women. The practices of compulsory examination, treatment, and detention of local women were a crucial component of British colonial administration throughout Asia in the early 1800s. With the spread of imperial settlements and the surge of international labor migrations in

## **[S]tate and civil surveillance of trafficking have always been differentially entrained on different female bodies as vulnerable or dangerous.**

the second half of the nineteenth century, borders and transit hubs such as ports and railway stations came to be seen as dangerous vectors in the transmission of disease, especially from the colonies to the metropolises. While the sensationalist discourse of “white slave traffic” engendered sympathetic figurations of female vulnerability, it also fueled and justified suspicious regard of traveling female bodies. Alarm about the high rates of venereal diseases among soldiers in the First World War (1914-1918) galvanized a new round of concerted state actions to monitor and regulate transnational female movement and sexual labor.

The early history of antitrafficking includes determined efforts by certain women to contest state tactics of state surveillance as discriminatory and dehumanizing in what we might identify as a determinedly anti-surveillance feminism. An oft-repeated account traces the origin of the international movement against the “trafficking in women” to the concerted opposition to the Contagious Disease Acts. On the other hand, if we follow the suggestion of Ummni Khan, where a distinctive form of “feminist surveillance” is the phenomenon under critical scrutiny, we should attend to how the antitrafficking work of women social reformers and feminist activists have aided and abetted state scrutiny and control over both female *and* male bodies. The feminist project of making women and gender visible within and across numerous disciplines and interdisciplinary studies is rendered especially contradictory when articulated in terms of a knowledge field that starts off from the problematization of visibility as a mode of subjection and regulation. Surveillance betrays and degrades the liberatory promise of visibility.

Then too, trafficking frustrates the sweeping reach of surveillance. As one of the most hyperbolized and enduring subjects of journalistic exposes, academic scholarship, government investigations, and international relations, the traffic in women bears an immense and prolific archive of documentation and analysis. How-

be a preposterously skewed ratio defying basic economics. Moreover, as the Global Alliance Against the Traffic in Women points out, short-term events simply are not profitable because of costs associated with smuggling, transportation, bribery, and document forgery, instead concluding that while trafficking in various forms is a real problem, the connection between global sporting events and sex trafficking is a fabrication.

[...]

Yet despite the evidence being painfully clear from South Africa in 2010, when London’s turn came in 2012, the Metropolitan Police moved in on five London Olympic boroughs. As Laura Agustín documented at length during the pre-Olympic raids, the moral panic was not actually rooted in social fact, but the areas targeted conveniently happened to be on the cusp of gentrification, with a campaign in the run-up to the Olympics reporting that the crackdown was necessary to prevent organized criminal elements and also, interestingly, the athletes themselves from sexually exploiting women. [...]

But the outcome was again the same. In the end, police had no tangible evidence of trafficking to show, but they did have a lot of arrests of sex workers and had made it much harder for education, outreach, and advocacy groups who do frontline work with sex workers to provide services. It also means that in a time of austerity and budget cuts to schools, hospitals, pension plans, health care, and policing, valuable resources are being needlessly squandered to appease a handful of evangelical Christian groups and misinformed leftist activists and celebrities. It also de-emphasizes other forms of trafficking and exploitation relevant to sporting events, including construction labor. And lastly, the panic turns consensual sex workers into victims of physical and sexual violence, both juridically and materially, thereby creating the necessary conditions for the exploitation that these groups ostensibly wish to prevent. Moreover, the pattern is a global one that pervades regardless of the form of government or cultural particulars of the host countries. The parastatal alliances are not adjuncts of neoliberalism, per se, and instead flourish precisely because of their adaptability.

[...]



clients went up slightly, for an overall *steady level of demand*. There was no substantial demographic shift, including age or nationality. However, reports of police brutality, harassment, and corruption increased.

[...]

In London, a post-Olympic research report from a city councilman, Andrew Boff, alleged that despite the city throwing 600,000 pounds at the antitrafficking initiative, “I found no strong evidence that trafficking for sexual exploitation does in fact increase during sporting events nor that such trafficking or prostitution had increased in London. In fact my research found a decrease.... The data I have however reveals that raids increased significantly in the Olympic host boroughs. This has not led to large numbers of sex traffickers being caught nor victims found.” In my interviews with National Health Service manager Georgina Perry, who runs services for 1,500 sex workers a year in three boroughs of London, she explained that the Lord Mayor’s Office maintains that all prostitution is exploitation and that all prostitution is therefore forced. “I’ve seen trafficking,” she told me in her East End office. “We’ve had sex trafficking here before with Thai trafficking victims in the early 2000s. I would tell you if it was happening during these events, but it’s not.... And most of the sex workers held in debt bondage tell me they don’t want rescue. They want to marry or they want to work for themselves. Many do want transition [out of the sex industry], but not rescue.” She had been part of the Mayor’s Office’s coalition on trafficking and the Olympics, but had frequently been a voice of opposition. “Everyone saw dollar signs ... people wanted to make their careers off of it. They were hiring PR companies, media people ... the police got 600,000 pounds extra.... I just kept releasing the data, keeping my head down.... I work based on evidence and I think in terms of vulnerabilities, not victims.”

[...]

Rather than accept claims that the reason there is no evidence of trafficking is because news of antitrafficking measures scared away the traffickers, the Wall Street Journal points out that the numbers used for the World Cup do not add up: forty thousand sex workers for a few hundred thousand soccer fans, not all of whom are men, and not all of whom would buy sex, would just

ever, as activists, policymakers, and academic experts have repeatedly pointed out, the clandestine, coercive, dispersed, and mobile aspects of trafficking resist unequivocal verification and clear representation. The archive of antitrafficking offers up a long, jagged history of both diverse surveillance rationales and tactics, as well as multiple surveillance failures and impossibilities. In this essay I argue that a persistent racist preoccupation with the fate of *white* women demarcates one such fault line. Even as the invocation of a generic “traffic in women and girls” in the early twentieth century expanded the reach of the problem and the corresponding modalities of vigilance, state and civil surveillance of trafficking have always been differentially entrained on different female bodies as vulnerable or dangerous.

The work of antitrafficking in the League of Nations during the interwar period is particularly instructive for examining the multiple contradictions outlined above. The League served as an important historical and institutional pivot between the imperial regimes carried over from the nineteenth century and the post-Second World War emergence of newly decolonized countries and the global governance regime associated with the United Nations. In the aftermath of the First World War, the traffic in women occasioned a compelling rationale and platform for the coming together of nations with divergent interests, shifting borders, and unequal resources. From its inception, the League of Nations was engaged with addressing the traffic as an urgent and indisputably international problem. Article 23c of its covenant thus “entrusted the League with the general supervision over the execution of agreements with regard to the traffic in women and children.” Calibrating the surveillance of women’s cross border movements among states and nongovernmental organizations was crucial to the incipient conceptualization and enactment of international cooperation. From 30 June to 1 July 1921, the League convened an International Conference on the Traffic in Women and Children in Geneva. In his opening speech, the Belgian foreign minister Paul Hymans heralded the occasion: “Hitherto treaties of peace have only dealt with questions of frontiers, indemnities and commercial and financial interests. For the first time in the history of humanity other interests are therein included and among them the dignity of human labor and the respect for women and children.”

In the spirit of this new internationalism, it was suggested that the phrase “traffic in women and children” replace “white slavery,” thereby “making it clear that measures adopted should be applied to all races alike.” Such universalizing platitudes obscured the imperial genealogy, with its persistent racial demarcations and national interests, of the discriminating and targeted surveillance of women’s bodies, sexuality, work, and migration. In principle, the framing of the traffic in women as a global human problem necessitating international cooperation and coordination rendered these member states and their varied laws and policies regarding sex work, labor, age of consent, emigration, and immigration the target of a new supranational regime of surveillance, judgment, and proper accreditation. This framing held out the potential of clarifying the uneven sexual economies and topographies, which had been carved out by racism, patriarchy, and competing empires. In practice, however, even after the move to replace “white slave traffic” with the more neutral and inclusive “traffic in women,” a distinction and separation continued between “white women” and their racialized others. Persistent racial obsessions and racist blind spots impeded and exposed the limits of the League’s attempts to coordinate international policy and action against the traffic in women by implementing what were deemed newly effective modes of undercover surveillance and expert data gathering.

