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Duet: Prostitution, Racism and Feminist Discourse

*Vednita Carter and Evelina Giobbe**

*and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid
so it is better to speak
remembering we were never meant to survive*

Audre Lorde, "Litany for Survival"¹

We come to this piece from two very different backgrounds. One of us is a Black woman, the other a first-generation Italian-American. One

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Evelina Giobbe is Executive Director of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation Resource Institute (CSERI). CSERI was established in 1996 to answer the need for a coordinated community response to the expanding sex industry in Minnesota. Its mission is to abate commercial sexual exploitation through research, education and community organizing; to advocate for the rights of prostituted women, youth and transgender persons; and to increase opportunities for individuals to leave the sex industry. CSERI maintains a library on commercial sexual exploitation; publishes original research; develops and distributes prevention materials; provides professional training and consulting services; coordinates public policy initiatives and provides services to prostituted individuals including pro bono legal representation, legal advocacy and educational scholarships.

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1. Audre Lorde, *Litany for Survival*, in *THE BLACK UNICORN* (1978).

daughter carries the familial imprint of slavery, the second, fascism. Both share a history of sexual exploitation by white men and a commitment to ending the prostitution of our sisters. We write to bear witness. We espouse an ideology of liberation rejecting any accommodation to white male supremacy.

We have written and lectured for over a decade about prostitution as a system of institutionalized violence against women. Ironically, this period approximates our collective years in the sex industry. Over the years, the parallels between *being* a prostitute and *organizing* against prostitution as survivors has struck a discomfiting chord.

This kind of activism is about giving people what they want, how they want it and asking them to let you give it to them again another time. The script always remains the same. Lawyers want to talk legal theory, sociologists want to talk occupational ideologies and postmodern feminists want to talk about sexual autonomy, free speech and choice.² Nobody, it appears, really wants to talk about *prostitution*.

Preparing for a speaking engagement is very much like turning a "talk trick." You pack your cites in your bag like condoms to protect yourself from the rhetoric spouting from the white middle-class academics while they masturbate at you. You carefully prepare your arguments to fit into the prearranged scenario. Initially, you think you can change hearts and minds by simply exposing the truth. Your early optimism begins to fade however, when you find yourself saying the same things to the same people in city after city, state after state, year after year. Part of the problem is that you are walking into a racially charged political sexual fantasy. Typically, "feminist" panels on "sex work" are mirror images of the prostitution world replete with actors assembled from central casting. There's the liberal-lefty lawyers representing the tricks, a madam representing the pimps, a prostitutes' rights activist representing the "whores," and then there is you. Conferences about prostitution are not unlike bachelor parties. The customers (conference attendees) want to watch two whores (women) mud wrestle (debate) for their sexual (intellectual) enjoyment. In the end, you get fucked (your experiences are reduced to a matter of unpopular opinion), take your money (honorarium) and go home to get ready for your next date.

The goal of these conferences is *not* to examine the institution of prostitution, how it functions in tandem with racism and sexism, or to find solutions to the former or the latter. To the contrary, the goal is to promote public policy that will provide more johns with more sex, more pimps with more money and prostitutes with more of the same. Prostituted women are offered two roles in these discussions: lifting one's dress with a wink and a

2. See generally Travis Hirschi, *The Professional Prostitute*, 7 BERKELEY, J. SOC. 33, 44-45 (1962). See also James H. Bryan, *Occupational Ideologies and Individual Attitudes of Call Girls*, 13 SOC. PROBS. 443 (1966).

smile or tearful, hand-wringing displays of victimization. We've never been very good at either. But then we weren't really very good at sex work.

Conference proceedings are usually published ostensibly to give a broader voice to panel participants. Central to the publication is the appearance of neutrality: the *inclusion* of a diversity of voices and views. Ironically, the parameters of the original setting and the demands of writing a journal article are exclusionary by virtue of their form. Having never read a law journal (feminist or otherwise) while waiting for the next trick to arrive or in between sets at a strip club, we question the intrinsic value of using scarce time and resources to prepare a submission. Furthermore, our primary purpose is to work towards the liberation of prostituted women, which requires the organizing of and with prostituted women. We realize it is highly unlikely that we will reach our constituents, let alone organize them, through this venue. However, considering the relatively small section of the marketplace of ideas to which our views have been relegated, we have decided to take our free speech where we can get it. At the very least, our short "duet" will provide a counterpoint to the ceaseless droning of the chorus.

If we are to design public policy that adequately addresses the issue of commercial sexual exploitation, we must retreat from the intellectual wet dream in which we have immersed ourselves. We must confront the stark reality of prostitution on its own terms, in its own language and in the social context that it exists. This is not an easy voyage. For the non-prostituted woman, it entails looking into the eyes of the men, and the all too many women whom you have allowed into your life, and daring to question the ways in which they have passed through the lives of our prostituted sisters. Men have created a society in which women occupy two opposite poles. The laws these men have created are designed to keep women apart: one in the brothel, the other in the academy—with the threat of being banished to the marriage bed as a warning to all who would question these generous options. It is long past time to cross this divide which has been built upon the silence that men have imposed on us all by exposing the reality of prostitution.³ This Article attempts to make that leap by stripping away the metaphors which have hidden the harm of prostitution and also by examining the sex industry within the context of race, class and the gender oppression in which it is rooted.

3. See generally Margaret A. Baldwin, *Split at the Root: Prostitution and Feminist Discourses of Law Reform*, 5 YALE J.L. & FEMINISM 47 (1992) (discussing the relationship between prostitutes and other (non-prostituted) women and the way this divide is codified in law).

THE NEXUS BETWEEN PROSTITUTION AND SLAVERY

One must understand the past before one can understand the present. It is often very painful for African-Americans to look back in history. Everything ever portrayed about Black women, by way of visual images or writing, has been negative. Black women have been depicted in ways that one would think could only be fictional or in some horror story. In truth, many of these portrayals are our reality. We have seen the Black mammy, always caring for white folks' children, even to the point of suckling milk from her breasts so she does not have enough milk for her own child.⁴ We have seen her as a slave, valued only for her "breeding capacity," and we have seen her children taken from her.⁵ Pornography portrays her as a wild animal that is always ready for any kind of sex, at any time, at any place, with anybody.⁶ Today sex-oriented businesses are typically zoned in Black neighborhoods. Poor, Black communities have become de facto combat zones where street prostitution is highly visible and readily available.⁷ The implicit message to white men is that it is all right to solicit Black women and girls for sex, that we are all prostitutes.⁸ On almost any night, you can see them slowly cruising our neighborhoods, rolling down their windows, calling out to women and girls. The message to Black women is equally clear: this is how it is, this is who we are, this is what we're for. With all the negative images and labels ascribed to Black women, it is no surprise that many of us remain confused about who we really are and who we want to be.⁹

Around the late 1950s and 1960s our image was beginning to change. When our country was immersed in the civil rights movement—African-

4. See Cheryl Gilkes, *From Slavery to Social Welfare: Racism and the Control of Black Women*, in CLASS, RACE, AND SEX: THE DYNAMICS OF CONTROL 288-300 (Amy Swerdlow & Hanna Lessinger eds., 1983). See also BELL HOOKS, *SISTERS OF THE YAM: BLACK WOMEN AND SELF-RECOVERY* 49 (1993) (arguing that over-reliance on strong Black women in the workplace cast them in the role of contemporary "mammies" who will assume the burden of all responsibilities).

