

**The White Slave Trade and the Yellow Peril:  
Anti-Chinese Rhetoric and Women's Moral Authority**

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by

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## **Abstract**

Despite the mid-to-late nineteenth and early twentieth century's cultural preoccupation with white women's sexual vulnerability, another phenomenon managed to take hold of public consciousness: "yellow slavery." Yellow slavery was the variation of white slavery (known today as sex trafficking) that described the practice when Asian women were the victims. This thesis attempts to determine several of the reasons why Chinese women were included as victims in an otherwise exclusively white victim pool. One of the central reasons was the actual existence of the practice, which this thesis attempts to verify through the critical examination of found contracts and testimony of Chinese women. However, beyond just the existence of the practice of yellow slavery, many individuals used the sexual exploitation of Chinese women for their own cultural, religious, and political ends. Anti-Chinese agitators leveraged the image of the Chinese slave girl to frame anti-Chinese efforts as anti-slavery efforts, as well as to depict Chinese immigrants as incapable of assimilating into American culture and adhering to American ideals of freedom. Additionally, white missionaries created mission homes to shelter and protect the Chinese women and girls escaping white slavery. However, within these homes, the missionaries were then able to push their perceived cultural and religious superiority by pushing the home's inmates into their ideals of Protestant, middle-class, white womanhood. Finally, suffragists utilized concern for Chinese sex workers to call for women's suffrage based on women's unique moral authority to stop immorality, an authority that men did not share.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgement .....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: A Kernel of Truth: Verifying the Existence of “Yellow Slavery” .....	15
Chapter 2: “The Last Vestige of Slavery on American Soil” Sex Work, Slavery, and Anti-Chinese Rhetoric in Postbellum America .....	32
Chapter 3: The Dilemma of Reformers: Cultural Superiority, Moral Authority, and Suffrage ..	50
Conclusion .....	77
Bibliography .....	81
Appendix.....	93

## Introduction

*Traffic in Souls*, directed by George Loane Tucker, premiered at Joe Weber's Theatre on Broadway and 29<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City in November of 1913.<sup>1</sup> Its plot told the story of Mary Burton and her rush against the clock to save her younger sister Lorna from white slavery, an earlier term for what would now be known as sex slavery. The film is often considered one of the first exploitation films ever made, was one of the earliest examples of a feature length movie produced in America and was met with an astonishingly enthusiastic response. One movie theatre claimed to have had made \$3,500 off tickets to that movie alone in one week, which is the modern equivalent to a little over \$93,600.<sup>2</sup> Another magazine claimed that the movie grossed approximately \$450,000 between the twenty-eight theatres that played it in the Greater New York area, which speaks to the movie's popularity.<sup>3</sup> And considering the popularity of novels like Reginald Wright Kauffman's, *The House of Bondage* and white slavery plays like *The Lure*, it is not hard to imagine how *Traffic in Souls* managed to do so well.

It did so well in part because it played on an anxiety that was everywhere at the time of the movie's release. While fears about human trafficking might feel exceptionally modern in our increasingly globalized world, there is nothing new about them; it is simply an old problem with a new name. Fears of the growing mobility and autonomy of women, greater urbanization, as well as the shifting demographic of America, all contributed to the fever pitch that was surrounding the phenomenon of white slavery and the belief that girls were being drugged, coerced, kidnapped, and tricked into sex work.

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<sup>1</sup> "A Tidal Wave of 'White Slave Films,'" *Photoplay Magazine* 26, no. 2, (July 1925): 127, accessed April 29, 2021, <https://www.google.com/books/edition/Photoplay/zVcTAAAIIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1>.

<sup>2</sup> "Weber's Getting Money," *Variety*, November 28, 1913, 12, accessed January 19, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/variety32-1913-11/page/n123/mode/2up>.

<sup>3</sup> "A Tidal Wave of 'White Slave Films,'" 127.

However, as the name white slavery might suggest, the women in these stories were usually depicted as white, American-born country girls who had recently moved to the big city for work. Primary sources with titles like “Chicago’s Black Traffic in White Girls,” depict the author’s prioritization of white women’s victimization.<sup>4</sup> Some of the depictions cited above are also examples of the emphasis on white women’s vulnerability; both Lorna and Mary in *Traffic in Souls* were white and *The House of Bondage* also features a white protagonist.<sup>5</sup> Other examples of media from the time, including movies, plays, novels, court records, and pamphlets, also reflect this emphasis by almost exclusively focusing on the safety and stories of white women.<sup>6</sup>

Given the prominence of white women as victims in many of the popular depictions of white slavery, many historians have concluded that the white slavery scare focused almost exclusively on white women.<sup>7</sup> And this is not an unfounded conclusion, as demonstrated in the

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<sup>4</sup> Jean Turner-Zimmermann, *Chicago’s Black Traffic in White Girls*, (Chicago, IL: Chicago Rescue Mission and Woman’s Shelter, 1911), accessed April 13, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/chicagosblacktra00turn/page/n3/mode/2up/search/race?q=%22white+slavery%22>

<sup>5</sup> Reginald Wright Kauffman, *The House of Bondage*, (New York, NY: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1910), 2, <http://archive.org/details/housebondage02kaufgoog>.; *Traffic in Souls*, directed by George Loane Tucker (1913; New York City, NY: Independent Moving Pictures, 1994), Kanopy, <https://kanopy.com/video/traffic-souls>.

<sup>6</sup> For example, E. Norine Law, *The Shame of a Great Nation: The Story of the ‘White Slave Trade*, (Harrisburg, PA: United Evangelical Publishing House, 1909), 151, accessed April 18, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/The\\_Shame\\_of\\_a\\_Great\\_Nation/rRgEAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Shame_of_a_Great_Nation/rRgEAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0). Fredrick Marin Lehman, *The White Slave Hell, or, with Christ at Midnight in the Slums of Chicago*, (Chicago, IL: The Christian Witness Company), 172, accessed April 22, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/whiteslavehellor00lehm/page/172/mode/2up/search/immigrant>.; *The Inside of the White Slave Trade*, directed by Frank Beal (1913; Moral Feature Film Co.), Amazon Prime, [https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B07DL58162/ref=atv\\_dp\\_share\\_cu\\_r](https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B07DL58162/ref=atv_dp_share_cu_r).; *People v. Moore*, 9 (Ct. Gen. Sess. N.Y. 1910), <https://www.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/content/list-all-trial-transcripts>.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Donovan, “White Slaves and Ordinary Prostitutes,” in *Respectability on Trial: Sex Crimes in New York City, 1900-1918*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1357128&site=eds-live&scope=site>.; Erin Gallagher-Cohon, “The Dirt on ‘White Slavery’: The Construction of Prostitution Narratives in Early Twentieth-Century American Newspapers,” *Constellations* 5, no. 1 (2013): 36-37, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.29173/cons21380>.; Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 134.; Janet Beer, and Katherine Joslin, “Diseases of the Body Politic: White Slavery in Jane Addams’ ‘A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil’ and Selected Short Stories by Charlotte

sources cited above. While the rhetoric of the period showed clear favoritism towards women of European descent, “yellow slavery” or the enslavement of Asian women on the West coast was depicted as a parallel concern by some anti-white slavery activists, even if it did not get a similar blockbuster treatment that *Traffic in Souls* did. For example, Ernest A. Bell’s *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls or War on the White Slave Trade* included a chapter entitled “The Yellow Slave Trade.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Oliver Edward Janney’s *The White Slave Traffic in America* included a chapter on “Woman Slavery on the Pacific Coast” which primarily focused on the treatment of Chinese and Japanese women.<sup>9</sup> Of course, it is true that the book compartmentalized yellow slavery, however, the fact that Bell and Janney both included yellow slavery in their larger works on white slavery suggests that the sweeping declaration that white slavery was only about white women is not entirely founded.

This inclusion in books like Bell and Janney does raise questions, however. While it was not impossible for the general population to care about the well-being of women of color, it did not tend to be in Progressive Era Americans’ nature. For that reason, it is presumed that there is motive behind the inclusion of Chinese women as victims in the otherwise white victim pool of white slavery. So, who benefited from Asian women being depicted as victims? What kinds of

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Perkins Gilman," *Journal of American Studies* 33, no. 1 (1999): 6, accessed April 27, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/27556532](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27556532).; Jessica R. Pliley, “The American Myth of White Slavery,” in *Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the FBI* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 30, accessed April 5, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qdtkx.5](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qdtkx.5).; Jo Doezema, “Loose Women or Lost Women? The Re-emergence of the Myth of White Slavery in Contemporary Discourses of Trafficking in Women,” *Gender Issues* 18, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 25, accessed April 10, 2020, <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rlh&AN=3454464&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

<sup>8</sup> Ernest A. Bell, “The Yellow Slave Trade,” in *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls or War on the White Slave Trade*, ed. Ernest A. Bell, (Chicago, IL: G.S. Bell, 1910), 213-222.

<sup>9</sup> O. Edward Janney, “Woman Slavery on the Pacific Coast,” in *The White Slave Traffic in America*, (Baltimore: The Lord Baltimore Press, 1911), 41-51.



agendas did the narrative of yellow slavery further? And was there actually any reality to the phenomenon?

This thesis aims to answer some of these questions by examining a few of the reasons why the Asian victims of yellow slavery managed to appear in public discourse alongside the white victims. To begin with, the first chapter aims to first prove the existence of yellow slavery as an actual phenomenon to create the grain of truth that later sensationalism would build on. From there, the next two chapters aim to investigate a few of the reasons Chinese women's exploitation may have remained present in public discourse. Chapter two focuses on the usage of yellow slavery as a tool for anti-Chinese agitators to advocate for immigration restriction. Chapter three looks at the use of yellow slavery as a vehicle through which Protestant missionaries could promote their feelings of religious and cultural superiority, as well as how suffragists depicted yellow slavery as a moral issue that required women's moral authority to abolish. Between these three chapters, an argument should be established to demonstrate what political and social motives helped to keep yellow slavery in public discourse.

## **Historiography**

This thesis builds yellow slavery's existence, which chapter one lays out. The existence of the practice of buying and selling Chinese women for sex work has not had the same critical treatment that white slavery has had. Widely cited works on the topic of white slavery, like Mark Thomas Connelly's *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* and Ruth Rosen's *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* and Timothy Gilfoyle's *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920*, dedicate considerable time and attention to determining whether white slavery amongst white women was a cultural

myth or a lived reality. In comparison, when mentioned at all, the existence of the enslavement of Asian women has not had the same critical, in-depth treatment.

For example, Ruth Rosen dedicates just two pages in her chapter on the existence of white slavery to discussing the existence of the enslavement of Asian women. But her engagement with the source material does not reach the same level of critique and skepticism that the source material deserves. One example of a source Rosen cites is Mary Grace Charlton Edholm's "A Stain on the Flag," a pamphlet written by a moral purity crusader for a newspaper that offers unattributed quotes from alleged Chinese slaves.<sup>10</sup> While historian Judy Yung later went on to argue that the quotes in this pamphlet are reflective of other testimony that has been uncovered from other enslaved women, it is troubling that Rosen did not grapple with the potential inaccuracies or sensationalized elements of the work.<sup>11</sup>

Sociologist Lucie Cheng Hirata's "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America" is another seminal work on yellow slavery. Its longer length and specific focus on Chinese sex workers means that Hirata had more room to expand upon her ideas and provide greater nuance. However, much like Rosen, Hirata's article also cites from several journal articles written by individuals like Reverend Otis Gibson and Charles R. Shepard,

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10 Judy Yung, *Unbound Voices: A Documentary History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 124-128.

11 "O. Edward Janney (Oliver Edward) Papers," TriCollege Libraries Archives and Manuscripts, accessed February 22, 2021, <http://archives.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/resources/5072jann>; Judy Yung, *Unbound Voices*, 124-128. Some of Rosen's other cited sources included "Chinese Girl Slavery in America," which was written by Charles R. Shepard, the director of Chinese Missions for American Baptist Home Mission Society and was published in the *Missionary Review*. Edward Janney's *The White Slave Traffic in America* was also utilized as a source by Rosen, despite Dr. Janney's close ties to the American Purity Alliance, National Vigilance Committee, and the Society for the Suppression of Vice in Baltimore.<sup>11</sup> Rosen also cites *The Social, Moral, and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration*, which was a report and set of testimony put out by the Senate of the State of California and has a decidedly anti-Chinese tone. It is important to note that I do not intend to argue that these works are not necessarily inaccurate or are complete propaganda, after all, I utilize some of them in this thesis. However, like I said above, Rosen's seemingly uncritical engagement with source materials that could potentially be propagandistic in nature is concerning and suggests that the evidence requires a second look.

both of whom were heavily involved in the mission home community, without addressing the potential limitations of these sources because of their authors.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Hirata also cites a handful of newspaper articles without discussing the potential for sensationalism or the prominence of yellow journalism in this period.<sup>13</sup> This oversight could be a result of her background as a sociologist rather than a historian, but regardless, it leaves a hole in the historiography.

So, while both Hirata and Rosen's work did contribute to scholarship relating to yellow slavery, their work neglected the intensely critical evaluation that is necessary for such a sensationalized topic with a variety of agendas hidden inside. Primary sources cannot be taken at their word and the historian has an obligation to point out the limitations of these sources and question the motives and biases that may have shaped it. For that reason, the first chapter of this thesis will primarily function as an improvement on the existing historiography surrounding yellow slavery by reevaluating the extent of its existence and critically questioning the existing evidence. Hopefully, the research presented in this chapter can serve as a foundation for this thesis's larger focus of how and why yellow slavery managed to remain relevant as a topic in public discourse.

With this foundation of yellow slavery's existence established, chapter two will begin this thesis's investigation into the reasons why yellow slavery prevailed in public discourse by first looking at yellow slavery's use in anti-Chinese rhetoric, a topic which has broadly gone

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12 Charles R. Shepard, "Chinese Girl Slavery in America," *The Missionary Review of the Work* 43, no. 11 (1923): 893-898, accessed November 11, 2020, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015010806159&view=1up&seq=934>; Dickinson College Archives, "Otis Gibson (1826-1889)", Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections, *Dickinson College*, accessed November 1, 2020, <http://archives.dickinson.edu/people/otis-gibson-1826-1889>; Lucie Cheng Hirata, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 5, no. 1 (1979): 6, n10, 9 n23-24, 10 n28 n30, accessed Nov. 1, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173531>.

13 Hirata, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved," 10 n29 n32, 13 n47 n55, 15 n66, 19 n83-84 n90-91, 20 n93, 21 n101-102.

undiscussed by scholars. While some historical research has been done regarding sex work among Chinese women and its relevance to anti-Chinese rhetoric, very little attention has been paid to the alleged nonconsensual nature of this sex work. Emphasis has instead been placed on the threat to the health and morals of white Californians posed by Chinese sex workers and its centrality to anti-Chinese rhetoric. Works like Hiroyuki Matsubara's "Stratified Whiteness and Sexualization of Chinese Immigrants," Jean Pfaelzer's *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans*, Jingwoan Chang's "Prostitution and Footbinding: Images of Chinese Womanhood in Late Nineteenth-Century San Francisco," Brian Donovan's *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-vice Activism, 1887-1917*, and George Anthony Pepper's *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration Before Exclusion* all express this emphasis.<sup>14</sup> In each of these works, the disdain for Chinese sex workers (and by extension, all Chinese women) was rooted largely in their ability to spread sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and promote immorality among the white population.

Of course, these works' emphasis on STIs and immorality is not unfounded; many anti-Chinese agitators did emphasize Chinese sex workers' capacity to contract and spread more virulent strains of STIs, as well as the cheap prices of their services facilitating the proliferation of sex work among young, white boys. However, these anxieties were frequently flanked by the

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14 Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-vice Activism, 1887-1917*, (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, IL, 2006).; George Anthony Pepper, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration Before Exclusion*, (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, IL, 1999).; Hiroyuki Matsubara, "Stratified Whiteness and Sexualized Chinese Immigrants in San Francisco: The Report of the California Special Committee on Chinese Immigration in 1876," *American Studies International* 41, no. 3 (2003): 32-59, accessed Aug. 30, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41279986>.; Jean Pfaelzer, "The Woman's Tale: 'In Case I Should Be Kidnapped,'" in *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans*, (Random House: New York, NY, 2007).; Jingwoan Chang, "Prostitution and Footbinding: Images of Chinese Womanhood in Late Nineteenth-Century San Francisco," San Francisco State University, accessed April 20, 2020, [https://history.sfsu.edu/sites/default/files/images/2001\\_Jingwoan%20Chang.pdf](https://history.sfsu.edu/sites/default/files/images/2001_Jingwoan%20Chang.pdf).

characterization of Chinese sex workers as slaves and Chinese men as slave traders. And given the frequency with which Chinese sex workers were depicted as slaves, the lack of scholarship on the topic is conspicuous. By instead solely focusing on Chinese sex worker's capacity to spread disease or corrupt working-class, white men, scholars have missed an opportunity to examine how the treatment of Chinese women influenced anti-Chinese rhetoric and depictions of Chinese culture. Because the depiction of Chinese sex workers as slaves did more than just demonize Chinese women, as the depictions of these women as disease vectors or seductresses might. This rhetoric of the "Chinese slave girl" implicated the entirety of Chinese culture and offered an additional piece of the larger narratives that painted Chinese immigrants as incapable of assimilating to American culture because of the acceptance and proliferation of slavery in their culture. Because previous scholarship has not engaged with Chinese sex workers being depicted as slaves, the role that gender roles in Chinese society and American views of slavery played in anti-Chinese rhetoric has been obscured.

In addition to challenging previous scholarship that centers Chinese sex workers' role in anti-Chinese rhetoric as conduit for STIs and immorality, this chapter will also build on some of the scant scholarship that has been done on how anti-Chinese agitators used unfree labor amongst Chinese immigrants to fight for their exclusion. For example, Moon-Ho Jung's "Outlawing 'Coolies': Race, Nation, and Empire in the Age of Emancipation" examined the unfree labor of Chinese men, pejoratively called coolies, and how the framing of coolie labor as slavery allowed for anti-Chinese rhetoric to frame immigration restrictions as anti-slavery measures. So, while Jung's work primarily examines the unfree labor of Chinese men, the observations made in his article are applicable to the focus of this second chapter, which hopes to

expand his investigation into the ties between anti-slavery rhetoric and the unfree labor of Chinese women.

This chapter will also be building on some of the points made by Yu-Fang Cho in her book, *Uncoupling American Empire: Cultural Politics of Deviance and Unequal Difference, 1890-1910* which features a chapter on Anglo-Chinese author Sui Sin Far and her short story “Lin John.” While the literary criticism in and of itself is not incredibly helpful to this thesis, the background Cho provides is. In the first half of the chapter, Cho lays out how newspapers during this period put effort into painting yellow slavery as “a practice specific to the Chinese in postemancipation United States.”<sup>15</sup> By painting the brothels in Chinatown as racially exclusive and white visitors in Chinatown as spectators, it obscured the complicity of non-Chinese participants. It also dissociates the current issue from the “past” of African slavery and the similar elements of empire and exploitative capitalism that led to the need for cheap, Chinese labor.

