

## Focus on Global Sex Trafficking:

# Crime and No Punishment

February 1, 2007

**T**rafficking in women is the new growth industry for organized crime, with opportunities abounding for pimps, brothel owners, newspaper advertising salesmen and other third parties in San Francisco. Still, Western Europe continues to absorb the vast majority of sex slaves coming out of Asia and the former Soviet bloc. The International Organization for Migration estimates that half a million girls and women are indentured each year in EU countries after responding to false job offers or being sold to traffickers by someone they trust.

In California, where prostitution is illegal, rising demand for sex workers is likewise fueling the trade in human beings. Beefed up laws and high-profile raids of San Francisco brothels in 2004 and 2005 have not made a meaningful dent in the business, either. The number of massage parlors here has mushroomed to 90 in the last few years, causing the Board of Supervisors to pass an ordinance last fall calling on future applicants to submit to a public hearing.

The Department of Public Health currently has responsibility for monitoring massage parlors, after the Board transferred supervision away from the SFPD in 1993.

While licensed to provide therapeutic bodywork and spa treatments, many establishments openly advertise sex services on the internet and in popular weekly newspapers like the *S.F. Bay Guardian* and *S.F. Weekly*.

The SFPD Vice Squad conducts raids based on info from the ads, but the police only arrest or cite the prostitutes. Records show that there were 1,351 such collars in the past year. Brothel owners are not arrested, says Captain Tim Hettrich, due to lack of evidence to prove they are knowingly operating a house of prostitution.

Last October, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published an investigative series on the crisis. Reporter Meredith May interviewed key city officials and retraced the odyssey of a sex slave from her home in South Korea to a brothel on Geary Street.



A team from the Women's Media Centre of Cambodia interviews a policeman along the Thai-Cambodian border about trafficking of Khmer women and children into Thailand.

Of the thousands of prostitutes working in San Francisco, not all are trafficked, but an estimated 30,000 women are entering the United States each year. In addition to California, the highest concentration of sex slaves are found in New York, Texas and Nevada.

In 2005, about 100 Korean "masseuses" were taken into

custody here in a federal sting. Some 45 alleged traffickers and brothel owners were also detained in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Dubbed Operation Gilded Cage, a year and a half later, nine of the alleged traffickers have had their charges dismissed. Nearly all the rest have plea bargained their way to lesser charges, such as harboring illegal aliens, receiving prison sentences of under two years and fines of \$5,000 or less.

Of the 100 sex slaves taken into custody, the vast majority were deported after receiving no compensation for the work they performed. This included 26 women who had offered to testify against the traffickers, according to the S.F. District Attorney's office. In addition, more than half of the \$2 million dollars confiscated in the raids was forfeited by the massage parlor owners to the federal government in exchange for leniency.



**"We've spent \$1 million already, and we revoked one massage license permit in a year."**

Mayor Gavin Newsom, quoted in Meredith May's series on trafficking last fall.

Pro sex worker activists may be hurting efforts of anti-traffickers

# Trafficking, Prostitution, Porn and San Francisco

February 1, 2007

Once locked inside the steamy wrappers of *Hustler* and *Penthouse* magazines, pornography today is as in your face as it can get, whether it's a billboard on the side of the bus or display ads saturating the pages of free newspapers.

The caravan of women in their birthday suits may represent the latest craze in designer esthetic, but how nudity sells clothes remains a puzzler. Pop culture is promoting the line that images of promiscuous women make a counterculture statement, sort of a back-at-you slam of the religious right.

In fact, there's a lot more going on here than meets the naked eye. While their brothers are losing themselves in the latest Nintendo release of *Grand Theft Auto*, young women of Generation Next may well be getting primed for a world in which the women's workplace is no longer in the financial district but the red-light district.

Whether it's sex tourism in Third World countries or a lap dance in North Beach, the growing demand for available bodies has created a gold rush worldwide. Sex trafficking schemes have flourished both domestically and abroad as vulnerable women become the targets of elaborate swindles, often involving their own families and friends.