5. See La Frances Rodgers-Rose, *The Black Woman*, in SAGE PUBLICATIONS 18, 20 (1980).

6. See generally PATRICIA HILL COLLINS, *BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT: KNOWLEDGE, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT* (1991). Patricia Collins traces the sexualized representations of African-Americans and the pornographic treatment of African-American female bodies in the 19th century, including public displays of female slaves on the auction block and the sexual objectification of Sarah Bartmann. Bartmann was put on exhibition at fashionable Parisian parties as an example of deviant sexuality. Upon her death in 1815, she was dissected and her buttocks and genitals put on display. See *id.* at 168-69, 171-72, 175.

7. The majority of street prostitution and illegal saunas (brothels) in Minnesota are located in pockets of urban poverty in North and South Minneapolis and to a lesser extent the Frogtown area of St. Paul.

8. See COLLINS, *supra* note 6, at 177 (arguing the myth of the Black prostitute is the justification for social control over Black women and legitimizes rape and other forms of sexual violence).

9. See generally WILLIAM H. GRIER & PRICE M. COBBS, *BLACK RAGE* (1968).

Americans banded together.¹⁰ We had very powerful leaders, many of whom were subsequently killed.¹¹ For a moment in history, however, "Black Power" was our rallying cry and "Black is Beautiful" was how we identified ourselves.¹² It is what we believed about who we were and what we were capable of. When the civil rights movement waned, the identity we were beginning to create for ourselves vanished with it. Once again we became caught up in white society's denigrated image of who we are.¹³

Our ancestors did not feel this lack of self-worth. Before the invasion of Africa by the white man, Africans were a dignified people. Family was the basic unit of the nation.¹⁴ The only way African people could survive was if the African family survived. They had but one view of women—they were to be highly respected.¹⁵ If a wife lost her husband, the husband's brother was obligated to take his brother's family, including the wife, into his home.¹⁶ She was considered the queen of Africa, the giver of life, and as such was honored and adored.

Among all the jewels stripped from the Africans, when the continent was raided by whites and during their subsequent enslavement, the loss of spiritual culture and sexuality was the most devastating. During the slavery

10. The American civil rights movement is commonly dated from the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The banding of African-Americans occurred through events such as bus boycotts in Louisiana and Alabama, the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), voter registration drives, the freedom rides and the March on Washington. See generally CLAYBORNE CARSON ET AL., *EYES ON THE PRIZE CIVIL RIGHTS READER* (1987).

11. We had Martin Luther King, Jr. (killed in 1968), Rosa Parks, Autherine Lucy (first Black admitted to University of Alabama), Daisy Bates (president of the NAACP in Arkansas during "Little Rock" and editor of a Black newspaper), James Farmer (CORE leader of Freedom Riders), James Meredith (first Black to attend class at the University of Mississippi, killed in 1966), Medgar Evers (head of Mississippi NAACP, killed in 1963), Herbert Lee (killed in 1961), Stokely Carmichael (chairman of SNCC) and Malcolm X (killed in 1965). See generally CARSON ET AL., *supra* note 10.

12. The phrase "Black Power" was coined by SNCC field secretary Willie Ricks in June 1966. However, the slogan gained widespread movement acceptance when, frustrated by the few gains made by Blacks, Stokely Carmichael, then Chairman of SNCC, called for Black Power and the crowd of 600 passionately responded "Black Power! Black Power!" SETH CAGIN & PHILIP DRAY, *WE ARE NOT AFRAID* 440-41 (1988).

13. See BELL HOOKS, *BLACK LOOKS: RACE AND REPRESENTATION* (1992). "A culture of domination demands of all its citizens self-negation. The more marginalized, the more intense the demand. Since Black people, especially the underclass, are bombarded by messages that we have no value, are worthless, it is no wonder that we fall prey to nihilistic despair . . ." *Id.* at 19.

14. See Rodgers-Rose, *supra* note 5, at 16; JUDY H. KATZ, *WHITE AWARENESS* 121-22 (1978) (comparing African and English culture).

15. See Rodgers-Rose, *supra* note 5, at 16.

16. This is not an unusual practice in family centered cultures. As late as 1933, it was a common practice in southern Italy. One of the authors' Grandfather died at the age of 33 leaving a wife and four small children in the town of Torre del Greco. His brother married his widowed sister-in-law and raised his nieces and nephews as his own children. Another widowed relative married his deceased wife's sister after her husband passed away in 1978.

era, female slaves suffered horribly from constant and brutal sexual exploitation. Rape was a fact of life on the plantation.¹⁷ Female slaves were continually subjected to the drunken or abusive sexual advances of a master, overseer or the master's sons.¹⁸ Few Black women reached the age of seventeen without having been molested by a white male.¹⁹ Many white men would deliberately impregnate Black women for the sole purpose of producing female children. They would wait until the child reached the age of eleven or twelve years old and sell them to a "fancy house." A fancy house was a place where girls of mixed race were sold into prostitution.²⁰ During the period of slavery mixed-breed girls were worth a great deal of money in the prostitution business.²¹ As on the plantation, the women would have to tend to the sexual needs of white men no matter how loathsome and perverted the needs.²² In return for her submission, she was given nicer clothes, food and a decent place to stay. Because her basic needs were provided for, she was made to feel that her sexual exploitation raised her standard of life and therefore she was better than other slaves.

After their emancipation in 1863, many slaves fled from the South to

17. See Rodgers-Rose, *supra* note 5, at 20. See also GERDA LERNER, BLACK WOMEN IN WHITE AMERICA, chs. 1 & 3 (1973); SUSAN BROWNMILLER, AGAINST OUR WILL: MEN, WOMEN & RAPE 7 (1976) (discussing how the rape of female slaves was not punishable by law as it was impossible to rape one's own property).

18. See Testimony of Harry McMillan before the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission (June 1863), in FREEDOM: DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF EMANCIPATION 1861-1867, SERIES I, VOL. II, THE WARTIME GENESIS OF FREE LABOR: THE LOWER SOUTH 250-54 (Ira Berlin et al. eds., 1990) (compilation of letters and testimony from the U.S. National Archives). In discussing sexual relations between female slaves and their masters McMillan states

the young men did it; there was a good deal of it. They often kept one girl steady and sometimes two on different places; men who had wives did it too sometimes; if they could get it on their own place it was easier but they would go wherever they could get it.