However, despite the general usefulness of Cho’s work, the chapter examines the issue of yellow slavery primarily as an issue of empire and utilizes the writing of the Anglo-Chinese author, Sui Sin Far, to frame the discussion. This limited focus is not a flaw with Cho’s work, but simply an opportunity for expounding. Cho’s point about yellow slavery being painted as a specifically Chinese issue is central to my second chapter and efforts to draw a connection between anti-Chinese rhetoric and yellow slavery.

The third chapter of this thesis, which will examine how Progressive Era reformers and missionaries utilized yellow slavery to achieve their own ends. The first part of the third

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<sup>15</sup> Yu-Fang Cho, *Uncoupling American Empire: Cultural Politics of Deviance and Unequal Difference, 1890-1910*, (Albany: University of New York Press, 2013), 87.

chapter—the feelings of cultural or religious superiority as motivators for the missionaries—builds on a robust body of literature regarding religious missionary work and imperialism. Still, I struggle to narrow down what work my research builds on, given that missionaries’ views of non-westerners as heathens is typically a given within this area of historiography. However, Daniel Liestman’s “‘To Win Redeemed Souls from Heathen Darkness’: Protestant Response to the Chinese of the Pacific Northwest in the Late Nineteenth Century” was particularly helpful, especially regarding the similarities in topic. In this article, Liestman essentially lays out a timeline of the interactions between Chinese immigrants and missionaries from different Protestant denomination in the years after the Civil War. The variety of quotes Liestman included from different missionaries, was particularly useful for gaining insight into how these men viewed the Chinese and their duty to them. In almost every instance, a sense of religious or cultural superiority presents itself, be it through the reference to the Chinese immigrants as heathens or emphasizing the need to assimilate them.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel Liestman, “‘To Win Redeemed Souls from Heathen Darkness’: Protestant Response to the Chinese of the Pacific Northwest in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (1993): 179-201, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/970935>. For other useful scholarship on ‘civilizing missions, please see: Harry Libersohn, “The Civilizing Mission,” *Journal of World History* 27, no. 3 (2016): 383-387, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44631471>.; Kenneth Pomeranz, “Empire and ‘Civilizing’ Missions, Past and Present,” *Daedalus* 134, no. 2 (2005): 34-45, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20027976>.; Paul W. Harris, “Cultural Imperialism and American Protestant Missionaries: Collaboration and Dependency in Mid-Nineteenth-Century China,” *Pacific Historical Review* 60, no. 3 (1991): 309-338, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3640451>. More on missionaries to the Chinese in America, please see: Ian Welch, “‘Our Neighbors but Not Our Countrymen’: Christianity and the Chinese in Nineteenth-Century Victoria (Australia) and California.” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 13, (2004): 149-83, accessed March 20, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23613281>.; Wesley S. Woo, “Presbyterian Mission: Christianizing and Civilizing The Chinese in Nineteenth Century California,” *American Presbyterians* 68, no. 3 (1990): 167-178, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23332664>. For more on women missionaries, please see here: Hyaeweol Choi and Margaret Jolly, *Paradoxes of Domesticity: Missionary Encounters in the Making of Christian Homes in Asia and the Pacific* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/stable/j.ctt13wwvck>.; Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), accessed March 20, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/gospelofgentilit00jane>.; Manpreet Kaur, “Definitions and Perceptions: Accounts on ‘Women’s Work For Women’ In The Late 19th Century,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 72, (2011): 793-803, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44146771>.

The second part of this chapter, which focuses on female moral authority, will discuss how yellow slavery featured in suffrage rhetoric. This part of the chapter owes a particular debt to Peggy Pascoe's book, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*. The actual content of Pascoe's book looks primarily at the work of female missionaries in the American West, but the notion of "female moral authority" and the usage of marginalized communities by white, Protestant women to leverage some form of power and control in their communities struck a particular chord with my work. Pascoe only discusses how home mission workers use women's suffrage for about five pages—and denies that those who worked with Chinese women engaged in discussions of women's suffrage—but the connection Pascoe established between suffrage, political power, and moral authority is key to the second half of this chapter.<sup>17</sup>

While not explicitly cited in many works, Pascoe's notion of "female moral authority," or the idea that women had a superior moral compass compared to men does appear in a wide variety of scholarship relating to social movements and suffrage. After all, concerns over issues like sex work, age of consent, and prohibition were all considered issues of morality, issues that only women could address given men's unwillingness to deal with the issue, in addition to women's superior moral compass. Only through great political representation and suffrage were women able to correct these societal ills. Because of the close intertwining of issues of social

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<sup>17</sup> Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 46- 50. Another major inspiration was Brian Donovan's chapter, "Suffrage and Slavery: The Racial Politics of the Women's Christian Temperance Union Purity Campaign" in *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* was also a major inspiration for this chapter, given Donovan's focus on how the Women's Christian Temperance Union's (WCTU) anti-white slavery efforts and its tie to suffrage. Donovan places a particular focus on how the WCTU relied heavily on the ideology of Anglo-Saxon superiority and looks primarily at white victims, but the connection he drew between white slavery and suffrage were key to me investigating yellow slavery and suffrage further.



purity and women's suffrage, a variety of scholarship has briefly touched on the connection. These works tend to follow the traditional argument that suffragists were using social purity issues, such as white slavery, as a tool to galvanize interest in women's suffrage on a moral basis.<sup>18</sup> However, I found very few monographs or articles where the thesis is centered on this connection. Mary Ting Yi Lui's article, "Saving Young Girls from Chinatown: White Slavery and Woman Suffrage, 1910-1920" is one of the few exceptions.

Lui's article examines the work of Rose Livingston, an activist in New York City during the early twentieth century who made daring efforts to save white women from brothels in Chinatown, and how stories of Livingston's activism were harnessed by prominent suffrage leaders at the time, such as Harriet Laidlaw. Lui argues that the threats to white womanhood that Livingston's speeches exemplified were successful in raising concerns regarding the need for moral protection for white girls. This allowed suffrage leaders to argue for suffrage to more conservative audiences who may have felt suffrage based on equal rights might be too radical but might be receptive if it was in service of protecting white women.

At its core, I believe that Lui's argument holds true. White slavery, like prohibition, was a useful tool for suffragists to galvanize more conservative women for the women's suffrage

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<sup>18</sup> Examples of some scholarship where this is touched on (briefly) please see: Alex Smolak, "White Slavery, Whorehouse Riots, Venereal Disease, and Saving Women: Historical Context of Prostitution Interventions and Harm Reduction in New York City during the Progressive Era," *Social Work Public Health* 28, no. 5, (2013): 496-508, accessed March, 4, 2021, doi: [10.1080/19371918.2011.592083](https://doi.org/10.1080/19371918.2011.592083); Elizabeth Bernstein, "The Sexual Politics of the 'New Abolition,'" *differences* 18, no. 3, (2007): 132-133, accessed March 3, 2021, [https://glc.yale.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/sexual\\_politics\\_of\\_new\\_abolitionism.pdf](https://glc.yale.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/sexual_politics_of_new_abolitionism.pdf); Hsin-ying Li, "White Slavery Writing Contemplates China: Jean Turner Zimmermann's *The Social Menace of the Orient*," *Humanitas Taiwanica* 82, (2015): 164, accessed March 5, 2021, [https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hia&AN=103282953&site=eds-live&scope=site](https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hia&AN=103282953&site=eds-live&scope=site;); Jodie Masotta, "Decades of Reform: Prostitutes, Feminists, and the War on White Slavery" (undergraduate honors thesis, University of Vermont, 2013), 23-25, accessed March 10, 2021, [https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/S13\\_Thesis\\_Masotta.pdf](https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/S13_Thesis_Masotta.pdf); Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*, (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 56-58, 114.

movement. However, Lui's argument focuses very heavily on the victimization of white women and I wish to expand her argument to demonstrate how suffragists used the oppression of women of color as a rhetorical tool to gain greater support for women's suffrage. While the sexual vulnerability of white women did tend to remain the most prominent issue in these debates, there is still value in examining the ways in which sympathetic portrayals of Chinese women were utilized by white reformers to leverage their own agendas.

## **Conclusion**

Beyond its contributions to the scholarship, this thesis has additional relevance to the real world as well. After all, sex trafficking and sex work continue to be hot button issues and a variety of groups with different political and social ends have leveraged it as an issue. Many appear to be genuine, good faith actors, such as the Polaris Project or the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women.<sup>19</sup> But some are not, such as the QAnon conspiracy theory movement, who claimed that many prominent Democrats trafficked children for sex, a claim partially made out of a desire to demonize the conspiracy adherents' political opponents.<sup>20</sup> This thesis hopes to encourage greater critical thinking surrounding the motives of anti-trafficking advocates to ensure that individuals are supporting causes that truly care about supporting the survivors, not reaching the group's own political or social ends.

This thesis also hopes to encourage greater critical thinking concerning intersectional feminism. As the final chapter will demonstrate, white women seeking greater public and

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<sup>19</sup> "Home," Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women, accessed April 30, 2021, <https://www.gaatw.org/>;  
"Home," Polaris Project, accessed April 30, 2021, <https://polarisproject.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> Kevin Roose, "What Is QAnon, the Viral Pro-Trump Conspiracy Theory?" *The New York Times* (New York), March 4, 2021, accessed April 30, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-qanon.html>.; Mike Wendling, "QAnon: What is it and where did it come from?" *BBC*, January 6, 2021, accessed April 30, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/53498434>.

political participation have leveraged the genuine suffering of women of color to call for their own political advancement. This serves as an important reminder that feminist activism must be intersectional at all levels and truly make effort to address the needs and interests of women of color instead of simply leveraging their struggles for white women's political gain.

And finally, in light of the March 16<sup>th</sup> Atlanta spa shootings and the uptick in hate crimes against Asian American and Pacific Islanders over the course of 2020-2021, this thesis hopes to serve as a reminder of the violence, vitriol, and hatred that Asian women have been historically subjected to and persists to this day.<sup>21</sup> This thesis offers a mere glimpse at the kind of exclusionary and colonialist rhetoric Asian immigrants have faced upon their arrival to the United States during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It demonstrates the efforts taken to demonize and denigrate Asian cultures by white missionaries, politicians, journalists, and reformers. It also hopes to serve as a reminder of what Asian Americans have succeeded in overcoming, as well as how far we still must go.

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<sup>21</sup> "2020-2021 National Report," Stop AAPI Hate, March 16, 2021, <https://stopaapihate.org/2020-2021-national-report/>.

## **Chapter 1: A Kernel of Truth: Verifying the Existence of “Yellow Slavery”**

### **Introduction**

The so-called “Broken Blossom Trials” took place in spring of 1935 as an attempt to prosecute several individuals who were buying and selling Chinese girls and women into sex work in California. The case was allegedly one of the first efforts in years to prosecute the Chinese traffickers in California and hold them accountable for the damage they were doing to the women they trafficked. The California legal system was either unable or unwilling to get involved in prosecuting Chinese criminal activity, but the story of Jeung Gwai Ying, one of the women who was trafficked, intrigued A.J. Zirpoli, the assistant U.S. attorney in San Francisco.<sup>1</sup>

Defying the use of the adjective “broken” to describe her, Jeung Gwai Ying managed to escape her captors and spoke to Immigration and Naturalization Service officials of her experience of being purchased from her mother by a man named Wong See Duck under the promise that he would find her a job. After purchasing Jeung from her mother, Wong See Duck and his associates coached Jeung on a fake life story that they would tell the immigration officials when they reached the United States. From there, she was sold into a prostitution ring

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Wong, Four Chinese Woman and their Struggle for Justice – The Broken Blossoms Case of 1925, accessed November 11, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200530135628/https://edwardwong.atavist.com/four-chinese-women-and-their-struggle-for-justice-the-broken-blossoms-case-of-1935>.; Julia Flynn Siler, *The White Devil's Daughters: The Women Who Fought Slavery in San Francisco's Chinatown*, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), 322-332.; Mildred Crowl Martin, *Chinatown's Angry Angel: The Story of Donaldina Cameron*, (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, Publishers, 1977), 253-262.

run by two women named Yee Mar and Jew Gwai Ha and was expected to engage in sex work and turn over all her earnings to Yee Mar, Jew Gwai Ha, or one of their associates.<sup>2</sup>

Another young woman named Quan Gow Sheung mirror Jeung's story, stating that she had also been purchased from her mother by an associate of Wong See Duck and was sold to Yee Mar, Jew Gwai Ha, and their associates to be prostituted. Two other young women, Wong So and Leung Louie Gin also stepped forward to speak of their similar experiences of being purchased from their parents by Wong See Duck and then being sold to Yee Mar and Jew Gwai Ha once they reached America. Once they were purchased by Yee Mar and Jew Gwai Ha, both Wong So and Leung Louie Gin were expected to engage in sex work and turn over all their money to their owners.<sup>3</sup> While the trial transcripts themselves have been lost, the bravery that each of these young women demonstrated is unquestionable. By speaking to Immigration and Naturalization Officials and testifying against Yee Mar, Gwai Jew Ha, Wong See Duck, and his wife, Kung Shee, they succeeded in obtaining justice for themselves and the dozens of other women their traffickers abused and exploited. These women also succeeded in speaking their truths and managed to preserve their experiences for posterity, indicating the lived reality of yellow slavery for some women.

The existence of such a practice, as was testified to by Jeung Gwai Ying, Quan Gow Sheung, Wong So, and Leung Louie Gin, is the root of yellow slavery's presence in public discourse. While the image of a sympathetic (or infantilized) "yellow slave" could be utilized by suffragists, anti-Chinese advocates, and other reformers, with equal pragmatic value, the

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<sup>2</sup> Wong, *Four Chinese Woman and their Struggle for Justice.*; Siler, *The White Devil's Daughters*, 322-332.; Martin, *Chinatown's Angry Angel*, 253-262.

<sup>3</sup> Wong, *Four Chinese Woman and their Struggle for Justice.*; Siler, *The White Devil's Daughters*, 322-332.; Martin, *Chinatown's Angry Angel*, 253-262.

inclusion of Chinese women in the predominately white victim pool of the white slave scare came down to the fact that such a trade had actually existed. While it is possible that such a concern could have come out of nowhere, it seems unlikely. Much like white slavery, yellow slavery was born out of a smidgen of truth where Chinese women and girls were indeed being bought, tricked, coerced, or kidnapped for the purpose of becoming sex workers in the U.S. Unlike white slavery, however, yellow slavery has not received the same critical breakdown or intensive focus, which is what this chapter aims to provide.

As I hope to make evident over the course of this chapter, white slavery was a sensationalized issue during the Progressive Era that grew out of the actual existence of the practice. So, to begin with, this chapter unpacks the reality of white slavery as detailed by Ruth Rosen in *The Lost Sisterhood*. This demonstrates how reformers, journalists, and everyday people blew reality out of proportion and used it as a tool to reach a particular political or social end, as well as to express certain cultural anxieties. From there, the chapter will engage in a critical breakdown of the surviving evidence of yellow slavery, including surviving contracts and testimony of the affected women to center their frequently silenced voices.

### **The Reality of a Cultural Myth: The Existence of White Slavery**

Contradicting estimates of the extent of white slavery peppered the Progressive Era. The FBI director suggested 15,000 to 20,000 women were procured for the white slave trade every year; while Norine Law, an activist, suggested 65,000 native born women and 15,000 foreign women were procured for the slave trade; and two investigators for the Chicago Metropolitan Press claimed that 5,000 girls were annually brought into the white slave trade in Chicago alone.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Federal Officer Who is Making War on Traffic in White Slaves,” *The Tampa Tribune* (Tampa, FL), October 6, 1912, accessed April 8, 2021, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/325994566>; John Dillon and H.W.

The wide variety in estimates is attributable to the wildly varying definitions of what white slavery actually was. To some, all forms of sex work were white slavery, while to others it was only white slavery when the woman was drugged or kidnapped to be prostituted.

Regardless of the definitions, most scholars agree that the numbers cited by reformers were exaggerated and sensationalized. Yet, despite the exaggeration and sensationalism, Ruth Rosen's *The Lost Sisterhood* provides a compelling argument for the existence of white slavery to some extent. For example, Rosen points to newspaper articles that list 1,057 deportations from 1910 to 1915 that cite white slavery as the reason, as well as 372 court cases involving white slavery from 1910 to 1913.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the legal evidence, Rosen also utilized a survey taken of 6,209 sex workers during the Progressive Era that asked how or why they had entered sex work. Of this group, 7.5% of the respondents cited white slavery or extreme coercion as their reason for entering sex work. Although Rosen believes that the percentage could be somewhat higher amongst all sex workers because of the survey's methodology, she thinks that white slavery as a cause for an entry into sex work was never more than 10% of all sex workers.<sup>6</sup>

So, based on Rosen's careful work, it can be presumed white slavery did exist in some capacity, but it was not the ubiquitous practice that many activists claimed it was. In hindsight, many scholars have viewed the perception of widespread white slavery to be something of a "cultural myth" or manifestation of cultural anxieties surrounding the rapidly changing culture

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Lytle, *From Dance Halls to White Slavery: The World's Greatest Tragedy* (Chicago: C.C. Thompson, 1912), 8, accessed October 26, 2020, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/From\\_Dance\\_Hall\\_to\\_White\\_Slavery/EP6NH1jihcUC?hl=en.](https://www.google.com/books/edition/From_Dance_Hall_to_White_Slavery/EP6NH1jihcUC?hl=en;); Norine Law, *The Shame of a Great Nation: The Story of the "White Slave Traffic"* (Harrisburg: United Evangelical Publishing House, 1909), 118.

5 Unfortunately, the newspaper articles cited by Rosen reside in the Harriet Laidlaw collection at the Schlesinger Research Library, which makes it difficult to provide more precise numbers on newspaper articles relating to white slavery. Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 118, 125, 133.

