

5-1-2016

# “The Devil That Lives In Human Frames:” Gender, Prostitution, Drink And Reform In The Progressive Era

Shannon M. Cardinal  
*University of New England*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dune.une.edu/theses>

 Part of the [History Commons](#)

© 2016 Shannon Cardinal

---

## Preferred Citation

Cardinal, Shannon M., ““The Devil That Lives In Human Frames:” Gender, Prostitution, Drink And Reform In The Progressive Era” (2016). *All Theses And Dissertations*. 63.  
<http://dune.une.edu/theses/63>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at DUNE: DigitalUNE. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses And Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DUNE: DigitalUNE. For more information, please contact [bkenyon@une.edu](mailto:bkenyon@une.edu).

“The devil that lives in human frames:” Gender, Prostitution, Drink and Reform in the  
Progressive Era

Shannon Cardinal

HIS 450: Senior Capstone

Spring 2016

Advisor: Prof. Elizabeth De Wolfe

Consuela Frewen Sheridan, a journalist for the *New York World*, recorded in her diary in October of 1921 a foray, accompanied by undercover police officers, into the hazy Los Angeles underground:

We pushed open a door ajar. A Chinese prostitute stood smoking her pipe. Soberly dressed, in black silk jacket and trousers, her hair so neat and shiny, her face almost unpainted, she shyly grinned at us. . . . The police have their hands full in Chinatown, to prevent gambling, doping and prostitution. Though why it should be any concern of the law's whether a Chinaman, in Chinatown, is solicited by a Chinese prostitute is more than I can understand.<sup>1</sup>

Sheridan evinced disinterest towards the Chinese. She wrote as if she found her night researching the unsavory haunts of the City of Angels dull, though the diary entry unfolds a compelling tale. She and her law enforcement companions tramped across L.A. towards a brothel. They were briefly tailed by a “silent footed follower” into a “black unlighted alley . . . where murders are not infrequent.”<sup>2</sup> After her investigation, instead of returning to the safety of her accommodations to reflect on her disgust with the traffic in women, the horrors wrought by abuse of drugs and liquor, or the corruption of the police complicit in these activities, she “motored back to Burlingame and hurriedly dressed and arrived extremely late at a dinner party.”<sup>3</sup> There she began to process the events of her evening:

Wine flowed, and restored my jaded spirits. I looked round the table at the brilliant, cheerful, noisy company and a new thought came to me. I found myself pondering on the high moral standard imposed by the United States. Continually I ask myself this question: "Is the United States more moral than any other country? Are the men and women human, or has legislation and public opinion extinguished the devil that lives in human frames?" I find no answer.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Clare Consuela Frewen Sheridan, “Diary of Clare Consuela Sheridan, October, 1921,” *My American Diary* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), 321-322. Sheridan was a British ex-pat, the cousin of Winston Churchill and in a relationship with Charlie Chaplin during this period. Her ties to communism strained her relationship with Churchill, with whom she was very close.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Humanity and morality were major concerns of the “jaded” lost generation, and of the generation of hopeful reformers before them. To these groups nothing represented human frailty and excess, “the devil that lives in human frames,” like prostitution and drunkenness. These “twin born” vices gripped rapidly developing U.S. cities, alternately plagued and medicated soldiers returning from exotic outposts and the horrors of World War I, and threatened to destroy the wholesome comfort of American homes.<sup>5</sup> Often reformers, journalists, law enforcement and the medical community shared seemingly contradicting opinions on prostitution and liquor. They felt human vice was natural, ancient and to some extent irrepressible, but that morality and faith were also integral aspects of human nature that could shine through and defeat sinful tendencies when given encouragement to fully develop. Like gardeners pulling weeds, reformers tried to legislate and control vice so they could make space for virtue to thrive. They understood that prostitution and liquor overlapped in a complicated web of human misbehavior, though they viewed these problems within the narrow confines of their own gender, sexuality and class.

Reformers took a gendered approach to addressing prostitution and liquor between 1900 and 1933, overtly and subversively expressing their own gender in their writings and work, and holding male and female offenders to different medical, legal and social standards. Nonetheless, reformers of both genders subscribed to a similar four point strategy of suppression: qualify and quantify, contain, disinfect, and domesticate. Their approach to these directives was influenced by gender in fascinating ways.

---

<sup>5</sup> Frances E. Willard, "The Liquor Crime and the Social Evil," *Vigilance* I, no. 9 (1886): 6, Nineteenth Century Collections Online. Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge.

## “A danger to all their associates:” Prostitution and Intoxicating Drinks

Sex and alcohol are inextricably linked in western culture. Ancient Greeks had their *symposia*, salons fueled by wine and the company of prostitutes.<sup>6</sup> The Old Testament features stories of drunken debauchery leading to the downfall of Sodom and Gomorrah, and tells of Hannah, the childless wife whose abstinence from drink and fervent prayer are what enabled her to “know” her husband Eli and “begat” Samuel, the son she desperately wanted.<sup>7</sup> The life of serial monogamist and heavy drinker Henry VIII, the decadent, spoiled French aristocracy personified by Marie Antoinette, the scandals of many United States congressmen, senators and presidents; much of our history revolves around pretty women and stiff drinks.

Historian Catherine Murdock observes in *Domesticating Drink* that “after the turn of the [twentieth] century, discussion of alcohol usage remained inseparable from discussion of women’s sexuality, oppression and physical danger.”<sup>8</sup> In 1910 the Chicago Vice Commission found “as a contributing influence to immorality and the business of prostitution there is no interest so dangerous and so powerful in the city of Chicago as the liquor interests.”<sup>9</sup> Lieutenant John G. Buchanan linked prostitution and liquor as two of “the three principal vices affecting an army.”<sup>10</sup> In his 1919 article on vice he attacks not only professionals, but any women who engaged in premarital sex as prostitutes, whether or not they derived a clear economic benefit from their actions. An August 1920 article on “The Prostitute in Jail,” a study conducted in

---

<sup>6</sup> Tom Standage, *A History of the World in Six Glasses* (New York: Walker & Co, 2005), 62.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel 1:1 (Revised Standard Version)

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 78.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth, Rose, *American Women and the Repeal of Prohibition* (New York: NYU Press, 1995), 18.

<sup>10</sup> John G. Buchanan, “War Legislation Against Alcoholic Liquor and Prostitution,” *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 9, no. 4 (Feb. 1919): 520. The third vice is gambling.

Puerto Rico, praised Attorney General Howard L. Kern for “a most splendid effort to follow the plan laid down by the federal authorities for the suppression of prostitution and the liquor traffic for the protection of the men in uniform.”<sup>11</sup> To policy makers, especially in the military, women and liquor were considered as allied dangers, so insidious the Armed Forces needed protection from them. Reformers agreed.

The relationship between gender and intoxicating drinks is complicated. In writing the history of sex, drink and reform, historians are beginning to revise many stereotypical yet inaccurate depictions, including the perception of most women reformers as staunch puritans who vehemently opposed liquor and prostitution. For example, David Kyvig’s work on the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Repeal (WONPR) which challenges these depictions. In 1929 the WONPR launched a campaign to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment, a law they felt undermined personal liberty, respect for the Constitution, and the safety of American communities by introducing many citizens to illegal and dangerously unregulated alcoholic drinks.<sup>12</sup> The WONPR was a towering organization of more than one million members, which achieved its goal thanks to the skills of leaders like Pauline Sabin, Jean Sheppard and Grace Root.<sup>13</sup> Kyvig has written extensively on the organization, and Murdock credits the WONPR for “adroitly combining morality with American realpolitik,” and writes “‘wet’ women created a model for effective female political activism in the later twentieth century.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> “The Prostitute in Jail,” *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 11, no. 2 (Aug, 1920): 276.