Id.

19. See DANIEL A.P. MURRAY, THE MASTERSHIP AND ITS FRUITS: THE EMANCIPATED SLAVE FACE TO FACE WITH HIS OLD MASTER 6 (N.Y. Loyal Publication Society 1864).

The old masters usually made their selections from the house servants and young masters generally preferred for their concubines their half-sisters. It was the common custom. They were usually taken at the age of thirteen or fourteen . . . a chaste colored girl at the age of seventeen was almost unknown.

Id. See also LERNER, *supra* note 17.

20. See Deborah G. White, Ain't I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Antebellum South 202-03 (1979) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago) (on file with University Microfilms International). See also JOHN D'EMILIO & ESTELLE B. FREEDMAN, INTIMATE MATTERS: A HISTORY OF SEXUALITY IN AMERICA 102 (1988) (discussing Black female slaves purchased for concubinage); MURRAY, *supra* note 19, at 6 ("Their own offspring . . . were treated as slaves; they were frequently subjected to ferocious treatment, and sold, to be put out of their sight.").

21. See White, *supra* note 20.

22. MURRAY, *supra* note 19, at 6 ("I have known . . . women to be severely whipped for not coming to the quarters of the overseer or master for the purpose of prostitution when ordered so to do.").

the North in search of true freedom. Mistakenly believing that the northern whites' moral opposition to slavery signified their belief in racial equality, it's easy to imagine what the thoughts of Blacks might have been:²³ up North they could find work, provide for their families. There would be no more worries about mothers and daughters being raped and assaulted or sold. Little did they know the white man wasn't going to relinquish their bodies that easily. It was going to take more than the Emancipation Proclamation for this to happen. Whites continued to perpetuate the myth that all Black women were wild sex animals in an attempt to excuse and hide their continued sexual exploitation. Up until the 1960s they were still invading the homes of Black families in the South, raping mothers and daughters.²⁴ It wasn't until the civil rights movement that this practice appeared to stop, or at least we didn't hear about it anymore. As a result of the systematic abuse Black women have suffered in this country, the lesson sadly passed on from grandmother to daughter in our communities is that sexual exploitation by white men is inevitable.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF PROSTITUTION

The function of the institution of prostitution is to allow males unconditional sexual access to females, limited solely by their ability to pay for this privilege. Culturally supported tactics of power and control facilitate the recruitment or coercion of women and children into prostitution and effectively impede their escape. These tactics include economic marginalization, child sexual abuse, rape and battery, as well as racism, classism and heterosexism.

A society that keeps women economically marginalized through educational deprivation and job discrimination²⁵ ensures a ready pool of women who will be vulnerable to recruitment into, and entrapment in, prostitution. However, poverty is only one factor that pushes women into the sex industry. The average age of entry into prostitution in the United States is fourteen.²⁶ Studies of prostituted women reveal that their initial sexual experience occurred at a very early age,²⁷ most often the result of rape.²⁸ The vast majority of adult prostitutes were sexually abused as

23. See CAGIN & DRAY, *supra* note 12, at 201 (discussing northern sympathies for the plight of southern whites during the mid-1870s).

24. See LERNER, *supra* note 17.

25. See generally SUSAN FALUDI, *BACKLASH: THE UNDECLARED WAR AGAINST AMERICAN WOMEN* (1991) (discussing the status of women). See also LERNER, *supra* note 17, at 83-143 (educational discrimination), 259-62 (job discrimination).

26. See Susan Kay Hunter, *Prostitution is Cruelty and Abuse to Women and Children*, 1 MICH. J. GENDER & L. 91 (1993).

27. See D. KELLY WEISBERG, *CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT: A STUDY OF ADOLESCENT PROSTITUTION* 92, 165-66 (1985) (reviewing current studies on juvenile prostitution).

28. See *id.*

children,²⁹ usually by a father or step-father.³⁰ They commonly suffered physical abuse and neglect in their families of origin.³¹ For most, the only way to stop the violence is to run away from home.³² Young, frightened and unable to find employment, these girls are easy prey for pimps who promise them friendship, romance and riches.

Battering further facilitates the recruitment of adult women into prostitution. For example, a study conducted in New York City, found that as many as forty percent of homeless people are battered women.³³ By the late 1980s battering had become the leading cause of injury to women.³⁴ Two-thirds of the women fleeing abusive relationship were turned away from battered women's shelters due to lack of space.³⁵ Without other resources, prostitution may be the only option available for them to feed themselves and their children.

Although individual men perpetrate child sexual abuse, rape and battery, a compelling argument can be made that these behaviors are culturally supported forms of social control. The prevalence of such occurrences,³⁶ the fact that they differentially injure females, and the failure of male-controlled social institutions to prevent or redress such victims' injuries,³⁷ point to implicitly sanctioned conduct. The inordinate rate of these kinds of abuses in the lives of both women and girls as antecedents to prostitution unmasks cultural support for commercial sexual exploitation.

Racism and classism exacerbate oppressive social and economic

29. See *id.* at 91-93 (review of literature on childhood sexual abuse as an antecedent to prostitution).

30. See Catharine A. Mackinnon, *Prostitution and Civil Rights*, 1 MICH. J. GENDER & L. 13, 28 (1993).

31. See WEISBERG, *supra* note 27, at 93-94 (review of literature on familial physical abuse and neglect as antecedents to prostitution).

32. See *id.* at 121-23, 170-71 (review of literature on runaway behavior as an antecedent to prostitution).

33. See FALUDI, *supra* note 25, at xiv.

34. See *id.*

35. See NATIONAL LOW-INCOME HOUSING COALITION: WOMEN AND HOUSING TASK FORCE, UNLOCKING THE DOOR: AN ACTION FOR MEETING THE HOUSING NEEDS OF WOMEN 8 (1988).

36. See PHYLLIS CHESLER, MOTHERS ON TRIAL 56-57 (1987) (19% of American women (one in six) are sexually victimized as children; 2-5 million American women (one in seven) are paternally raped as children). See also FALUDI, *supra* note 25, at xiv (battery leading cause of violence against women), xvii (reported rapes had more than doubled since 1970s; sex-related murders rose 160% between 1976 and 1984; one-third of the women murdered were killed by their spouse or male partner).