6 Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 133.

in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. As cities rapidly industrialized, women began to work outside of their homes at an unprecedented rate, and as a result, many women gained a level of mobility and independence that they had not previously experienced. Suddenly, they could visit heterosocial spaces like ice cream parlors, saloons, dance halls, and movie theatres, without chaperones.<sup>7</sup> These spaces represented threats to Victorian era sexual mores and were frequent targets of both anti-sex work and anti-white slavery propaganda.<sup>8</sup>

Anxieties about changing demographics also pervade these discussions of white slavery with the procurers frequently depicted as non-white or foreign, often Jewish, Italian, or Chinese. In 1910, near the starting point of the white slavery scare, 14.4% of all people living in America were foreign born, which is the second highest percentage since the census first started recording nativity in 1850.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the gross number of immigrants being relatively high, these immigrants were also primarily coming from Eastern and Southern Europe.<sup>10</sup> Individuals from Eastern and Southern Europe were often seen as racially distinct from native born, white Americans, and were seen as inferior. Thus, this changing demographic represented a threat to the purity of a white America, and as more foreign men came into the country, white women's sexual (and racial) purity was increasingly threatened. Scholars speculate that this anxiety

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7 Donovan, *White Slave Crusades*, 7, 25-29.; Frederick K. Grittner, *White Slavery: Myth, Ideology, and American Law*, (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), 64-66.; Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, 43-44.

8 Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, 43. For an example of this demonization of ice cream parlors, please see: Edwin W. Sims, "Chapter IV: Menace of the White Slave Trade," in *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls or War on the White Slave Trade*, ed. Ernest A. Bell (Chicago, IL: G.S. Ball, 1910), 71, accessed Oct. 12, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/fightingtraffici00bell/page/70/mode/2up>.; H.W. Lytle and John Dillon, *From Dance Hall to White Slavery: The World's Greatest Tragedy*, (Chicago, IL: Charles C. Thompson Co., 1912), accessed Oct. 12, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/fromdancehalltow00lytl/page/n7/mode/2up>.

9 Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 To 2000*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006), 1, accessed Oct. 12, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2006/demo/POP-twps0081.pdf>.

10 Gibson, et al., *Historical Census Statistics*, Table 4.



surrounding the potential threat immigrant men posed was why the procurers in white slave narratives were almost always characterized as foreign-born or non-white, which Brian Donovan discusses at length in his book.<sup>11</sup>

White slavery did exist in some form, but it was far less prevalent than turn-of-the-century accounts had asserted. While the experiences and trauma of the white women who were forced into sex work and held captive is valid, it is fair to say that the fear of white slavery was not reflective of the actual rate of incidence. Instead, sensationalist authors and journalists published lurid accounts of the alleged exploitation of white women and girls, which fanned existing cultural anxieties surrounding changing demographics, the growing mobility and autonomy of women, industrialization, and urbanization.<sup>12</sup> However, beyond the propaganda and sensationalized newspaper articles, very little evidence exists to suggest that white slavery was the wide scale issue that reformers had asserted. So, similarly to what Rosen achieved in her own book, this chapter aims to establish whether yellow slavery existed.

### **Evidence of Sex Slavery Among Chinese Women in America**

Like Rosen's utilization of first-hand accounts from white sex workers to discern the reality of white slavery, this final section utilizes surviving primary sources that suggest the existence of sex trafficking of Chinese women in America. This comes primarily in the form of translated contracts which have been uncovered and translated by other scholars, or were

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11 Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, 131. Rosen takes a slightly different approach to understanding the prevalence of immigrants as procurers in these narratives. Unlike Donovan, Rosen argues that consistent use of foreigners was a way for Americans to obfuscate responsibility for both sex work and sex slavery. Instead of taking responsibility for the economic and social conditions that allowed sex work to proliferate, they project that guilt onto immigrants. I personally find this argument less compelling than the interpretation given by Donovan, however, I thought it might be worth noting.

12 Donovan, *White Slave Crusades*, 7, 25-29.; Grittner, *White Slavery: Myth, Ideology, and American Law*, 61-66.; Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, 43-44.

translated in primary sources, such as government testimony. These contracts will be considered in conjunction with the limited testimony given by Chinese women about their experiences to ensure their voices are heard

The first of these contracts appeared in Judy Yung's incredible book, *Unbound Voices: A Documentary History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*. This contract, dated from 1886, allegedly stated that a woman named Sun Gum was "indebted to her mistress for passage from China (costing \$1,205), will serve as a prostitute for four and a half years without wages and extend the term by one month for every fifteen days of illness." An inked thumbprint finally punctuated the contract, the equivalent of Sun Gum signing her name.<sup>13</sup> It is entirely possible this contract is a fabrication, but the fact that the contract was written in Chinese makes that somewhat less likely. Very few reformers likely had enough familiarity with Chinese to be able to write out such a detailed document.<sup>14</sup>

Horace Page, a senator from California read another translated contract into the Congressional Record in 1875. This contract stated that Yut Kum borrowed \$470 from a woman by the name of Mee Yung. In exchange for this loan, Yut Kum would engage in sex work for four years for no pay to pay back her debt to Mee Yung. Much like the contract provided by Judy Yung, this contract also notes that "If Yut Kum should be sick fifteen days she

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13 Judy Yung, *Unbound Voices*, 133.

14 Laurene Wu McClain, "Donaldina Cameron: A Reappraisal," *Pacific Historian* 27, no. 3, (1983), accessed October 30, 2020, <https://proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=4804373&site=eds-live&scope=site>. Donaldina Cameron, for example, was one of the most prominent rescue home workers for Chinese women in this period. Furthermore, she worked at and directed the Presbyterian Chinese Mission House for over forty years, yet never learned Chinese. I should note that the article I am citing is fairly critical of Cameron and her racial views and I would like to state that my own views do not necessarily align with McClain's. Of course, Cameron's record is not spotless. Cameron deserves to be viewed with a critical lens; however, I feel McClain's article needs to be paired with Peggy Pascoe's description of Cameron's racial views to achieve a more balanced view of Cameron. I intend to discuss Donaldina Cameron in more detail in my third chapter.

shall make up one month,” which suggests a synchronicity between the contracts and a consistency in the terms of these agreements.<sup>15</sup> However, these contracts are not identical, with one of the major differences being the amount of money being borrowed and repaid. In the case of the Sun Gum, she was expected to repay \$1,205 in debt through four and a half years of unpaid labor. Comparatively, Yut Kum’s loan was \$470, but Yut Kum’s contract demanded she work four years, only a half a year less than Sun Gum.

As will be discussed later, Horace Page was an anti-Chinese advocate, and this contract was presented in a speech for anti-Chinese legislation that restricted the immigration Chinese women who were suspected of being sex workers. For that reason, skepticism of the source Page provides because of his potential motives for citing it is necessary. After all, as will be discussed in the next chapter, talk of Chinese women as slaves was frequently used as fodder for anti-Chinese rhetoric. However, the similarities between Yut Kum’s contract and other contracts that have been uncovered suggest that this contract was likely legitimate or, at the very least, a close mimicry of the kind of contracts that were being created.

For example, sociologist Lucie Cheng Hirata also provides a translated contract for a woman named Xin Jin in her article about Chinese sex workers. Much like the contracts already discussed, this contract states that Xin Jin is in debt to an individual named Tan Fu for the equivalent of \$524 for her passage over to the United States. And much like the contracts mentioned above, the contract states that if Xin Jin were to become sick for more than 15 days, another month will be added to her term of service. Xin Jin’s contract had even more similarities to the contract cited in Representative Page’s speech, namely the clause that gave the purchaser

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15 Horace F. Page. "Treaty Relations with China," in *Appendix to the Congressional Record* (U.S.C: Washington, D.C., 1875), 44, accessed Nov. 1, 2020, <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llcr&fileName=005/llcr005.db&recNum=41>.

of Xin Jin or Yut Kum a hundred-day return policy if either woman had one of the “four great sicknesses,” which were leprosy, epilepsy, conception, and/or being a “stone woman.”<sup>16</sup> Xin Jin and Yut Kum’s contract also share the clause that if either women became pregnant, an additional year would be added to her service. However, one clause that Xin Jin’s contract had that distinguished her contract from the ones previously mentioned. Xin Jin’s contract lists “Should Xin Jin run away before her term is out, she shall pay whatever expense is incurred in finding and returning her to the brothel” as one of her clauses. While this clause is unusual compared to the other contracts that have already been discussed, it is not unprecedented. As more contracts are discussed, more examples will be provided<sup>17</sup>

Additional contracts appeared in government testimony as well. For example, the House of Representative’s Industrial Commission on Immigration issued a report on immigration in America. This report includes a “bill of sale” for a young woman named Ah Kam. This contract is like the ones previously mentioned, with Ah Kam being forced to engage in sex work for four and a half years in order to pay back the \$460 she borrowed for her passage to America. The terms relating to the length of her service also shared similarities to the contract previously mentioned. However, rather than a month being added with every fifteen days of illness, another month would be added for every *fourteen* days of sickness Ah Kam suffered and an additional year if she were to become pregnant. The contract also refers to Ah Kam’s signature to the

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16 “Stone-woman” was essentially a catch-all phrase for women who were unable to have sex with a man for whatever reason.

17. Lucie Cheng Hirata, “Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 5, no. 1 (1979): 15-16, accessed Nov. 1, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173531>. It is worth noting that it is somewhat unclear where this contract originated from, given that Hirata cites both a Chinese book about the century that Chinese people had been living in North America and a book written in English about the Chinese in the American West. I have currently requested both books from OU and I will hopefully be able to make some leeway on the origin of this document. It seems credible, but if it turns out to come from government testimony, I would like to be able to note that in my work.

document as “her mark,” which was likely a thumbprint, like both Xin Jin and Sun Gum’s contracts.<sup>18</sup>

Yet another contract appears in the U.S. Senate’s Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration. Alfred Clarke, the police chief of San Francisco, presented this contract, which Reverend Otis Gibson translated. This contract was for a young girl named Loi Yau, who was in debt to her mistress five hundred and three dollars.<sup>19</sup> In order to repay this debt, she would serve four and a half years as a sex worker for no wages. Like the other contracts, for every fifteen days of sickness, a month would be added to her service. A more specific similarity that appears in Loi Yau’s contract was the clause that appeared in Xin Jin’s contract that states that “If she [Loi Yau] runs away before time is out and any expense is incurred catching her, then Loi Yau must pay the expense.”<sup>20</sup>

At the state level, the California Senate’s Special Committee on Chinese Immigration’s report on the social, moral, and political effect of Chinese immigration also includes a translated bill of sale as evidence for Ah Ho. Like the other contracts, Ah Ho was forced to work as a sex worker for four years to pay back the \$630 she borrowed for her passage to America. Ah Ho’s

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18 U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Industrial Commission on Immigration, *Reports of the Industrial Commission on Immigration, Including Testimony, with Review and Digest, and Special Reports, and on Education, Including Testimony, with Review and Digest*, 57th Cong., 1st sess., 1901, Doc. 184, 771-772, accessed November 1, 2020, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Reports\\_of\\_the\\_Industrial\\_Commission\\_on/u2kaAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Reports_of_the_Industrial_Commission_on/u2kaAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0).

19 Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 35. Reverend Otis Gibson was a Methodist pastor who started and ran the Women’s Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church on the Pacific Coast with the purpose “to elevate and save the souls of heathen women.” His home functioned similarly to Donaldina Cameron’s Presbyterian Chinese Mission House in that it took in women who were trying to escape their lives as sex workers and slaves. Gibson then tried to evangelize them and bring them into the fold of white, middle-class, American culture.

20 U.S. Congress, Senate, Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1877), 146, accessed November 10, 2020, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=NYpEAQAAMAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA144-IA2>.

contract also shares similarities to Xin Jin and Loi Yau by also having a clause that declares that “if Ah Ho runs away before the time is out...whatever expense is

incurred in finding and returning her Ah Ho shall pay.” Unlike the other contracts, however, Ah Ho will be forced to add another month to her contract for every *ten* days of sickness, while the previous examples placed the threshold at fourteen or fifteen days.<sup>21</sup> But beyond that small divergence, little in the contract departs dramatically from the other contracts cited here (see Appendix)

Still, these contracts must be viewed with skepticism. These contracts could have been fabricated to achieve a particular end, either by the committees themselves or the individuals they received the contracts from. However, that still does not seem entirely likely. After all, if these documents had been fabricated, why was only one bill of sale offered as evidence in each report? A translated contract would likely make far more compelling evidence than hearsay, yet sources cited only have the single example of a bill of sale. Of course, that does not mean that these contracts could not have been faked, but it does make the idea of these contracts as genuine examples slightly more plausible. Furthermore, even if this evidence on its own was not compelling, when placed in concert with testimonies of women who were enslaved and those who either procured or sold them, it bolsters the plausibility that Chinese women were in fact treated as sex slaves in the American West.

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21 California Legislature, Senate Special Committee on Chinese Immigration, *Chinese Immigration: Its Social, Moral, and Political Effect: Reports to the California State Senate of Its Special Committee on Chinese Immigration* (Sacramento, F.P. Thompson, Supt. State Printing, 1878), <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=TXEOAQAIAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.RA1-PP8>, 128.

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One such testimony comes from a young woman named Gon Sing, who testified to the Industrial Commission on Immigration about how a procurer purchased her in China for six hundred and eight Mexican dollars before being brought to the United States under the premise that she would be married to a well-to-do Chinese man. However, once she reached California, she realized the reality of her situation before being placed in “a house of ill fame.” However, she eventually got word to Donaldina Cameron and the Presbyterian Chinese Mission House to rescue from her situation.<sup>22</sup> A young woman named Chun Ho also offered her testimony to the commission, claiming that her mother sold her for two-hundred Mexican dollars and was brought

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22 U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Industrial Commission on Immigration, *Reports of the Industrial Commission on Immigration, Including Testimony, with Review and Digest, and Special Reports, and on Education, Including Testimony, with Review and Digest*, 57th Cong., 1st sess., 1901, Doc. 184, 789-790, accessed November 6, 2020, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Reports\\_of\\_the\\_Industrial\\_Commission\\_on/u2kaAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Reports_of_the_Industrial_Commission_on/u2kaAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0).

into the country under fraudulent pretenses and forced them to work in “houses of ill-repute.” Like Gon Sing, Chun Ho also managed to get word to Donaldina Cameron of her imprisonment in a house on St. Louis Alley. Eventually, Chun Ho succeeded in getting her freedom and moved into the Presbyterian Chinese Mission House.<sup>23</sup>

Other examples of testimony come from Wong Ah So, another women rescued by the Presbyterian Chinese Mission House. According to the surviving forms of Wong Ah So’s story, Wong Ah So grew up very poor in the Guangdong Province of China. When Wong Ah So turned nineteen, a man named Huey Yow came to Wong Ah So’s mother and informed her that America was a rich country and that there was a chance for her daughter to live a better life if she emigrated. As a result, Wong Ah So’s mother allowed Wong Ah So to go with the man as his wife after being paid four hundred and fifty Mexican dollars for her daughter’s hand in marriage. However, once the couple arrived in America in 1922, it became clear to Wong Ah So that Huey Yow was not actually her husband and she was a sex slave instead. Wong Ah So characterized this realization in her interview:

...after I had been there for about two weeks, a woman came to see me. She was young, very pretty, and all dressed in silk. She told me that I was not really Huey Yow’s wife, but that she had asked him to buy her a slave, that I belonged to her, and must go with her, but she would treat me well, and I could buy back my freedom, if I was willing to please, and be agreeable, and she would let me off in two years, instead of four if I did not make a fuss.<sup>24</sup>

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23 It is important to note that both women did use an interpreter to give their testimony, so that is important to keep in mind. Things could have been mistranslated or their meaning unintentionally altered. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Industrial Commission on Immigration, *Reports of the Industrial Commission on Immigration, Including Testimony, with Review and Digest, and Special Reports, and on Education, Including Testimony, with Review and Digest*, 57th Cong., 1st sess., 1901, Doc. 184, 783-785, accessed November 1, 2020, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Reports\\_of\\_the\\_Industrial\\_Commission\\_on/u2kaAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Reports_of_the_Industrial_Commission_on/u2kaAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0).

24 *Oriental and Their Cultural Adjustment*, Social Science Source Documents, no 4 (Nashville: Social Science Institute, Fisk University, 1946), 31-35, quoted in Judy Yung, *Unbound Voices: A Documentary History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 203-205.



However, after seven months of being forced into sex work, Wong Ah So managed to make her escape to the Presbyterian Chinese Mission Home and eventually converted to Christianity.<sup>25</sup>

Jeung Gwai Ying was one of the survivors who testified in the “Broken Blossoms” case cited in the introduction of the chapter. Although the trial transcripts were destroyed, Jeung’s testimony to the Immigration and Naturalization Service survived where she spoke to her experience coming to the United States in 1931 when she was nineteen years old.<sup>26</sup> In this surviving testimony, Jeung explained that her father had died in the late 1920s, leaving her family very poor and Jeung Gwai Ying’s mother to care for Jeung Gwai Ying, and her two younger siblings. So, when a woman came to her mother saying that Jeung Gwai Ying could come to America and get good paying work, her mother reluctantly accepted the offer of one hundred and fifteen U.S. dollars and allowed for Jeung Gwai Ying to travel to America.<sup>27</sup>

For several months after she arrived in the United States, a third-floor San Francisco apartment served as Jeung Gwai Ying’s prison cell. Over the course of her imprisonment, she

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<sup>25</sup> *Oriental and Their Cultural Adjustment*, 201-208.; Donaldina Cameron, “The Story of Wong So,” *Women and Missions* 11, no. 2 (August 1925: 169-172, accessed November 5, 2020, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89077049609&view=1up&seq=683>.; Yung, *Unbound Voices*, 203-205.

<sup>26</sup> *Shee v. Haff*, 94 F.2d, 336 (9th Cir. 1938), accessed November 10, 2020, [https://scholar.google.com/scholar\\_case?case=2499385512362322352&q=Shee+v.+Haff&hl=en&as\\_sdt=636&as\\_vis=1](https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=2499385512362322352&q=Shee+v.+Haff&hl=en&as_sdt=636&as_vis=1). The original interview transcripts of Leung Gwai Ying’s interview are in California, which was inaccessible to me, which required me to reply on some of the secondary research that has been conducted on the topic of the so-called “Broken Blossom Trials” for my quotes. However, these quotes do largely align with the other sources I have found on the topic. For example, the court case of *Shee v. Haff* was a criminal case brought against Jew Gwai Ha and Yee Mar, the women who were alleged to have owned Leung Gwai Ying and one of the witnesses listed was Jeung Ying. The write up has a short description of Jeung Ying’s situation which matches up with quotes offered in the secondary scholarship. Furthermore, the document refers to the hearings that took place at the office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service that the quotes were alleged to have been pulled from, leading me to be willing to believe the validity of the quote in lieu of seeing it in person

<sup>27</sup> Julia Flynn Siler, *The White Devil’s Daughters*, 5-7.; Wong, “Four Chinese Woman and their Struggle for Justice.”

was stripped and prodded by bidders on three separate occasions until two women named Jew Gwai Ha and Yee Mar purchased her for four thousand five hundred dollars. Once Jew Gwai Ha and Yee Mar purchased Jeung Gwai Ying, she described her job thusly:

I went to whatever hotel that my two owners sent me for the night. I practiced prostitution two times at the Tai Sing Hotel (706 Jackson St. at Grant Ave.) on two different nights; and over ten times at the Grand View Hotel (605 Pine St. at Grant Ave.). I was also taken to men's rooms on Powell Street on three different occasions... Some paid me \$25 and some \$30 for the night, but I had to turn in \$21 as that was required by my owners for the night.<sup>28</sup>

However, the existence of the Presbyterian Chinese Mission House was brought to her attention by one of her customers after she said that she "couldn't stand that kind of life." So, a little over two weeks after her final sale, Jeung Gwai Ying managed to escape from her owners on her way back from the beauty parlor in December of 1933.<sup>29</sup>

As compelling as each of these testimonies are, it is still entirely possible that any of these women's experiences were twisted or shaped to achieve a particular end or even been misinterpreted by a translator. Still, these women have been left largely silent and forgotten, and these testimonies are some of the few examples where these women have been able to speak for themselves and their experiences. Furthermore, when presented on their own, the testimonies may not be as compelling. However, when placed alongside the other circumstantial evidence, the words of these women and their experiences largely ring true. Wong Ah So spoke of being expected to work four years, a clause that appeared in almost all the contracts provided; Chun Ho's mother sold her, the same as Wong Ah So; and both Gon Sing and Jueng Gwai Ying mention that they were able to get into the country due to perjured testimony at their immigration

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28 Wong, "Four Chinese Woman and their Struggle for Justice." Wong cites three different court cases in which this quote could have come from: District Court of the Northern District of California, criminal cases #25293, 25294, or 25295. He said he found these records at the National Archives and Record Administration in San Francisco/San Bruno.