<sup>12</sup> David E. Kyvig, “Women Against Prohibition,” *American Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (Autumn, 1976): 476.

<sup>13</sup> Kyvig, “Women Against Prohibition,” 474.

<sup>14</sup> Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 8. For more Kyvig on the WONPR see *Repealing National Prohibition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) and *Law, Alcohol and Order: Perspectives on National Prohibition* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985). In addition, Kyvig published quite a few articles on the WONPR’s founder, Pauline Sabin.



Historians tended to ignore the entire repeal movement, male as well as female, because it was overshadowed at its moment of success by the emergence of the New Deal. Although the neglect of the WONPR may be understandable, it is nonetheless unfortunate. Large numbers of women, cooperating with each other and for the most part working independently of men, made a significant contribution to ending national prohibition and thus to the history of American constitutional change.<sup>17</sup>

Though the New Deal is undeniably one of the most notable pieces of American legislation, the only instance of repealing a constitutional amendment poses an equally compelling and important moment in U.S. legal and social history, one that merits mention along with the policies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Temperance and Prohibition are remembered not because they happen at a more convenient, less cluttered time, but because they make for a sexier tale, involving faithful, true women and upstanding men against ruthless mobsters, moonshine, flappers and prostitutes. One can argue that repeal is overlooked because it is the end of the party, occurring at the beginning of a long, sobering decade of economic depression, growing aggression in Europe and a war so horrible it is indelibly stamped on the American conscious. But, similar to the following decade the 1920s was a busy time, which saw a generation stumbling after experiencing the horrors of World War I, women gaining suffrage and a ban on the sale and distribution of alcohol, and all these major events seem to generate plenty of coverage and interest in academia. Yet, repeal and the WONPR remains vastly unexplored.

Women temperance leaders are remembered and revered as *the* representation of women leaders of the period between 1880 and 1930 because their social approach to the issue and appeals to domesticity are nonthreatening in a way that female wet tactics were not. Female wets were the first women's group to enter the political arena armed with the vote, and were more likely to have achieved higher education than the generation of reformers before them. They

---

<sup>17</sup> Kyvig, "Women Against Prohibition," 481.



represented threatening invasions into academic and political spaces previously dominated by men. The lack of historical coverage on women in favor of repeal (and in favor of humane, secular discourse and action regarding prostitution) comes not from a lack of these reformers, or from a distracted profession obsessing over other landmark events and legislation, but from a biased cultural legacy which places women in a mother/whore dichotomy and leaves those who do not fit neatly into these categories out of the picture. This dichotomy has been questioned in recent decades thanks to the work of historians interested in feminism, gender studies, addiction and human sexuality, such as Barbara Meil Hobson and Timothy Gilfoyle,<sup>18</sup> but a great deal of work remains to be done in presenting a fuller and more accurate picture of the reformers of the Progressive Era and the Roaring Twenties.

#### “Reformers may be divided into two classes”: The Role of Gender in Reform

Reformers considered the effects of prostitution and liquor gendered, and treated these behaviors according to the gender of the deviant citizens they were addressing. Their own gender was also of deep importance to their reform actions.

Prior to World War I reformers considered men (as johns and pimps) the aggressors and women as frail victims, forced to become prostitutes through drugs, coercion and violence. These women were often referred to as “white slaves,” a popular image which evoked a helpless, lower class Caucasian damsel, even though prostitution affected women of every race.<sup>19</sup> During and after the war, prostitutes were perceived as deviously undermining the war effort. Soldiers were

---

<sup>18</sup> See Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992); and Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>19</sup> On race and prostitution, see Kevin Mumford’s *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

cast as the victims of loose women, who were taking advantage of susceptible enlisted men's homesickness and grief to sexually exploit, rob and infect them. No longer seen as victims, prostitutes were characterized as traitors. Defining the term 'victim' and identifying victims of sex traffic and sexual violence is a task fraught with complication and heavily gendered dialogue, both contemporarily and within historic record. Historian Mary Murphy posits that prostitutes were victims: "victims of a tangled sexual ideology that advocated 'passionlessness' for women, but recognized the need for prostitution to absorb the 'excess lust' of men."<sup>20</sup> Barbara Meil Hobson agrees that prostitutes are exploited by "economic and sexual systems [that] work in tandem in producing gender inequality" but questions the idea that prostitutes can be strictly defined as victims: "as [early twentieth century] investigators gathered more and more data about the vice trade, it became evident that the majority of prostitutes in the United States had not been trapped unknowingly in houses of bondage."<sup>21</sup> Though Hobson writes to expose the intersections of inequality in society, she acknowledges that the dichotomous view of victims and perpetrators within prostitution is short-sighted and simplistic. Prostitution was often entered into willingly by women looking for employment, and some feminists and sex workers interpret selling sex as empowering, even subversive, "defying social proscription [and] extending the bounds of the pleasurable."<sup>22</sup>

Gender was important to reformers when it came to addressing the victims and moving targets associated with the societal issues they wrestled, but it also played an important and often unacknowledged role in their own lives and work. Men as reformers and activists often wrote and spoke with unapologetic vigor, unwaveringly blunt about the issues that mattered to them.

---

<sup>20</sup> Mary Murphy, "The Private Lives of Public Women: Prostitution in Butte, Montana, 1878-1917," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 7, no. 23 (1984): 34.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), ix, 142.

<sup>22</sup> Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue*, viii.

They could openly speak about sex and intoxication, as their gender and professions allowed them expertise and authority on the subjects.

For example, Lieutenant John G. Buchanan in his address on “War Legislation Against Alcoholic Liquor and Prostitution” pursued reform through legislation, calling on federal, state and local governments to work in tandem to handle vice in camps, and he emphasized protecting the men as soldiers. Women tended to pursue reform through social connections before they earned the vote, and their emphasis was on protecting families and individuals from ruin. Buchanan’s argument relies on appeals to masculinity, strength and the health of male sex organs. He asserts “this war will be won by man power. Our Army before the war would admit no man suffering from venereal disease. Such a rule is impossible now....Not only will this war be won by *man* power; it will be won by *man power*. Morale has somewhat to do with the decision of battles and the fate of nations.”<sup>23</sup> He assured the listener that “‘clean bunches’ are... the better fitted to save democracy, in spirit as well as in body.”<sup>24</sup> Though in these examples he spoke in a tidy and almost cryptic manner, in discussing prostitutes his language becomes bolder:

‘The devil knoweth not the mind of a man’ -how much less of a woman! When medical examinations show that eighty to ninety per cent of the prostitutes arrested during the war have one or more venereal disease and the so called ‘charity girl’ pursuing the avocation for erotic, not meretricious, reasons, is even more notably a disease carrier, I submit that the federal law, in cases where soldiers and sailors are concerned, should make up for deficiencies of those state laws which do not punish fornication.<sup>25</sup>

Buchanan made it clear that he considered prostitutes the center of sexually transmitted diseases. He attacked the ‘charity girl’ - an amateur young woman who traded sexual favors with her dates in exchange for drinks, dinners, clothes and tickets to events she could not afford on

---

<sup>23</sup> Buchanan, “War Legislation,” 528.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 529.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 526.

her slim factory wages- and claimed that she enjoyed the sexual exchange in her situation more than the social and economic benefits. In his view this eroticism made her worse than traditional prostitutes and more likely to carry disease. When reformers claimed that these women enjoyed their economic dependence because it made their lives 'easy' and that they relished in the sex they traded, they removed guilt from the soldiers who disobeyed orders and placed blame upon the cunning women who tempted these men. When women are denounced as idle, licentious and diseased by an authority, they can be subjected to policy. In the case of military reform, that policy was containment in prisons and torturous disinfection, to be discussed later in this paper.