37. See NATIONAL WOMAN ABUSE PREVENTION PROJECT, UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FACT SHEETS (federal funding for battered women's shelters withheld). See also COALITION ON WOMEN & THE BUDGET, INEQUALITY OF SACRIFICE: THE IMPACT OF THE REAGAN BUDGET ON WOMEN 23 (1986) (funding for shelters denied; Office of Domestic Violence closed); FALUDI, *supra* note 25, at 463 (citing statistical information for 1987 from the National Center on Women and Family Law, 30 states have some form of marital rape exemption); CHESLER, *supra* note 36, at 242-54 (fathers rarely jailed for incest; sexually abusive fathers rarely denied custody or visitation).

conditions that make poor women and women of color particularly vulnerable to prostitution. African-American women are disproportionately represented among the women of color that are featured in pornography.³⁸ Black women are portrayed as “animalistic, incapable of self-control, sexually depraved, implusive, unclean” and undeserving of human affection.³⁹ Pornography depicts them inviting and enjoying rape by white men.⁴⁰ These racist stereotypes promote, celebrate and perpetuate race-motivated sexual violence.⁴¹ This created the overall environment that targets Black women for recruitment into prostitution by pimps and for harassment or solicitation by johns.⁴²

Finally, heterosexism supports the male sexual imperative. Heterosexism advances the belief that men have uncontrollable sexual urges which, if not fulfilled, will drive them to rape “innocent” females.⁴³ Herein lies the ultimate justification for prostitution.

THE HARM OF PROSTITUTION

*Prostitution is akin to the gardener's deliberate hand
cutting away at the roots of a woman's soul
pruning back the branches of her desires
trapping her in a tiny vessel in which she cannot grow
until her stunted, gnarled form acquiesces
and her dwarfed, deformed spirit
is pronounced a thing of beauty to men's eyes.*⁴⁴

The first harm of prostitution is “agreeing” to do it. A woman entering prostitution typically acquires a new name, changes her appearance and creates a fictitious past.⁴⁵ She does this not so much to protect herself from the police (although a string of aliases help), but to rearrange her persona so as to meet the market demand, and in an attempt to save something of

38. See generally Alice Mayall & Diana E.H. Russell, *Racism in Porn*, in *MAKING VIOLENCE SEXY: FEMINIST VIEWS ON PORNOGRAPHY* 167, 170-75 (Diana E.H. Russell ed., 1993).

39. *Id.* at 167, 176. See also COLLINS, *supra* note 6, at 167-73.

40. See generally Mayall & Russell, *supra* note 38, at 171-75.

41. See *id.* at 176.

42. See Evelina Giobbe, *Confronting Liberal Lies About Prostitution*, in *THE SEXUAL LIBERALS AND THE ATTACK ON FEMINISM* 69 (Dorchen Leidholdt & Janice G. Raymond eds., 1990).

43. See Lars O. Ericcson, *Charges Against Prostitution: An Attempt at a Philosophical Assessment*, 90 *ETHICS* 335, 341 (1980) (contending that sexual satisfaction is a basic need); KATHLEEN BARRY, *FEMALE SEXUAL SLAVERY* 256 (1979) (arguing against the notion that, “the drive . . . is [believed to be] so overwhelming that the male is the one to be acted upon by it; thus the sex drive is put out of his control. At the same time it demands a fitting object for release, and thus the female role is defined.”).

44. Unpublished poem by author Evelina Giobbe (on file with author).

45. See, e.g., BARRY, *supra* note 43, at 94-95 (prostitutes commonly take on assumed names).

herself for herself.⁴⁶ Prostitutes are caricatures of women fashioned from a pastiche of pornographic films and magazines that feature prostituted women *acting like prostitutes*, which johns later use to teach prostitutes how to act. The process of becoming a prostitute entails the systematic destruction of an individual woman's ideas, beliefs, feelings and desires which are replaced with a compilation of values lifted from the texts of various pornographic paperbacks. A *good prostitute* is devoid of a unique and personal identity. She is empty space surrounded by flesh into which men deposit evidence of their masculinity. She does not exist so that he can. Prostitution done *correctly* begins with theft and ends with the subsequent abandonment of self. What remains is essential to the job: the mouth, the genitals, anus, breasts . . . and the label.

The second harm of prostitution is the prostitution itself. To be a prostitute is to be unconditionally sexually available to any male who buys the right to use your body in whatever way he chooses. Women have described prostitution as rape that is bought and paid for.⁴⁷ Prostitutes are "visited upon" by about five men per day—close to two thousand men per year. A girl who enters prostitution at fourteen will have submitted to the sexual demands of four thousand men before she is old enough to drive a car, eight thousand men before she is old enough to vote and twelve thousand men before she is deemed mature enough to buy a single beer in most states.⁴⁸ In addition to the daily mind-numbing indignity of (dis)engaging in "nonviolent" unwanted sex, prostituted women are subjected to a wide range of sexual abuse as part of the "job description."

The third harm of prostitution is a woman's accommodation to it. The repeated act of submitting to the sexual demands of strangers, with whom she wouldn't otherwise choose to engage in even the most superficial of social interactions, necessitates that a woman alienate her mind from her body. To be a prostitute is to be an object in the marketplace: a three-dimensional blank screen upon which men project and act out their sexual dominance. To be a prostitute is to witness male sexuality, stripped of any pretense of civility, and to say, "I want it." It is to withstand the unmasked fury of male supremacy pounding against your body and to say, "I want it."

46. See Evelina Giobbe, *Juvenile Prostitution: Profile of Recruitment*, in CHILD TRAUMA I: ISSUES AND RESEARCH 127 (Anne Wolbert Burgess ed., 1992) (interview with Karen: "When I would work the street, I wasn't 'Karen.' . . . When I was on the street 'Candy' would come out Candy took over, or 'Randi' or 'Susie,' or how many others all took over. Those are the ones that survived that life. Karen would not have survived it.").

47. See Evelina Giobbe, *Prostitution: Buying the Right to Rape*, in RAPE & SEXUAL ASSAULT III, at 144 (Ann Wolbert Burgess ed., 1991) (interview with MD: "I don't know how else to explain it except that it felt like rape. It was rape to me.").

48. See Ruth Parriot, *Health Experiences of Twin Cities Women Used in Prostitution* 8 (1994) (unpublished manuscript on file with authors and WHISPER program (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt) Minneapolis, MN) (reporting an average of 10,292 lifetime acts of prostitution with a high of 81,270; average number of years in prostitution was 8.6).

It is to feel the thrust of male power at the back of your throat and to choke out "I want it." To be a prostitute is to never forget: to see every man in every john and every john in any man, everywhere and always. To be a prostitute is to never be believed, unless you say, "I want it." At the very worst, prostitution is literal sexual slavery. At the very least, prostitution is an accommodation and an adaptation to white male supremacy in its most brutal incarnation.

Then there are the ancillary harms: the rapes, the robberies and the inevitable beatings punctuated by shouts of "bitch" and "whore" and "slut," gratuitously meted out by pimps, by johns and by the police.⁴⁹ These are the commonplace insults to injury that are directed at prostitutes simply because they are prostitutes.