29 Siler, *The White Devil's Daughters*, 5-7.; Wong, "Four Chinese Woman and their Struggle for Justice."

hearings. All these similarities and commonalities begin to add up, bolstering each piece of evidence's validity when considered as a whole.

## Conclusion

Between the contracts and the testimonies, a compelling case can be made that Chinese women were indeed being bought, tricked, coerced, or kidnapped for the purpose of serving as sex workers in the U.S. To what extent? It is hard to say. Lucie Cheng Hirata did attempt to provide some statistics regarding the number of sex workers in San Francisco from 1860 until 1880.<sup>30</sup> However, even those numbers are questionable, given that they were derived from census records and census workers were alleged to list non-English speaking Chinese women's occupation as "prostitute" due to the language barrier and racist assumptions.<sup>31</sup> Julia Flynn Siler states in *The White Devil's Daughters: The Women Who Fought Slavery in San Francisco's Chinatown*, that the Presbyterian Mission House had names of over eight hundred women in its ledger who had sought shelter there from its founding in 1874 until 1909.<sup>32</sup> Still, that number may not be an accurate depiction of how many women were essentially sex slaves, given that women came to the mission house for reasons other than escaping sex slavery.<sup>33</sup>

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30 Hirata, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved," 22. For reference, those estimates were 556 sex workers in 1860, 1,425 in 1870 (one of whom was Chinese American, or was born in the U.S.), and 435 in 1880 (seven of which were U.S. born). The reason for the drop-off in 1880 could be the passage of the Page Act in 1875, which prevented sex workers from being brought into the country from China.

31 George Anthony Peffer, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration Before Exclusion*, (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, IL, 1999), 97-100.; Kerry Abrams, "Polygamy, Prostitution, and the Federalization of Immigration Law," *Columbia Law Review* 105, no. 3 (2005): 656-657, accessed Aug. 30, 2020, [https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6520&context=faculty\\_scholarship](https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6520&context=faculty_scholarship).; Hirata, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved," 23-25.

32 Siler, *The White Devil's Daughters*, xii.

33 Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*, 73-76. This is evident in Peggy Pascoe's reference to a girl named Chin Leen who came to the Mission House because she was unhappy in her marriage to a much older man, not because she was being forced into sex work.

Perhaps it is beside the point to try and determine the true number of Chinese women who were forced into sex work once they arrived in America. As seen in Ruth Rosen's analysis of the white slavery scare, the mere existence of the issue, even on a small scale, sparked the sensationalism that dominated the anti-white slavery rhetoric of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Arguably, this chapter functions similarly to Rosen's work regarding white slavery. The actual existence of yellow slavery helped to bring the narrative of "Chinese slave girls" to the public's attention during the Progressive Era. However, one of the reasons this narrative *remained* in the public discourse into the 1920s and 1930s was because of its usefulness to other causes. Much like white slavery, a variety of people utilized the enslavement of Chinese sex workers as a talking point for a variety of different political and social ends.<sup>34</sup> The larger uses for the yellow slavery narrative were varied, occasionally contradictory, and impossible to document all of them in a single thesis. I do endeavor, however, to examine two of the potential political or social ends that kept the narrative of Chinese women being enslaved in the public consciousness. The first of these is the use of yellow slavery as a tool of anti-Chinese rhetoric to push the larger agenda of Chinese exclusion, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>34</sup> Donovan, *White Slave Crusades*, 3.

## Chapter 2: “The Last Vestige of Slavery on American Soil” Sex Work, Slavery, and Anti-Chinese Rhetoric in Postbellum America

### Introduction

Horace Page was a senator from California, a state that held 77% of all Chinese immigrants in America in 1870.<sup>1</sup> Naturally, this also meant anti-Chinese tensions were also exceptionally high as white Californian directly competed with Chinese immigrants for jobs and lived alongside Chinese immigrants, who adhered to a different set of cultural practices and values. This bred particularly strong contempt towards the Chinese amongst many Californians, who wanted the Chinese gone, or, at the very least, reduced.<sup>2</sup>

To appease his constituents, Page pushed for a variety of anti-Chinese legislation as early as a month into his first term in Congress. He pursued efforts to restrict immigration from China, as well as limit the rights and naturalization opportunities afforded to Chinese immigrants. The legislation he is most well-known for, however, is the legislation that bears his name: the Page Law of 1875.<sup>3</sup> This law is often considered one of the first federal, racially based immigration restrictions that heavily focused on the involuntary immigration of male Chinese laborers, called coolies. The law also targeted Chinese women who were brought to the country “for lewd and

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 1989), 79.

<sup>2</sup> C.C. Williams, *Congressional Career of the Hon. H.F. Page, Representative of the Second District of California and Renominated for a Fifth Term*, (San Francisco, CA: Francis, Valentine & Co., printers, 1880), 10-11, 14-19, accessed Nov. 1, 2020, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t21c22m22>.

<sup>3</sup> The Page Law served a few functions: 1). Forbid the importation of “women for the purpose of prostitution,” 2). Forbade the immigration of convicts and women who intended to become sex workers, 3). Gave the consul-general or consul of the United States the responsibility of deciding if an individual was voluntarily immigrating, and 4). Stiffened the fine for people transporting people who were not coming of their own free will and consent. An Act supplementary to the acts in relation to immigration (Page Law), U.S.C. ch. 141, 18 Stat. 477 (1875), accessed Sept. 14, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/43rd-congress/session-2/c43s2ch141.pdf>.

immoral purposes.”<sup>4</sup> However, eight days before he introduced the law to the House, Page gave a speech, citing his motives for the passage of the law, a speech that he concluded by saying:

I hope, sir, that it will have the effect to place a dividing line between vice and virtue; that it will send the brazen harlot who openly flaunts her wickedness in the faces of our wives and daughters back to her native country, and teach these traffickers in human beings that in this land of ours, where virtue is respected and honest toil appreciated, we will no longer submit to their infamous practices.<sup>5</sup>

While the Page Law only refers to the individuals as “women for the purpose of prostitution,” Page’s speech made a strong case for the kind of sex work that the law tried to target and why.<sup>6</sup> The use of the word “trafficker” suggests that Page was specifically targeting yellow slavery, not sex workers who had chosen to enter the profession. Additionally, the reasons Page cited for excluding sex workers was not because of their threat to the health or individual morality of white Californians. To Page, the threat these women pose is larger, more existential; sex slavery threatens the respect of virtue and appreciation of “honest toil” that characterize the entire country. This differs from how most scholars have discussed the role of Chinese sex workers in anti-Chinese rhetoric. For these previous scholars, the emphasis has been placed on how Chinese sex workers were framed as threats to the health and morals of white Californians in anti-Chinese rhetoric. This has come at the neglect of the depiction of Chinese sex worker as slaves which was so prominent in Page’s speech and justification for one of the United States’ first federal, racially based immigration restrictions.

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4 An Act supplementary to the acts in relation to immigration (Page Law), U.S.C. ch. 141, 18 Stat. 477 (1875), accessed Sept. 14, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/43rd-congress/session-2/c43s2ch141.pdf>.

5 Horace F. Page. "Treaty Relations with China," in *Appendix to the Congressional Record* (U.S.C: Washington, D.C., 1875) 44, accessed Sept. 15, 2020, <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llcr&fileName=005/llcr005.db&recNum=41>.

<sup>6</sup> To be clear, the Page Law impacted non-Asian women as well. However, it tended to target Asian women in particular

In all fairness, many anti-Chinese agitators did emphasize Chinese sex workers' role in spreading STIs and corrupting poor, white boys with their cheaper prices. These anxieties were frequently flanked by the characterization of Chinese sex workers as slaves and Chinese men as slave traders, however. And unlike the image of the Chinese sex worker as disease vector or temptress, the depiction of Chinese sex workers as slaves also implicated the entirety of Chinese culture. An excellent example of this coexistence can be found in a virulently anti-Chinese pamphlet, entitled *Meat Vs. Rice: American Manhood Against Coolieism, which Shall Survive?* which Samuel Gompers and Herman Gutstadt wrote for the American Federation of Labor. The pamphlet pointed out testimony that highlights that “the influence of Chinese prostitution upon the white population is exceedingly bad” when discussing the threat of STIs.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to this, however, Gompers and Gutstadt also used an entire page to discuss the notion that Chinese men sold Chinese women and kept them in slavery. The authors justified their focus on the enslavement of Chinese women by stating:

The foregoing represents but a minor and by far the most innocent part of the testimony taken by legislators, supervisors and grand juries, but it proves beyond controversion that in spite of their (Chinese) residence in the United States for half a century there has been no improvement in their social or moral conduct.<sup>8</sup>

While Gompers and Gutstadt asserted that the sale of Chinese women was minor or less important than some of the other issues put forth in the pamphlet, both authors still felt this issue was important enough to include as a part of their argument for the exclusion and expulsion of the Chinese from America. And this is hardly unique. The trope of characterizing Chinese sex workers as slaves came up repeatedly in discussions of Chinese morality. Even if these

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7 Samuel Gompers and Herman Gutstadt, *Meat Vs. Rice: American Manhood Against Asiatic Coolieism, which Shall Survive?*, (Asiatic Exclusion League: San Francisco, CA, 1908), 32-33, accessed Sept. 15, 2020, [https://books.google.com/books?id=qmMLAQAAIAAJ&source=gbs\\_navlinks\\_s](https://books.google.com/books?id=qmMLAQAAIAAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s).

8 Gompers et al., *Meat Vs. Rice*, 19.

characterizations were not directly tied to calls for Chinese exclusion, the clear condemnation of Chinese morality that came with discussions of yellow slavery figured into the larger narratives of Chinese immorality that played a major role in the anti-Chinese rhetoric of the period.

As the Gompers and Gutstadt piece demonstrated, depictions of Chinese sex workers as both threats to the morality and health of white Californians could appear alongside the image of the yellow slave. And by neglecting this concept of the Chinese sex workers as slaves, scholars have missed an opportunity to examine how the treatment of Chinese women influenced anti-Chinese rhetoric and depictions of Chinese culture. Because, unlike the focus on Chinese sex worker's influence on white Californian's health and individual morality, the depiction of Chinese sex workers as slaves connected American ideas of slavery and Chinese sex work. This connection allowed anti-Chinese agitators to depict Chinese culture as immoral and Chinese procurers as antithetical to American values. It also helped to paint Chinese immigrants as incompatible with American values because of their willingness to accept slavery in their culture.

Afterall, the idea that Chinese immigrants were continuing the institution of slavery in the decades following the Civil War was a particularly pertinent difference. As literature scholar Yu-Fang Cho's work on the topic has demonstrated, the concept of yellow slavery painted this issue of sex work or sex trafficking as uniquely Chinese in nature. Emphasis placed on the racial exclusivity of the brothels and the role of white visitors to Chinatown as spectators, which marked "prostitution as a uniquely Chinese problem and the epitome of crimes against humanity."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cho, *Uncoupling American Empire*, 88.



By characterizing Chinese sex workers as slaves, writers and speakers of the time framed this new form of slavery with considerations of America's own peculiar institution. The long and bloody Civil War that America fought to end slavery and preserve the union was still sharp in the public's mind in the second half of the nineteenth century. So, the thought that a new form of slavery could slip into the country was a direct threat to the emancipation many had fought for. It was also a uniquely Chinese threat, and something had to be done about it.

### **Chinese Slavery as a Threat to Emancipation and the National Ethos**

The notion that Americans might be uncomfortable with a new form of slavery entering the postbellum United States did pop up in several newspaper articles from the period. However, anxiety about unfree Chinese labor and American emancipation also had a precedent, as made clear by prior scholarship focused on Chinese coolies. Coolies was a pejorative term applied to Chinese men who had come to America on a "credit-ticket system." This basically meant that these men would borrow money for their passage over to America and would then pay back what they borrowed out of the earnings from their job.<sup>10</sup> Because these men were forced to work for so little in such awful conditions, however, many white Americans interpreted this system as a form of indentured servitude that was closely analogous to slavery.<sup>11</sup>

Moon-Ho Jung's article "Outlawing 'Coolies': Race, Nation, and Empire in the Age of Emancipation" discusses the relevance of this conflation in much more depth. In his article, Jung outlined how American proslavery ideologues often pointed to coolieism in English colonies following England's abolition of slavery. By highlighting the cruelty of the coolie system in the

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10 Abrams, "Polygamy, Prostitution, and the Federalization of Immigration Law," 651-652.

11 Abrams, "Polygamy, Prostitution, and the Federalization of Immigration Law," 651-652. It should be noted that coolieism in other locales, such as Cuba and Hawaii were much more brutal and akin to slavery. However, in America, to call coolieism slavery is not accurate.

British Caribbean, these proslavery advocates were trying to demonstrate the kind of inhumanity that could follow the abolition of the “benign” form of slavery in the South. Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the spectrum, abolitionists and anti-slavery Republicans saw coolie labor as different from slavery in name alone. So, by the postbellum period many lawmakers interpreted coolieism as a threat to the peace and emancipation that had been won through a bloody Civil War.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, efforts to limit coolies entering the United States were framed as anti-slavery measures.<sup>13</sup> Kerry Abrams makes a similar assertion in her article, “Polygamy, Prostitution, and the Federalization of Immigration Law” when she states, “Lawmakers became increasingly concerned about the link between coolieism and slavery following the Civil War.”<sup>14</sup>

While Jung’s article focused mainly on male coolies, a few stray lines allow for an expansion of Jung’s focus to include sex work. Near the beginning of the article, Jung wrote, “Indeed, by the 1880s, alongside the prostitute, there was no more potent symbol of chattel slavery’s enduring legacy than the ‘coolie...’”<sup>15</sup> Later on in the article, Jung again mentioned how the creation of immigration laws, like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Page Law of 1875, were intended to target “‘coolies’ (and prostitutes) in the name of ‘immigrants’ and freedom...”<sup>16</sup> These connections are fleeting, but they seem to suggest a connection between

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12 Moon-Ho Jung, “Outlawing ‘Coolies’: Race, Nation, and Empire in the Age of Emancipation,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005): 697-698, accessed Sept. 9, 2002, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40068312>. It should be noted that Jung does discuss that following the emancipation of African American slaves, some southerners attempted to utilize the contract labor of Chinese workers. Jung does not linger on this for very long, however, which seems to imply that the portrayal of coolieism as dangerous or worse than Southern slavery had stuck.

13 Jung, “Outlawing ‘Coolies,’” 698.

14 Abrams, “Polygamy, Prostitution, and the Federalization of Immigration Law,” 652.

15 Jung, “Outlawing ‘Coolies,’” 678.

16 Jung, “Outlawing ‘Coolies,’” 698

coolieism and sex work in the minds of some Americans.<sup>17</sup> By drawing those connections, Jung also included sex workers in these anxieties and threats to American freedom, even if not explicitly discussed. Kerry Abrams also drew a similar connection between Chinese sex work and coolieism when she wrote that, “Prostitution, like coolie labor, was seen as analogous to slavery.”<sup>18</sup> When Abrams pointed to the haunting legacy of the African slave trade as one of the reasons that anti-coolie legislation passed, it can be presumed that similar concerns were also present in discussions of Chinese sex workers.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, coolieism and sex work are not perfectly analogous to each other. After all, coolieism was manual labor and was much closer to the form of chattel slavery that had previously existed in the United States. This likely raised more concerns about a *return* to the kind of slavery that had occurred in the antebellum South. Comparatively, sex slavery was likely more of a threat to American ideals of freedom and liberty than a threat to the free labor system that had been established by the Civil War.<sup>20</sup> And these assertions of a connection between Chinese sex workers and antebellum slavery were not simply based on the conflation of coolieism and sex work.

Newspaper articles like, “Chinese Prostitution” in an 1876 issue of the *Sacramento Daily Union* exemplify this connection between Chinese sex workers, antebellum slavery, and American’s discomfort with the reintroduction of slavery in quotes like:

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17 Jung, “Outlawing ‘Coolies,’” 698. Jung never explicitly lists the nationality of the sex workers he is referring to. However, given the explicit references to the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Page Act, it is likely that the sex workers in question are Chinese.

18 Abrams, “Polygamy, Prostitution, and the Federalization of Immigration Law,” 659.

19 Abrams, “Polygamy, Prostitution, and the Federalization of Immigration Law,” 652.

20 Jung, “Outlawing ‘Coolies,’” 678. That is not to say that concern about coolieism was not based in concern about the threat to the American ideals of freedom and liberty. After all, Jung frames much of the anti-coolie legislation as being seen as a “a stand for America, for freedom.”

The fact having been once established that slavery is in full blast on the Pacific coast there is nothing to for it but to show the Chinese that we at least have some respect for our own laws, and that after having rooted slavery out of the South we are not going to permit its re-establishment under our very noses.<sup>21</sup>

Given the title's direct reference to sex work, the kind of slavery being referred to is likely sex slavery, not coolieism. And as the author of the article argued, allowing for the continued enslavement of Chinese women violated post-Emancipation laws and threatened America's abolition of slavery, as well as the American ethos of freedom and liberty. While this author does not outright call for the exclusion of Chinese immigrants, they want something to be done to stop the enslavement of Chinese women.