In 1884 W.S. Bell, Corresponding Secretary of the New England Freethinkers' Association, gave a speech discussing his opposition towards prohibition. In "ANTI-PROHIBITION" he attacked the Massachusetts Legislature on their lack of stringent laws against sexual assault and the still too young age of consent (ten years of age at the time of his writing, it would be raised to thirteen in 1886.) He ridiculed restrictive drinking laws and their advocates. He felt prohibition did nothing to protect women and families, and argued that intemperance only hurt the tippler and so was a private matter. He implied that the temperance movement was full of meddlers and gossips only concerned with their own reputation and that of their spouses, claiming "a Society for the Suppression of Vice... under Comstock's reign means the suppression of Infidelity."<sup>26</sup> To further his point that irresponsible drinking was an inevitable part of life, he irreverently paraphrased the Bible: "intemperance is... not a crime. It is an old vice, dating back to the dawn of history. There we read of two renowned characters,-one named Noah and the other named Lot,-getting beastly drunk."<sup>27</sup> His brash disregard for the censure of

---

<sup>26</sup>W.S. Bell, "Anti-Prohibition: An Address Delivered in Paine Hall, Before the N.E. Freethinkers' Convention, Jan. 28, 1884," (Boston: JP Mendum, 1884), 16.

<sup>27</sup> Bell, "Anti-Prohibition," 7.

his peers was a natural advantage of his privilege. Conservative reactions to his speech were not likely to end his career, so there was no need to be concerned about causing offense or protecting his reputation.

Female reformers faced a more delicate situation: expected to guard their reputations from slander while fostering a desire to care for and improve the world as it related to the domestic sphere, they advocated for reform on the basis that it would improve American homes. They approached reforming prostitutes by offering maternal care and religious instruction to make streetwalkers better women (who were less dangerous to so-called respectable husbands) and argued for eradicating drunkenness to protect themselves and their homes from immoral influences and the violence enacted by intoxicated fathers, husbands and sons. They were not allowed the same license when it came to how they discussed or wrote about sex and drink because they were expected to be inexperienced and innocent, if not of the acts than of their motivations. A married woman was in the safest position to talk about prostitution because she was securely ensconced in a socially approved sexual relationship, one in which prostitution posed the greatest threat to herself and her family's moral and physical health; but she was still expected to be ignorant of carnal desire. A true woman viewed sex as a holy duty worked upon her by her husband, which must be done for the good of the family and the nation, not for mutual pleasure.

This belief is echoed in *Sex in History*, which mentions “American Dr. Alice Stockham” who “claimed in 1894 that any husband who required marital intercourse except with a view to conceiving children was making his wife into a private prostitute.”<sup>28</sup> However, not every reformer held these essentialist beliefs. In the private diary of Elizabeth Cady Stanton she

---

<sup>28</sup> Reay Tannahill, *Sex in History* (London: Scarborough House Publishers, 1992), 355.

critiques a sexually charged poem: “I have been reading *Leaves of Grass*. Walt Whitman seems to understand everything in nature but woman. In ‘There is a Woman Waiting for Me,’<sup>29</sup> he speaks as if the female must be forced to the creative act, apparently ignorant of the great natural fact that a healthy woman has as much passion as a man, that she needs nothing stronger than the law of attraction to draw her to the male.”<sup>30</sup> Though not all reformers subscribed to the passionless and pure ideal of True Womanhood, women had to acknowledge it in their published work, or risk being labelled promiscuous and immoral themselves.

Ellen Martin Henrotin, President of the General Federation of Women's Clubs and a member of the Chicago Vice Commission, hinted at this double standard in her papers. One of her edited typescripts, “The Sensational Element in Reform,” divides reformers into “two classes- the reformer of morals or the teacher of ethics, and the reformer of material life.”<sup>31</sup> It is clear that she considers women the former, and men the latter. Popular beliefs about women as the moral backbone of the United States granted them the ability to teach ethics within proscribed domestic and religious limits, whereas men’s greater political agency allowed them access to the influence and funding that made reforming “material life” achievable. Martin’s edits reveal self-censorship on the subject of prostitution, the “social evil.” She strikes any reference to prostitution from the paragraph which introduces women as reformers seeking suffrage, but later in the text returns to sex trafficking to remark “even the discussion of it re-

---

<sup>29</sup> It is uncertain whether the title Stanton cites was correct in the edition she read, or if she incorrectly paraphrased in trying to remember. Entitled “Poem of Procreation” when it was originally published in 1856, it is now “A Woman Waits for Me” in most reprints. See James E. Miller Jr.’s criticism, “Sex and Sexuality,” in J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings, eds., *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, As Revealed in Her Letters, Diary and Reminiscences*, Vol. 2. eds, Harriot Stanton Blatch and Theodore Stanton (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1922), 210. Entry dated Sept. 6, 1883.

<sup>31</sup> Ellen Martin Henrotin, “The Sensational Element in Reform,” A142 Box 2 Folder 20, Ellen Martin Henrotin Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. 2.

quires most skillful handling.”<sup>32</sup> Henrotin avoids directly associating suffragists with sex so as not to strengthen harmful stereotypes, and acknowledges the difficulty of addressing prostitution- to discuss the issue without enormous degrees of caution and tact would leave her open to attacks on her character, and weaken the suffrage movement.<sup>33</sup>

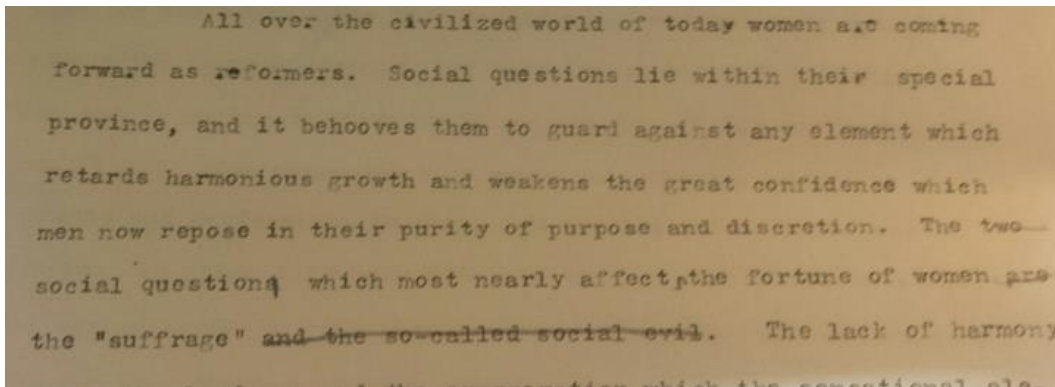


Fig. 3: Henrotin, “The Sensational Element in Reform” Edits<sup>34</sup>

Hobson explains that women reformers at the turn of the century “sought explanations that were less threatening” than “female sexual precociousness” to explain prostitution.<sup>35</sup> The suggestions Buchanan made, that public women are naturally lascivious, when applied more widely to women in public became damaging to women’s early political movements. Slurs claiming that women meddling in the public sphere were dangerous and promiscuous were casually flung at feminist reformers who sought the vote or access to jobs and education, the

---

<sup>32</sup> Henrotin, “Sensational Element,” 13-14.