On 15 December 1920, the Assembly of the League of Nations adopted several linked resolutions. In addition to urging those governments who had signed the 1904 agreement and the 1910 Convention for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic to put them into operation “immediately,” another resolution called on the League’s Council to convene an International Conference of Traffic in Women and Children, which would be charged with the “task of endeavouring to harmonise the opinions of the different Governments in order that common action may be taken.” Toward that end, the Assembly authorized the Secretariat to issue to all member states a questionnaire that inquired about domestic laws regarding trafficking, the penalties prescribed for specific cases, and statistics for prosecutions and convictions. The 1921 International Conference in Geneva concluded with the recommendation that each member nation submit annual reports on both the traffic in their territories and

tistic had not even been accurate the first time around, antiprostitution groups stuck with the forty-thousand figure. Calling it “the Cup crisis that never was,” the South African journalist Kashiefa Ajam reported: “40,000: That’s how many cases of human trafficking were predicted during the World Cup. Zero: that’s the actual number of reported cases.” The International Organization for Migration, which is responsible for running many antitrafficking programs, derided the whole thing as a “myth,” with director Mariam Khokhar calling it “hype.” South Africa, she said, “has had a problem with human trafficking for a long time now. Suddenly, before the World Cup started, it was highlighted as a big problem.... The initial figure was 40,000. Then it was 100,000. We don’t know where these figures came from. But the problem got attention, and people were made aware of something they may not necessarily have known about. So maybe the hype wasn’t such a bad thing.” Except, of course, that the policies one embraces to combat trafficking are vastly different depending on the size and scope, and hype has very real consequences for sex workers, stigma, public health, public perception. At a minimum, laws restricting women’s autonomy over their bodies ought to be based on evidence, not just rumors spawned by evangelical Christians and antiprostitution feminists getting caught up in the intoxicating haze of their own moral panic.

SWEAT, a sex worker advocacy group in Cape Town, teamed up with researchers at Wits University, the University of Ghent in Belgium, and public health officials at Stellenbosch University to conduct several studies for the United Nations Population Fund, most notably a large phone survey of sex workers before, during, and after the games, and another study that trained sex workers as fieldworkers to implement a survey of 2,200 sex workers working across the country’s major red-light districts, including repetitions for before, during, and after the Cup as well as additional methodological components including participants keeping field notes of their business interactions for the fieldworkers. Although their findings are painstakingly elaborated, the basic summary is as follows: there was a small increase of women advertising in the run-up to and during the Cup. Fewer non-South Africans advertised (or were advertised for) in newspapers and sex trader sites than expected. Domestic client rates went down slightly during the Cup, and foreign

## Busting Myths before Brothels

Despite much alarm, these expectations have consistently proved completely false and utterly sensationalistic. In the case of the Super Bowl, widespread panic about Mexican girls being trafficked caused an embarrassed FBI to publicly admit that there had been *no* trafficking as expected. However, the coverage after the fact of the “surprising” absence of sex trafficking at these sporting events was not given nearly the amount of attention as the stories leading up to the event, leaving readers under the impression that sex trafficking actually *had* coincided with the Super Bowl.

Well-funded evangelical groups such as the Salvation Army—which most people know only as charitable bell ringers but which also operates a powerful and well-funded evangelical antigay political lobby—took out numerous advertisements warning of the dangers of sex trafficking during global sporting events, including the South African World Cup. Likewise, the Protestant Church of Germany and the German Women’s Council had taken a similar approach when Germany hosted the World Cup. The South Africa Drug Authority warned that “a billion condoms may not be enough,” and Great Britain promptly sent 42 million condoms to its former colony for the Cup. Local celebrities took to cable to warn people not to “fall prey” to traffickers. The most common figure bandied about was that forty thousand people would be trafficked into South Africa for the World Cup, but this number actually came from a Swedish antiprostitution group and, after being cited in a UN meeting, quickly congealed into a “known fact” for CNN and various other news outlets even though numerous academics have noted that no one knows anything about the methodology whatsoever and we have no actual research study that ever produced that number. In truth, the figure was simply being recycled from the German World Cup in 2006, when, according to the South African social scientist Marlise Richter, “over-heated media reports suggested that 40,000 women and children would be trafficked into Germany to meet the demand for paid sex of three million soccer tourists. Only five people were subsequently found to have been trafficked during that time period.”

Despite South Africa being a completely different country with relatively little in common with Germany and the fact that the sta-

their domestic antitrafficking efforts. The League of Nations thus took on the role of an international clearinghouse. It also passed a new, more expansive International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children in September 1921, which increased the age of consent of women engaged in prostitution from twenty to twenty-one. The League also appointed a permanent Advisory Committee on the Traffic of Women and Children, comprising nine national “delegates” and five “assessors,” each representing an international voluntary organization. When the League sponsored its own official investigation of the traffic in the 1920s, it proceeded in two stages and resulted in two separate publications. The first, published in 1927 and titled *Report of the Special Body of Experts on Traffic in Women and Children* (hereafter, the 1927 Report), comprised 270 pages. The second report, published in 1932 and titled *Commission of Enquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the East* (hereafter, the 1932 Report), was much longer, at 556 pages. Paul Knepper has hailed the two inquiries together as not only “the first worldwide study of human trafficking” but also “the first ever social scientific study of a global social problem.”

[...]

Three specific aspects of these two reports compromise the claims to both their international expansiveness and their empirical innovations. First, both reports were blatantly concerned with the fate of *white* women. The 1932 Report is especially striking on this point in its clear demarcation between “Traffic in Occidental Women in Asia” and “Traffic in Asian Women” and in its unabashed concern about the sexual fate of Russian women refugees in China. This provides evidence that the imperialist, racist, and nationalist foundations of early British state regulation of and voluntary vigilance against prostitution from the nineteenth century preconditioned the later antitrafficking work of the League of Nations. Second, there was a specifically American genealogy for the 1927 Report’s use of “on the spot” and “undercover” investigations, which had been deployed earlier as part of the “social hygiene” movement in the United States. Third, there were substantive differences in methodology and composition between the two reports, which demonstrate the epistemological blind spots imposed by persistent racist and racist thinking.

## I.

The League's racially motivated and demarcated handling of the traffic in women must be framed in relation to a longer history of imperial expansion, labor exploitation, and gendered labor migration in the nineteenth century. Well before the domestic enactment of the Contagious Disease Acts in England in the 1860s, the practices of medical surveillance, forced treatment, and physical isolation of women were a crucial component of British colonial administration throughout Asia in the early 1800s. A lock hospital was established in the Madras presidency in 1805, and others could be found throughout the British Empire in Asia, including in Penang, in the Malay Peninsula. In her comprehensive study *Prostitution, Race, and Politics*, Philippa Levine writes, "It is in India, however, that we see the workings of the early system most vividly." Levine continues: "William Burke, inspector general of hospitals for the army in India, outlined his ideal plan in 1827: a register of prostitutes; their compulsory examination fortnightly, with certification for the healthy and hospitalization for the infected; and punitive measures for women failing to appear for examination. These principles would become the core of the empire wide regime enacted three decades later." Thereafter, Hong Kong's Ordinance No. 12 was passed, in 1857, which mandated brothel registration and regular medical examination. Since "the ultimate goal of regulated prostitution was to provide 'clean native women' for foreign military personnel," the ordinances in Hong Kong were "effectively limited to Asian women servicing foreigners." British-administered lock hospitals could also be found throughout Asia, including treaty ports in Japan.

In addition to the presence of British colonists and soldiers throughout Asia, several significant migrations in the nineteenth century shaped the peculiar contours of the 1932 Report. A migratory route of women who were "typically already professional sex workers" from Europe and the U.S. to China began with the Opium War (1841-1842) and accelerated after the introduction of steamship travel and the opening of the Suez Canal, in 1869. The rapid economic development of port cities like Hong Kong and Singapore was accompanied by the growth of large red-light districts employing mostly Chinese and Japanese women, which were tolerated by

tion Army and the International House of Prayer (IHOP) on the right, and a bloated state security sector of police, international security specialists, and legislators scrambling to funnel resources to themselves during an era of austerity and neoliberal reform.

[...]

Nor were we the first or only experts to note that the state uses its anti-trafficking laws to increase extralegal detention of sexually vulnerable populations, raise sentences for vice crimes, and harass single women and *travestis* traveling across borders—all without satisfactorily bringing traffickers or abusers to justice. The media ran similar stories about sex trafficking when Dallas hosted the 2011 Super Bowl, causing the Dallas police to go on TV and announce that one hundred and fifty thousand to two hundred thousand prostitutes, including trafficking victims, could show up for the big game (enough for every fan in the stadium to have her or his own prostitute).

Human rights and antiprostitution activists likewise sounded the alarms in 2010 that South Africa's five hundred thousand World Cup attendees would cause sex trafficking to skyrocket to forty thousand victims. Similar claims were made in Vancouver, Athens, Berlin, London, and other World Cup and Olympic host cities by GAATW. Now Brazil is following the same pattern. But what exactly is the correlation? After all, it makes intuitive sense that rowdy, drunken sports fans would be more likely to want to get laid while partying. Might they be predisposed to purchasing sex to accomplish this goal? And if there is a demand for sex, wouldn't traffickers move women to the area, and might migrant women be more likely to enter into commercial sex without knowing the risks and thereby be exposed to exploitative practices?