Another example appeared in a reprinted article from the *Sacramento Bee* in *The Elevator* in 1865.<sup>22</sup> This article discussed how the Emancipation Proclamation had intended to free all people from involuntary bondage, yet the Chinese system of slavery remained in the United States. While much of the article discussed coolieism, the article includes a short digression to discuss how Chinese women were forced into a "horrible system of indiscriminate prostitution practices" that was worse than the sexual exploitation practiced in African slavery. The article then reaches its conclusion by claiming that the eventual passage of the 13th amendment would be "a mockery and a lie" if the "odious system of Chinese slavery" were not ended.<sup>23</sup> By calling on both the Emancipation Proclamation and the eventual 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the author of the article made their anxieties clear. While both the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the

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21 "Chinese Prostitution," *Sacramento Daily Union* (Sacramento, CA), Apr. 19, 1876, accessed Sep. 19, 2020, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SDU18760419.2.5&srpos=2&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-Chinese+slavery---1>.

22 The Elevator was an African American newspaper, which gives this an additional interesting twist.

23 "Shall We Tolerate Slavery!" *Sacramento Bee* (Sacramento, CA), June 1865, quoted in *The Elevator* (San Francisco, CA) June 20, 1865, accessed Sep. 20, 2020, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=EL18650630.2.4&srpos=18&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-Chinese+slavery---1>.

Emancipation Proclamation offered the promise of a new country, free from the institution of slavery, the perceived enslavement among the Chinese was a threat to that. So, while this article did not deal exclusively with sex slavery in the way that the *Daily Union* article did, they both shared a similar evaluation. To both authors, sex slavery (and coolieism) were threats to the American ideals of freedom and emancipation, therefore something should be done to keep it from taking root.

Another, somewhat different example appeared in a 1901 issue of the *San Francisco Call* which quotes a speech given by then-assistant U.S. attorney for San Francisco, Duncan E.

McKinlay at the Chinese Exclusion Convention:

...here in this free land, in the city of San Francisco, under the very flag that is the hope, the inspiration and the glory of all who love liberty and rejoice in freedom, human chattel are bought and sold, bartered and exchanged—yes, in this very market place. And there is no Federal law on the statute books to reach and remedy this evil, and so the new Chinese exclusion law must be framed to wipe out the last vestige of slavery on American soil.<sup>24</sup>

Following this quote, McKinlay went on to clarify that he is referring to “Chinese slave girls” specifically, not to coolieism. While the anxiety surrounding the reinstatement of slavery in America was not as evident as in the article from the *Daily Union* or *The Elevator*, McKinlay’s references “Chinese slave girls” being the “last vestige of slavery on American soil” was a clear allusion to the abolition of slavery forty years earlier. To McKinlay, these women were the last remaining contradiction to America’s love of liberty, and thus, Chinese exclusion must be enacted to protect American ideals. So, much like the attitudes discussed in Jung’s article about

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24 Duncan E. McKinlay, “Slavery in Chinatown,” *San Francisco Call* (San Francisco, CA) Nov. 23, 1901, accessed Sep. 18, 2020, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19011123.2.2.12&srpos=12&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-Chinese+slavery-----1.>; *Notable Speeches by Notable Speakers of the Greater West*, (The Whitaker and Ray Company, Inc.: San Francisco, CA, 1902), 136, accessed January 20, 2021, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Notable\\_Speeches\\_by\\_Notable\\_Speakers\\_of/CDBKunnqf70C?hl=en&gbpv=1.](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Notable_Speeches_by_Notable_Speakers_of/CDBKunnqf70C?hl=en&gbpv=1)

coolieism, McKinlay's efforts to exclude Chinese immigrants were framed as anti-slavery measures to protect American ideals of freedom. The only difference was that the enslavement of Chinese women was the threat to America's ethos, rather than the free labor system.

Each of these newspaper articles (as well as Jung and Abrams) demonstrate how the perception of involuntary labor was a contentious thing for many Americans. The ways that sex work existed among Chinese women appeared to threaten the hard-won emancipation of the Civil War and the "love of liberty" that underlaid much of the American ethos. In this sense, Chinese sex work offered a unique threat that other kinds of sex work did not. This was not simply a threat to the health of white Americans, but a larger existential threat to the very values of the nation. So, even if the portrayal of Chinese sex work as a new form of slavery was not directly related to discussions of immigration restrictions, the portrayal was likely enough to make many Americans wary.

### **Comparisons to American Chattel Slavery**

The ties between the slavery of the American South and the perceived slavery among Chinese sex workers served other purposes beyond simply threatening America's abolition of slavery. In some instances, Chinese sex work would be directly compared to American slavery. These comparisons usually resulted in the subjugation of Chinese women being deemed worse than the subjection of those of African descent. These comparisons likely did more than sow fear of a reinstatement of a slave system in the United States; they put an even finer point on the perceived relative immorality of Chinese culture. After all, based on the characterizations offered, the Chinese form of slavery was not simply the slavery of the American South repackaged, but actually something much worse. By portraying Chinese culture as allowing slavery to exist while America had just fought a war over its abolishment, there was an implicit

assertion that Chinese culture was somehow more immoral than American culture. Because after all, by 1865, most Americans now viewed slavery with contempt, as an evil and immoral practice.

Of course, slavery was once an institution that had been tolerated or accepted, but in the lead up and aftermath of the Civil War the perception of slavery changed among many Americans. As historian Andrew Gyory wrote, slavery instead became associated with “everything evil: subjection, barbarity, servility, despotism, and caste. It came to represent the antithesis of progress as well as freedom.”<sup>25</sup> Many of the public discussions regarding the slave societies that remained after the 1860s characterized this new view. One such example was a *New York Times* article that referred to slavery as a barrier to Brazil’s progress and that its continued existence was the result of “the mixed evils of ignorance, sloth, and greed.”<sup>26</sup> Another example appeared in *The Pacific Appeal* as a part of a discussion of Cuban slavery which stated that, “Cruel, avaricious and Burbonic Spain has cherished slavery in Cuba as the hen that laid the golden eggs.”<sup>27</sup> Of course, not every newspaper article about Brazilian or Cuban slavery took on such a moralizing tone. Based on these examples, however, the practice of the continued presence of slavery in a society being portrayed as a moral failing of said society is evident.

Understanding the way slavery condemned cultures in moral terms gives credence to the notion that depicting sex work among Chinese women as slavery may have contributed to the perception of China as an immoral culture. By then comparing Chinese slavery with American

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 24. That is not to say that all Americans shared this view. Obviously, for many individuals in the South, slavery was seen as a benign institution.

<sup>26</sup> “Slavery in Brazil,” *The New York Times*, (New York, NY), Apr. 9, 1876, accessed Sep. 24, 2020, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1876/04/09/80328352.html?pageNumber=6>.

<sup>27</sup> “Cuban Slavery,” *Pacific Appeal*, (San Francisco, CA), Jun. 28, 1879, accessed Sep. 24, 2020, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=PA18790628.2.16&srpos=4&e=-----187-en--20--1--txt-txIN-Cuban+slavery-----1>.

slavery, that immorality became relative, and America came across as the superior culture. Several examples of this rhetoric at work appear in the report on the moral, cultural, and social impact of Chinese immigration that the Senate of the State of California put out in 1878.

The testimony of police officers, legal professionals, clergymen, doctors, and representatives of the Chinese organizations of San Francisco primarily made up the conclusions of this report. In addition to the testimony they gathered, however, the committee also penned an “Address to the People of the United States” and a “Memorial to the Congress of the United States” to summarize their findings. In their findings, the committee wrote, “The people of California are thus compelled to endure a form of slavery more obnoxious than any hitherto known in the history of the world...”<sup>28</sup> This was quite a comparison, considering that upon the writing of this address, it had been a little over a decade since the last American slaves had been emancipated. Furthermore, it was unlikely the committee members were entirely ignorant of the nature of American slavery; at least one of them grew up in a place that practiced slavery.<sup>29</sup> Yet, by marking the enslavement of Chinese women as “more obnoxious” than any other kind of slavery that has ever existed, they were very much including America’s own peculiar institution in that comparison. Regardless of the committee members’ own feelings about the evilness or

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28 California Legislature, Senate Special Committee on Chinese Immigration, *Chinese Immigration: Its Social, Moral, and Political Effect: Reports to the California State Senate of Its Special Committee on Chinese Immigration* (Sacramento, F.P. Thompson, Supt. State Printing, 1878), accessed September 12, 2020, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=TXEOAQAAIAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.RA1-PP8>, 28.

29 California’s Secretary of the Senate, “Records of State Senators 1849-2020,” *Office of the Secretary of the Senate*, accessed 9 Sept. 2020, 31, [https://secretary.senate.ca.gov/sites/secretary.senate.ca.gov/files/Senators\\_%20and\\_%20Officers\\_%201849\\_2020.pdf](https://secretary.senate.ca.gov/sites/secretary.senate.ca.gov/files/Senators_%20and_%20Officers_%201849_2020.pdf); “Collection Guide: Finding Aid to the Bohnett-Evans Family Papers, 1853-1994,” Online Archives of California, accessed 9 Sept. 2020, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt5x0nd2ww/>; “His Work Ended. Death of Colonel Creed Haymond,” *San Francisco Call* (San Francisco, CA), 14 Jan. 1893, accessed 9 Sept. 2020, [https://images.findagrave.com/photos/2012/51/70649837\\_132988252406.jpg](https://images.findagrave.com/photos/2012/51/70649837_132988252406.jpg). I can even find evidence of at least one committee member serving in the Civil War. Further research needs to be done, but currently, only George S. Evans appears to have clear ties to the Civil War. Creed Haymond was also born in Virginia and lived there until around 1852.



goodness of American slavery, by making this comparison they were labelling the slavery amongst the Chinese as relatively worse than American slavery. This comparison was even more blatant in the committee's "Memorial to the Congress of the United States," where they stated, "These women exist here in a state of servitude, beside which African slavery was a beneficent captivity."<sup>30</sup> As discussed above, slavery became increasingly seen as a moral failing of a society. And even if a committee member did not see American slavery as a particularly harsh or damaging institution, this comparison still makes Chinese slavery out as being a comparatively bad thing. So, by both stating that Chinese culture allowed slavery to exist and that this form of slavery was worse than American slavery, a sense of cultural and moral superiority underlaid these comparisons.

The testimony given to the committee by Reverend Otis Gibson, a Methodist minister, also provides an example of a similar comparison. Reverend Gibson worked closely with many of the Chinese immigrants of San Francisco and served as one of the few sympathetic voices for the presence of Chinese immigrants in California. However, when asked bluntly, "Then, so far as the women are concerned, they are in slavery with more hard features than have been known to white races?" he simply replies, "Yes, sir."<sup>31</sup> Much like the quote from the "Address," this exchange between Reverend Gibson and the committee pitted Chinese culture against all other forms of slavery, including the slavery of the antebellum South. Much like the quotes above, the portrayal of Chinese culture was of a culture more immoral than the United States.

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30 California Legislature, *Chinese Immigration*, 1878, 61. The committee goes on to state, "The contracts upon which their bodies are held under this system are fully explained and set out in the evidence, and we submit more than sustain what might otherwise be regarded as an extravagant deduction." This conveys that the kind of slavery they are referring to is literal and not a more metaphorical, patriarchal kind of slavery.

31 California Legislature, *Chinese Immigration*, 1878, 99.

Additional comparisons between the chattel slavery of the antebellum South and the alleged enslavement of Chinese women appear in other places as well, such as an 1883 article from the *San Jose Herald* that summarized an article from a different publication. This article similarly compares the enslavement of Chinese women to American slavery, stating:

This [living in practical slavery] is especially true of Chinese women, who are not only slaves, but hired out by their masters for purposes of prostitution. Nothing more horrible than the condition of these poor creatures can be conceived of—negro slavery in its worst form never subjected its victims to such depths of degradation.<sup>32</sup>

Another such comparison appears in the *Napa County Reporter*, stating that:

There are several thousand slaves in California, and the bondage in which they live is a thousandfold more hideous than ever suffered by the slaves in the South. Right here in Nappa there are several Chinese female slaves, whose owners require them to prostitute their bodies for hire, and give them the harshest of treatment if they do not earn a liberal sum every week.

### **Comparing Treatment of Women to That of Animals**

In addition to the comparisons between the form of slavery believed to exist among Chinese immigrants and the kind of slavery that had formerly existed in America, rhetoric that supported anti-Chinese narratives also utilized another kind of comparison: comparing enslaved Chinese women's treatment to that of animals. There are several examples of this in the Senate of the State of California's testimony regarding the moral, social, and cultural impact of Chinese immigration on Californians. One such example appears in the testimony of George W. Duffield, a San Francisco police officers, who stated that he believed that Chinese women were "being bought and sold like sheep."<sup>33</sup> Another example was Oliver Jackson, a police officer from

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32 "Keep Them All Out," *San Jose Herald* (San Jose, CA) Oct. 25, 1883, accessed Sep. 20, 2020, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SJH18831025.2.6&srpos=126&e=-----en--20--121--txt-txIN-Chinese+prostitution-----1>.

33 California Legislature, 1876, *Chinese Immigration*, 47. It should be noted that Duffield does go on to state that "The women are treated now a great deal better than they used to be," which might imply that Duffield's view of Chinese men is not as harsh. However, I feel that the comparison between Chinese sex workers and

Sacramento, who said “They [Chinese sex workers] are all bought and sold the same as horses and cows, bringing prices according to age and beauty.”<sup>34</sup> In both of these instances, the testifiers compared the way in which Chinese women were trafficked to the sale of livestock. This comparison highlighted the dehumanization that appeared to occur in this traffic and implied a lack of respect for human life. This, in turn, served as a kind of indictment of Chinese culture for allowing such a practice to exist.

Eithne Luibhéd’s book *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* briefly alludes to something similar when she discussed how scientific racists believed that the poor treatment of women reflected cultural inferiority. Luibhéd cites the work of Count A. de Gobineau, who asserted that ““It is said that all barbarians treat their women as slaves”” and ““...no race which assigned to women in the beginning an inferior position ever raised her from it in any subsequent stage of development. *I select the Chinese for illustration.*””<sup>35</sup> While Gobineau’s work does not compare the treatment of these “barbarian” women to animals, the presence of the spirit of his work in both Duffield and Jackson’s comments is clear. By portraying Chinese women as being treated like slaves or beasts of burden, a connection was drawn between those women’s treatment and the inferior culture that allowed for that to happen. And much like the comparisons between American and Chinese slavery, this inferiority had the effect of painting Chinese immigrants as incompatible with American morality. Two more instances of comparisons between the treatment of Chinese sex workers and animals put an even finer point on how these comparisons helped to establish a marked distinction in morality between the cultures.

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sheep remains relevant, especially given that Duffield attributes this better treatment to the fact that the police were monitoring their treatment.

34 California Legislature, 1876 *Chinese Immigration*, 142.

35 Emphasis Luibhéd’s. Eithne Luibhéd, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 36-37.

One of these instances was the testimony of Wong Ben, a Chinese immigrant, who stated, “They [procurers] don’t take as good care of them, whether they are sick or well, as white people do a dog.”<sup>36</sup> Wong Ben’s statement had the comparison between the treatment of animals and the treatment of Chinese sex workers, much like Duffield and Jackson’s statements did. However, by specifically comparing the treatment of Chinese sex workers to *white* people’s treatment of dogs, Wong Ben seemingly contributed an additional layer of racial and moral inferiority. So, not only are Chinese men immoral because they treat Chinese sex workers like animals, but they are *more* immoral than white individuals because white people seemingly hold more reverence for the life of any living being. The similar instance of this rhetoric appears in the testimony of Matthew Karcher, San Francisco’s Chief of Police. In this testimony, the committee asked Karcher if it was true that Chinese sex workers who had ceased to be profitable were “less cared for than are useless domestic animals by the white race?” To this question, Karcher replied simply, “a great deal less.”<sup>37</sup> Regardless of the intentionality, the committee members’ question and Karcher’s answer placed the treatment of Chinese sex workers in contrast with the treatment of animals by white people. And like Ben, by making this distinction, both the committee and Karcher helped to mark Chinese men as morally inferior and incompatible with white Americans.

## **Conclusion**

By utilizing the characterization of Chinese sex workers as slaves, the writers, and speakers of this time labelled Chinese immigrants as morally inferior and a threat to the national values of freedom and liberty, as well as paint Chinese culture as irreconcilable with American culture. Overall, it helped to support the larger narratives that were being pushed by anti-Chinese

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36 California Legislature, 1876, *Chinese Immigration*, 100.

37 California Legislature, 1876 *Chinese Immigration*, 131.

agitators, including Chinese immigrants' inability to assimilate, their disrespect for American laws, and their corrupting influence on white Americans.

Additionally, utilizing the image of Chinese sex workers as slaves also abdicated white men's responsibility in the perpetuation of the practice, despite their patronage of trafficked Chinese women. As Yu-Fang Cho suggested in her book, *Uncoupling American Empire: Cultural Politics of Deviance and Unequal Difference, 1890-1910*, newspapers during this period put effort into painting yellow slavery as "a practice specific to the Chinese in postemancipation United States" by emphasizing the role of Chinese men in the perpetuation of the practice.<sup>38</sup> While white men may have been held accountable for their actions by some commentators, the vast majority pointed to Chinese men and Chinese culture as the only perpetrators at fault and instead painted white men as victims. When discussing white men, commentators tended to revert to the narrative of Chinese slave girls as temptresses or disease vectors, usually placing the blame on the Chinese women themselves.

This reversion back to the depiction of Chinese sex workers as STI carriers or moral corrupters of white men demonstrates how these depictions were used, alongside that of the "Chinese slave girl." It shows how Chinese men were held accountable for their role in the trafficking of Chinese women and were depicted as threats to American freedom and liberty. Meanwhile, white men were still allowed their sexual access to Chinese women by shifting the blame to the women themselves, rather than the white men for supporting a morally bankrupt system at odds with American values. So, regardless of what rhetorical tool used by anti-Chinese agitators, white men were relieved of their role in the perpetuation of the practice.

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<sup>38</sup> Cho, *Uncoupling American Empire*, 87.

The next chapter will be touching on two more reasons why yellow slavery managed to appear in public discourse which primarily relate to white women, both suffragists and missionaries. To begin, this chapter will not have the same singular focus as the chapters before it. Instead of highlighting a single reason that yellow slavery remained in public discourse, the next chapter's focus will instead be on a group of individuals who helped keep the enslavement of Chinese women in the headlines, rather than a specific purpose. These individuals, usually women, were the reformers and mission workers who were often on the front lines of helping to "save" or protect the enslaved Chinese sex workers, as well as suffragists who utilized the specter of yellow slavery to push calls for women's suffrage.<sup>39</sup> Inevitably, these white women were likely motivated by a variety of different factors. Many of them did appear to genuinely care about the Chinese women they were helping to protect and did so out of a genuine desire to help Chinese women. However, these desires to help often came underlaid with a variety of more covert agendas or agendas that these white women may (or may not) have been consciously pursuing.