Recent cover of a New York fashion magazine.

## Embracing Sex Work

On the question of prostitution in general, those who lobby for its decriminalization say women should have the right to freely exploit their sexual-erotic possibilities, whether it's for fun, profit, or just to make ends meet.

In spite of the proliferation of debt bondage and slavery associated with the sex trade, proponents argue that the violence against prostitutes would for the most part disappear if the profession is legalized in the United States. That's because sex workers would no longer have to operate underground or in the shadows.

Arresting prostitutes has created a wedge between the victims and those who are supposed to be protecting them, according to pro-prostitution groups. By ending this historic antagonism, they assert it will be easier for sex workers to come forward, report crimes, and get help from the police.

On the other side of the debate are those who say this vision of safe and healthy sex work defies reality. Janice Raymond, who co-directs the U.S. based Coalition Against the Traf-

ficking in Women, has examined prostitution where it has been legalized, and says the verdict is in. Drug dealing, organized crime and violence - far from decreasing, have turned neighborhoods into war zones and garbage dumps.

Most girls and women enter the trade at age 13, abolitionists note, which hardly amounts to a career decision. This induction typically follows either a sexual assault, coercion by a pimp, or the result of homelessness and poverty.

(Despite the existence of battered women shelters for women nationwide, these facilities usually house only 10-30 beds each,

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**MUNI Does Dallas.** An ad on the side of a 44-O'Shaughnessy bus spotted last December in San Francisco. According to the a Muni spokeswoman, the First Amendment protects advertisers' rights to get as pornographic as they like, as long as the copy meets the rules of the so-called Miller Test for what cannot be considered obscene.

forcing the vast majority of eligible victims to compete for space in the larger H.U.D. funded adult shelters. Although the latter may provide 100-400 beds, the lion's share of those accommodations are allocated for homeless men.)

In addition, most researchers estimate that 85 percent of prostitutes are controlled by pimps or brothel owners. Most of the money earned in sex work, therefore, goes to someone else, causing opponents to argue it's that someone else who stands to gain the most from decriminalizing the profession, not the prostitutes.

The abolitionists also offer evidence that legalization causes johns (i.e. the customers) to start coming out of the woodwork, while traffickers are more likely to deliver to ports where laws are lax. In Western Europe, where sex

works has been legalized in several countries, trafficked women have become a staple of everyday society. After all, where there's an increased demand for a product, more merchandise has to be secured from somewhere. That's why the number of sex slaves indentured in EU countries is currently about ten times the estimate given for the United States.

### Enter the Netherlands

Amsterdam may be the West's Ground Zero for the prostitution industry. Rows of shop windows line many quaint, teeming alleys of its sprawling red-light district, where girls in their very early twenties show off their figures behind plate glass doors that lead to private cubicles.

Sometimes a Mercedes eases

its way down a street, and behind the wheel, a virile-looking owner of one of the shops appears to be just returning from a week in Monaco. He makes his money - on paper anyway - by renting out display windows to prostitutes who pay him \$100 a shift.

It's a 24/7/365 business, too. On any given day, men from Germany, Britain, Italy, Brazil, Chicago or Beijing can be seen trawling the aisles and commenting matter-of-factly to one another about the pros and cons of each girl.

Strange as it may seem, it was the Netherlands that first took the initiative on global sex trafficking about a decade ago. In 1997, the country held the presidency of the European Union and opted to preempt other legislation in the hopper by imposing its own watered

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# Pornography Company Acquires Half City Block to Film Bondage Videos for Sale on Internet

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The S.F. Armory sat empty for thirty years, apparently waiting for this moment.

On December 29th, Kink.com, which offers some of the grislier pornographic fare available for purchase on the internet, acquired the historic structure in the Mission District for \$14.5 million.

According to spokeswoman Sarah Hill, the company was drawn to the medieval aspect of the location. The building is modeled after a Moorish castle, which makes it ideal for filming dungeon scenes and other backdrops for torture.