**[A]ntiprostitution feminist groups and evangelical rescue organizations persist in supporting blanket anti-prostitution policies, using global sporting events as a time to induce moral panics and push through harsh anti-sex worker measures...**



## A Global Pattern

This government sleight of hand in which prostitutes are merely grist for the mills of the Brazilian *patria* is largely predicated on the assumption that sex trafficking not only exists but is increasing and will continue to increase *because* of the World Cup and the Olympics. There is an oft-cited correlation between sex trafficking and global sporting events that one finds trumpeted on progressive blogs, leftist groups on social media sites like Facebook urging petition signatures, Change.org, and mainstream media outlets like CNN, which runs a permanent initiative, “The Freedom Project: Ending Modern Day Slavery,” on its home page.

[...]

Despite their disconnection from the lived experiences of sex workers themselves, antiprostitution neo-abolitionist organizations remain the only groups eligible for US funding. Thus the Obama administration disqualifies any program engaged in peer outreach such as sending sex workers to do HIV prevention and education or even to raise awareness about trafficking and debt bondage schemes if they also choose to defend their perfectly legal profession. It also disqualifies groups that attempt to include feedback from sex workers in public policy directed at sex workers themselves. Nonetheless, antiprostitution feminist groups and evangelical rescue organizations persist in supporting blanket antiprostitution policies, using global sporting events as a time to induce moral panics and push through harsh anti-sex worker measures, which pertains to my second claim. [...]

[...]

What I conclude, based on these interviews with stakeholders in London, Cape Town, and Rio, a closer look at the Observatório’s own data, the British and South African internal documents, and compiled research reports, is that the correlation between global sporting events and sex trafficking is, at best, severely overblown and, at worst, a near total fabrication. It is the product of a discursive alliance between antiprostitution feminist organizations and sympathetic celebrities like Ashton Kutcher and America Ferrera (as a proxy of New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof) on the left, evangelical Christian donors and lobbyists such as the Salva-

colonial authorities as a “necessary evil” to placate the large population of migrant male laborers. In her account of the “traffic in sexual labor,” Eileen Scully includes Chinese women’s immigration to the United States in the 1840s as an early example of the traffic, and she further points to the presence of Chinese and Japanese women in Latin America, Southeast Asia, Australia, and South Africa by the late 1800s. Borders, ports, and other transit zones came to be regarded as especially dangerous and were closely monitored to ward off diseases. The increasingly vociferous discourse of venereal disease as a “racial poison” and a “racial threat” in the 1860s coincided with an actual decline in infections. This setup expressed anxieties about racial purity in the face of both increased white female emigration and the immigration of nonwhite others.

The authors of the 1927 Report acknowledge its link to earlier strands of antitrafficking work and its internationalization, which began in England and Western Europe in the nineteenth century. In 1869 Josephine Butler and other reformers founded the Ladies National Association (LNA) for the Repeal of the Contagious Disease Acts. Regarding the compulsory physical examinations as “symbolic rape,” the LNA “meticulously kept track of the number of examinations in which no venereal disease was discovered” and considered them to be “the central inequity of the Acts.” Butler later established the British, Continental, and General Abolitionist Federation, in 1875, which extended the movement to abolish licensed brothels to the continent, since it was believed that the system of state-regulated prostitution in certain continental countries like France encouraged and facilitated the cross-national trafficking of women and girls. The federation convened an International Congress in 1877 and played a crucial role in sponsoring and financially underwriting targeted and on-the-ground investigations of the traffic. The 1927 Report mentions how their efforts led to an official British inquiry into the traffic of women and girls to the continent, which in turn resulted in the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment, as a model precedent for how concerted investigations could lead to effective regulation.

After the repeal of domestic laws in 1889, the continued use of contagious-diseases ordinances in the British colonies and protectorates shifted the focus of antitrafficking measures to these overseas territories. The British, Continental, and General Abolition-

ist Federation was renamed the British Committee for the Abolition of the State Regulated Vice in India and throughout the British Dominions. In addition to interviewing soldiers returning from abroad, the organization employed both paid agents and voluntary supporters, who conducted investigations in India in 1891 and 1892, and also in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and the Straits Settlements (Levine 2003, 104). The work of antitrafficking enjoined and enabled certain Anglo American women to participate actively in an early form of transnational knowledge production that predated and presaged the League of Nations inquiries. In 1882 Butler personally encouraged the American missionaries Elizabeth Wheeler Andrew and Katharine Bushnell, of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, to undertake an onsite investigation of trafficking and regulated brothels in India, which was later published as *The Queen's Daughters in India* (1899). Andrew and Bushnell reported that "regulation was rampant and that Indian women submitted rather than face expulsion from the cantonments." It is significant to note that their vigilant gaze was also trained on the imperial state and its "sanctioning of incorrigible soldierly behavior."

In the 1890s there emerged another strand of antitrafficking work in Britain that was affiliated with social-purity reformers, who advocated for the state oversight and regulation of prostitution. The National Vigilance Association (NVA) began to organize an international campaign against "white slave traffic" and garnered the support and endorsement of state officials. It also convened an International Congress on White Slave Traffic in London, in June 1899, which the 1927 Report hailed as "the starting point of a complete organization for defensive and active measures against the traffic." The NVA spearheaded a new organization, named the International Bureau (IB) for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women, which fostered "a close and permanent agreement ... among the philanthropic and charitable societies of different countries to communicate to each other information as to the emigration of women under suspicious circumstances, and to undertake to protect the emigrants on their arrival." The various national committees of the IB became actively engaged in the work of monitoring and managing the transnational movements of European women. In addition to being prominently led by men, the NVA and the IB cultivated and enjoyed a

force against small infractions like vagrancy and public lewdness (to target prostitutes), which eventually escalated into numerous military incursions into the favelas with armored tanks in a process it calls *pacificação* (pacification).

This intensification is reminiscent of brutal crackdowns during Brazil's military dictatorship (1964–85), as well as a series of "quality of life" sweeps in the run-up to the UN Earth Summit in 1992 documented by Amar, in which police rounded up prostitutes (especially *travestis*) in operations with moralizing names like Operation Shame, Operation Sodom, and Operation Come Here Dollbaby. However, the size, scale, and imbrication of the intrastatal alliance of feminist, human rights, and evangelical Christian organizations lend tacit moral credence to the government's assault. Company is coming, and Brazil's poor had better be on their best behavior.

The parastatal alliances identified by Amar represent a broader depiction of what Elizabeth Bernstein calls "militarized humanitarianism" meeting "carceral feminism." Bernstein explains that what unites neo-abolitionist feminists like the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women and Equality Now with evangelical Christians like Focus on the Family is not an apolitical common interest in human rights but a shared commitment to a carceral ideology that advocates state punishment, criminalization, jail, and imprisonment. Also, a new wave of young evangelicals is willing to set aside hot-button issues such as gay marriage and abortion, and embrace the language of women's rights and social justice to garner support for antitrafficking. Evangelicals and antitraffickers got perhaps their biggest boost from George W. Bush, who expanded Bill Clinton's "charitable choice initiative" to make religious groups eligible for federal funding. As Denise Brennan notes, the rush to talk about sex trafficking instead of other forms of trafficking into forced labor was spurred as much by xenophobia and a desire to avoid comprehensive immigration reform as by a concern with sexuality. In my own analysis, I take up Bernstein's focus on the carceral but expand it beyond the evangelical and feminist camps to Amar's broader array of actors in order to map the repeating political economic pattern related to global sporting events and to better understand the effects of this carceral feminist parastate on sexual culture in Brazil.

[...]

In this way, the United States *forces* sovereign states to attack legal forms of sexual work in order to combat “trafficking.” It requires a conflation of prostitution with trafficking. Moreover, foreign organizations that do not denounce legal sex work are ineligible for funding under the “Anti-Prostitution Loyalty Oath,” which led to a complicated series of legal appeals that eventually reached the US Supreme Court, which finally overturned the antiprostitution oath domestically in 2013 in a landmark decision based on free speech grounds. However, the Supreme Court decision does not, of course, extend this new protection to non-US citizens or foreign organizations receiving US funding. [...]

[...]