<sup>33</sup> Henrotin often displays forced hesitation to write on sex and prostitution. In a manuscript entitled “Psychology of Prostitution” She expresses her belief that the responsibility of educating young men and women about sex rests firmly with men, endorsing their expertise and seemingly excusing herself from discussing sex, even while discussing sex education. She writes: “[b]oth boys and girls in this country stand sadly in need of the guidance of their fathers and the direction of men on the school facilities- the almost total preempting of the teaching profession in the grade and parochial schools by unmarried women has resulted in a certain super-sensitiveness on one of the most natural of family relation-ship...procreation.” A142 Box 2 Folder 16, EMH Papers, 8-9.

<sup>34</sup> The Manuscript edits I would like to highlight read: “All over the civilized world of today women are coming forward as reformers. ...the ~~two~~ social questions which most nearly affects the fortune of women ~~are~~ is the ‘suffrage’ and the so-called social evil.” (EMH papers, “Sensational Elements,” 13)

<sup>35</sup> Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue*, 174.

assumption being that women only wanted access to politics and business to fraternize with powerful, virile men so they could use and undermine them. Hobson writes “to accept the notion that women actively sought sex with men in a casual way or sold their sexual services like any other commodity in the market undercut the rationale for the women’s movement. That would suggest that women,” who framed their interest in suffrage and reform as “seeking political power to refashion the moral fabric of society, were not a class different in nature and values from men.”<sup>36</sup> So a respectable woman had to damn the prostitutes’ actions as impure and unnatural, while pleading that underneath there lay a heart of gold, inherent in each woman, which could be made righteous again in the wayward girl.

Still, women reformers could not risk associating these impure women too closely with the upstanding moral version of womanhood suffragists and reformers purported to represent. In agreement with many male reformers and doctors, women reformers like Henrotin cast prostitutes as “below average” intelligence, “sub-normal” or mentally ill, medically classifying these women as separate and other.<sup>37</sup> This doublethink is an unfortunate example of the sophisticated rhetoric of privileged feminists who allowed the ideal of True Womanhood to remain intact in discussions involving both women reformer’s political agency and women offender’s bodies and sexuality. Reformers expounded on True Womanhood, denying that it was incompatible with the New Woman, in order to advance the rights of some women under the guise of extending further protection to all.

Women reformers faced more than one double bind. Rumors of associating with too many men could damage one’s reputation, but a lack of association with credible men was also

---

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>. Ellen Martin Henrotin, “Psychology of Prostitution,” A142 Box 2 Folder 16, Ellen Martin Henrotin Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. 6.



silencing. Without the endorsement of educated men, some charitable societies suffered. Leadership changes and a lack of funding plagued the Massachusetts Society for Social Hygiene in 1928. Dedicated to fighting venereal disease, providing education about sex and marriage, and eradicating pornography and prostitution, the group found a lack of men on the board an obstacle to recruitment, status and growth. A letter from Vice President Maida H. Solomon to Mr. Bradley about the difficulty of reorganizing the Society after a slump reads: “[w]e are very weak on males and Drs. on the signing committee and the men might hesitate to join so many females.”<sup>38</sup> Though many of the women on the board were deeply dedicated to the society’s mission (Solomon remained Vice President for twenty eight years, and Executive Secretary Dorothy W. Miller served for twenty two years) without connections to professional men, they understood their organization would not be considered serious or worthy of funding.

Though gendered issues often divided reformers, united by their desire to incite progress, they adopted a similar strategy to suppress vice.

### “Follow the plan”: Strategies of Suppression

Reformers’ gender and the gender of the audiences and offenders they addressed greatly influenced the way they approached prostitution and liquor, dictating the way they spoke and wrote, and what actions they took to combat intemperance and the social evil. Yet reformers, regardless of gender, adopted a similar, four-point strategy for these vices: qualify and quantify, contain, disinfect, and domesticate. Interestingly, they adapted these strategies in gendered ways.

#### *Qualify & Quantify*

---

<sup>38</sup> Maida H. Solomon to Mr. Bradley, Feb 28, 1928, Box 1 Folder 1, Massachusetts Society for Social Hygiene Papers. Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Reformers tried to qualify the damage prostitution and liquor wreaked on families and society through alarming poems, articles, posters and speeches. Their work often contrasted the safe, happy, clean, and private ideal home with darkness, filth and the crowded streets. It was intended to warn the feckless husband that when returning home from a hard day, if he brought the sins of the world home with him he was destroying his own haven. In 1898 *True Republic* published these lines: “Only a glass of liquor, but in it what pain and woe! / None but the broken-hearted and the wife of the drunkard know... Only a glass of liquor, but it wrecked a happy home! / It threw the shadow o’er it, and now all joy has flown.”<sup>39</sup> The poem claims that liquor introduced “dark[ness]... cold and dread” to the home. This work expresses the idea that carelessly inviting the conditions of the outside world to invade the home (like returning drunk from the pub or with an infection from a brothel) has disastrous consequences on one’s family.

Similarly, Ellen Martin Henrotin wrote in a cover letter “To members of Chicago Women’s Club” that prostitution and venereal disease “murders our young sisters, infects our boys and darkens the home” and urged the reader to take steps to “protect their daughters from the slaver and their sons from the sorrow of blinded children and the living death of Locomotor Ataxia.”<sup>40</sup> This warning again pulls the focus towards the domestic sphere, warning that prostitution will affect not only the john, but “our... sisters,” “boys,” “daughters,” and “sons.”

The “slaver” Henrotin refers to is the term used for pimps and madams who lured women into prostitution. Before World War I reformers believed that most prostitutes entered the business through victimization, as “white slaves.” The popular mythology held that pimps would have to find ways to trick women, because without the influence of drugs or violence the fairer

---

<sup>39</sup> H. G., “Only a Glass of Liquor,” *True Republic*, VIII no.3 (1898): 48. Nineteenth Century Collections Online, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen Martin Henrotin, cover letter, report to the Social Hygiene Committee, Chicago,” A142 Box 3 Folder 48, Ellen Martin Henrotin Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

sex was considered simply too moral to enter sex work. Jane Addams recounts an incident of this insidious coercion at Hull House involving a factory girl named Chloe. On her way home from work and “craving a drink to dispel her lassitude before her tired feet should take the long walk home, [she] had thus been decoyed into a saloon, where the soft drink was followed by an alcoholic one containing ‘knockout drops,’ and she awoke in a disreputable rooming house—too frightened and disgraced to return to her mother.”<sup>41</sup>

Stories of innocent young women being drugged, kidnapped and raped (or seduced and abandoned,) leaving them with nowhere to turn but towards prostitution remained popular in novels, songs, films and journalism for years. Though many of these stories are not blatant fabrications, the proliferation of tales makes it difficult to separate fact from fiction in studying how women generally entered the profession.<sup>42</sup> For many immigrant women and poor working women in the city, assault no doubt complicated their lives and work, but respectable society never accepted them as true women in the first place, and so could not cast them out as a lost girl either. Difficult economic circumstances likely encouraged many to venture into prostitution. Whether the catalyst was prior sexual assault, destitution or a mixture of both, it is undeniable that poverty, drugs and violence plagued the lives of many working girls.

White slave stories as warnings were highly dramatized, emotional pleas distributed repeatedly in the history of American Literature. The entertainment of the Progressive era, and the many decades before it, features a breadth of fictionalized accounts of the lives of drunks and

---

<sup>41</sup> Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House with Autobiographical Notes*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912), 204-205.