Kink.com is a purveyor of BDSM videos. The acronym stands for bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sado-masochism. The company's current studio is located at 942 Mission Street.

The S.F. Armory was built in 1914 as a place for national guardsmen to muster when called up during an emergency to quell labor riots. The most famous of these uprisings occurred in 1934, when a barricade was set up alongside the armory and police officers retreated inside for safety. The building was added to the register of national historic places in America in 1978.

A description of the interior can be found on the website sfarmory.com, which notes, "It is full of period detail, including cavernous dungeon-like basements, stone staircases, sweeping corridors, and a gigantic drill court spanning almost an acre.



S.F. Examiner columnist Ken Garcia toured the facility recently with Kink C.E.O. Peter Acworth.

Garcia elaborated on "its castle-like qualities – which include an underground stream, basement-level stables, gothic corners and prison-style windows."

Reporting the sale for local NBC affiliate *Channel 11*, reporter Jean Elle said some area residents expressed dismay about the new enterprise, although one young man lauded the venture as being "in the spirit of the city."

Kink spokeswoman Hill said the company will try to smooth over ruffled feathers in the neighborhood by offering space to local nonprofits for fundraisers.

Because of the area's zoning, Kink will not have to apply for any permits, and the city is powerless to stop the sale, regardless of any neighborhood opposition.

In the television report, spokeswoman Hill added, as if to allay any concerns, "The community will never have to know what happens inside these walls."

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down version. Because Dutch girls aren't big on applying for jobs as sex workers, a steady flow of foreign migrants is essential to Holland economy as the California Acqueduct to Central Valley farmers. The Dutch government taxes prostitutes' earnings at a rate of about 18 percent, using part of the money to provide them with free health care, and if they publicly register, retirement pensions.

The Dutch managed to keep the European community in check until 2000, when the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime was negotiated. Even though the Netherlands had long argued that there was a difference between migrant sex workers and trafficked women, the new Palermo Protocols, as the sex trafficking laws came to be known, did not make that distinction.

The Protocols were eventually signed by 80 countries, including the United States during the Clinton Administration. The Dutch responded by filing suit in the European Court, asserting travel for the purpose of prostitution was a protected right under free trade agreements. The court agreed, and that was the end of the beginning of that.

According to Raymond of the Coalition Against the Trafficking in Women, the Netherlands has its own laws prohibiting the employment of trafficked women, but the crime continues because raped and terrified victims are coached by traffickers to tell anyone who asks them that they are simply seeking employment.

And yet everyone knows, Raymond says, that "they didn't get there on their own steam." The traffickers assess tens of thousands of dollars for transportation costs, while brothel owners and other

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**The  
Shape of  
Things  
To Come**

third parties may add their own charges. The debt balloons and the women are told they will be freed as soon as it's paid off out of their prostitution earnings.

Raymond notes that despite Holland's liberal stance on prostitution, police have closed down a third of the brothels in Amsterdam, Utrecht and Rotterdam in recent years because of their links to organized crime. Many of the owners have retaliated with lawsuits or simply started new companies and picked up where they left off.

"These guys are like phoenixes," she explains. "They rise from the ashes."

Across the way, in the United Kingdom, two Albanian traffickers of Lithuanian women were recently sentenced to five and seven years in prison, respectively, according to the BBC.

The men were apprehended as part of Operation Pentameter, which rescued 84 trafficked women and children, 12 of whom were aged between 14 and 17. Both men pleaded guilty to trafficking for sexual exploitation, causing or inciting prostitution for gain, and two counts of controlling prostitution for gain. British authorities also confiscated hundreds of thousands of dollars from their bank accounts.

Raymond's group has called on the United States to revise its own rules for dealing with traffickers, which she says are not in compliance with international law. Congress passed the Trafficking victim's Protection Act (TVPA) a few months ahead of the Palermo Protocols. Much to the activists' chagrin, the TVPA included the Dutch language of "force, fraud, or coercion" that had been rejected in the Palermo Protocols.