[...] The conflicting definitions of trafficking at the local, national, and international level (not to mention between various organizations) creates a slipperiness in definition that parastatal alliances have used to further antisex agendas. Concerns about the rapid advance of urban cleansing and moral crusades led to the stalled attempt by Wyllys to pass “Gabriela’s Law,” which the evangelical right-wing pastor Marco Feliciano, Brazil’s controversial congressional head of human rights, and other conservatives killed in committee. Brazilians have an expression, *para ingles ver*, “for the English to see,” referring to laws that were passed against slavery but never put into practice, existing purely for show. Today it is used to describe pulling the wool over someone’s eyes to keep up appearances, including in this case public policies that do one thing while pretending to do quite another. I maintain that the crackdowns against sex workers before sporting events are designed to present an image of a safe and prosperous Brazil to the media and are very much in keeping with this tradition of being “for the English to see.”

[...]

But how to obtain the kind of control necessary to pull off such a transformation for the world to see? Beginning in 2009, Rio’s evangelical Christian mayor began a militarized version of “broken windows theory” called *O Choque de Ordem*, “the shock of order.” That same year, the governor of the state hired Rudy Giuliani (New York City’s former mayor and pioneer of racial profiling and broken windows enforcement) as chief of security for the 2016 Olympic Games. The Brazilian government cracked down with excessive

close relationship to the state. They received some financial support from their respective governments and also worked with law enforcement and immigration officials in the exclusion and repatriation of foreign women suspected of being prostitute. Such heightened vigilance did not, however, translate into increased protection of women from exploitation. Writing of the period from 1895 to the First World War, Scully points out, “Policing and regulatory responses exacerbated the situation, as migratory prostitutes under siege became more reliant on pimps and more vulnerable to corrupt officials.”

The IB played a leading role in coordinating the first International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic, which was signed on 18 May 1904, as well as the 1910 International Convention for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic, which the League of Nations later adopted and expanded. Under the auspices of antitrafficking, both the 1904 and 1910 documents asserted the signatory state’s responsibility for monitoring the transnational movement of girls and women. According to Article 1 of the 1904 Agreement, the signatory countries would “establish or name some authority charged with the co-ordination of all information relative to the procuring of women or girls for immoral purposes abroad.” Article 2 called for the parties “to have a watch kept, especially in railways stations, ports of embarkation, and *en route*, for persons in charge of women and girls destined for an immoral life.” This concerted surveillance over traveling female bodies was later incorporated almost verbatim in the questionnaire that the League of Nations circulated in 1921: “4.

**The internationalization of the work of antitrafficking necessitated the move from “white slave traffic” to the more universal rubric of the “traffic in women and children,” but much of the discourse and subsequent work of the League of Nations maintained a hierarchical racial distinction.**

Has the government taken any steps to have ports and railway stations watched for the purpose of checking the Traffic in Women and Children? If not undertaking this duty to themselves, have they delegated this responsibility, and if so, to what agency?." Articles 3 and 4 of the 1904 Agreement, which addressed the matter of the repatriation of "women and girls of foreign nationality who are prostitutes," were incorporated as question 5: "Has the Government taken steps to ascertain from foreign prostitutes the reasons for which they left their countries? If so, what has been the outcome of this enquiry?." The internationalization of the work of antitrafficking necessitated the move from "white slave traffic" to the more universal rubric of the "traffic in women and children," but much of the discourse and subsequent work of the League of Nations maintained a hierarchical racial distinction. Question 8 in the 1921 questionnaire explicitly focused on protective measures against "White Slave Traffic." Several annual government reports also continued to deploy the term. The persistence of the use of the term *white slave traffic* was not residual but crucial to the fashioning of international consensus in an era marked by both imperialist jockeying and uneven nation formations. [...]

## II.

The exercise of the League's "political will and determination" was further complicated by the unknowable contours of the purported problem. Trafficking is difficult to spy, document, and control. The two reports and the archives of the *League of Nations Official Journal* repeatedly demonstrate a fissure between convincing demonstrations of diligent surveillance and acknowledgment of the impossibility of a thorough monitoring and documentation of the phenomenon. Since the League, and especially its Social Section which included the Advisory Committee on the Traffic of Women and Children, lacked the financial resources and administrative structure to gather specific details about local and national conditions, it was still largely dependent on official government communiques and "field reports" submitted by voluntary associations such as the IB. There was the possibility for underreporting the extent and severity of the conditions by state authorities. Pointing to how several of the

gives neo-abolitionists greater influence in public policy development when it comes to questions of trafficking and prostitution, and how to police these activities during sporting events.

However, the correlation between trafficking and global sporting events—although it may seem intuitive—is actually a myth. During these events, when celebrities lend their voices to media campaigns or when feminist groups rally or when evangelical Christian missionaries arrive in a country and preach sermons about sex predation and abduction by traffickers, what one does see correlated is an intensification of police and state violence against sex workers. This violence is also almost invariably accompanied by land grabs, rapid gentrification, and displaced poor people under the auspices of promoting "economic development," a problem exacerbated, as Andrea Cornwall, Sonia Corrêa, and Susie Jolly show, by the disinterest and outright hostility shown by "development theory" experts to issues of gender and sexuality. [...]

[...]

## Resisting Rescue

[...]

[...] Failing to (appear to) take adequate steps to combat trafficking not only results in a downgrading and loss of esteem in the eyes of the international community but can also lead to a loss of funding. Each country's progress is determined by the US State Department and consists of whether the United States feels that a country has provided enough evidence of "vigorously investigating" severe cases, whether the country provides for and protects victims that it does not choose to deport (a common occurrence), whether the country has raised ample public awareness about the danger and scope of trafficking, and—importantly—whether the country has made serious attempts to "reduce the demand for commercial sex acts" and nationals' "participation in international sex tourism." Importantly, this latter point includes completely legal and consensual prostitution and sex tourism, a bit of moral imperialism by the Bush administration that nonetheless suits the secular liberal feminist views of the Obama administration and its State Department.



**[T]he correlation between trafficking and global sporting events ... is actually a myth. During these events ... what one does see correlated is an intensification of police and state violence against sex workers. This violence is also almost invariably accompanied by land grabs, rapid gentrification, and displaced poor people...**

total abolition of the sex industry is the first step to stopping trafficking, usually by criminalizing the purchase of all sex, voluntary or otherwise, in an approach known as End Demand (or the Swedish Model). Meanwhile, sex worker rights groups and feminist anti-trafficking groups that do not support total abolition are not eligible for US funding, which requires a blanket antiprostitution pledge. That

realm of reduced accountability and unregulated power.”

Such tactics are not new in Brazil, but I argue that they are being intensified as a result of global sporting events and the increased public attention that comes with hosting such events. The use of moral panics around sex trafficking and sporting events to bolster development is not unique to Brazil, either. As I document below, there is a pervasive parastatal pattern of governments, neoliberal entrepreneurs, evangelical Christian groups, and liberal activists who promote the idea of a strong correlation between global sporting events and sex trafficking. The result is a moral panic that extends far beyond feminist, religious, and juridical circles, filtering into popular consciousness. For example, in Brazil, a wildly popular telenovela called *Salve Jorge* airing during the run-up to the World Cup seized on the fears of predation, reifying a hyperbolic vision into a common, if misguided, fantasy that foreign men were out to sexually enslave Brazilian women.

Typically, religious groups and neo-abolitionist feminist groups oppose all prostitution and believe that

countries represented on the advisory committee, including France, Italy, and Japan, did not move toward abolition in practice, Jessica Pliley goes so far as to assert “that many governments wanted to appear [to be] actively addressing the problem of trafficking without having to take any meaningful action.” Further complicating questions of objectivity and accountability, Great Britain, France, Portugal, Japan, the Netherlands, and the United States submitted replies and reports on behalf of their colonies, overseas possessions, protectorates, or territories. As well, in the first decades of the twentieth century, many nations were in the active and contested process of state-building, making it difficult to attribute such reports to a single, organized bureaucratic agency. In her study of prostitution in Shanghai in the early twentieth century, Gail Hershatter points out that “no systematic statistics were collected” and further questions the record-keeping practices of the state: “Counting, like classifying and regulating, is not a neutral activity. The creation of statistics, in Shanghai as elsewhere, was part of a state-building process, an intrusive aspect of the project of modernity, often resisted by the people it sought to incorporate. Numbers that give the impression of precision were collected by an inconsistent group for changing reasons from a population that had every reason to lie.” There was also some skepticism about the “field reports” of voluntary organizations, a tendency to dismiss them as exaggerated and sensationalistic.

On 21 March 1923, Grace Abbott, an advisory-committee representative from the United States, submitted a memorandum recommending a new international enquiry sponsored by the League. Its scope would be ambitiously broad and multidimensional.