THE HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF SEX WORK

Prostitution has a profound effect on women's health and emotional well being. The physical and sexual abuse inherent in prostitution results in many health complications and lasting damage.⁵⁰ In a study conducted by Melissa Farley and Howard Barkan, eight percent of the respondents reported that assaults by pimps and customers resulted in serious injury (e.g., gunshot wounds, knife wounds, etc.).⁵¹ In a second study, conducted by Ruth Parriot, twenty-three percent of the sample who were beaten by customers suffered broken bones; two women were so severely battered that they spent time in a coma.⁵² Additionally, Parriot's sample reported head injuries, knife wounds, loss of consciousness and miscarriage resulting from beatings in their personal relationships with pimps/partners.⁵³ In a third study conducted by CSERI (Commercial Sexual Exploitation Resource Institute) fourteen percent of the respondents reported permanent injuries, and thirteen percent disfigurement, resulting

49. Over half (52%) of prostituted women seeking services from the WHISPER program in 1995 had been physically assaulted by a john and 40% by a pimp; 48% had been raped by a customer and 29% by a pimp. Unpublished Study by CSERI, 1998 (on file with author Giobbe) [hereinafter CSERI Study A]. A second study of prostituted women conducted by CSERI revealed that 59% of prostitutes had been raped by a client and 48% were forced to commit a sexual act against their will; 27% were sexually assaulted by a police officer and half were sexually assaulted by a pimp. Unpublished Study by CSERI, 1998 (on file with author Giobbe) [hereinafter CSERI Study B]. Additionally, the women interviewed were beaten by customers (55%), the police (21%) and pimps (90%). Women also reported being robbed by customers (38%) and police officers (16%). See also Melissa Farley & Howard Barkan, *Prostitution, Violence, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*, 27(3) WOMEN AND HEALTH 37-49 (1998) (reporting 82% of their San Francisco sample had been physically assaulted. Of these, 88% had been threatened with bodily harm and 83% had been threatened with a weapon. 68% of the respondents also reported being raped and 48% were raped more than five times.).

50. See Parriot, *supra* note 48, at 19.

51. Farley & Barkan, *supra* note 49, at 41.

52. Parriot, *supra* note 48, at 19.

53. *Id.*

from prostitution-related violence.⁵⁴ Studies by Parriot, and those conducted by Farley and Barkan, also commented on the women's overall poor health.⁵⁵

The emotional and psychological effects of prostitution on women's lives have been well documented. Participants in the Parriot study reported an average of six stress-related disorders, most frequently depression, insomnia, flashbacks and sexual dysfunction.⁵⁶ Sixty-eight percent of Farley and Barkan's sample of working prostitutes suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁵⁷ A study of 127 prostitutes in Puerto Rico discovered a high prevalence rate of depressive symptoms.⁵⁸ In this study, researchers found that sex workers with high depression rates were more likely to report high-risk behaviors.⁵⁹ Depression contributes to a higher level of isolation.⁶⁰ Sadness and apathy associated with depression interferes with motivation.⁶¹ PTSD causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning and a sense of foreshortened future.⁶² Prostitutes also suffer from a unique and irrational fear that could be coined "the Scarlet Letter Syndrome." They believe that people, especially men, can "tell" that they are prostitutes merely by looking at them.⁶³ This problem is exacerbated for Black women who have been indelibly branded as whores in the racist American consciousness. Symptoms associated with depression and PTSD, and other

54. CSERI Study B, *supra* note 49.

55. See Farley & Barkan, *supra* note 49, at 41 (50% of sample reported general health problems which the respondents believed were related to or exacerbated by sex work. These problems included arthritis or nonspecific joint pain (14%); cardiovascular symptoms (12%); liver disorders (11%); reproductive system symptoms (10%); respiratory symptoms (9%); neurological symptoms, such as numbness or seizures (9%); HIV infection (8%)). See also Parriot, *supra* note 48, at 11-14 (reporting positive pap smears (24%), colposcopy (12%), complications in pregnancy including low birth weight or premature delivery (29%), miscarriage (24%), STDs (85% reporting 4 episodes of gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, genital warts or herpes) and pelvic inflammatory disease (31%)).

56. Parriot, *supra* note 48, at 17.

57. Farley & Barkan, *supra* note 49, at 42 (reporting prostitutes had an overall mean PLC (PTSD Checklist measuring severity of symptoms) of 54.9 compared to PLC scores of 30.6 in victims of child sexual abuse and 34.8 among Persian Gulf War veterans. Additionally, prostitutes scored highest on C symptoms (measuring numbing and avoidance); 79% of the sample suffered from three or more C symptoms (i.e., emotionally numb, sense of foreshortened future)).

58. See Margerita Alegria et al., *HIV Infection, Risk Behaviors, and Depressive Symptoms Among Puerto Rican Sex Workers*, 84 (12) AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 2000-02 (1994) (70% have a high rate of depressive symptoms).

59. *Id.* at 2001.

60. See DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL OF MENTAL DISORDERS 424 (Am. Psychiatric Ass'n. ed., 1994) (§309.81).

61. See *id.*

62. See *id.*

63. See CSERI Study B, *supra* note 49 (interview with Marlene: "I felt like I always had a big "P" on my forehead"); Giobbe, *supra* note 47, at 157 (interview with LV: "A man will look at me like . . . they just know"; interview with RM: ". . . people look at me . . . like I'm dirty . . . just a funny look they give you when they know you've been on the streets.").

emotional stressors, contribute to the woman's inability to extricate themselves from the sex industry.

Considering the pervasive violence and stress in prostituted women's lives, it is not surprising to find high levels of drug and alcohol abuse in this population. Seventy-five percent of Farley and Barkan's sample reported chemical dependency.⁶⁴ In Minnesota, one hundred percent of the CSERI Study B sample,⁶⁵ ninety-five percent of the CSERI Study A sample⁶⁶ and ninety-four percent of Parriot's sample⁶⁷ were chemically dependent. Further, fifty-five percent of Parriot's sample reported always being high when turning a trick and thirty-four were high at least half of the time—thus further impairing judgement and further decreasing their ability to negotiate transactions with customers.⁶⁸

The emotional impact of prostitution can be life threatening. Nineteen percent of Parriot's sample engaged in self-injurious behavior including self-mutilation. Forty-six percent attempted suicide, and within that group, sixty-five percent made subsequent attempts.⁶⁹ Fifty-three percent of the entire CSERI study A sample, and fifty-three percent of Black women surveyed attempted suicide.⁷⁰ Seventeen percent of Farley and Barkan's sample stated that they would choose immediate admission to a hospital for an acute emotional problem, drug addiction or both.⁷¹

THE QUESTION OF CHOICE & THE INTERNATIONAL PROSTITUTES' RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Probably the most disturbing aspect of the international prostitutes' rights movement is the way in which a hierarchy built on race and class privilege informs its ideology. The overwhelmingly white leadership of this well-funded movement is comprised of academics⁷² and attorneys⁷³

64. Farley & Barkan, *supra* note 49, at 45.

65. CSERI Study B, *supra* note 49 (80% were poly drug users; 82% reported crack cocaine use and 39% described themselves as alcoholic as well as chemically dependent).