That's why enforcement has been anemic to date. Prosecutors with the U.S. Attorney's offices



Message ads in local weekly newspapers can run from \$100 to \$300 apiece, quite a haul for their publishers.

claim they can't get juries to believe the testimony of trafficked women, since the alleged victims are in the country illegally and might have initially agreed to their transport.

According to Raymond, the women's testimony shouldn't be required to demonstrate that they were forced into prostitution, since the Senate ratified the Convention on Transnational Crime after passing the TVPA. Consent is irrelevant in the treaty.

### S.F. Advocates Weigh In

Local prostitution researcher Melissa Farley concurs with Raymond on the subject of coercion.

"It's not just the kidnapping of an innocent victim in Moscow with a gun held to her head.

That's just incredibly naive."

Most trafficking scams begin with bogus job offers, she says, and some women are well aware that they are being transported illegally into foreign countries. That doesn't mean they waive their protections against rape, kidnapping, false imprisonment and forced sexual servitude. The brothel owners, guards and other handlers are all guilty of the same crime.

"Women are not just trafficked in the abstract. Women are trafficked into prostitution," Farley explains. Laws that try to separate the two represent a tactic that immunizes the brothel owner, while compelling law enforcement to catch smugglers in the act rather than where the contraband is delivered.

As for the origins of sex trafficking schemes afoot in the world today, Dechen Tsering of the San Francisco based Global Fund for Women says most sex slaves come from rural areas in developing countries. The problem is especially acute in places where men have had to leave home in search of work. "There are villages now in Nepal and in China where it's the women doing everything," Tsering explains. With most of the men in the village gone, young women are more vulnerable to fake offers of jobs in other countries.

Tsering is the Global Fund's Program Officer for Asia and Oceania. She estimates that over \$7 billion is generated annually in initial sales at the first stage of trafficking, and another \$32 billion as the women change hands from one pimp to another in the course of their incarceration.

As a result, the Global Fund has made nearly 300 grants since 1987 worth \$3 million dollars to

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indigenous groups who address the economics (as well as the politics) of trafficking in source countries..

However, Tserin insists part of the problem lies in the wealthier nations, where a lack of conscience underscores the popularity of sex tourism and other trafficking schemes. In Japan, for instance, many corporations have a policy of sending male executives on sex tours to Cambodia as a bonus for good job performance.

Widespread government corruption within the Developing World and dependency on international bank loans are not helping either. Some of the groups that we work with are trying to expose this corruption," she adds, "at great risk to themselves."

The international banks, which are funded by taxpayers in the United States and other industrialized countries, may be doing more harm than good, according to Tserin. While government officials in the recipient nations benefit personally from the bank loans, the repayment schemes usually stipulate austere cuts in spending for health and human services,

as well as privatizing national industries. The latter provision allows multinational corporations to enter the country, a trend that has been repeatedly linked to the destruction of local economies.

### Advancing Prostitutes' Rights

Back on this continent, San Francisco's generally permissive attitude towards prostitution dates back to the raucous bordello days of the Gold Rush.

It was in the 1970's that Margo St. James established the first prostitutes' rights group, called COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), which has hammered for legalization ever since. COYOTE identifies itself as a member of the International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights, an umbrella organization formed in Amsterdam in 1985.

St. James also initiated the annual Hooker's Ball and ran for the Board of Supervisors twice, almost snagging a seat in 1996. More recently, she founded the St. James Infirmary, described as a peer-based occupational safety & health

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"The DMSC Collective in India receives millions of dollars a year for AIDS prevention from Bill Gates. This group of mostly women pimps promote legal prostitution while they control a multi-brothel prostitution/trafficking complex that houses 60,000 women and girls in Kolkata. Pimping other women is one way to get out of prostitution."

Melissa Farley, writing in *The Nation*, August 2005.