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<sup>39</sup> Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*, 97-98, 103-104. The use of "save" in quotation marks is because of several stories of Chinese women fleeing from the different Mission Homes because of the restrictive lifestyle it required. Some women may not have been enslaved (or felt that they were enslaved) and wanted to return to the life they had been removed from. Additionally, in the second section of this chapter I will be detailing how some women, including suffragists, used the oppression of Chinese women to bolster their own moral authority and call for specific political change. While these women may have been genuine in their intention, it is also equally possible that those women were simply using Chinese women as a useful prop for their rhetoric. So, save appears in quotation marks both because the women themselves may not have actually been saved and the intention of the women using their stories may not have been to save those Chinese women either.

## Chapter 3: The Dilemma of Reformers: Cultural Superiority, Moral Authority, and Suffrage,

### Introduction

Donaldina Cameron was the superintendent for the Presbyterian Chinese Mission Home in San Francisco from the late 1890s up until 1934. After serving three decades as the home's superintendent, she had made herself quite well-known in California. Her propensity for daring deeds, like raiding brothels to "save" the young Asian girls being held hostage there led the criminal underworld of Chinatown to allegedly give her the nickname "Fahn Quai," or "White Devil."<sup>1</sup> Cameron also popped up in local newspapers with astounding frequency, often being cited as having led a group of policemen to several stowed away girls who traffickers had tried to hide or being declared the guardian of an orphaned or abandoned girl who had just been rescued from a brothel.<sup>2</sup>

However, these daring raids did not feature as prominently in the pages of magazines like *Women's Work* and *Women and Missions*. In these magazines, the focus remained instead on the education efforts taken on by the Presbyterian Chinese Mission Home, recent pageants, the progress of their residents in their conversion to Christianity, fundraising efforts. In these magazines, Donaldina Cameron's other alleged nickname, "Lo Mo," or "mother," seemed more appropriate. It was in these magazines that Cameron's goal as a missionary came into sharper

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<sup>1</sup> Siler, *White Devil's Daughters*,

<sup>2</sup> "Appointed Guardian," *Marysville Daily Appeal* (Marysville, CA), November 13, 1914, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=MDA19141113.2.41&srpos=7&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-%22donaldina+cameron%22-----1.>; "Chinese Slave Girl, 12, Rescued," *San Francisco Call*, (San Francisco, CA) November 15, 1922, accessed April, 2021, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19221115.2.31&srpos=38&e=-----en--20--21--txt-txIN-%22donaldina+cameron%22-----1.>; "Would Guard Chinese Girl," *San Francisco Call* (San Francisco, CA), April 8, 1904, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19040408.2.24&srpos=30&e=-----en--20--21--txt-txIN-%22donaldina+cameron%22-----1.>

focus, as was the case with “Suey Leen—A Changed Life,” an article Cameron wrote for a 1921 issue of *Women’s Work*. While the article does begin with the dramatic aspects of Suey Leen’s experience being trafficked, including her being accidentally shot by police officers after a robber and Suey Leen being sent to a sanatorium after attempting suicide.

Those more dramatic details, however, were only one page of a two-and-a-half-page story. In the remaining page and a half, Cameron details how Suey Leen had “continued to grow in spirit more and more after the pattern of her Saviour” and had become the Home’s chef. It seems apparent that Suey Leen was a success story to Cameron, worthy of being submitted to a missionary woman’s magazine. No longer was Suey Leen a “hopelessly-debased, opium drugged slave,” instead she was “a transformed Suey Leen who graciously entertained all the Mission Home staff of helpers, and her own group of rescued girls.” And at the core of that transformation was evidently her conversion and embrace of Christianity, as indicated by the singing of hymns at the anniversary of her rescue, the reference to her growing spirit, and her efforts to read a Chinese Bible.<sup>3</sup>

This magazine article begins to hint at one of the underlying motives that may have driven some of the white missionary women to work with the Asian women and girls the Mission Homes sheltered. As Cameron’s article about Suey Leen begins to suggest, there was also an underlying belief in the corrective and improving capabilities of religious conversion. These women shared an implicit (or explicit) belief in the superiority of Protestantism and western culture which drove many of the missionary women to heavily promote Christianity and western culture to their charges.

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<sup>3</sup> Donaldina Cameron, “Suey Leen—A Changed Life,” *Women’s Work: A Foreign Missions Magazine* 36, no. 7, (July 1921): 145-147, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89077048437>.



In a parallel effort, suffragists, the other group of white women this chapter aims to focus on, utilized yellow slavery as a tool to achieve their own ends. Like the missionary women, suffragists believed that their unique, female moral authority made them uniquely qualified to fix the moral issues of sex slavery and exploitation. Where they differed, however, were their proposed solutions. Missionary women had turned to the promotion of their religion and culture, as well as created Victorian homes that centered on female authority. In contrast, suffragists called for the vote, insisting that it was only through the ballot that women could correct the moral messes left behind by men who were unwilling or unable to fix them. To the suffragists, it was only through direct political action that they could properly fulfill their moral authority.

To be clear, both suffragists and white missionary women were likely motivated by a variety of different factors and many of them did appear to genuinely care about the Chinese women they were helping to protect and did so out of a genuine desire to help Chinese women. However, these desires to help often came underlaid with a variety of more covert agendas or agendas that these white women may (or may not) have been consciously pursuing.

Because there were likely as many motives as there were reformers, it would be impossible to detail them all within the space allotted. However, this chapter does intend to examine two potential motives: feelings of cultural/religious superiority and a female moral authority as a tool to call for women's suffrage. Through the investigation of the motives of these white reformers, this chapter aims to demonstrate yet another set of motives that may have pushed "yellow slavery" into public discourse.

### **Cultural and Racial Superiority Amongst Mission Workers**

The feelings of cultural or religious superiority that drove white missionaries to work with Chinese women in America were not new. Religious missions have a long history of colonialist rhetoric that included the labelling of non-Western people as inferior using labels like “savage” and “barbaric.” The concept of using religion as a tool to “civilize” non-western, non-white people was often central to the efforts of missionaries. In fact, primary schools teach the phrase “God, Gold, and Glory” to help students memorize the motives of early European conquest.<sup>4</sup> This phrase emphasized the key role that Christianity and the desire to evangelize others played in the early colonization and imperialism of Europe. So, by its nature, colonialism and religious missions have been intertwined and dependent on one another.

These ties between imperialism and missionaries did not weaken as time passed and American expanded its borders. For example, works like Reverend Edward Storror’s *Protestant Missions in Pagan Lands* (1888) laid out how missions understood their duties in the late nineteenth century. As Rev. Storror indicates in his title, he viewed the nations that international missionaries worked in as “Pagan Lands,” which aligns closely with the language of “heathenism” and “barbarianism” that were mentioned above. This characterization of these non-Christian nations goes beyond the title, with Storror writing that “The lowest Protestant State, for instance, is far higher, in all that constitutes civilization and the hopeful features of a society,

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<sup>4</sup> This partially comes from my schooling experience and memory of this phrase, as well as its presence in a few textbooks, teaching guides, or AP test review books I looked through. Examples include: *Exploring Civilizations: A Discovery Approach, Teaching Guide*, (Toronto: Global Modern Curriculum Press, 1979), 46, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/exploringcivilizunse/page/46/>; Nathan Barber, *Master the AP European History Test: Teacher-Tested Strategies and Techniques for Scoring High 2002*, (Stanford, CT: ARCO, 2002), 65-68, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/masterapeuropean00arco/page/64/>; Sue Ann Kim and Paul Stitch, *Global History & Geography STARreview*, ed. Wayne Garnsey, (Middletown, NY: N & N Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), 130-131, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/globalhistorysta0000kime/page/n3/mode/2up>.

than the most advanced Mohammedan or polytheistic State.”<sup>5</sup> For this reason, Storror argued that:

Here, then, is the warrant for Foreign Missions, their justification, and more than their justification. The heathen world has lost, somehow, the true knowledge of God. It is, therefore, as a ship without a compass, a traveller who has lost his way, a lonely child in the night, a diseased man in the hands of empirics. Its present life is unsatisfactory and degrading, its future life uncertain. The Church of God has it in its power to remedy all this.<sup>6</sup>

This quote justified the existence of missions as a way to aid these lowly, pagan societies to achieve the kinds of “hopeful features” of Christian societies and gain a more satisfactory and meaningful life. Storror’s feeling of cultural and religious superiority in this statement is clear, as is the role that Storror expected missionaries to play to help assert that superiority. These missionaries were helping “civilize” these cultures through their effort to spread what they felt was a superior culture and religion.

Arthur Judson Brown’s *The Why and How of Foreign Missions* (1908) has a similar scope as Storror’s book, which was the purposes and efforts of different foreign missions. However, Brown’s book had a different tone from Storror, by initially providing the appearance of acceptance, and even an appreciation, of other cultures, writing that:

Men in our churches are no longer so ignorant of other peoples...the white man does not look down upon the men of other races as he did a century ago. He recognizes more clearly the good qualities which some of the non-christian people possess. He hears more of the industry of the Chinese and the intellect of the Hindu.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Storror, *Protestant Missions in Pagan Lands: A Manual of Missionary Facts and Principles Relating to Foreign Missions Throughout the World*, (London: J. Snow, 1888), 12, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/msu.31293006771103>.

<sup>6</sup> Storror, *Protestant Missions in Pagan Lands*, 26-27.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Judson Brown, *The Why and How of Foreign Missions*, (New York: Young People’s Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada, 1908), 3-4, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015019412082>. Brown does recognize that prejudice remains, especially against those of African and Asian descent. He is not painting a completely sunny picture of race relations at his time of writing.

This more complimentary tone seems contrary to the language of “heathens” and “barbarians” of Storrow and earlier missionaries. However, Brown later goes on to write that “Taking non-Christian peoples as we know them, however, it is sorrowfully, irrefutably true that they are living in known sin...”<sup>8</sup> This kind of language is much closer to the language used by Storrow and earlier missionaries, which label non-Christian people as inherently sinful. Perhaps even more tellingly, Brown wrote “No exceptions are to be made. Christ did not say, ‘Teach all nations, *save those that you deem beneath you*,’ nor did he say, ‘Preach to every creature except the Hindu and Buddhist and Mohammedan, who have religions of their own.’” (emphasis mine).<sup>9</sup> So, while Brown’s earlier statements may have conveyed the belief in other cultures having positive or admirable traits, these nations were still lower than Christian nations in Brown’s worldview. For this reason, much like Storrow, Brown claims that white, it is Christian missionaries’ duty to share the gospel with the sinful others and to bring these nations to the higher level of civilization that Christian nations occupy.

As these two sources indicate, the non-Christian or non-western nations that missionaries visited were broadly characterized as barbaric, sinful, or somehow lesser than western, Christian civilizations. Therefore, the duty of these missionaries was to go and proselytize the non-Christian peoples of these nations to allow them to create better lives and better societies, given that they are incapable of doing so without Christianity. This was part of the underlying assertion of general cultural and religious superiority that was (and is) prevalent throughout the missionary movement.

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<sup>8</sup> Brown, *The Why and How of Foreign Missions*, 9

<sup>9</sup> Brown, *The Why and How of Foreign Missions*, 16.

This feeling of cultural and religious superiority was also prevalent in white missionaries who worked with Chinese people specifically, who similarly painted the Chinese as barbaric and sinful, as well as disrespectful to Chinese women. *Chinese Characteristics* by Arthur H. Smith demonstrates this well, given Smith's roles as a Chinese missionary who served in China during the late nineteenth century. Over the course of the book, Smith detailed the different aspects of the Chinese people and their culture. While Smith did make efforts to point out the laurels of the Chinese people, such as their thriftiness in diet and dress, he did not hold back on critiquing things that he thinks are unseemly or immoral. One of these characteristics was the treatment of women, which he states:

While Chinese women have incomparably more liberty than their sisters in Turkey or in India, Chinese respect for women cannot be rated as high. Universal ignorance on the part of women, universal subordination, the existence of polygamy and concubinage—these are not good preparations for the respect of womanhood which is one of the fairest characteristics of Western civilisation.<sup>10</sup>

Smith's quote exemplified the sense of cultural superiority that many missionaries, like Smith, felt while living in China regarding Chinese culture's treatment of women. However, unlike some of the other missionaries, Smith did not advocate for the introduction of Western culture into China to solve this problem. Smith did not see Chinese culture as the issue, but instead believed that the Chinese people's flaw was in their conscious and their character. For this reason, Smith felt that the introduction of Western cultural norms to Chinese society would largely be immaterial. Without a change to the Chinese people's conscious, these issues within their character and conscious as a people, like the treatment of women, could not possibly hope

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<sup>10</sup> Arthur Henderson Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, (New York: F.H. Revell Company, 1894), 245, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t8df7m986>.

to be changed. Smith does not argue, however, that the solution was to entirely leave the Chinese alone. Instead, Smith argues in his conclusion:

What China needs is righteousness, and in order to attain it, it is absolutely necessary that she have a knowledge of God and a new conception of man, as well as of the relation of man to God. She needs a new life in every individual soul, in the family, and in society. The manifold needs of China we find, then, to be a single imperative need. It will be met permanently, completely, only by Christian civilisation.<sup>11</sup>

Smith ultimately reached the same as the conclusions as Brown and Morrow; bringing Christianity to these heathenistic places and raising the moral character of the society is the duty of the white, Christian missionary.<sup>12</sup>

Up until this point, the sources provided simply argue that missions and missionaries had the intent to improve what they saw as barbaric or heathenistic practices of other countries through the implementation of Christianity (or western civilization). Given that belief that introducing Christianity or Western civilization would improve the “barbarians” they were working with, it establishes a basis of missionary work having a sense of cultural or religious superiority underlying it. However, it does not explain whether the missionaries who specifically worked with enslaved Chinese women were also motivated by this same sense of religious and cultural superiority. It is at this point that it is necessary to explain how these mission houses

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, 329-330.

<sup>12</sup> I acknowledge that Smith does not characterize the poor treatment of Chinese women as a moral failing in the first quote. However, in a later chapter on filial piety, he writes “The whole structure of Chinese society, which is modelled upon the patriarchal plan, has grave evils.” (Smith, 183). The evils cited were the subjugation of children to their parents, the inferiority of daughters, and the expected submission of wives to their husbands. While this does not detail the specific issues of how women were treated in Chinese society in the way the first quote did, the use of a moralistic term like “evil” to describe this system which subjugated women suggests that Smith did in fact see the poor treatment of women as a moral failing that needed to be corrected. Thus, the application of Christianity was, in part, intended to improve this moral failing.

worked and how the activities and rules put in place demonstrated the missionary's goals of proselytizing and Westernizing the women for whom they cared.

The Presbyterian Occidental Mission House in San Francisco was perhaps the most famous of these homes. Situated on the corner of Sacramento Street and Joice street sit the current iteration of the mission home, the Cameron House, now a Christian-based community center for the Chinese immigrants in San Francisco's Chinatown. Upon the house's establishment in 1874, its intended to function as a refuge for Chinese sex workers who had been trafficked from China. However, over time it also housed Chinese women who had fled for other reasons including fleeing abusive marriages or escaping the *mui-tsai* system.<sup>13</sup> However, the Presbyterian mission home did not merely exist to house and protect these women and girls from recapture and further abuse. Their protection was predicated, at least in part, on an adherence to middle-class, white, Protestant ideals and "being there trained in Christian living and in household work."<sup>14</sup> A writer in a missionary magazine describes the mission home thusly:

The security of the Mission is the only avenue of escape for the Chinese slave girls, but the Rescue Home is not merely a refuge. It is a Christian home, mothered by the rescuer; it is a modern school, where English branches are taught by its own graduates and Chinese by native women from the Canton Mission; it is a practice school in domestic science where the girls do all the work of the Home; and it is a mission school, where religious example and instruction bear fruit in the transformed lives of the rescued.<sup>15</sup>

So, even in this complimentary description, the writer made it clear that this home was not just a place of refuge, but a place where its residents were also expected to engage in

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<sup>13</sup> Siler, *The White Devil's Daughter*, 40.

<sup>14</sup> Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., *The Fifty-Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, (New York: Mission House, 1891), 66, accessed March 12, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924071141943>.

<sup>15</sup> Laura Bethell, "A Guardian at the Gate," *Sunset the Pacific Monthly*, 350-351, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015009375273>.

religious education and domestic activities. This suggests that there were ulterior motives beyond keeping Asian women physically safe from harm. That said, it should be noted that the dismissal or rejection of Chinese culture in these missions was not absolute. For example, when describing how Donaldina Cameron treated her wards, a writer for a missionary magazine wrote:

She keeps her girls in native costume, deploring their preference for leather shoe over their own gay embroidered silk ones, regretfully indulging them in a change from their own style of hairdressing to ours. While the girls study English, they also study Chinese, and are taught to hold fast to all that is good of Chinese tradition and custom. At least half of them continue their ancestor worship and other practices of their Oriental faith.<sup>16</sup>

Upon first reading, it certainly appears that Donaldina Cameron did not feel a sense of supremacy concerning Western culture or Christian beliefs, given her acceptance of the Chinese language, Chinese customs, and traditional religious or spiritual practices of the women she care for. And it is entirely possible that Cameron did not feel a sense of cultural supremacy, believing that the aesthetics of Chinese dress were beautiful. However, it is essential to remember that at their heart, these homes were spaces that were intended to Christianize the women who sought refuge there. This is clear when looking at the rigid schedule the home's residents were expected to follow, which Donaldina Cameron herself described:

Family prayers are conducted in the pleasant dining-room where the large family father around a light, clean, white breakfast tables. The young voices sound very sweet as they join in on the morning hymns, 'Father, we thank Thee' and 'May Jesus Christ be praised.' The music floats through the open windows down the hillside, falling like a benediction on the ears of the poor heathen Chinatown, just below. 'Break Thou the bread of life,' is sung over their simply meal, which is cooked and served by the Chinese girls. After breakfast come regular household duties. Older members of the family care for the little ones, washing, ironing, and sewing for them. At nine o'clock two schools open: A primary school under the Woman's Board, with Margaret Woo, a 'daughter of the Home,' assistant teacher; an advanced school, maintained by the Board of Public Education. Each day is well filled with lessons, housework, sewing, music and some recreation. Prayer

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<sup>16</sup> Bertha H. Smith, "They Call Her 'The White Devil,'" *The American Magazine*, April 1915, 61, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/msu.31293029594227>.



services are held in the evening; the little ones meet with the matron in their nursery, the older girls with the superintendent in the schoolroom. Between nine and half past, the family retire each to her own clean, white bed.<sup>17</sup>

This schedule placed Christianity and expectation of the adherence to Western femininity at the forefront of these women's lives. The home's residents were not simply being protected from the highbinders who threatened their lives, but they were required to sing Christian hymns, do the bulk of the housework, and pray. And in addition to these day-to-day expectations, a missionary magazine wrote that "All members of the household attend Sunday-school" and that "A class in special Bible study is conducted each Friday afternoon, which all attend."<sup>18</sup> So, much like the hymn singing and the expectation of conducting housework, Sunday School and Bible study attendance was expected, regardless of the women's religious affiliation.