66. CSERI Study A, *supra* note 49 (reporting overall 12.2% i.v. drug use; 98% of Black women surveyed were drug abusers, 92% reporting crack cocaine use).

67. Parriot, *supra* note 48, at 15 (reporting use of alcohol (98%), crack cocaine (96%) and heroin (38%) as well other drugs).

68. *Id.* at 9. It is also important to note that unlike Farley and Barkan's sample of streetwalkers in San Francisco, women interviewed for Parriot's study and CSERI Studies A and B were involved in a variety of types of prostitution, including, but not limited to, street walking, working in massage parlors or saunas, escort or out call services (for madams, pimps and independently from their own book (private clientele)).

69. Parriot, *supra* note 48, at 17.

70. *But see* W. J. FREMOUW ET AL., SUICIDE RISK: ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE GUIDELINES 25 (1990) (reporting 33% of those in the general population who attempt suicide made subsequent suicide attempts).

71. Farley & Barkan, *supra* 49, at 41.

72. *E.g.*, Pricilla Alexander, Gail Pheterson.

73. *E.g.*, American Civil Liberties Union position that prostitution should be decriminalized.

who *don't have to do sex work*, and middle-aged former sex workers who *no longer do sex work*.⁷⁴ These individuals exploit third world women of color who have *few viable alternatives to sex work*⁷⁵ and promote the prostitution of American women who are trapped in a cycle of poverty and despair.⁷⁶ The pro-prostitution lobby stands on a shaky platform of economic justice built on the false premise that prostitution is a quid pro quo commercial sexual transaction and as such should be subject to standard labor laws and protections.⁷⁷ Summarized briefly, their position holds that prostitution is a job. Therefore, prostitutes are independent businesswomen. As such, prostitutes are feminists and thus they can do what ever they choose with their bodies (sell sex) and their money (give it to pimps).⁷⁸ This view ignores the social context in which prostitution occurs, especially the race/class power differential that exists between prostitutes and their customers.⁷⁹

74. E.g., Margo St. James, Norma Jean Almodovar and (the younger) Carol Leigh.

75. See DEBBY PHILLIPS, *SEX TOURISM IN THAILAND: A TRAVELER'S JOURNAL* (1995) (on the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Web Page, <www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/catw/phillips.htm>)

In this village . . . young girl children were forced into prostitution. Not only to finance their community but to finance their country. For me, this experience provided a very clear example of how Third World women pay off Third World debts - yet, the men they serviced were the very culture who financed the demands and made the payments. This imbalance seemed to me, not to be with Thailand but with us.

Id. (May 8 entry).

76. For a historical view of Black women and prostitution see Frank Byrd, *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF BIG BESS, SOCIAL-ETHNIC STUDIES: LIFE IN HARLEM* (1938), *reprinted in* *AMERICAN LIFE HISTORIES: MANUSCRIPTS FROM THE FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT 1936-1940*.

Women of minority races and economically bankrupt groups have always been exploited by materially stronger groups. Negro women are no exception to this rule. Many of them are forced to semi or full-time prostitution in order to have a place to sleep. This is nothing new to them. Many of their mothers before them were in the same predicament.

Id. at 1. See also Farley & Barkan, *supra* note 49, at 46-47 (reporting 88% of the working prostitutes interviewed stated that they wanted to leave prostitution, reporting the following barriers to exiting the sex industry: lack of a home or safe place (78%); no job training (73%); absence of treatment for drug or alcohol abuse (67%); lack of childcare (34%) and the need for physical protection from pimps (28%)).

77. See *VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WHORES* (Gail Pheterson ed., 1989) for a presentation of the positions of the national pro-prostitution lobbies, COYOTE and the National Task Force on Prostitution, as well as for the positions of the international lobbies; the International Committee for Prostitutes Rights and the Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes.

78. For an in-depth critique of these positions see Toby Summer, *Women, Lesbians and Prostitution: A Working-class Dyke Speaks Out Against Buying Women for Sex*, 2 *LESBIAN ETHICS* 33 (1987); Baldwin, *supra* note 3; Giobbe, *supra* note 42, at 68.

79. See, e.g., Philipa Levine, *Prostitution in Florida: A Report to the Gender Bias Study Commission of the Supreme Court of Florida* 9 (1988). See also *id.* at 95-99 (customers of prostitutes are typically suburban white, middle-class, middle-aged married men), 35-40 (prostitutes are typically teenagers or young women, poor, undereducated, homeless and drug-addicted).

In a gender-stratified culture, men exert power over women when they use or manipulate sex role expectations in order to obtain their desires. Johns exert power over prostitutes by exploiting the traditional sex role expectations of women, along with the particular occupational ideology of prostitution.⁸⁰ They also exert power over prostitutes by reinforcing positive and neutralizing definitions of prostitution.⁸¹

Johns rigidly control the conditions under which prostitution occurs and strictly define the commercial sex transaction to meet their needs.⁸² The knowledge and actual experience of customer violence reduces a woman's willingness to refuse customer demands.⁸³ Furthermore, a woman's willingness to risk antagonizing a potential john is further constricted by the fact that prostitution typically occurs in isolated areas and assaults against prostituted women are not treated seriously by law enforcement officials or the court.⁸⁴ Lastly, even if a woman refuses to comply with a customer demand and escapes without being harmed by the john himself, she may be beaten by her pimp or fired from the sauna or escort service who *employs* her, for losing a good (paying) customer.⁸⁵

The most overt form of power used by johns to insure a prostituted woman's compliance is compensatory or economic power. Because an exchange of money occurs, the john is given license to use the woman's body in whatever manner he chooses. Any refusal on her part can result in the withdrawal of compensation. His ability to do so is enforced, directly and indirectly, by pimps and owners of prostitution businesses whose sole objective is to maximize their profits, or by the economic factors that initially put the woman at his disposal.

Racism further contributes to the power that men have over prostitutes. Racism is ubiquitous in American culture. Whites exert power over people of color by virtue of their white skin privilege. It is general knowledge that white men, as a class, control the major social institutions in the United States. They control educational institutions, the legislature, the criminal justice system, financial institutions and major corporations in the United States. Historically, white men as a class benefitted from the institution of slavery, as did their wives, their families, communities and the country as a whole. Today, all whites continue to reap the benefits of slavery and the American system of apartheid under which Blacks currently live. Therefore, it is fair to argue that in the microcosm of prostitution, johns buy

80. See CHARLES WINICK & PAUL M. KINSIE, *THE LIVELY COMMERCE: PROSTITUTION IN THE UNITED STATES* 50 (1971); Bryan, *supra* note 2, at 443.