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clinic for sex workers. The clinic is supported by the Exotic Dancers Alliance (which represents strippers and other entertainers in North Beach) and receives funding from the San Francisco Department of Public Health.

Years earlier, COYOTE's first foray into providing social services, an agency known as CALPEP, floundered when reports surfaced that the executive director had hired her former pimp as the personnel director. The agency provided AIDS education and counseling to prostitutes during the 1980's, receiving millions of dollars from the Centers for Disease Control.

Former prostitute Norma Hotaling was one of the whistleblowers in that scandal, forming her own agency in 1993 called SAGE (Standing Against Global

COYOTE member Carol Leigh made her debut in san Francisco with the political satire of **The Adventures of Scarlet Harlot**, a one-woman play which played throughout the Bay Area in the 1980s. Leigh currently manages BAY SWAN, Bay Area Sex Workers Advocacy Network, a website which advocates on behalf of prostitutes.

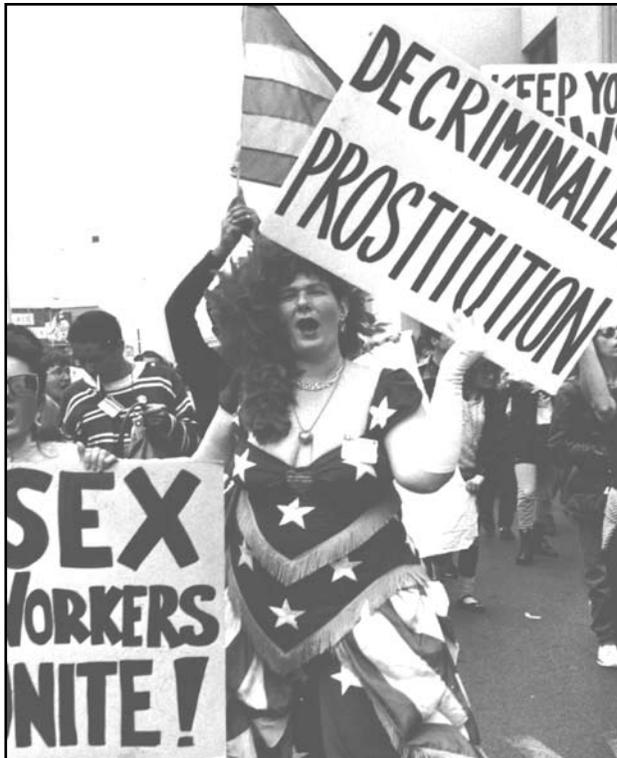


Photo by Tracy Mostovoy

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Exploitation). She received help from a San Francisco police officer and was eventually honored by Oprah, whose Angel Fund awarded SAGE one hundred thousand dollars.

In 2003, Senator Diane Feinstein secured an additional \$1.3 million congressional earmark for Hotaling's group. SAGE sees over 300 women and men each week and still has a long waiting list for services. The agency provides substance abuse programs, mental health counseling and vocational training to prostitutes, as well as medical services in conjunction with the Tom Wadell clinic.

Hotaling says many of her clients are women in their thirties and forties who have been "aged out" of the trade, and now find themselves without other job skills.

She has testified before the House Monetary Trade Committee and the Helsinki Commission on the subject of trafficking, and was a featured speaker at the American Psychological Association's annual convention a few years ago.

Since Hotaling spent her early years revolving between the

streets and jail, her philosophy regarding the sex trade diverges from that of the cocktail party-hopping St. James and other pro-sex activists agitating for legalization. The movement, according to Hotaling, is much smaller than people realize.

"So that whole camp has created a politically correct way of thinking about prostitution," she said in an interview ten years ago. "And then I came along, and I think have been raining on their parade ever since."

Kathleen Kim, a teaching fellow at Stanford Law School, represented some of the 120 trafficked women arrested in a federal raid in the Sunset District in 2004.