Geographically the investigation should include, if possible, the principal cities of the world, but, if this is not possible, typical cities should be selected from which there is reason to believe the traffic is or is not being carried on, those in which regulated houses and those in which abolition is the policy, those situated in countries in which prostitutes and all those who live or benefit by prostitution are excluded from admission, and those whose laws regulating immigra-

tion make no or inadequate provisions for immoral persons.  
(League of Nations)

Note how three different kinds of cities were delineated according to state regulations regarding prostitution and immigration restriction, suggesting that an assessment of the efficacy of state regulation itself was at stake. The rubric of “traffic in women” thus enabled a more far-reaching and probing investigation into a broad range of national laws and enforcement mechanisms. Abbott went on to call for the need for an on-the-ground investigation to supplement the limits of the information provided by governments and voluntary associations.

[...]

Having earned a master’s degree in political science from the University of Chicago and worked with Jane Adams at Hull House, Abbott was a prominent member of a new generation of social workers who “crafted their professional identities and asserted their expertise by embracing scientific practice methods, with an emphasis on investigation, detailed case records, scientific nomenclature, and social diagnosis.” Before serving as the director of the Immigrant’s Protective League and being appointed as the first chief of the U.S. Children’s Bureau, Abbott had published numerous articles, in such venues as the *American Journal of Sociology*, on a range of issues, including immigrant labor, social welfare, child labor, and juvenile delinquency. Thus, her important role in proposing these investigations demonstrate the early twentieth-century comingling and cooperation of the state, the university, and private philanthropy in the work of surveillance over certain women’s bodies.

In addition to Abbott’s instigation, the leading position of U.S. actors in overseeing and funding this investigation merits closer scrutiny, especially given that the United States was not a formal member of the League of Nations. As proof and as a model of the efficaciousness of the investigation, Abbott invoked in the memorandum a U.S. Senate inquiry on the “Importation and Harboring of Women for Immoral Purposes” in 1908-1909, which found that women and girls from Europe and also from Asia were brought to the United States. She stated that “the authorities charged with

Evangelical Ecstasy Meets Feminist Fury:  
Sex Trafficking, Moral Panics, and Homonationalism  
during Global Sporting Events

Gregory Mitchell

In February 2011 police “rescued” about eighty *travesti* (loosely translated as “transgendered”) sex workers from sex traffickers in São Paulo, including six teenagers. The women had traveled from the poor and conservative northeast to the cosmopolitan southern city of São Paulo and stayed together in a dilapidated, over-crowded tenement building. “Rescue” in this case actually took the form of arresting the *travestis*, though their crime is unclear, because unlike other countries where victims of trafficking are often charged criminally with prostitution, sex work is not a crime in Brazil.

[...]

I begin with the case of the *travestis* because it encapsulates several pressing problems facing Brazil before it hosted the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. When one begins tugging at the loose threads of this shoddily woven story, one finds that state actors acting in bad faith used the *travestis* like so many other women in Brazil’s sex industry, to appease the US State Department and international human rights and women’s rights organizations while broadening the power of a corrupt state apparatus. In this analysis, I build on Paul Amar’s notion of the *parastatal* (a lexical mirroring of “paramilitary”) to describe “coalitions that can include government policymakers, NGOs, private-security agencies, morality campaigns and property developers ... performing the public functions of a state that has outsourced its functions into a parallel

antitrafficking movement, I have sought to show in this article that they are not the only points of contact that are vital to understanding how this coalition of “strange bedfellows” was enabled: these intersections must also be situated in terms of a series of broader political and cultural realignments that have occurred during a period in which the consumer and the carceral are increasingly seen as the preeminent vehicles for social justice. These shared political commitments serve not only to link contemporary feminists and evangelicals to each other but also to join both constituencies to a broad spectrum of secular and religious conservatives.

There is a large body of critical feminist literature documenting the ways in which Western feminist forays into the international human rights terrain are inseparable from neocolonial state interests. But this analysis points to the ways in which neocolonial humanitarian interventions have also been used as a staging ground for the resolution of internecine conflicts within both Western feminism and evangelical Christian circles. As this article has shown, two different shifts in feminist and conservative Christian sexual politics have made the contemporary campaign against sex trafficking possible: the feminist shift from a focus on bad men inside the home to bad men outside the home, and the shift of a new generation of evangelical Christians from a focus on sexually improper women (as prior concerns with abortion suggest) to a focus on sexually dangerous men. What has also been revealed here is the way both groups are turning away from direct engagement with the gender politics of the family and toward a focus on gender and sexual violence in the public sphere. It has been through these shifts that both groups have come to foster an alliance with neoliberal consumer politics and a militarized state apparatus that utilizes claims of a particular white, middle-class model of Western gender and sexual superiority in achieving its goals.

[...]

the enforcement of American law as well as private organisations in the United States interested in the abolition of prostitution will, I am sure, be glad to give all possible assistance.” As appreciatively acknowledged in the introduction to the 1927 Report, both multinational investigations were made possible by donations from the American Bureau of Social Hygiene, which provided \$75,000 and then \$125,000, respectively, to the two inquiries. The Bureau of Social Hygiene (BSH) was established in 1913 by John D. Rockefeller Jr. and fellow “social purity” reformers as a private philanthropic organization devoted to investigating and combating prostitution. Rockefeller had previously served as the chair of a special grand jury commissioned by the County of New York, in 1910, to investigate the “organized traffic in women for immoral purposes.” Subsequently, he envisioned that “this permanent organization, small and operating in relative secrecy, would have some power to effect a solution to the social evil that a more open democratic process would not have.” In contrast to the moralism and sensationalism of the earlier purity crusades against the “white slave traffic,” the BSH sought to achieve “instrumental reform that was efficient, scientific, elitist” by engaging trained experts to study social problems such as prostitution and venereal disease. Before providing financial support for the League’s inquiries into the traffic in women, the BSH funded investigations into prostitution in the United States and Europe and published the findings. The BSH also financed social programs, such as the Laboratory of Social Hygiene in Bedford Hills: “Women sentenced to this reformatory underwent a battery of physical and psychological tests aimed at isolating factors which contributed to prostitution.” Thus, the emerging methods of the social sciences came to supplement and legitimate rather than supplant older private and public modes of discipline and punishment.

The BSH also funded the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), which merged two older organizations, the American Federation for Sex Hygiene and the American Vigilance Association, and focused on combating venereal disease through sex education. The ASHA was led by William F. Snow, a professor and public-health expert, and included Jane Addams, a close mentor to Abbott. The ASHA applied what it considered “forward-looking scientific approaches” and private investigators to uncover and

document pressing social problems such as prostitution. Snow also served as chairman of the League of Nation's Special Body of Experts on the Traffic in Women and Children from 1924 to 1928. He, in turn, was responsible for the appointment of Bascom Johnson, who had served as head of the legal affairs at ASHA and as the director of investigations of the two enquiries. During the First World War, both Snow and Johnson successfully worked with the U.S. Army Commission on Training Camp Activities to control the epidemic of venereal diseases by closing down or moving red-light districts that were near military encampments. Their efforts were related to a nationwide wave of vice commissions in the 1910s, whose investigations led to more repressive laws and policies against women suspected of engaging in prostitution: "Many states established reformatories for women ... and required medical examinations for venereal diseases prior to marriage." Snow had also served as the vice president of the American Eugenics Society. Eugenicist ideologies of "racial preservation" through forced sterilization and immigration restriction were expressed in the ASHA's *Journal of Social Hygiene*. One article begins, "For any country at any given stage of advancement of its arts, and of exhaustion of its resources, there is an optimum number of inhabitants up to which the country can continue to increase its population without producing an undue pressure upon subsistence.... A well-ordered community will strive to reach this adjustment. It may do so by encouraging or discouraging emigration, or by raising or lowering the birth-rate." Another article, titled "Eugenical Sterilization in the United States," argues that "the relation between the inheritable qualities of our immigrants and the destiny of the American nation is very close.... Thus, if the American nation desires to upbuild or even to maintain its standard of natural qualities, it must forbid the addition through immigration to our human breeding-stock of persons of a lower natural hereditary constitution than that which constitutes the desired standard."

The significance of monitoring immigration was prominent in the expanded "Questionnaire issued by the special body of experts on the traffic in women and children" on 3 April 1924, which was printed as annex 2 of the 1927 Report. In addition to requesting government statistics on the "number, age, nationality and length of residence of foreign women who are known to be regularly engaged

make purchases that will contribute to faith-based organizations (as in the ironically titled Not for Sale Freedom Store; see <http://www.notforsalecampaign.org>) or by purchasing items that women who have purportedly been freed from sexual slavery have crafted. For contemporary evangelicals, the purchase of consumer goods in the name of fighting trafficking serves a dual purpose in solidifying the distinction between freedom and slavery: on the one hand, "freedom" resides in Western consumers' ability to purchase the trinkets and baubles that "trafficking victims" produce; on the other hand, it pertains to the practice that new evangelicals call "business as mission," in which former "slaves" are brought into "free" labor by producing commodities for Western consumers. Ultimately, business as mission can be seen as a global-capitalist refashioning of the nineteenth-century evangelical practice of "rescuing" women from prostitution by bringing them into domestic labor or teaching them to sew.