81. For example, "prostitution is a job like any other job," "women are born with a gold mine between their legs," "prostitutes don't sell themselves, they are selling a service" etc.

82. This is not a hard concept to grasp, basically "who pays the piper, calls the tune."

83. See *generally supra* note 49 (prevalence of violence against prostitutes).

84. See David P. Bryden & Sonja Lengnick, *Rape in the Criminal Justice System*, 87 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 1194, 1304 (1997).

85. Case notes on file with authors.

Black women with a currency backed by a living history of domination and oppression.

DECRIMINALIZATION/LEGALIZATION DISCUSSION

The World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights⁸⁶ calls for the "decriminaliz[ation of] all aspects of adult prostitution and [the] regulat[ion] of third parties"—they mean pimps here folks, really—"according to standard business codes."⁸⁷ The charter also demands that "prostitutes should have the freedom to choose their place of work . . . [and] provide their services under the conditions that are absolutely determined by themselves and no one else."⁸⁸ The charter states that "[t]here should be no law discriminating against prostitutes associating and working collectively in order to acquire a high degree of personal security."⁸⁹ The charter also suggests that "prostitutes should pay regular taxes on the same basis as other independent contractors and employees and should receive the same benefits."⁹⁰ Finally, it calls for the creation of a committee "comprised of prostitutes and other professionals . . . to insure the protection of the rights of the prostitutes and to whom prostitutes can address their complaints."⁹¹

Proponents of prostitution advance their agenda by equating prostitutes with oppressed laborers consigned to the underground economy, hounded by the government and deprived of the rights and benefits afforded to workers outside of the sex industry.⁹² From this perspective, decriminalization, or even the legalization of prostitution, seems logical public policy. However, when the "job" of prostitution is exposed, any similarity to legitimate work is shattered. Put simply, whether you're a "high-class" call girl or a street walkin' ho, when you're on a "date" you *gotta* get on your knees or lay on your back and let that man use your body anyway he wants to. *That's* what he pays for.

Pretending prostitution is a job like any other job would be laughable if

86. World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights, International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights (ICPR), Amsterdam 1985, *published in* A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WHORES, *supra* note 77, at 40 [hereinafter CHARTER].

87. *Id.*

88. *Id.*

89. *Id.* at 41.

90. *Id.*

91. *Id.*

92. For the purpose of this section, the authors will limit their analyses to prostitution, as it is outside of the scope of this article to present a public policy perspective on the legal sex industry (i.e., pornography and stripping). Although the authors believe that the legal sex industry, like prostitution, is a form of commercial sexual exploitation, in no way do we negate the efforts of strippers, for example, to improve the immediate environmental conditions in strip clubs and bring suit against club owners if necessary for fair compensation. However, these actions do not ameliorate the inherent harms of commercial sex from our perspective.

it weren't so serious. Leading marginalized prostituted women to believe that decriminalization would materially change anything substantive in their lives as prostitutes is dangerous and irresponsible. There are no liberating clauses in the World Charter. Pimps are not "third party managers."⁹³ Pimp/prostitute relationships are contingent on a woman engaging in prostitution and relinquishing all or part of her earnings to her man.⁹⁴ The relationship is defined and controlled by the pimp for his economic gain. What "standard business codes" are applicable to this form of economic exploitation? What regulatory body would enforce such codes? At the same time that proponents call for standard business practices to be applied to the *business* of prostitution, they demand that prostitutes be free of any laws that would dictate where and how they deliver their *services*. Why would a legitimate business enterprise be exempt from the oversight of local zoning boards? Why shouldn't the health department impose codes on an industry that can and does affect the health of its employees, customers and the public?

Finally, the charter states that "prostitutes should pay regular taxes on the same basis as other independent contractors and employees and should receive the same benefits."⁹⁵ The only person right now who does not have his hand in prostitutes' collective pockets is the government. Implementation of the Charter would change all of this. As independent contractors, prostitutes would have to pay a self-employment tax of 15.3%, plus any applicable state taxes.⁹⁶ Independent contractors do not receive benefits—because they are considered both employer and employee they must pay for their own medical insurance and retirement plan.⁹⁷

Some advocates suggest "prostitute collectives" as a solution.⁹⁸ Would the collective be incorporated as a business? If not, what is it? If so, the corporation would be minimally responsible for paying taxes, unemployment and workers' compensation insurance for their employees. Further, the corporation would have to comply with OSHA health and safety standards, affirmative action policies and sexual harassment laws. All of this would probably require the services of an accountant, an

93. For a comparison of tactics of power and control used by pimps and men who batter their partners, see Evelina Giobbe, *An Analysis of Individual, Institutional, & Cultural Pimping*, 1 MICH. J. GENDER & L. 45-50 (1993).

94. See Diana Gray Hilton, *Turning-Out: A Study of Teenage Prostitution* 110 (1971) (unpublished master's thesis, on file with the University of Washington) (pimps appropriate all or most of prostitutes' money). This definition may be extended to include corporate pimps or brothel owners in that a woman's "working" relationship to her pimp "employer" is contingent on her engaging in prostitution and relinquishing all or part of her earnings to him.

95. CHARTER, *supra* note 86, at 41.

96. 26 USC §1401 (West 1998).

97. *Id.*

98. CHARTER, *supra* note 86, at 41 ("There should be no law discriminating against prostitutes associating and working *collectively* . . .") (emphasis added).

attorney and possibly the purchase of professional liability and/or malpractice insurance. Suddenly, prostitution has become a very complex business. The likely result of these policies is a two-tier system: independent contractors and small prostitution businesses running legal operations on one hand, and "freelancers" working off the books and on the streets—at a lower rate of compensation—on the other. The Charter's most unrealistic component however, is the committee it creates "to insure the protection of the rights of the prostitutes and to whom prostitutes can address their complaints . . . comprised of prostitutes and other professionals like lawyers and supporters."⁹⁹ If prostitution were a legitimate enterprise why would prostitutes need a special committee to review *workplace* grievances? What entity will vest this "committee" with the legal power to arbitrate disputes? What types of "complaints" would be mediated? Is the worker unhappy with the amount of compensations negotiated with the client? Did he exceed the limit of their sexual contract? Maybe he just took too damn long Would the committee have a family law component to mediate disagreements between prostitutes and their pimps? Would this subcommittee handle domestic violence complaints? Squabbles among wife-in-laws? Maybe the complainant is unhappy because her quota is too high or perhaps she'd like to *manage her own money*. Even if there were a committee, and even if they were somehow vested with the legal authority to mediate disputes, prostitution is by nature an anonymous and transitory industry—how would they actually find the person a complaint is lodged against? How would they compel him to appear before the committee, let alone comply with their findings?