"Basically the clients are handled," she says, asserting that such operations have the effect of re-traumatizing the victims. All the women's personal belongings are removed in an effort to "preserve the integrity of the crime scene."

The women themselves are held on immigration charges, though not in jail.

Kim believes the feds would accomplish more by establishing

a relationship of trust and cooperation with foreign prostitutes in advance of the raids. In place of heavy-handed prosecutorial zeal, a more humanitarian approach towards the victims might in the end yield stronger cases against the suspects.

### One Shelter from the Storm

There's only one housing alternative in the city for recovering and victimized prostitutes, and that's one of five in the nation, collectively providing less than a hundred beds.

SAFEHOUSE opened in 1998, housing ten women. Debra Salan says her organization still spends considerable time generating private contributions, since 11% of its government funding has been cut in the last three years.

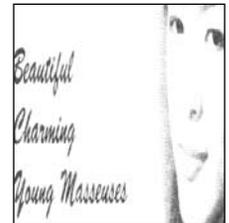
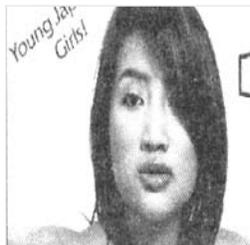
Under the Care Not Cash program of Mayor Newsom, homeless women, including prostitutes, are eligible for lodging in city-funded Single Room Occupancy hotels, known as SROs. However, because these facilities operate on the harm reduction model (i.e.

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# S.F. Chronicle Reporter Accused of "Ruining the Party" with Investigation of Sex Slavery

Last October, Meredith May finished work on a four-part series examining sex slavery as it played out among San Francisco's 90-plus massage parlors.

Running on the front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, May's story tracked the odyssey of a young woman who was trafficked into the United States from South Korea, then placed into debt bondage, working at a Geary Street brothel.

"It really touched a lot of nerves," May says of the series. The *Chronicle* website *sfgate.com* was touched with over a million hits from readers, while some 500 bloggers had posted comments by the end of the first week.

During a visit to South Korea, May observed an unexpected level of materialism among young Koreans. "The pressure to look rich

is outlandish," she says, and young girls are going to great lengths, in some cases prostitution, to get the



S.F. Chronicle Staff Reporter  
Meredith May

money they need to buy a pair of American sneakers or a Louis Vuitton handbag.

Back in San Francisco, May followed a team of inspectors from the Department of Public Health, the City Attorney's office, the Depart-

ment of Building Inspection, the police and fire departments, and Mayor Newsom himself as they made unannounced visits to five alleged brothels.

At one stop, the team got no further than the lobby before they found a man having sex with a masseuse on the couch.

Of some 400 emails May received from readers, about half said they were moved by the story. Among the other half were regular customers of the city's massage circuit, who claimed May was "ruining the party" by stirring up so much controversy. The series also stimulated emotions within the Korean community, with about half of those emailing thanking her for bringing the issue out from under the rug. The other half accused her of stereotyping Asian culture.

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allowing residents to take drugs in their rooms), women often become targets of violence and other predatory behavior at these locations.

While the city is in the process of creating a woman-only SRO residence in the south of market area, that building will house only a very a small number of applicants.

*For more information:*

Coalition Against the Trafficking in Women [catwinternational.org](http://catwinternational.org)

Global Fund for Women  
[globalfundforwomen.org](http://globalfundforwomen.org)

Prostitution Research and Education  
[prostitutionresearch.com](http://prostitutionresearch.com)

SAGE [sagesf.org](http://sagesf.org)

SAFEHOUSE [sfsafehouse.org](http://sfsafehouse.org)

Salan would like to see SAFEHOUSE acquire a larger facility that provides transitional housing to 30-40 women, while converting the current 5-bedroom family residence into a long-term alternative for women who are suffering serious trauma from repeated or devastating sexual assaults. She

notes that about a third of her clients never recover from their ordeals, and placing them in more permanent assisted living situations has been a real challenge.

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