The smiling photograph from Christianity Today and the idea of business as mission forge a dramatic contrast with the work of sociologist Elena Shih, who has done ethnographic research with several different evangelical Christian rescue projects in Thailand and China. She has found that nearly all the "victims" who are employed as jewelry makers by the rescue projects are adult women who had previously chosen sex work as their highest paying option, but who, after accumulating some savings, elect to engage in evangelical Christian "prayer work" and jewelry-making instead. After signing on to the jewelry-making projects, they soon discover that their lives will henceforth be micromanaged by their missionary employers, that they will no longer be free to visit family and friends in the red-light districts, and that their pay will be docked for missing daily prayer sessions, for being minutes late to work, or for minor behavioral infractions. Many come to question whether their current lives really offer them more freedom than they had before.

### Conclusion: Carceral politics as gender justice?

[...]

Although sexual intersections are crucial to cementing the coalition between feminists and Christians that has given rise to the

redirect lives accustomed to suburban safety toward action and adventure: “We fret over what might happen to our stuff, our reputation, our standing.... All the things we value were never meant to be *safeguarded*. They were meant to be *put at risk and spent*.”

[...]

But more than a newly transnationalized middle-class masculinity is at stake here, particularly since the majority of the organization’s grassroots activists—as in antitrafficking campaigns in general—are middle-class young women. In contrast to a previous generation of evangelical Christian activist groups that avowedly embraced sexual and gender traditionalism for Western women, IJM’s members make frequent reference to the backward traditionalism of third-world cultures as one of the primary causes of sex trafficking, a framework that helps them to define and reinforce their own perceived freedom and autonomy as Western women. In this regard, they follow what Inderpal Grewal has identified as the contemporary feminist model of human rights activism, produced by subjects who imagine themselves more ethical and free than their “sisters” in the developing world.

The embrace of the third-world trafficking victim as a modern cause thus offers these young evangelical women a means to engage directly in a sex-saturated culture without becoming “contaminated” by it; it provides an opportunity to commune with third-world “bad girls” while remaining first-world “good girls.” Whether by directly entering the third-world brothel or by viewing highly sexualized media portrayals, the issue of trafficking permits a sexualized frame to exist without threatening these women’s own moral status or social position. One twenty-three-year-old evangelical antitrafficking activist whom I encountered at the *Call and Response* screening bluntly reflected upon the Christian concern with trafficking in terms of the issue’s “sexiness,” noting that “Nightline does specials on it ... it would be hard to do a Nightline special on abortion.”

[...]

Although consumer-friendly politics have become a stock feature of many forms of contemporary social justice activism, they occupy an especially prominent place in evangelical antitrafficking campaigns in which new abolitionists are frequently summoned to

in prostitution, either in licensed houses or elsewhere,” the lengthy, multipart question 5 asks for “any available statistics regarding immigration and emigration for the years 1919-1923,” including the “total number of male and female immigrants classified according to nationality,” and it specifies “foreign women who have been admitted in the last five years ... classified according to age-group (under 18, 18-21, 21-30, and over 30), and according to occupations.”

The determining influence of this distinctly U.S. preoccupation with prostitution, immigration, and racial purity in shaping the 1927 enquiry was largely eclipsed by highlighting the incontrovertible rigor of direct observation of “facts” by trained experts. The inclusion of professional women such as Alma Sundquist of Sweden, a physician who served on the three-member traveling commission, further provided an aura of legitimacy. [...]

### III.

Rather than herald their innovation and scientific rigor, I would argue that the League reports attest to the shared genealogy and porosity among undercover, state-sanctioned, and academic modes of knowledge production, and to how each served to prop up the factual aura of the others’ truth claims. Instigated, underwritten, and carried out by particularly interested U.S. agents, the “revolutionary” method of employing undercover agents could not be applied in the second investigation in the Far East. As Knepper notes, “Because the traffic in women in Asia involved Asian women, [Johnson] had ‘little use for [a] white investigator’.” Instead, the 1932 Report relied on interviews with government officials and testimonies from local voluntary organizations. Thus, the racially discriminating and geopolitically selective origins of anti-trafficking in the imperial age were reinscribed in the shift to “international co-operation” built on “expert” and “on-the-spot” investigations.

[...]

The first section of the 1932 Report, “The Findings of the Inquiry,” opens with the two racial distinctions clearly denoted in paragraph headings titled “Traffic in Occidental Women in Asia” and, immediately following, “Traffic in Asiatic Women.” Although the authors later note that “the bulk of the traffic with which this report



is concerned is traffic in Asiatic women from one country of Asia to another,” they first point out that “there is a certain movement of occidental prostitutes to the Orient, while hardly any oriental women are known to go for purposes of prostitution to the Occident.” The overriding concern with interracial sexual relations, which is categorized as a matter of “international traffic,” is expressed and explained in the further subdivision of “occidental women.”

[...]

Note the slippage between interracial and international. Even as the rubric of the “international” was marshaled to herald a new, racially neutral concern about the traffic in women and to authorize the League with an unprecedented supranational political will, this passage demonstrates a persistent inability to transcend the racist and racialist worldview of empire. The remarks go on to point out how the demand for Occidental women was decreasing in Asia, adding that, “provided efforts to check traffic [were] maintained, there [would be] no need to fear a revival of the conditions of twenty or thirty years [before], when considerable numbers of Occidental prostitutes, beginning with the countries nearer their homes, went farther and farther afield in the Orient in the various stages of their search for new opportunities to exercise their profession.” The assurances against interracial sexual contact is soon reiterated: “Traffic in the East is characterized by the fact that prostitutes going to foreign countries do so exclusively in search of clients among their own countrymen abroad.” The summary ends with a paragraph subtitled “Less Cynicism than in Occident,” which notes that even as the “Asiatic prostitutes” had to contend with more deplorable working conditions, “there was a noticeable absence of vulgar appeal to sensuality, such as is often displayed by occidental prostitutes.”

The following substantial section, on “Racial Groups of Victims,” is further subdivided into these distinguished groups: “Occidental Women (Excepting Russians of the Far East) as Victims of the Traffic to the Orient”; “Russian Women in the Far East as Victims of International Traffic”; “Chinese Victims of International Traffic”; and “Women of Japanese Nationality as Victims of International Traffic.” These sections are followed by shorter sections on “Filipino Women,” “Annamite Women” (in reference to women from the Union of

way to forge an effective politics is to move away from hot-button controversies around gender and sexuality and to focus their attention on what they understand to be uncontroversial and consensus-building issues such as global warming, human trafficking, and HIV/AIDS.

Yet the new-evangelical pursuit of social justice that has spawned the antitrafficking movement remains wedded to a particular constellation of sexual and gender politics, one that, while sharing key points of continuity with their Christian-right brethren, is in equally important ways quite distinct. At a basic level, new evangelicals’ embrace of human trafficking as a focus of concern must be situated as a culturally modernizing project rather than a traditionalizing one. Under the guise of moral condemnation and prostitutes’ rescue, women in particular are granted new opportunities to participate in sexually explicit culture, international travel, and the previously forbidden corners of urban space. Moreover, contemporary evangelical antitrafficking activists hew closely to a liberal-feminist vision of egalitarian heterosexual marriage and professional-sphere equality in which heterosexual prostitution, as for many middle-class secular liberals, represents the antithesis of both these political aims.

[...]

A stark example of the neoliberal criminal justice agenda that undergirds new-evangelical humanitarian interventions is the International Justice Mission (IJM), which has been at the forefront of the media-friendly militarized humanitarianism that has characterized the faith-based response to human trafficking since the late 1990s. In the rescue-and-restore model of activism that IJM has promulgated, male employees of the organization go undercover as potential clients to investigate brothels around the globe, partnering with local law enforcement (as well as main-stream press outlets) in order to rescue underage and allegedly coerced brothel occupants and to deliver them to rehabilitation facilities. Gary Haugen, IJM’s founder and chief executive, provides the justification for these techniques in his recent book, *Just Courage* (2008), arguing that the epic struggle of good versus evil necessitates the choice between being “safe or brave.” Haugen’s muscular vision of social justice activism explicitly identifies human trafficking as an issue that can

audience members called for the pimps not only to be locked away indefinitely but to be physically assaulted. In *Very Young Girls* as in carceral feminism more generally, a vision of social justice as criminal justice, and of punitive systems of control as the best motivational deterrents for men's bad behavior, serves as a crucial point of connection with state actors, evangelicals, and others who have embraced the antitrafficking cause.