So, while it is true that Donaldina Cameron did allow the residents of the home to "continue their ancestor worship and other practices of their Oriental faith" and continue to wear traditional clothing, these women were also expected to engage with Presbyterianism and western housekeeping practices. Evidently, this acceptance of Chinese culture coexisted with the expected adherence to Western culture and religion reveals the evangelizing intent that was at the heart of the Presbyterian Mission Home's mission.

While it is possible (or even probable) that evangelizing came second to the protection and rescue of these enslaved Chinese women, the fact that Christianity still featured so prominently in mission home life aligns with the rhetoric of other missionaries that were discussed above. Donaldina Cameron even refers to "poor heathen Chinatown" in her quote

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<sup>17</sup> Donaldina Cameron, "Rescue Work of Occidental Board," *Woman's Work*, January 1911, 11-12, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/womanswork261pres/page/12/mode/2up?q=Occidental+Board>.

<sup>18</sup> Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., *Reports of the Missionary and Benevolent Boards and Committees to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.*, (Philadelphia: Office of General Assembly, 1905), 417-418, accessed March 13, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015066950588>.

detailing the day-to-day schedule of the house, which reflects the language of Smith and Storrow and suggests a belief that Christianity elevated these women above their heathen origins. So, even if conversion was not forced, the conversion of these women and girls was likely a desire or hope of the missionary women. Otherwise, Presbyterianism likely would not have been injected into all parts of home life.

Furthermore, the purpose of the prevalence of Christianity and Western ideals in the Mission House is made clear in Cameron's final lines of her article:

A home atmosphere pervades the Mission House and under its beneficent influence there are constantly being trained and developed really fine characters, true, lovable Christian young women. Some of these are now filling positions of usefulness and trust, while others are honored wives and mothers in their own comfortable homes.<sup>19</sup>

To Cameron, the home intended to improve the inhabitants, to turn them into "fine characters." While it may not be explicitly stated that those improvements came from the Christianizing or Westernizing of those women, it was heavily implied. After all, this statement seems to imply that these women were not "fine characters" to begin with or may not have been able to develop into ones on their own. Instead, they required the beneficent influence of the Mission Home and its rigid schedule and heavy inundation of Christianity to develop their character. It was only then, with their adherence to Protestantism could they become "honored wives and mothers." This sentiment reflects the sentiments cited earlier which point to Western civilization and Christianity as beneficent institutions that improved their lives and character. The belief in the superiority of Western civilization and Christianity to the cultural and religious practices the individuals previously engaged in is also implicit in this belief.

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<sup>19</sup> Cameron, "Rescue Work of Occidental Board," 12.

Of course, the Presbyterian Mission Home was not the only mission home for Chinese women on the west coast at this time. The behaviors in the Presbyterian Mission house seemed aligned with the efforts and explicit sentiments of other mission homes, however. For example, the Methodist Mission House was also located in San Francisco and Rev. Otis Gibson cited a letter written by Methodist women asking for support in the formation of a “Female Department” in the Mission Home. In this letter, the writers stated that, “‘A society called the ‘Women’s Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church on the Pacific Coast,’ was organized August 1871, in San Francisco, having for its especial object, the elevation and salvation of heathen women on this coast.’”<sup>20</sup> To the women who wrote the letter, the Women’s Society’s purpose quite clear: the Christianization of Chinese immigrants, especially Chinese women. And if there was any question of this purpose, the letter goes on to state:

‘Situated as we are, on the western confines of our country, separated only by the ocean from the vast heathen hordes of Asia, it is a matter of self-preservation if we do not have any higher motive) that we endeavor to Christianize this foreign element that is being brought into our midst. None can do this work as well as we, and if we neglect it what fearful consequences will ensure, both to us and our children after us, are beyond the bounds of the most vivid imagination.’<sup>21</sup>

The Women’s Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church on the Pacific Coast made it exceedingly clear what the purpose of the mission house is. It intended to Christianize, and arguably civilize, what they perceive to be the heathen hordes. An 1875 report from the Woman’s Missionary Society of the Pacific Coast makes that even more evident when they detailed the religious teaching each of the women received:

They have a Tuesday evening prayer-meeting, led by their teacher. They also have a Sunday morning prayer-meeting, led by one of their own number. They attend the preaching in Chinese in the chapel of the Mission House on Sunday,

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<sup>20</sup> Otis Gibson, *The Chinese in America*, (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1877), 203, accessed February 20, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/chineseinameric00gibsgoog/>.

<sup>21</sup> Gibson, *The Chinese in America*, 203.

and a Sunday-school at half past 1 o'clock in the afternoon, and at 6 o'clock P.M. attend the evening Sunday-school.<sup>22</sup>

The schedule outlined in the report demonstrated the ubiquity of religion in these women's day-to-day life, which is like the presence of religious hymns and prayer in the Presbyterian Mission House. And this was done with the explicit intent that the Methodist missionaries "rescue these women from Pagan thralldom, and bring them under the influence of Christian culture."<sup>23</sup> So, perhaps even more explicitly than the Presbyterians, these Methodist women believed that their form of Christianity and womanhood was superior and the only way to correct the shortcomings that existed in Chinese culture.

The Presbyterian and Methodist Mission Houses both demonstrated the feelings of cultural and religious superiority that underlaid (and underlays) much of the missionary movement. Of course, it was entirely possible that some missionaries may have had genuine concern and love for the Chinese women they rescued as well. However, when the purpose of Christian missions to spread Christianity was paired with the ways in which rescued women were compelled to engage with Christianity and the domestic duties of a middle-class housewife, rescue homes and their missionaries appear to have an ulterior motive. Even in instances where Chinese women could continue some of their cultural practices, the constant pushing of Western gender roles and religion presented itself as a constant challenge. For that reason, it is arguable that underneath the efforts to protect and rescue Chinese women was the intent to evangelize and Americanize the Chinese women they housed. And this desire to convert Chinese women in this

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<sup>22</sup> Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Fifty-Seventh Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1875*, (New York: self-pub., 1875), 150, accessed March 12, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924057470126>.

<sup>23</sup> Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Fifty-Seventh Annual Report*, 150

way reveals the missionary women's implicit belief in the superiority in their religion and culture, which will improve these women's lives

### **“Yellow Slavery,” Women's Suffrage, and Moral Authority**

The second part of this chapter examines how suffragists occasionally utilized yellow slavery as a rallying cry for women's suffrage. And although the women of the Presbyterian Chinese Mission Home never spoke of their opinions on women's suffrage, this transition is not as hard of a right turn as it might appear.<sup>24</sup> Both mission women and suffragists leveraged their female moral authority quite substantially, which was the idea that women somehow had stronger moral compasses and were responsible for guiding their husbands and sons on a good path. This idea was partially born out of the “cult of true womanhood,” which began to develop amongst the middle and upper classes in the early 1800s, which idealized the concept of the “true woman.” This true woman had four central virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity and “Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power.”<sup>25</sup> In this “cult of true womanhood,” Domestic virtue was prized and women's role as mother was emphasized; the home was unambiguously the realm of women. White, middle class women were not expected to come into public spaces to advocate for civic change. Their role was largely restricted to that of Republican Mother, simply socializing their husbands and sons to uphold the virtues that made them good citizens.

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<sup>24</sup> Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*, 47.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, (1966): 152, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2711179>.

However, despite the “cult of true womanhood” somewhat restricting the behaviors of women to that of the home, some women used this claim moral authority to fight against patriarchal oppression. Peggy Pascoe demonstrates this particularly well in *Relation of Rescue* as she outlined how mission home women created mission homes as spaces where they could leverage their authority to care for other women in a socially acceptable setting. Rather than leaving the home to go protest in the streets, mission women would create white, middle-class, Victorian homes where women were at the center. This allowed mission women to subvert patriarchal authority in their own way, by taking actions like encouraging women’s education or lobbying local officials for political change relating to the constituency they were caring for.

The female moral authority that came with the “cult of true womanhood” also remained prominent in the fight for women’s suffrage because the social purity issues that often-utilized claims of women’s moral authority frequently overlapped with the fight for women’s right to vote. By using social issues, like sex work, temperance, and child welfare, women could claim that their superior moral compasses were needed to correct these moral shortcomings of society. Moral authority could be a useful rhetorical tool to convince more conservative women of the necessity for women’s suffrage, as well. Because even if more conservative women would not advocate for women’s suffrage on the principle of gender equality, they might have been willing to advocate for women’s suffrage on the basis that women’s superior moral compass would allow them to vote to clean up the messes that men had made.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The Women’s Christian Temperance Union is one of the best examples of this. Some excellent scholarship on the WCTU’s use of moral authority in their fight for women’s suffrage include: Amy R. Slagell, “The Rhetorical Structure of Frances E. Willard’s Campaign for Woman Suffrage, 1876-1896,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 4, no. 1, (2001): 1-23, accessed March 10, 2021, doi:10.1353/rap.2001.0013.; Richard H. Chused, “The Temperance Movement’s Impact on Adoption of Women’s Suffrage,” *Akron Law Review* 53, no. 2, (2019): 359-386, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/akronlawreview/vol53/iss2/3>.

So, while the mission women who worked in the Presbyterian Chinese Mission Home may have seen the solution to patriarchal control as creating their own autonomous homes that lacked male authority, suffragists saw the solution as women getting the right to vote. But regardless of their solutions, both groups of women attempted to obtain their goals through the leveraging of their unique, female moral authority. And both groups utilized their moral authority to protect a particularly vulnerable group of people, such as children, the poor, the imprisoned, or in this case, Chinese women and girls.

While Historian Mary Ting Yi Lui does not narrow in Chinese women as the vulnerable population suffragists were aiming to protect, she does succeed in illustrating the tie between white slavery, moral authority, and suffrage in her article, “Saving Young Girls from Chinatown: White Slavery and Woman Suffrage, 1910-1920.” In her article, Lui demonstrated how the stories of women like Rose Livingston were used by suffrage leaders to galvanize audiences with discussions of the horrors of white slavery and the unwillingness of male political officials to address the issue. This, in turn, intended to incense women who may not have advocated for women’s suffrage based on female equality but felt that women’s unique moral compass was necessary to turn around the policies that allowed white slavery to exist. However, Lui argues in her article that much of the outrage surrounding white slavery, which she defines as being the “kidnapping and trafficking of white women,” was aroused due to “...Livingston's passionate oratories on the subject of women's sexual oppression and racial endangerment at the hands of unscrupulous Chinese men.”<sup>27</sup> By asserting this, Lui argued that these fears regarding racialized

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<sup>27</sup> Lui, “Saving Young Girls from Chinatown,” 396.

sexual danger faced by white women at the hands of Chinese men convinced some conservative women of the need for women's suffrage.

To be clear, Lui's assertion that worries about women's sexual oppression was a major sticking point for those who may not have advocated for women's suffrage on the principle of women's equality does appear accurate. Additionally, Lui was right that the majority of the white slavery victims discussed by suffragists were white, however, not exclusively so. By ignoring the presence of Chinese women as victims in the rhetoric of suffragists literature, Lui has neglected the complicated, and exploitive, relationship white suffragists had with Chinese women. A relationship that is worth exploring.

This complicated relationship is partially laid out by Mary Chapman in her article, "A 'Revolution in Ink': Sui Sin Far and Chinese Reform Discourse." While not the central focus of the article, Chapman explained how early white feminists exploited similarities that they saw between Chinese women and American women to bolster their own cause. To these white women, Chinese women were "domestically confined, sexually exploited, and despotically treated by patriarchs," and represented the powerlessness of women under patriarchy.<sup>28</sup> For example, the image of Chinese women's bound feet was prominent amongst suffragists and other women's rights advocates. It was a useful rhetorical tool because foot binding was seen as a barbaric practice by most Americans who saw the breaking of Chinese women's feet as a restriction on their freedom. So, by equating the binding of Chinese women's feet, which was

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<sup>28</sup> Mary Chapman, "A 'Revolution in Ink': Sui Sin Far and Chinese Reform Discourse," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2008), 979-980, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40068558>; Mary Chapman, *Making Noise, Making News: Suffrage Print Culture and U.S. Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 182-185, accessed March 12, 2021, <http://www.muse.jhu.edu/book/2217>; Mary Chapman, and Angela Mills, *Treacherous Texts: An Anthology of U.S. Suffrage Literature, 1846-1946* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 116-118, accessed March 12, 2021, 116-118, <http://www.muse.jhu.edu/book/2217>.



seen as barbaric, to the different kinds of oppressions or restrictions American women faced, the oppression of white women became easier to conceive of for white Americans.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, one of the suffragists who supported Rose Livingston, Harriet Burton Laidlaw, did precisely that in a letter to the editor of *The New York Times*. In her letter, she insisted that American men were restricting American women by denying them the vote and were consequently limiting the development of women:

... You men are fixing an artificial limit to the life and development of American women. In China they are doing the same. They are saying: "Oh, no: do not unbind the feet of the women; they will stray from the home."<sup>30</sup>

Laidlaw's letter illustrated the point Chapman made in her article, demonstrating how a suffragist connected the oppression of Chinese women to the oppression of American women to bolster her argument.<sup>31</sup> Statements like this were particularly useful rhetorical tool because foot binding was largely seen as a demonstrably barbaric practice by most Americans, and not just any barbaric practice, but a barbaric practice of the non-white Other. Rhetoric like Laidlaw's played on feelings of white racial superiority by pointing out the perceived similarities between

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<sup>29</sup> Hagar Kotef, "Little Chinese Feet Encased in Iron Shoes: Freedom, Movement, Gender, and Empire in Western Political Thought," *Political Theory* 43, no. 3 (2015): 334-55, accessed March 18, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24571635>.

<sup>30</sup> Harriet Burton Laidlaw, "Vote Will Humanize Women," *The New York Times*, (New York), May 26, 1912, accessed March 21, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1912/05/26/100368260.html?pageNumber=75>.

<sup>31</sup> A few additional examples of feminists and women's rights activists using Chinese women's bound feet as a rhetorical tool can be found in: Caroline Wells Healey Dall, *The College, the Market, and the Court, or, Woman's Relation to Education, Labor, and Law*, (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1868), 371, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044009629015?urlappend=%3Bseq=419>; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences 1815-1897*, (New York: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898), 204, accessed March 15, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/eightyyeasmore0000stan>; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "A Slave's Appeal" (Speech to the Judiciary Committee, New York State Legislature, 1860), in *Man Cannot Speak for Her: Key Texts of the Early Feminists*, vol. 2, ed. Karlyn Campbell (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 180, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/mancannotspeakefo0000camp/page/180>.

the treatment of American women, which was likely seen as acceptable and humane in the eyes of most Americans, and the oppressive practice of foot binding that a “less evolved” non-white society used to restrict women. It created a kind of analogy that meant to make the reader to question the humaneness of America’s treatment of women because of its comparison to a cultural practice that was perceived to be barbaric. And by equating the two, rhetoric like Laidlaw’s were suggesting that perhaps America was not as evolved or superior as it had presented itself. It called claims of racial superiority into question and forced Americans to reckon with having to treat white women better if they wanted to remain racially superior to Asians or other people of color.

To be clear, Laidlaw’s quote does not directly relate to this chapter’s challenging of Lui’s portrayal of Caucasian white slaves being the only victims depicted in suffrage rhetoric. However, demonstrating women’s rights activists’ usage of Chinese women’s oppression as an analogy for their own oppression is a worthwhile precedent to establish. Additionally, it demonstrates an instance of Harriet Laidlaw, one of Rose Livingston’s biggest supporters, casting Chinese women in a sympathetic role. Even if Chinese victims did not feature prominently in Rose Livingston’s speeches, this article showed Laidlaw’s capacity to portray Asian women in a sympathetic light. Even if it was not in a context of white women needing the vote to save these Chinese women, it suggests non-white women did appear in suffrage literature more often than may be suggested by Lui’s article. So, when pairing Laidlaw’s quote with the depictions of yellow slavery in suffrage literature, an argument can be made for yellow slavery potentially being used as a tool to call for women’s right to vote.

One of the best examples of yellow slavery and suffrage appears I have come across appeared in an article written by Carrie Chapman Catt, the president of the National American

Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) from 1900-1904 and again from 1915-1920. The article, entitled “Traffic of Women” opens with the sentence: “A few weeks ago, the police of San Francisco made a raid upon a Chinese resort and captured three Chinese slave girls who had been imprisoned in the place after having been smuggled into the city from a Pacific Mail Steamer a month previous.” The first paragraph then goes on to discuss the raid in more detail before moving onto Catt’s next point, which was that those three slave girls were examples of a common practice. Catt wrote:

Thousands of Asiatic girls are captured or bought every year to supply the ever increasing demands of commercialized sex vice. Japanese and Chinese girls have been smuggled into the United States continually since the exclusion acts made such immigrants unlawful, and before that date they were brought to American ports openly.<sup>32</sup>

Up until this point in the article, white victims of white slavery have not been mentioned at all. Of course, the article does eventually go on to mention the potential for white women to be enslaved as well and the included illustration depicted a white woman and her daughter worriedly reading a sign that advertised the statistics of white slavery. However, the fact that the first column of the article was taken up by discussions of Asian women seems notable. It was the hook of the article, something to catch hold of the reader’s attention and heartstrings. It validates and prioritizes the issue over even white women’s enslavement, something not commonly seen in anti-white slavery rhetoric.

The article also depicted how women’s claims of moral authority, concerns over white slavery, and suffrage all coalesced, which Catt exemplified:

There is but one certain and permanent cure— woman suffrage, and even this will not bring immediate results. There has been a double standard of morals since the beginning of things. The man’s standard is enfranchised. It is an active energy in

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<sup>32</sup> Carrie Chapman Catt, “The Traffic in Girls, *The Woman Voter and Newsletter*, March 1913, 14, accessed March 23, [https://archive.org/details/womanvoter00woma\\_30/page/14](https://archive.org/details/womanvoter00woma_30/page/14).

politics and is the source of all police graft upon commercialized vice. It is his standard which maintains prostitution. When the woman's standard is enfranchised every police force will feel the presence of a constituency behind it demanding the enforcement of the law.<sup>33</sup>

Catt claimed the mantle of moral authority for women. She argued that women had an ability to vote for the enforcement of laws, an ability that men lacked. Therefore, it was women's duty to get the right to vote and to vote their consciences and do away with white slavery, something that men would not be able to do on their own. While they differed in what solution they deemed appropriate, Catt's conclusion is very similar to that of the missionary women cited above. Like Catt, they believed that it was women's duty to protect the vulnerable Asian women who were being exploited by men. The only difference was that missionary women saw the solution as imparting Christianity and Western femininity to the Asian women they rescued, rather than changing legislation.