<sup>42</sup> Psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch published contemporaneous case studies on women who entered prostitution in the first half of the twentieth century, citing reasons such as pre-pubescent prostitution fantasies, lack of a mother figure, a brutal or passive father figure, premature sex, economic motives, and thrill-seeking. See *The Psychology of Women, Vol. I* (Boston: Grune and Stratton, 1944). Historian Sarah Deutsch (unrelated to Helene) published oral histories of prostitutes in *Women and the City: Gender, Space and Power in Boston: 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

prostitutes following a similar pattern. A young person falls in with the wrong crowd, goes astray, and sin snowballs in the fallen youth's life until it is too late for redemption-plagued by regret and seemingly friendless, the protagonist dies in a ditch or a den of iniquity. The author usually prefaces these stories with the message that they write only to instruct young people, and that they want the character's sinful life and death to be a lesson to others. Though the authors claim authority by posing themselves as reformers or Christians looking to instruct wayward youth, and often claim that their stories are true or based on true events, the entertainment value for many readers may have had more to do with the prurient nature of these violent and erotic tales than in the constructed moral awkwardly stuck in the preface. The placement of these claims indicate the author intended the reader to process the moral they insist their work illuminates even before the reader had a chance to analyze the tale itself.

Examples of these stories include Susanna Rowson's seminal novel *Charlotte Temple* (1790), one of the earliest American bestsellers about a naïve young girl seduced by her sweetheart, a rakish soldier who abandons her and her unborn child. Though not a sex worker by strict definitions, eighteenth century moral standards dictate Ms. Temple as a 'fallen woman' is a prostitute, and in a humiliating scene she is mistaken for one by her lover's friends. Her tale is meant to warn young women away from the path to that business, a fate considered worse than death. Following in the tradition of ruined women, the 1913 silent film "Traffic in Souls" tells the story of a woman who, with the help a handsome police officer, fights to free her sister from white slavery after she is drugged and lured into a New York City prostitution ring. T.S. Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Barroom* (1854) covers the dissolution of a family and the death of a child due to an inebriate father's abuses.

Literary Critic and Historian David S. Reynolds in *Beneath the American Renaissance* discusses the profusion of yellow literature in American after the 1830s. Sensational fiction flooded the market, and though it is difficult to quantify the amount of pamphlets and tracts printed during the era because “precise publishing statistics are unavailable,” primary sources indicate an abundance of cheap, racy works in circulation.<sup>43</sup> In his chapter on “The Reform Impulse and the Paradox of Immoral Didacticism” Reynolds captures the impulse of “exploitative publishers [who tried] to cash in on the public’s growing curiosity for the racy details of vice” during reform movements, “[f]or instance, *The Confessions of a Magdalene* (1831), a lurid pamphlet novel about a woman driven to prostitution after being drugged and seduced by a preacher, is evidently intended as a warning to seducers but comes closer to exploiting their nefarious deeds in titillating fiction.”<sup>44</sup> These stories were produced for a dual purpose: explicitly for moral instruction, the tales are undeniably suggestive entertainment which both demonized and glamorized the life of the criminal.

Mamie Pinzer, a reformed Philadelphia prostitute, acknowledged that these depictions of prostitutes and drinkers, products of “what conditions are known about girls like us,” were often inaccurate.<sup>45</sup> Through her correspondence with Bostonian Reformer Fanny Quincy Howe, Pinzer reveals herself not as a damsel in distress, but as a complicated, perceptive, intelligent woman who made her own decisions from a young age. These letters, written following a devastating surgery that robbed her of her eye and spurred a brief but powerful addiction to morphine, display street smarts, determination, and a mind well suited to business. She shares her desire to live a better life, to give back to girls in her previous situation, and to forgive her family and

---

<sup>43</sup> David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 210.

<sup>44</sup> Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 64.

<sup>45</sup> Mamie Pinzer to Fanny Quincy Howe, n.d. Box 1, Folder 2, Mamie Pinzer Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA..

move on from the complicated and hurtful relationships that hold her back.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, in her letters to Howe about her experience, she expresses penitence similar to many of the tragic, fallen heroines of pamphlet literature, and relates her own form of spirituality. Reflecting about her life in 1904, she shares: “I remember that when coming out into the street, on a bright sunny day, after having spent the night in debauch, I’d feel so degraded, especially if I saw children playing...and to still the ache in my heart, I’d look up in the sky and ask something of somebody.”<sup>47</sup> A reflective, reformed prostitute who went on to establish the Montreal Mission for Friendless Girls could have served as a wonderful poster girl for reformers, which is why Howe sought to publish these letters in the *Atlantic Monthly*. She was not successful.

The ways reformers qualified the lives and homes of those affected by drinking and prostitution were often sentimental or spiritual, a blend of fact and fiction which provoked fear, sadness and a conditional sort of sympathy in the reader. This approach read to contemporaneous audiences as decidedly feminine, and was characterized as such. Appeals to pathos only go so far, and in a piece about her discomfort with “The Sensational Element in Reform” Ellen Martin Henrotin writes: “On no subject is it possible to appeal more directly to the emotions or to so misrepresent facts as on that of the social evil. There is no problem of social life so incumbered [sic] with prejudice, tradition and general misrepresentation as is this one.”<sup>48</sup>

To prove that these tragedies were real and endemic, reformers bolstered their horror stories from the city streets by gathering massive amounts of data, extensively quantifying

---

<sup>46</sup> Mamie Pinzer, *The Mamie Papers: Letters from an Ex-Prostitute*. Eds. Ruth Rosen and Sue Davidson, (New York: The Feminist Press, 1997).

<sup>47</sup> Mamie Pinzer to Fanny Quincy Howe, n.d. Box 1, Folder 2, Mamie Pinzer Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>48</sup> Ellen Martin Henrotin, “Sensational Element,” Box 2 folder 20, Ellen Martin Henrotin Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. It should be noted that Henrotin did occasionally make and fall prey to the direct emotional appeals she expresses mistrust of in her papers, like her stirring plea in the cover letter previously cited.

prostitution. This data was tracked and interpreted by medical and legal authorities. The authorities who commissioned and published these reports and studies were overwhelmingly represented by men, which placed a credible veneer on the concerns of middle and upper-class reformers. Endorsed by male authorities, these reformers proved the issues were pressing through science and math, traditionally male domains. This approach came with major benefits: by quantifying vice, reformers could better prove the frequency and therefore the seriousness of the crimes they fought, keep track of the spread of infections, and formulate policies of containment, disinfection and domestication based on fact, not just on the emotional appeals made in novels.

In November of 1920 the *British Medical Journal* published a brief review of Danish Dr. S. Lomholt's findings during a clinical study of venereal disease. He recorded that "48% of the men attending a Copenhagen venereal clinic... were definitely under the influence of alcohol at the time of infection."<sup>49</sup> Seventy-five percent of the men who received an infection from a "professional prostitute... were under the influence of alcohol" when they became ill.<sup>50</sup> The numbers supported an age old truth: "alcohol greatly lessens the discrimination shown by the men in the choice of the women with whom they cohabit."<sup>51</sup> The article affirmed outright reformer's claims, stating "the campaign against alcohol is an important part of the campaign against venereal disease."<sup>52</sup>

The August 1920 report on prostitutes in Puerto Rico, a major U.S. military base, found that sixty-two percent of the women incarcerated for prostitution in the territory tested positive for syphilis. Women aged eighteen to twenty-two and twenty-three to twenty-seven were the

---

<sup>49</sup>"Alcohol and Venereal Disease," *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 3124 (Nov. 13, 1920): 756.