#### **“Our God of [criminal] Justice”: Militarizing humanitarianism in new evangelical antitrafficking campaigns**

[...]

Among many left-leaning secular critics of contemporary antitrafficking campaigns, old stereotypes persist about the underlying cultural politics and broader social interests that have resonated with contemporary evangelical Christians, a group that is frequently assumed to be one and the same with the antipornography, anti-abortion, and anti-gay rights activists of generations past. Although avowedly Christian-right groups such as Concerned Women for America and the Salvation Army have also been active participants in the contemporary antitrafficking crusade, my research in “justice-oriented” churches such as Citychurch, at prayer gatherings for trafficking victims, and at evangelical antitrafficking conferences and film screenings suggests that such groups do not represent the preponderance of evangelical Christian grassroots activity.

Instead, a new group of young, highly educated, and relatively affluent evangelicals who often describe themselves as members of the “justice generation” have pursued some of the most active and passionate campaigning around sexual slavery and human trafficking. In contrast to their Christian-right predecessors, the young evangelicals who have pioneered Christian engagement in the contemporary antitrafficking movement not only embrace the languages of women's rights and social justice but have also taken deliberate steps to distinguish their work from the sexual politics of other conservative Christians. Although many of these evangelicals remain opposed to both gay marriage and abortion, they do not grant these issues the same political priority as their more conservative peers. Instead, young evangelicals have argued that the best

Indochina), “Siamese Women,” “Women of Malay Race,” “Indian Women,” “Persian Women,” “Arab and Other Women of the Near East,” and, finally, “African Victims of International Traffic in Asia.” In spite of this vast range of geographical locations and ethnic diversity, the 1932 Report expresses the most urgent concern for the plight of the Russian women refugees as truly “unwilling” victims, forced to engage in prostitution and interracial sexual relations with Chinese men.

Despite the questionable methods, these reports were widely read and endorsed, fueling further enactments against and surveillance of women's cross-border movements. The antitrafficking efforts also fed, with mixed results, into calls for the greater involvement of women in policing and in public patrols. Some women activists publicly objected to how the expanding reach of the protocols and conventions would delimit the mobility of *all* women. There have been divergent assessments of the prominence of the traffic in women in the League of Nation's activities. Some scholars see it as an achievement and vindication of the hard-fought efforts of women's groups who sent delegates to Geneva to campaign for a range of issues, including an equal-rights treaty. To be sure, the multimodal work of antitrafficking created an opening for a limited number of women professionals and activists in this newly emergent international framework of advocacy and governance. [...] I have proposed a third framing of the League's work of antitrafficking, one that demonstrates how the coordinated surveillance of women's sexuality, labor, and migration made international cooperation thinkable, even as this very effort testified to the intractability of racist and racist divisions that precluded its effective enactment.

of victims (or what Janet Jakobsen has alliteratively glossed as “marriage, militarism and markets”) and the broad social appeal of this agenda is powerfully illustrated by the recent film *Very Young Girls*. The film has been shown not only in diverse feminist venues but also at the U.S. State Department, at various evangelical megachurches, and at the conservative Christian King’s College. Under the rubric of portraying domestic trafficking, the film seeks to garner sympathy for young African American women who find themselves trapped in the street-level sexual economy. By framing the women as “very young girls” (in the promotional poster for the film, the seated protagonist depicted is so small that her feet dangle from the chair) and as the innocent victims of sexual abuse (a category that has historically been reserved for white and non-sex-working victims), the film can convincingly present its perspective as antiracist and progressive. Yet the young women’s innocence in the film is achieved at the cost of completely demonizing the young African American men who profit from their earnings and who are presented as irredeemably criminal and sub-human. The film relentlessly strips away the humanity of young African American men in the street economy along with the complex tangle of factors beyond prostitution (including racism and poverty) that shape the girls’ lives. At one screening of the film that I attended at a white-shoe law firm in New York, following the film some

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violence has been framed, Bumiller demonstrates that the reciprocal is also true: once feminism became fatally inflected by neoliberal strategies of social control, it could serve as an effective inspiration for broader campaigns for criminalization. Bumiller observes that by the early 2000s, the neoliberal sexual violence agenda of feminism was increasingly being exported as part of U.S. human rights policy, solidifying the carceral imperative within feminism domestically and spreading the paradigm of feminism-as-crime-control across the globe.

The evidence indeed suggests that U.S. antitrafficking campaigns have been far more successful at criminalizing marginalized populations, enforcing border control, and measuring other countries' compliance with human rights standards based on the curtailment of prostitution than they have been at issuing any concrete benefits to victims. As Bumiller argues, this is not just a question of "unintended consequences" but rather has transpired as a result of feminists directly joining forces with a neoliberal project of social control. This is true both within the United States, where pimps can now be given ninety-nine-year prison sentences as sex traffickers and sex workers are increasingly arrested and deported for the sake of their "protection", as well as elsewhere around the globe, where the U.S. tier-ranking of other countries has led to the tightening of borders internationally and to the passage of punitive antiprostitution policies in numerous countries.

Most recently, with gathering feminist attention to "domestic" forms of trafficking (which films like *Very Young Girls* have sought to ignite), it has become clear that the shift from local forms of sexual violence to the international field back to a concern with policing U.S. inner cities (this time, under the guise of protecting women's human rights) has provided critical circuitry for the carceral feminist agenda. According to U.S. Attorney Pamela Chen, a full half of federal trafficking cases currently concern underage women in inner-city street prostitution. Enforcement-wise, this has resulted in an unprecedented police crackdown on people of color who are involved in the street-based sexual economy—including pimps, clients, and sex workers alike.

The carceral feminist commitment to heteronormative family values, crime control, and the putative rescue and restoration

Militarized Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism:  
The Politics of Sex, Rights, and Freedom in  
Contemporary Antitrafficking Campaigns

Elizabeth Bernstein

[...]

Over the past decade, mounting public and political attention has been directed toward the "traffic in women" as a dangerous manifestation of global gender inequalities. Media accounts have similarly rehearsed stories of the abduction, transport, and forced sexual labor of women and girls whose poverty and desperation render them amenable to easy victimization in first- and third-world cities. Meanwhile, a remarkably diverse group of social activists and policy makers—a coalition composed of abolitionist feminists, evangelical Christians, and both conservative and liberal government officials—have put forth an array of new legislation at the local, national, and transnational levels. Despite renowned disagreements around the politics of sex and gender, these groups have come together to advocate for harsher criminal and economic penalties against traffickers, prostitutes' customers, and nations deemed to be taking insufficient steps to stem the flow of trafficked women.

The key constituencies in the U.S. coalition of antitrafficking activists routinely insist that the commitments that unite them are both bipartisan and apolitical—a claim that is on one level difficult to dispute, since, as religious studies scholar Yvonne Zimmerman has noted, no one could plausibly claim to be "for" sex trafficking. In a different ideological register, the political scientist Allen D. Hertzke has celebrated the humanitarian agenda that has linked left and

**[E]vangelical and feminist antitrafficking activism has been fueled by a shared commitment to carceral paradigms of social, and in particular gender, justice ... and to militarized humanitarianism as the preeminent mode of engagement by the state.**

this article seeks to demonstrate the extent to which evangelical and feminist antitrafficking activism has been fueled by a shared commitment to carceral paradigms of social, and in particular gender, justice (what I here develop as “carceral feminism”) and to militarized humanitarianism as the preeminent mode of engagement by the state. I draw upon my ongoing ethnographic and policy research with feminist and evangelical antitrafficking movement leaders in the United States to argue that the alliance that has been so efficacious in framing contemporary antitrafficking politics is the product of two historically unique and intersecting trends: a rightward shift on the part of many mainstream feminists and other secular liberals away from a redistributive model of justice and toward a politics of incarceration, coincident with a leftward sweep on the part of many younger evangelicals away from the isolationist issues of abortion

right, secular and Christian around this issue, going so far as to hail the wide-sweeping antitrafficking coalition as “one of the most significant human rights movements of our time.” Despite the eager embrace of the anti-trafficking movement by activists occupying a wide spectrum of political positions—one that extends from radical feminist groups like the Coalition against Trafficking in Women and Equality Now to such well-established Christian-right organizations as Focus on the Family—in this essay I shall argue that what has served to unite this coalition of strange bedfellows is not simply a humanitarian concern with individuals trapped in “modern-day slavery,” as commentators such as Hertzke have maintained, nor activists’ underlying commitment to “traditional” ideals of gender and sexuality, as various left-leaning and critical feminist commentators have offered. Instead,

carceral politics and a securitized state apparatus to be antitrafficking feminists’ preferred political remedies.