Another example of this tie between the enslavement of Chinese women (or Asian women more broadly) and suffrage appeared in Dr. Katharine Bushnell and Elizabeth Wheeler Andrew's book, *Heathen Slaves and Christian Rulers*. For context, Katharine Bushnell was a medical doctor who was closely tied to the Women Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), specifically their Department of Social Purity. As part of her involvement with this department, Bushnell travelled to several of the lumber towns that populated the northern states to investigate the large populations of foreign-born lumbermen. From May to August of 1888, Bushnell investigated the towns and came to focus on the lives of the sex workers who lived in these towns and recounted the details of a horrible "white slave trade" she had uncovered there.<sup>34</sup> Her

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<sup>33</sup> Catt, "The Traffic in Girls," 15.

<sup>34</sup> Worth noting that most of these women were depicted as American born, with foreign born men being their exploiters and procurers. So, her first foray into this area had a heavy focus on white women.

report gained her national acclaim and Bushnell had many speaking engagements to speak about the horrors of white slavery and advocating for reform.<sup>35</sup>

Later down the line, Bushnell was eventually selected, alongside her fellow WCTU member, Elizabeth Wheeler Andrew, to serve as “round-the-world missionaries” for the organization and to visit other countries and spread the WCTU’s message.<sup>36</sup> As a part of this trip, they wrote *Heathen Slaves, Christian Rulers* to document the exploitation of Chinese women at the hands of the white, British imperialists and Chinese men, both in China and on the west coast. The lion’s share of the book focused on the exploitation of Chinese women by Christian men, with both Bushnell and Andrew questioning these men’s morality and the fact that British officials were allowing such practices to continue to happen. So, at its core, this book was not necessarily a book intended to promote women’s suffrage. However, despite suffrage not being the focus of the book Bushnell and Andrew do make a single plea for women’s suffrage in the final chapter of the book, writing, “We must realize what may happen to American women if almond-eyed citizens, bent on exploiting women for gain, obtain the ballot in advance of educated American women.”<sup>37</sup>

This quote is interesting because of its emphasis on “what may happen to American women” if Chinese immigrants continued to come to the United States. Unlike Catt, Bushnell

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<sup>35</sup> Donovan, *White Slave Crusades*, 39-43, 115-117.; Kristin Kobes De Mez, *A New Gospel for Women: Katharine Bushnell and the Challenge of Christian Feminism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 56-64, accessed March 26, 2021, <https://ebooks-ohiolink-edu.proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/content/a3581087-ce09-4a3d-accb-71d771817ae0>.

<sup>36</sup> Clara C. Chapin, *Thumb Nail Sketches of White Ribbon Women*, (Women’s Temperance Publishing Association, 1895), 7-8, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/thumbnailsketch00chapgoog/page/n32>.; De Mez, *A New Gospel for Women*, 62-63.; Very little is written on Andrew’s background. The little I could find listed her as the widow of a Methodist minister and co-editor of the WCTU’s *Union Signal*.

<sup>37</sup> Katharine C. Bushnell, and Elizabeth Wheeler Andrew, *Heathen Slaves and Christian Rulers*, (n.p.: n.p., 1907), accessed March 9, 2021, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/12818/>.

and Andrew were not pointing to the exploitation of Chinese women and calling for suffrage for women for the sake of opposing the exploitation of women of color. Instead, Bushnell and Andrew called for women's suffrage on the basis that white women could be similarly exploited by men, both Chinese and American. This argument builds on earlier statements that were made throughout the book that attempt to draw connections between Chinese women's circumstances and its potentially negative impact on American women. For example, in the introduction, Bushnell and Andrew write:

The Oriental slave trader and the Oriental slave promise to become a terrible menace and scourge to our twentieth century civilization. Herein lies great peril to American womanhood. Whether we wish it to be so or not,—whether we perceive from the first that it is so or not, there is a solidarity of womanhood that men and women must reckon with. The man who wrongs another's daughter perceives afterwards that he wronged his own daughter thereby. We cannot, without sin against humanity, ask the scoffer's question, "Am I my sister's keeper?"—not even concerning the poorest and meanest foreign woman, for the reason that *she is our sister*. The conditions that surround the Hong Kong slave girl in California are bound in time to have their influence upon the social, legal and moral status of all California women, and later of all American womanhood.<sup>38</sup>

Much like the use of foot binding as a metaphor by white women's rights activists, Bushnell and Andrew were attempting to create an international sisterhood on the basis on gender and oppression under the patriarchy. However, unlike the efforts to morally equate foot binding with Euro-American patriarchal oppression, Bushnell and Andrew were trying to create direct, cross-racial ties with a specific form of oppression, namely sex slavery. In that sense, the previously cited quote about the dangers of American women not getting the vote before Asian men did functions more like the speeches of Rose Livingston that Mary Ting Lui cited in her article. Rather than using white victims to raise concern about the presently occurring transgressions against white women, however, Bushnell and Andrew were using the specter of

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<sup>38</sup> Katharine C. Bushnell et al., *Heathen Slaves and Christian Rulers*.

white women being treated the same as Asian women to promote the need for women's suffrage. So, while the rest of *Heathen Slaves, Christian Rulers* primarily examined the oppression of Chinese women and how to correct this issue, in this instance, Asian women's oppression was arguably used as a prop to bolster arguments for white women's suffrage.<sup>39</sup>

The moral authority being leveraged in *Heathen Slaves, Christian Rulers* was less clear than the Catt article. This was further obscured by the part of the above quote that states, "The man who wrongs another's daughter perceives afterwards that he wronged his own daughter thereby."<sup>40</sup> This quote suggests a kind of morality and consciousness that men were usually not depicted as having in these circumstances. However, I argue that Bushnell and Andrew's work still has implicit assertions of women's moral authority. For example, the single reference to women's right to vote contains the implication that only with the women's vote that anything could be done about this danger that faced American women. They cannot count on their white male counterparts to vote in their interests. And Bushnell and Andrew say as much in the after their call for women's suffrage:

And beside the peril arising directly from the flood of Orientals who are accustomed to dealing with women as chattels, there will be the peril from a debased American manhood. Men cannot live in the midst of such slavery as this, tolerate it, defend it, make gain through it, patronize it, without losing all respect for woman and regard for her rights.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> De Mez, *A New Gospel for Women*, 83. To be clear, whether Bushnell and Andrews genuinely cared about the Chinese and Japanese women they were writing about is somewhat unclear. However, Kristen Kobes De Mez wrote in her book on Katherine Bushnell, "Because Bushnell and Andrew believed that few Americans were likely to take interest in the plight of Chinese women, they employed a variety of tactics to prevail upon their readers. Though they seemingly sympathized with the Chinese women, whom they considered victims of both their own culture and of abusive white men, they also contended that the wrongs perpetrated against Chinese women affected all Americans."

<sup>40</sup> Katharine C. Bushnell et al., *Heathen Slaves and Christian Rulers*.

<sup>41</sup> Katharine C. Bushnell et al., *Heathen Slaves and Christian Rulers*.

Bushnell and Andrew do not believe that American men have the moral fortitude to live alongside enslaved women and not totally disregard women's rights. Contrastingly, there was no reference to what could happen to the morality and temperament of women if sex slavery were to become accepted and mainstream. In this absence, there was the implicit assertion that women will always find sex slavery to be an odious practice, regardless of its ubiquity, while men's moral compass could be compromised by it becoming a mainstream practice. So, while moral authority of women was not as clearly asserted by Bushnell and Andrew, there was still underlying implications that tie it to the Catt article. In each example, the abuses of Chinese women were being used to promote the necessity of women's suffrage based on women's moral authority to stop vice.

Of course, these two examples will not topple the reality that white women were the most depicted victims in in discussions of white slavery within the context of suffrage rhetoric; they were not intended to. As stated above, this brief detour merely intended to complicate the image Mary Ting Lui painted of the exclusively white victim pool serving as the only compelling call to action for more conservative minded women. It also intended to further examine the ways in which white women leveraged the suffering and oppression of Chinese women to improve their station in life. While some of these women may have been genuinely empathetic to the plight of these enslaved Asian women, it is unhelpful to ignore the implicit ulterior motives that seemed to drive their efforts to keep discussions of yellow slavery in the public consciousness.

## **Conclusion**

For reform workers, mission homes gave them a space where they could project their feelings of religious and cultural superiority by trying to mold the house's inmates into the ideal middle-class, Protestant woman. Meanwhile, suffragists used the specter of yellow slavery as a



rhetorical tool to spark either empathy for the affected women or fear of similar treatment of white women. From there, appeals to the idea that it was only through the votes of women that these issues could be corrected encouraged more conservative women to advocate for suffrage based on women's moral authority, rather than the principle of gender equality.

Of course, some of these women may have been moved by genuine care for the Chinese women they cared for or spoke of. However, it is equally important to examine the ulterior motives of actors when the intentions seem more benevolent. Unlike the anti-Chinese agitators, these suffragists and missionaries were usually not advocating for violent hatred and expulsion of Chinese immigrants. Yet, much like those advocating for Chinese exclusion, these suffragists and missionaries were still using the suffering of other women as a means to their own end. So, much like white slavery, yellow slavery was a multi-purpose tool that could be wielded by wildly varying groups with equally varied goals.

## Conclusion

On March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021, a gun man walked into several massage parlors in and around Atlanta, Georgia, including Young's Asian Massage, Gold Massage Spa, and Aromatherapy Spa. As a result, eight people died, including six Asian women who worked there. The complete list of victims included Delaina Ashley Yaun, Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Paul Andre Michels, Hyun Jung Grant, Soon Chung Park, Suncha Kim, and Yong Ae Yue. The only injured party to survive the attack is Elcia R. Hernandez-Ortiz.<sup>1</sup> As I write this, police officers and other law enforcement agents are still trying to decipher the motives of the gunmen. Some claim it was the man's sex addiction that drove him to kill, seeing the massage parlors as sexual temptations.<sup>2</sup> Others say it was racism, which corresponds with the rise in anti-Asian hate crime that has occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of the gunman's motives, the attack has sparked a national conversation out America's history of anti-Asian hate and the sexual fetishization of Asian women, a conversation that work just so happens to be a part of.

To be fair, this thesis focuses more on how white men and women commodified the genuine lived trauma and suffering of Asian women for their own gain, not a direct look at how

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<sup>1</sup> "Atlanta Spa Shootings: Who Are the Victims?" *BBC*, March 22, 2021, accessed April 19, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56446771>; Ramon Padilla, George Petras, Janet Loehrke, Stephen J. Beard, "Visual Timeline: What Happened at Atlanta Spa Shootings" *USA Today*, March 19, 2021, accessed April 19, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/2021/03/17/graphics-atlanta-spa-shootings-robert-long/4731540001/>; "What We Know About the Atlanta-Area Spa Attacks," *New York Magazine*, March 21, 2021, accessed April 19, 2021, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2021/03/7-dead-after-shootings-at-multiple-spas-in-atlanta-updates.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Kate Brumback and Jeffrey Collins, "Attacked Spas Had Been Targeted by Prostitution Stings," *Associated Press*, March 19, 2021, accessed April 19, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-shootings-coronavirus-pandemic-spas-atlanta-6d5e7ab4aa19d82858fb750aa1b3cba1>. To be clear, it is not clear if the businesses were involved in sex work, but they were listed on a site that advertised brothels and have been the location of prostitution stings. Furthermore, not all women engaged in sex work through massage parlors feel themselves to be trafficked.

<sup>3</sup> Lindsay Whitehurst and Michelle L. Price, "Stigmas on Race, Gender and Sex Overlap in Atlanta Slayings". *Associated Press*, March 18, 2021, accessed April 19, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/us-news-race-and-ethnicity-shootings-las-vegas-mass-shooting-georgia-58690b8fd13adc6e76ef2b306fd2c58f>.

Asian women have been sexualized or anti-Asian violence. But nonetheless, it is part of the conversation. After all, the image of all Asian women as sexual slaves or sex workers that proliferated in this period contributed to the image of sexualized Chinese women who were submissive and sexually available. This myth was so prolific that some scholars believe that census takers in the 1870s and 1880s were prone to just list “prostitute” as the profession of Asian women they were unable to interview due to language barriers.<sup>4</sup> And it is this legacy of oversexualizing Asian women that continues to this day, regardless of its direct impact on the March 16<sup>th</sup> gunman’s motives. It is essential that we talk about yellow slavery and its impact on how Americans view Asian women. Even if my work does not focus exclusively on this issue, I do hope it will be a part of a larger spike in scholarship relating to Asian American history, America’s history of anti-Asian violence, and the treatment of Asian women that will arise from the Stop Asian Hate Movement and the greater recognition of America’s anti-Asian past.

This boom in scholarship is also essential because one thesis alone is not enough to adequately cover this topic. Like I said, this thesis does not claim to cover all the motives people may have had for discussing yellow slavery. Additionally, this thesis has focused more heavily on how white people utilized the lived reality of sex trafficking to push their own agendas. This neglects the Asian women themselves, including their voices and experiences which also deserve to be reamplified and shared. Women like Tien Fuh Wu served as “native helpers” in the mission homes, with Tien actually served as Donaldina Cameron’s right hand woman and translator for many years.<sup>5</sup> Another example is Tye Leung Schulze, the first Asian woman hired by the United States government, was assigned to the women’s quarters of the Angel Island Immigration

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<sup>4</sup> Hirata, “Free, Indentured, Enslaved,” 24.

<sup>5</sup> Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*, 112-114, 129-131.; Siler, *The White Devil’s Daughters*, 82-94, 149-161, 236-238, 301-315, 336-339.

Station to serve as a translator and whose job called on her to keep an eye open for women who were potentially being trafficked. Like Tien, Tye was sold to be a *mui-tsai* and lived in the Presbyterian Chinese Mission House until Donaldina Cameron recommended her for the government job.<sup>6</sup> Yet another example is Yamada Waka, a Japanese woman captured by a yellow slavery procurer and forced into sex work in Seattle. Yamada was eventually able to escape from Seattle to the Presbyterian Mission House in San Francisco. Unlike most women forced into sex work, Yamada wrote several slightly fictionalized accounts of her life and served as a translator and teacher for the home.<sup>7</sup> Other “native helpers” at the house include Yuen Qui, Leung Kum Ching, Mae Cheng, and several others detailed in Carol Wilson Green’s *Chinatown Quest* and Julia Flynn Siler’s *The White Devil’s Daughters*.<sup>8</sup>

Each of these women have unique motives that drove their participation with the mission house and anti-trafficking efforts. While they may have also been driven by similar feelings of Christian superiority as motivated white missionaries, many of these women also had shared language, shared culture, and shared experiences with the women they worked with, which was something the white mission women did not share. For this reason, these women also deserve in-depth investigation and an independent evaluation of their motives, much like this thesis did for white anti-yellow slavery advocates. While I wish that I had been able to touch on some of these amazing women within my thesis, it was impossible given the circumstances. However, I present this as a potential new direction to take this research and to better highlight the voices of the Asian women who were impacted by yellow slavery and aimed to stop it.

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<sup>6</sup> Siler, *The White Devil’s Daughters*, 239-243.

<sup>7</sup> Siler, *The White Devil’s Daughters*, 169-179.; Tomoko Yamazaki, *The Story of Yamada Waka: From Prostitute to Feminist Pioneer*, (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*, 127-129.; Siler, *White Devil’s Daughters*, 216, 241.; Wilson, *Chinatown Quest*, 20, 28-29

As demonstrated by the need to include the voices of Asian women, this thesis is not a complete or comprehensive work. However, I do believe that it is a valuable jumping off point for future historians hoping to study the topic to at least point out the exclusion of yellow slavery in most scholarship on white slavery. While white slavery was primarily concerned with the safety and well-being of white women, painting it as *solely* concerned with white women neglects some of the nuances. This, in turn, neglects the experiences of Asian women and the motivations and projects tied up in yellow slavery, including anti-Chinese rhetoric, suffrage, and cultural/religious colonialism. Of course, it is arguable that white slavery and the enslavement of Chinese women included many of the same motives and features, and many reformers argued that white slavery also included non-white victims.<sup>9</sup> However, despite these claims, Chinese sex slavery was still frequently distinguished from white slave trade as something distinct and different, especially through the use of terms like yellow slavery.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the existence of mission homes set up with the purpose of serving Chinese sex slaves specifically seems to suggest that these women deserve additional attention.

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9 Clifford Roe, *Horrors of the White Slave Trade: The Mighty Crusade to Protect the Purity of Our Homes*, (Chicago, IL: B.S. Steadwell, 1911), 97, accessed August 10, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/horrorsofwhitesl00clif/page/n7/mode/2up>. For example, Clifford Roe wrote in his books, “The phrase, white slave traffic, is a misnomer, for there is a traffic in yellow and black women and girls, as well as white girls.”

10 Ernest Bell, “The Yellow Slave Trade,” in *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls or War on the White Slave Trade*, ed. Ernest Bell, (Chicago, IL: G.S. Ball, 1910), 213-222, accessed August 13, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/fightingtraffici00bellrich/page/212/mode/2up>. Ernest Bell, for example, has a separate chapter in his book on white slavery entitled “The Yellow Slave Trade,” which seems to distinguish the so-called “yellow slave trade” from the white slavery that was discussed in the book. Even if yellow slavery is just a piece of the whole, the fact that it warranted a separate name still indicates differentiation.

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**Appendix:**  
**Table comparing the similarities and differences of “yellow slave” contracts**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Length of Service</b>	<b>Extension of term based on sickness?</b>	<b>Clause for running away?</b>	<b>One year extension for pregnancy?</b>	<b>Can the woman be returned?</b>	<b>Signed w/ a thumbprint?</b>
Sun Gum	1866	\$1,205	4 ½ years	Yes, 15 days	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes
Yut Kum	Prior to 1875	\$470	4 years	Yes, 15 days	Yes, she will have to recoup all costs	Yes	Can be returned if she is found to have one of the “four great sicknesses”	No
Xin Jin	1886	\$524	4 ½ years	Yes, 15 days	Yes, she will have to recoup all costs	Yes	Can be returned within 100 days if she has one of the “four loathsome diseases.”	Yes
Ah Kam	1899	\$460	4 ½ years	Yes, 14 days	Can be sold at her owner’s pleasure	Yes	N/A	Yes
Loi Yau	1873	\$503	4 ½ years	Yes, 10 days	Yes, she will have to recoup all costs	N/A	N/A	Yes