<sup>50</sup> "Alcohol and Venereal Disease," 756.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

most likely to be infected. Women under eighteen also showed high rates of infection, but those who remained in the business in their thirties and beyond showed a dip in syphilis. This indicated that these “old” women were madams and less likely to be having direct sexual contact with the patrons of their brothels.<sup>53</sup>

While the data on clinics and military bases focused on public health in the public sphere, a report made to the Social Hygiene Committee of Chicago revealed health effects within the private sphere. In the section titled “Extracts From the Report of 678 Physicians” the report found the common “origin of infection” for gonorrhea and syphilis was from the “public prostitute,” totaling 8053 cases, and that 988 of the afflicted had been infected by their spouse.<sup>54</sup> Sadly, the data included the hundreds of children in Chicago infected both by birth and sexual contact. This disturbing information revealed the way the sins of the public sphere were introduced to the home and the family.

### *Contain*

Armed with proof the ill effects of prostitution and alcohol were spilling into American households and infecting U.S. soldiers when victory required clean and able defenders, reformers felt compelled to form strategies to contain these evils. However, science does not exist in a vacuum. The interpretation of these facts, and their application in policy, were colored by gender. Civilian policies of containment included establishing reformatory schools for at-risk young women, and passing legislation, such as the Volstead Act, aimed at keeping alcohol available only in controlled channels. These policies were concerned with protecting the

---

<sup>53</sup> “Prostitute in Jail,” 276.

<sup>54</sup>Ellen Martin Henrotin, “excerpt from the reports of 678 physicians,” A142 Box 3 Folder 48, Ellen Martin Henrotin Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.



feminine private sphere from the ugly influences of the streets. In contrast, the military was concerned with protecting men as soldiers and the United States as a powerful nation, and used two major strategies: legislating and enforcing zero tolerance zones, and containing and treating prostitutes in jails and hospitals. Policies of containment were complicated, and had limited efficacy.

Reform school was considered the answer to “problem girls,” the state sponsored intervention which could prevent them from prostitution and a life in jail and set them instead on a respectable, domestic path.<sup>55</sup> These schools were designed by “the middle class and legal system” to “demonstrat[e] that morality is a teachable virtue to the lower class.”<sup>56</sup> They took in girls who were found “guilty of ‘falling into habits of vice and immorality’” due to a lack of parental control and productive employment, and after a few months of training for domestic service, placed them with middle and upper class families willing to foster these young women in exchange for their labor.<sup>57</sup> This was the last chance for many adolescents to become respectably feminized. Some girls, like Sadie Owen (a fourteen year old from Saco, Maine) reaped benefits from this program. Owen entered the Maine Industrial School for Girls after a run in with the law. She was described in 1906 as a young woman who was “beyond control” and “would not behave.”<sup>58</sup> After her retraining, the Bassett family took her in, and described her as “willing and usually pleasant.”<sup>59</sup> When her release date from service came Owen decided to stay with the Bassetts because “she liked it so well.”<sup>60</sup> Other young women, like Margaret Bushey, suffered from ill-use at their outplacement. Historian Camille Smalley comments “[i]ts

---

<sup>55</sup> Camille Smalley, “The ‘Bad’ Girls of Saco and Biddeford, Maine,” *Memories of Maine* (Winter 2015): 13.

<sup>56</sup> Smalley, “‘Bad’ Girls,” 13.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 14

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 15

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 15

difficult to say how successful the state reform system is because there is such a mix of success and failure.”<sup>61</sup> However, these reform schools were able to at least contain troubled young women for a few months. In many cases a retraining process which seemed to disinfect them of most working class behaviors successfully domesticated these young women during the length of their sentence. Though the girls’ reconditioning may not have lasted their lifetimes, reform schools did carry out the progressive mission and feminize troubled young women through the four strategies.

The Volstead Act supplemented the Eighteenth Amendment’s ban of alcoholic drinks by defining intoxicating liquors as those with “one-half of one percent alcohol by volume or more.”<sup>62</sup> It “established a massive federal bureaucracy to enforce National Prohibition” while accounting for and protecting “alcohol production...exempt from the act, including industrial alcohol that was widely used in lawful industries.”<sup>63</sup> Volstead also protected small scale production of alcoholic beverages for consumption within the home and at religious events. The act attempted to remove intoxicating liquor from American streets by closing bars and shutting down the large scale manufacture of potable alcohol intended for recreational use. Plainly, it was an attempt to contain alcohol and practically ban the working class, especially men, from one of their simple pleasures- gathering at the saloon. Yet it protected alcohol when its interest collided with the things the middle class dearly valued: the home, the place of worship, and the economy. This legislation, meant to further protect and separate men and women and strengthen the class divide, unintentionally led to a weakening of class and gender boundaries.

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 15

<sup>62</sup> Richard Mendelson, *From Demon to Darling: a Legal History of Wine in America* (University of California Press: Los Angeles, 2009), 60.

<sup>63</sup> Mendelson, *Demon to Darling*, 60.

Historian Mary Murphy explains the impact of Volstead on American nightlife: “Until the advent of Prohibition, drinking... was governed by clearly defined and understood social rules. Saloons were male preserves and reflected the ethnic and occupational strata of the community. Any woman who drank in a saloon was assumed to be a prostitute at worst, ‘loose’ at best. When reputable women drank, they did so at home. Prohibition rattled these traditional patterns.”<sup>64</sup> Changing social mores and the lure of the forbidden thanks to prohibitive legislation like the Volstead Act gave rise to “the speakeasy culture that gave more freedom to young women” by inviting them to drink, in public, with young men, flaunting their sexual allure through revealing attire without the stigma of prostitution. Instead of being further separated, young women and men were united in an act of rebellion against the legislation and behavioral standards of the previous generation. This shift heralded the advent of “a new heterosocial nightlife” which broke down the barriers Volstead and its proponents had tried to reinforce.<sup>65</sup>

Similar to the civilian policy of alcohol containment implemented by the Volstead Act, in Section 12 of the Selective Draft Act of May 18, 1917 “Congress authorized the President ‘to make... regulations governing the prohibition of alcoholic liquors in or near military camps and to the officers and enlisted men of the Army.”<sup>66</sup> Though previously this meant setting up dry zones in a five mile radius from any camp, In June of 1918, the army introduced a stricter policy of total abstinence. Lt. Buchanan noted in his speech “[the regulations] make the Army ‘bone dry.’ None of you gentlemen, even in the privacy of your own homes, may give me a drink of intoxicating liquor, including beer, ale and wine, without becoming a criminal.”<sup>67</sup> The Navy followed suit. In turning his attention to prostitution, Buchanan noted that like the early liquor

---

<sup>64</sup> Mary Murphy, “Bootlegging Mothers and Drinking Daughters: Gender and Prohibition in Butte, Montana,” *American Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1994): 175.

<sup>65</sup> Murphy, “Bootlegging,” 187,184.

<sup>66</sup> Buchanan, “War Legislation,” 520.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 524.

regulations, “Section 13 of the Draft Act, dated July 25, 1917...prohibited the keeping or setting up of homes of ill-fame within five miles of any military or naval station.”<sup>68</sup>

Of course, just as it proved difficult to keep liquor out of camps, prostitution was not limited to brothels and streets outside of those zones. More regulations were introduced to deal with the soldiers who slipped away from the camp, and with the prostitutes who managed to invade prohibited zones. January 1918 regulations “aimed at the suppression of all lewdness in ‘any place, structure or building’...prohibited...transporting for immoral purposes” to prevent prostitution in automobiles or aided by “taxi drivers and other procurers of lewd women.”<sup>69</sup> These additions underscore the meaning of the term ‘sex traffic.’ The mobility of prostitutes and drink threatened public health, because mobility was key to the spread of venereal disease. Enlisted men and officers who arrived in seaports and sought out “houses of ill-fame” often brought the diseases they received abroad back home, infecting their wives upon their return.