[...]

At a March 2, 2007, discussion focused on “ending demand” for sex trafficking at the Commission on the Status of Women meetings at the United Nations, the link between sexual and carceral politics was even more powerfully revealed. At this meeting dedicated to problematizing men’s demand for the services of sex workers, the panelists used the occasion to showcase how the carceral state could be effectively harnessed to achieve amatively coupled, heterosexual, nuclear families. The opening speaker from the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) explicitly hailed the five white, middle-class men in the room as exemplars of a new model of enlightened masculinity and urged the audience members to “to bring their husbands, sons, and brothers” to future meetings. The model of prostitution and trafficking that the CATW panelists invoked bore little if any connection to structural or economic factors, rendering prostitution wholly attributable to the actions of a small subset of bad men: husbands within the family who might seek the sexual services of women outside of it, or bad men outside the family who might entice women and girls within it to leave. Although the CATW regards itself as a progressive feminist organization, members displayed surprisingly little hesitation in their appeals to a punitive state apparatus. Nor did they demonstrate much awareness of the political-economic underpinnings of the singular form of heterofamilial intimacy that they advocated.

[...]

The above examples highlight an important alliance between feminism and the carceral state, one that extends beyond recent feminist partnerships with the religious right wing. In her recent book tracing the coemergence of second-wave feminist attention to sexual violence and neoliberal agendas of incarceration, Kristin Bumiller has similarly demonstrated the ways in which a myopic feminist focus on the criminalization of rape and domestic violence during the 1990s contrasted with grassroots and early second-wave feminist concerns about women’s social and economic empowerment. Arguing that the neoliberal carceral imperative has had a devastating impact on the ways that feminist engagement with sexual

also important historical resonances between the current U.S. anti-trafficking campaign and the Meese Commission antipornography hearings that took place during the 1980s, in which conservative Christians and secular feminists such as Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin similarly joined forces for the sake of sexual reform. As Judith Walkowitz and Wendy Brown have previously observed, the feminist embrace of state-anchored sexual moralism is particularly apt to resurface during periods of right-wing ascendancy like the Reagan and Bush years, when opportunities for more substantive political and economic change are elusive. While a resurgent feminist-conservative alliance was actively fostered by the George W. Bush White House—both rhetorically, as in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and through the cultivation of explicit political ties, as in the appointment of renowned feminist activist Lederer as Senior Director for Global Projects on Trafficking in Persons at the U.S. Department of State—various feminists would go on to actively and publicly embrace Bush Administration initiatives. Notably, in a February 2004 article in the *Washington Post* cowritten by iconic second-wave feminist Phyllis Chesler and women’s studies professor/antitrafficking activist Hughes, the authors provided a vigorous defense not only of the Bush Administration’s antitrafficking policies but also of its military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, declaring that contemporary conservatives and faith-based organizations had become more reliable advocates of democracy and women’s rights across the globe than the liberal left had ever been.

While the embrace of discourses of criminalization, democracy building, naming and shaming, and family values by a new crop of avowedly conservative feminists is certainly significant, noteworthy too is the extent to which feminists who identify as secular liberals have found themselves in easy agreement with much of this agenda and have thus been ready and eager partners to conservative-feminist antitrafficking campaigns. While commentators such as Wendy Chapkis, Kamala Kempadoo, and Miriam Ticktin have previously pointed to a collusion between mainstream feminism and state agendas of border control in contemporary antitrafficking campaigns (where feminist activism unwittingly supports the deportation of migrant sex workers under the guise of securing their protection), my ethnographic fieldwork extends this insight, revealing

and gay marriage and toward a globally oriented social justice theology.

[...]

### A genealogy of sex trafficking

[...]

As commentators such as legal scholar Jennifer Chacón have noted, trafficking as defined in current federal law and in international protocols could conceivably encompass sweatshop labor, agricultural work, or even corporate crime, but it has been the far less common instances of sexually trafficked women and girls that have stimulated the most concern by conservative Christians, prominent feminist activists, and the press. Members of these groups themselves acknowledge (sometimes with frustration) that a focus on sexual violation, rather than the structural preconditions of exploited labor more generally, has been crucial to transforming what had previously been of concern to only a small group of committed activists into a legal framework with powerful material and symbolic effects. As Brian McLaren, a progressive evangelical author and activist, observed to me during an interview, “It’s disturbing that nonprofits can raise money to fight sex trafficking in Cambodia but it’s much harder to raise awareness about bad trade policies in the U.S. that keep Cambodia poor so that it *needs* sex trafficking.”

Various commentators have noted the similarities between the moral panic surrounding sex trafficking as modern-day slavery in the current moment and the white slavery scare in the post-bellum years of the nineteenth century. While this earlier wave of concern engaged a similar coalition of “new abolitionist” feminists and evangelical Christians, prior to the Progressive Era the goal of eradicating prostitution had not seemed particularly urgent to either group. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, as tensions mounted over migration, urbanization, and the social changes being wrought by industrial capitalism, narratives of the traffic in women and girls for sexual slavery abounded. Although empirical investigations would eventually reveal the white slavery narrative to be largely without factual base (the evidence suggested that large numbers of women were not in fact forced into prostitution, other

than by economic conditions), anti-white slave crusaders were nevertheless successful in spurring the passage of a series of red-light abatement acts, as well as the federal Mann-Elkins White Slavery Act, which brought the nation's first era of wide-scale, commercialized prostitution to a close.

During the past decade, the term “trafficking” has once again been made synonymous with not only forced but also voluntary prostitution, while an earlier wave of political struggles for both sex workers’ and migrants’ rights has been eclipsed. According to observers both laudatory and critical, this displacement has been facilitated by the embrace of human rights discourses by abolitionist feminists, who have effectively neutralized domains of political struggle around questions of labor, migration, and sexual freedom via the tropes of prostitution as gender violence and sexual slavery. From the perspective of abolitionist feminist antitrafficking organizations, the shift to the human rights field in the mid-1990s was crucial to relocating a set of internecine political debates among feminists about the meaning of prostitution and pornography (one that had divided the U.S. feminist movement throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, and in which the nonabolitionist factions were emerging triumphant) to a humanitarian terrain in which the abolitionist constituency was more likely to prevail.

A simultaneous and similarly profound shift occurred during the same years within the U.S. evangelical movement. If in the early 1990s most evangelicals had little to do with the human rights field, by 1996 a greater reliance on NGOs by the United Nations, coupled with an awareness of the increasingly global spread of evangelical Christianity, would encourage many newly formed evangelical NGOs to enter the international political fray. Doris Buss and Didi Herman attribute this to the proliferation of UN-hosted conferences in the 1990s, which facilitated the expansion and further institutionalization of NGO involvement in international law and policy making. In combination with U.S. evangelicals’ growing interest in the issues of international religious freedom and the persecution of Christians, this shift served to propel new sets of religious actors into the trafficking debates and to make religious voices more prominent in the human rights field.

[...]

In a recent essay, the sociologist Ron Weitzer has described feminist and conservative Christian campaigns against sex trafficking in the United States as a “moral crusade” akin to previous social mobilizations against alcohol consumption and pornography. Weitzer demonstrates that although the campaigns’ empirical claims about the extent of sex trafficking into the United States and its more general relationship to prostitution are flawed, they have nonetheless been successfully institutionalized in a growing number of NGOs and in official state policy. While Weitzer’s argument is an important one and dovetails with various critical feminist perspectives on the issue, his account stops short of looking at other sociologically significant links between the two unlikely new-abolitionist constituencies—specifically, that which has united the two groups around a punitive and far from historically inevitable paradigm of state engagement, both domestically and internationally. While the sexual “loyalty oath” insisting that anti-trafficking groups explicitly denounce prostitution has been amply criticized by various left-leaning commentators, the *carceral* loyalty oath that implicitly undergirds such politics has gone largely unchallenged. In what follows, I describe how a sexual politics that is intricately intertwined with broader agendas of criminalization and incarceration has shaped the framing of trafficking for both conservative Christians and mainstream feminists, helping to align the issue with state interests and to catapult it to its recent position of political and cultural prominence. I begin by tracing the contours of what I term “carceral feminism,” providing a closer examination of those sectors of the contemporary feminist movement that have embraced the antitrafficking cause.

### The sexual politics of carceral feminism

[...]

Of course, for those familiar with the evolution of what Janet Halley has termed governance feminism (in which feminism “moves off the streets and into the state”), as well as the historical precedent of the white slavery panic, the inclusion of prominent feminist activists at the Hudson Institute event might come as somewhat less of a surprise. In addition to the echoes of white slavery, there are