Legalization and decriminalization are social experiments that have repeatedly failed.¹⁰⁰ They have not made a significant difference in prostituted women's lives. They have not kept all prostituted women out of jail. They have not reduced the social stigma attached to sex work. They have done nothing to ameliorate the inherent or ancillary harms of prostitution: economic exploitation by pimps, violence by johns and the trauma that results from both. Nor has it stopped the widespread use of drugs by prostitutes who can no longer separate mind from body in getting the job done. Prostitution exists in and is maintained by a male-controlled society where violence against women and children is pandemic and racism

99. CHARTER, *supra* note 86, at 40.

100. See A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WHORES, *supra* note 77, at 51-102 (criticizing statutes and ordinances governing prostitution in countries where it is legal or decriminalized); *Id.* at 234 (Philippina women forced into prostitution in Holland); *Id.* at 228 (interview with "Martha" describing forced prostitution in the Netherlands); *Id.* at 166 (lack of police response to sexual assaults against prostitutes in England); *Id.* at 60 (victim blaming by Australian police responding to serial rapes of prostitutes); *Id.* at 73 (court refuses to prosecute johns for theft of service); *Id.* at 71 (criticizing compulsory medical exams of prostitutes as an invasion of privacy); *Id.* at 87 (criticizing registration of prostitutes as stigmatizing).

flourishes. Ultimately, decriminalization or legalization proposals merely protect some men's right to cheap, easily accessible sex and pimps' ability to earn a damn good living by getting women to do it.

CONCLUSION

In the African-American community, prostitution is rooted in that very difficult tight space where Black women attempt to survive, the space where racism and sexism intersect. A Black underclass has developed in the United States, which has at its core a culture shaped by the legacy of slavery. The Black underclass includes second and third generation welfare recipients, has gangs as social institutions, and is supported by an underground economy built on drug trafficking and prostitution. The Black underclass, along with the poor of other races, makes up the culture of poverty. As a group, they lack access to legitimate economic resources and adequate health care. They are alienated from most social institutions except those that perpetuate the cycle of poverty and despair: welfare, corrections and the underground economy.

Most Black women used in prostitution were born into the Black underclass.¹⁰¹ They lost their childhood to the streets. Many came of age in juvenile detention centers and matured in adult correctional facilities.¹⁰² They raised some and lost all too many of their children to the streets. Unless things change—unless we change them—they will raise and lose their grandchildren too.

The liberation of Black women will require a multifaceted course of action enacted on an individual, community and political playing field. White society's standards and definitions have defined our sexuality as African-American women. Although the master no longer holds us captive on the plantation, we still carry the chains of slavery by virtue of our slave mentality. For Black women to reclaim what has been stolen, we must begin to name ourselves. We must realize that we no longer have to accept the many labels that have been engraved in our minds. Instead of

101. See THE INSTITUTE ON BLACK CHEMICAL ABUSE, *DEFINING THE CULTURE OF POVERTY: AFRICAN AMERICAN CLIENTS FROM THE CULTURE OF POVERTY WORKING WITH AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY TREATMENT, RECOVERY AND MENTAL HEALTH* 13–16 (1992 Institute Training Manual, Minneapolis).

102. See generally U.S. DEP'T JUST., OFF. JUST. PROGRAMS, BUREAU JUST. STAT., BUREAU OF JUST. STAT. BULL., NCJ-145321, *WOMEN IN PRISON* (March 1994). See also U.S. DEP'T JUST., BUREAU JUST. STAT., *SUMMARY FINDINGS* (June 30, 1997) (reporting at year end 1996 there were 1,571 sentenced Black inmates per 100,000 Blacks in the United States (compare to 193 white inmates per 100,000 whites)); During 1997, the incarceration of women in the United States increased by 6.2% (compare to increase of male prisoners at 5.2%); U.S. DEP'T JUST., *ADVANCE RELEASE, NATION'S PROBATION AND PAROLE POPULATION REACHED NEW HIGH LAST YEAR* (August 16, 1998) (reporting Blacks represent over 1/3 of the nations probationers at year end 1997 and almost 1/2 of parolees. Number of women on probation in 1997 increased from 18% in 1990 to 21% and women parolees increased from 8% to 11% in that same period).

internalizing our oppression, we must learn the skills to transform it into political action. Only when we are able to understand and begin to de-program ourselves, will African-American women begin to understand the true meaning of self-worth. Only then, will we be able to fight and end the dual oppression of racism and sexism that collide in the sex industry.

African-Americans must recognize the shackles of slavery that still confine us. We must work together as a community to provide options for prostituted Black women. We must break the deadly silence that holds so many women and girls captive to the violence of prostitution. We must educate ourselves about our history and its effects on who we are now. We must understand the trickery that has been played on us since the first African was thrown on these American shores only to be forced into bondage and sexual servitude. We must understand how abolition shaped our lives and the way we see each other.

African-American churches need to recognize that women used in prostitution, pornography and stripping are victims of racism and sexism. Like other victims of sexual assault, Black women and girls used in prostitution need and deserve tangible assistance to escape and overcome the trauma of commercial sexual exploitation. Often times it is very difficult for Black women to get out of the sex industry. They must abandon their homes, flee from pimps, husbands or boyfriends who forced them to turn tricks, or at the very least benefited financially from exploiting them. Black women must receive emotional support and advocacy services in order to escape prostitution safely and establish new lives for themselves and their children.

The predominately male leaders in the Black community must commit to ending violence against women with the same vigor that they apply to ending racism. They must realize that we, as Black women, are just as vital as they are to the survival of the African-American community. Black men need to unlearn the lessons of slavery. We are not their bitches and we are not their whores, anymore than we are the bitches and whores of white men—on the plantation or in the 'hood.

Finally, it is time for the predominately white feminist community to take an uncompromising stand against commercial sexual exploitation. Antiracism initiatives and diversity trainings are a sham when white attendees discuss the relative merits of prostitution during a break. Affirmative action is an empty promise when the cost of a handful of Blacks begrudgingly admitted to the university is paid for on the backs of Black women in the streets. The words *economic justice* turn to ash in the mouth mixed with the taste of a thousand white men pounding their penises at the back of your throat. It is time, past time, for an accounting. Black women—and their white allies—will no longer be fooled by the prostitution lobby's empty promises of liberation contingent on *us* providing sexual services to their husbands, brothers, sons and fathers,

while *they* sit in universities and law offices planning bigger and better urban plantations for us to toil in.