These soldiers also returned home with mental illness like anxiety and depression, acute cases of which were referred to as ‘shell shock,’ a condition we now recognize as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These men often self-medicated by drinking. Their physical ailments caught while abroad, like syphilis and gonorrhea, invaded stateside homes because authorities had not yet found proper ways to contain and treat the soldiers. Though eventually they figured out how to disinfect soldiers’ bodies, they did not have the tools to treat their emotional ills, and the coping behaviors soldiers developed translated in war zones and in the domestic sphere as moral offenses in their own right, which baffled authorities and social workers but nonetheless required response. World War I was a catch-twenty-two for these so-called “clean bunches.”

Given propaganda that assured them they were fighting to protect the morality and simplicity of

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Buchanan, “War Legislation,” 525.

home, when they returned they found themselves alienated, complicated, sometimes diseased and labelled immoral for the abusive drinking, tics and short tempers which were reactions to what they had experienced on the frontlines.

Shell shock was viewed as a weakness similar to vice, an indulgence in unpleasant emotion, and and Major Frederick W. Parson was quick to discredit soldiers who suffered from it for lengthy periods as dramatic:

A war neurosis which persists is not a creditable disease to have, as it indicates in practically every case a lack of the soldierly qualities which have distinguished the Allied Armies.... no one should be permitted to glorify himself as a case of "shell shock." It should become widely known that a persistent war neurosis is not something of which to be proud.... [I]t is a disorder of the will, and one does not boast of a weak will.<sup>70</sup>

For much of the war, the policy seemed to be to act as if shell shock was minor and easily cured, and hope that soldiers would be swayed to give up their mental anguish by the power of suggestion. These patients were treated much like the quarantined prostitutes discussed in the next section. William G. Black Jr. in his article on social work in World War I writes: "Shell shock patients, it was decided, were to be treated away from other patients, and the hospitals in which they were treated should not be made too attractive," and "while many army psychiatrists reported very high rates for "curing" shell shock patients, there undoubtedly was a high relapse rate that was not officially recognized by the army."<sup>71</sup> Though some psychiatric services were offered by the Red Cross under a program called Home Service during and after the war, the funding and man power of Home Service was simply not comprehensive enough to aid the servicemen who returned with mental illness.<sup>72</sup> Lacking accessible mental health care, and instructed that mental illness was only for the weak, soldiers struggled to contain the horrors they

---

<sup>70</sup> William G. Black Jr., "Social Work in World War I: A Method Lost," *Social Service Review* 65, no. 3 (Sep. 1991): 382-383.

<sup>71</sup> Black, "Social Work," 383.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

had experienced within themselves. This lifelong battle plagued many American servicemen returning from armed conflicts, before and since the war to end all wars.

When military and medical officials found that containment was not simple, easy, or 100% effective, they supplemented their strategy. Using cutting edge medical knowledge, they attempted to disinfect venereal disease patients. Similarly, reformers sought to disinfect prostitution and liquor.

### *Disinfect*

Alcohol has been used for medicinal purposes for centuries, as a pain killer and disinfectant. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century liquor was mixed in syrups (often with drugs like laudanum, opium and cocaine) to treat a host of common ailments. As Prohibition loomed medical professionals, pharmaceuticals and a variety of industries lobbied for exemption because their business required alcohol, and so the Eighteenth Amendment made provisions like the Volstead Act to allow production and use for medicinal and industrial purposes only. In disinfecting alcohol by making intoxicating drinks seemingly unavailable to the riffraff on the streets, reformers believed they could preserve it as wholesome and healthy in small amounts and control its usage. The government restricted liquor to the medicine cabinet, for administration by the woman of the house, who was considered morally superior and medically proficient enough to treat common illness with at-home remedies. Reformers' hope that after the Eighteenth Amendment alcohol would only be used in miniscule amounts at home to make families healthier, while trusting mothers as gatekeepers that would maintain American moral fortitude by abstaining from abusing these medicines, ultimately proved naïve.

“The Prostitute in Jail” report cited earlier made it clear that the armed forces could not be relied on to maintain their virtue and abstain from potentially infectious prostitutes.<sup>73</sup> The author found that “the confinement of a large number of prostitutes through the activities of the judges and district attorneys of Porto Rico[sic] made medical examinations possible.”<sup>74</sup> The examinations conducted on 721 prostitutes held in four jails revealed a great deal of useful data, from which it was concluded “the main source of infection is the prostitute, and that with her isolation new cases of syphilis among the men of the community and from these to the women and children cease, was definitely proven in Porto Rico[sic].”<sup>75</sup> This report claimed to prove that for military camps containment worked, when used in tandem with disinfection.

Doctors disinfected venereal disease patients through injections of arsenobenzol and mercury. Prostitutes were rounded up and confined, forced to undergo treatment that was brutally painful and lengthy. The arsenic compound they used had “toxic side effects” and administration of mercury, though it treated syphilis, was known to cause “neuropathies, kidney failure, and severe mouth ulcers and loss of teeth,... many patients died of mercurial poisoning rather than from the disease itself.”<sup>76</sup> Yet, for all the pain, the treatment seemed to produce results in the prostitutes treated in this study. The doctors felt “certain that cures were permanent in most cases...no case left the institution in an infectious state.”<sup>77</sup> As intensive treatments were administered over a period of incarceration, during their stay it was recorded that the patients’ health improved in general thanks to “a change in living conditions,” “the absence of alcohol” and “medical treatment that was directed to their general condition as well as to their local

---

<sup>73</sup> “Prostitute in Jail.”

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>75</sup> “Prostitute in Jail,” 276.

<sup>76</sup> John Frith, “Syphilis- Its Early History and Treatment Until Penicillin, and the Debate on its Origins,” *Journal of Military and Veterans’ Health* 20 no. 4 (2012): 53.

<sup>77</sup> “Prostitute in Jail,” 277.

troubles.”<sup>78</sup> Satisfied with their work, they observed “the results have been gratifying.”<sup>79</sup>

Doctors and legislators felt that “many of the girls, rid of the disease which may have prevented them from returning to a more decent mode of living, will not now be hindered by this cause, and will revert to domesticity without being a danger to all their associates.”<sup>80</sup> This document and the Volstead Act are fascinating because they reveal the ultimate goal of qualification, quantification, containment and disinfection: domesticating the threat loose women and intoxicated men posed by assimilating prostitutes and liquor into the home in small amounts, where they could be more tightly controlled.

### *Domesticate*

As previously discussed, reform schools and forced treatment of sexually transmitted diseases aimed ultimately at domesticating poorly behaved women, especially prostitutes, and containing these reformed women in homes. In Catherine Murdock’s *Domesticating Drink*, she claims women attempted to domesticate liquor in a similar manner, by assimilating it in their homes in contained spaces. Through cook books and guides to etiquette and entertainment, women possessed a “substantial body of literature detailing when and how alcohol might be integrated into domestic life.”<sup>81</sup> Starting with the Victorians, whose highly compartmentalized lives gave rise to a host of task specific objects like the decanter, housewives found ways to control drinking within the home, encouraging men to enjoy drinking moderately underneath the civilizing influence of the female gaze.<sup>82</sup> These maneuvers included setting tables with glasses

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 278

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>81</sup> Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 60.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 67-68.



which held smaller servings and dining etiquette which dictated when, where, and how to drink appropriately. For years alcohol had been used in medicine as an at-home remedy for common ailments and as a disinfectant. It was part of every woman's training in learning how to manage a household and care for others. Stripped of its association with bars and prostitutes, alcohol could be used as a symbol of a happy, healthy and virtuous home.

