

Sex Trafficking and the Weeklies - Part II:

Another Inconvenient Truth

August 14, 2007

Remember the flap over a column called “Why I hate Blacks” in *Asian Week* last February? The writer was fired and the publication made other big changes, too. One of its editors was still apologizing recently on the KPFA Morning Show.

Earth to San Francisco???. Every issue of the *Bay Guardian* and *S.F. Weekly* for the past several years reads like a column entitled “Why we think the only good women are prostitutes.” From the proliferation of advertising for so-called Gentlemen’s Clubs, to the pornographic hooker listings, these newspapers promote the notion that unlike other American citizens, young women represent a form of property can be rented out in the manner of a tuxedo.

As for racial profiling in these journals, statements like “Many Beautiful, Exotic Asians to choose from”, “Sultry Latina”, and “Young Chinese masseuses” might have triggered a few complaints by now.

But nothing. Even news reports detailing how many of these “masseuses” are the victims of kidnapping, extortion, physical and psychological assault, and false imprisonment seem to generate little more than a shrug and a yawn from citydwellers.

Sketics say there’s nothing to prove that massage parlors are not offering massage. Try logging onto the **myredbook.com** search engine, as we

did one day, and see for yourself what services are rendered. Just enter the name of almost any venue that advertises in the weeklies and *Voila!* One can read all about the action there without having to hire an investigator.

On this website, customers report their visits in detail, including the woman’s name, nationality, breast size and the appearance of her crotch.



Promotional artwork for the recent GiRL FeST event series in San Francisco, which featured a panel on sex trafficking and prostitution.

Then they make comments like this: “Some talent with lips and tongue but riding skills needs more enthusiasm.”

Still sound like a massage?

The city’s massage ordinance, incidentally, specifies that employees cannot wear lingerie, bikinis, etc. Yet that’s how the women are dressed in the ads, if they’re dressed at all. The so-called Escort section also has the same problem passing the straight-face test, as women here are almost always featured nude. If that’s not enough of a tip off, check out the copy on the ad: “New Sultry Latina - Best Oral Communication, Ultra-functional, 8 inches.”

Pages and pages of this stuff, in a

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city that boasts more nonprofit civil rights groups per capita than nearly anywhere else in the nation. Strange that we should have to be reminded of our international human rights obligations regarding trafficked women and the victims of sexual abuse at the hands of pimps.

Rainbow Grocery, that bastion of fair trade and immigrant rights, distributes both newspapers in large quantities at its Folsom Street store. And they intend to go right on circulating the titles, we were told.

Too bad about that, since over the years, both the *Bay Guardian* and *S.F. Weekly* have degenerated into little Quentin Tarantino inspired toxic waste dumps. With a quarter million copies of these kinky sex guides rolling off the presses every week, there are plenty to go around to all the branch libraries, busstops outside junior highs, the Montgomery Street highrises, coffee cafes and on all the streetcorners where we live.

And how convenient is that? If anyone wonders why trafficking is worse in the Bay Area than anywhere else in the country, this is likely the reason.

As if we need to remind our anti-globalization comrades, the sex-for-hire marketing juggernaut takes place at the expense of poor women in foreign countries, as well as those who live in our own low-income communities. While girls as young as 12 are being scooped up in places like Richmond and Oakland by a growing entrepreneurial class of pimps, Tim Redmond, Bruce Brugman and even the conservative, Phoenix-based *S.F. Weekly* publishers, whoever they are, go right on acting like the pillars of society they’re not. (Craig Newmark, who operates Craigslist, contributes to the cause

continued



Part of an advertisement for a massage parlor placed in one of the local weeklies. The demeaning depictions of Asian women are standard fare for both the **Bay Guardian** and **S.F. Weekly**.

in his own special way, as we note in our sex trafficking story in our current issue.)

Exactly how much money is generated from this modern-day version of human slavery is unknown, but since it costs about a hundred dollars for an ad the size of two postage stamps, one can do the math. Some pro-sex worker activists claim many of the ads are placed by self-employed prostitutes. Sure. That's like Julia Roberts telling Richard Gere in *Pretty Woman* she makes \$100 an hour but has to use a safety pin to keep her boot fastened. Gere didn't buy into the scam. Neither should we.

Equally hair-raising, when we look past the listings posted by the various Pimps-R-Us outlets, we find large display ads from institutions like Goodwill, the YMCA and the Jesuit-run University of San Francisco.

To say this makes for strange bed-fellows sounds cliché. Yet after paying out nearly a billion dollars in settlements to its child molestation victims, the Catholic Church isn't exactly getting off to a fresh start by pumping revenue back to the scene of the crime - or at least the same general vicinity.

And what about the tens of thousands of dollars in ad buys by state, local and federal government agencies you find in each issue of the *Bay Guardian* and *S.F. Weekly*? In other cities, the local authorities have pressured newspapers to stop running

ads for brothels. But in San Francisco, one local arts agency alone bought two half-page ads in a recent issue of the *Guardian* at an estimated cost of \$1,500.

As in the case with the Jesuits and the YMCA, it's not just the money, either. The presence of all these mom and apple pie advertisers functions as a sort of *Good Housekeeping* seal of approval to the whole concept of minority or foreign women as negotiable commodities. An act that was once viewed by our society as perversion and crime, now seems as everyday as going to the movies.

Finally, while law enforcement is warning teenage girls about predators on the internet and the need to watch themselves on **MySpace.com**, the alternative newspapers get to churn out more of these deranged characters every week.

Instead of draining the swamp, we seem to be filling it.

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