Years later, the WONPR expressed views on liquor that were similar to those of some Victorian predecessors. By associating responsible drinking with personal liberty and the home, they made it clear that there was always a place for alcohol in American life: at the dinner table. There, WONPR members believed parents could encourage moderate drinking and wholesome activity. Parents felt hampered in their ability to foster a respect for the law and the family by Prohibition's unintended consequences, like bootlegging and speakeasies.<sup>83</sup> The mobility of alcohol and their children had exponentially increased thanks to the invention of the automobile, and only by inviting drinks and young people back into their homes could they attempt to prevent the sexual promiscuity and recklessness encouraged by liquor and exciting new machinery like the Model T.

For both prostitution and liquor, reformers seemed to come full circle in their rhetoric and responses. Failing to completely oust these vices from American cities and homes by educating the public through horror stories and statistics, and struggling to contain offenders in jails and hospitals, reformers found other ways to disinfect and tame women and drink. By placing these hazards safely within more domestic social structures, like homes and reform schools, reformers believed prostitution and liquor would be easier to monitor, control and sanitize as necessary. Reformers realized there was some wisdom in keeping their virtues close, and their vices closer.

---

<sup>83</sup> Kyvig, "Women Against Prohibition," 469, 472.

## Conclusion

On the surface, reformers of both genders responded in the same manner to prostitution and liquor, through a policy of qualification and quantification, containment, disinfection, and domestication. When close read, their actions and writings reveal a tension. Male reformers were more overt in their approach to eradicating prostitution and disease, and less likely to favor prohibition. Female reformers were incredibly active in fighting the social evil, but had to write and act more subversively to attain their goal in reforming prostitutes. They were more likely to openly and fully endorse prohibition. Gender colored their perception of the issues, decided who and what the targets of their reform would be, and influenced their speech and actions.

The maneuvers of men and women reformers and authorities, the responses of offenders and the public, and the legislation and cultural heritage stemming from the Progressive Era and Prohibition reveal fascinating, complex contradictions and traditions that revolve around the way men and women interact. The records of these events largely rely on a gender binary that historians of sexuality and gender are just beginning to dissect. In this paper, I attempted to further the study of progressive reformers in the light of their gender, and draw out the subtle interactions between gender and class in their work. In researching how reformer's identities shaped their actions, new questions have surfaced. This paper is limited in scope to white reformers largely from the North. It leaves questions unanswered, like how did standards of femininity and masculinity, and a lack of political agency, affect black reformers and black

offenders? What was the experience of the male prostitute or the female drunk? Were the actions and reactions of queer reformers and offenders influenced by their sexuality? In contrast to northern reformers reactions to prostitution and liquor through legislation and organizations that they would qualify as innovative and liberal, how did reform of prostitution and liquor in the south play out in the wake of Reconstruction and the conservative backlash to Civil War that fostered a distrust of ‘carpetbagger’ ideals and lead to organizations like the Ku Klux Klan? These inquiries merit further exploration.

The question Clare Sheridan posed in her diary ninety-five years ago, "[i]s the United States more moral than any other country? Are the men and women human, or has legislation and public opinion extinguished the devil that lives in human frames?" still proves difficult to answer.<sup>84</sup> The men and women I have studied and discussed were most certainly human. They were passionate about creating a better world and felt deeply for the suffering of fellow human beings. However, they could be brutal and rigorous, even inhumane, in their study and application of solutions, like their incarceration and forced injections of poisonous compounds into women they saw as diseased and disgraced. They were in turns highly logical and overwhelmingly emotional, brilliant and short-sighted, patient and demanding, hopeful and hopelessly lost. They felt the United States was becoming increasingly immoral, and reacted in complicated ways to increase morality, sometimes with an ‘end justifies the means’ mentality. They did not succeed in permanently extinguishing “the devil that lives in human frames,” but instead established historic precedent for modern American moral and health panics.

American reformers were both amazingly moral and horrifyingly immoral, angelic and devilish, fairly effective and utter failures. These contradictions and interpretations are what

---

<sup>84</sup> Sheridan, “Diary of,” 322.

make these reformers so dynamic, and their manifold approaches can be illuminated by considering the effect gender and class identities had on their work.

Works Cited:

Addams, Jane. *Twenty Years at Hull-House with Autobiographical Notes*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912.

“Alcohol and Venereal Disease,” *The British Medical Journal* 2 No. 3124 (Nov. 13, 1920): 756.

Bell, W.S. “Anti-Prohibition: An Address Delivered in Paine Hall, Before the N.E. Freethinkers’ Convention, Jan. 28, 1884.” Boston: JP Mendum, 1884. Google Books.

Black, William G. Jr., “Social Work in World War I: A Method Lost,” *Social Service Review* 65, no. 3 (Sep., 1991): 379-402.

Buchanan, John G. “War Legislation Against Alcoholic Liquor and Prostitution,” *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 9, no. 4 (Feb. 1919): 520-529.

Frith, John. “Syphilis- Its Early History and Treatment until Penicillin, and the Debate on its Origins,” *Journal of Military and Veterans’ Health* 2 no. 4 (Nov. 2012): 49-58.

Janis, Elsie. “If I Know What I Mean: College Presidents and Campus Cut-Ups,” *Washington Post*. Feb. 10, 1924. SM6. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Web.

Henrotin, Ellen Martin. Papers. Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

H. G., "Only a Glass of Liquor." *True Republic* VIII no.3 (1898): 48. Nineteenth Century Collections Online. Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Web.

Hobson, Barbara Meil. *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Kyvig, David E. "Women Against Prohibition," *American Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (Autumn, 1976): 465-482.

Massachusetts Society for Social Hygiene. Papers. Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Mendelson, Richard. *From Demon to Darling: a Legal History of Wine in America*. University of California Press: Los Angeles, 2009.

Murdock, Catherine. *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870- 1940*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Murphy, Mary. "Bootlegging Mothers and Drinking Daughters: Gender and Prohibition in Butte, Montana," *American Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1994):174-94.

-----"The Private Lives of Public Women: Prostitution in Butte, Montana, 1878-1917," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 7, no. 23 (1984): 30-35.

Pinzer, Mamie. Letter to Fanny Quincy Howe. Mamie Pinzer Papers. Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

----- *The Mamie Papers: Letters from an Ex-Prostitute*. Edited by Ruth Rosen and Sue Davidson. New York: The Feminist Press, 1997.

"The Prostitute in Jail" *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 11, no. 2 (Aug, 1920): 276-279.

Reynolds, David S. *Beneath the American Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Rose, Kenneth. *American Women and the Repeal of Prohibition*. New York: NYU Press, 1995.

Sheridan, Clare Consuela Frewen, "Diary of Clare Consuela Sheridan, October, 1921," *My American Diary*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922. North American Women's Letters and Diaries. Web.

Smalley, Camille. "The 'Bad' Girls of Saco and Biddeford, Maine," *Memories of Maine* (Winter 2015): 13-15.

Standage, Thomas. *A History of the World in Six Glasses*. New York: Walker & Co, 2005.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, As Revealed in Her Letters, Diary and Reminiscences*, Edited by Harriot Stanton Blatch and Theodore Stanton. Vol. 2. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1922. North American Womens' Letters and Diaries. Web.

Tannahill, Reay. *Sex in History*. London: Scarborough House Publishers, 1992.

"War Between Rum and Religion," *The Freethought Ideal* VII, no. 16, Ottawa, Kansas (Mar. 1, 1901) Kansas Historical Society. Web.

Willard, Frances E. "The Liquor Crime and the Social Evil," *Vigilance* I no. 9 (1886): 6. Nineteenth Century Collections Online. Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Web.