

where the body and mind of young girls are exposed to moral corruption, where drunkenness is in order, and which lead directly to the police courts. The avowed purpose of the articles is a hint for the authorities to close these halls and disrupt any kind of pleasure that may be derived from them. There are some good points in the movement, if only those propagating it would clear up the issue beginning at the right place, and use discrimination.

Because good judgment is not found in the articles, we object to them; their survey does not extend only to places where an orgy is indulged in every evening—these articles invade our immigrant dance halls; they attack our places of decent recreation. The venom of the reports is especially directed against two of our halls; one article turned against the hall of the Sokol Chicago, the other against the Pilsen Auditorium. The female writer of the articles visited the Sokol Chicago Hall on the occasion of an entertainment given by the "Ynot Club," and the Pilsen Auditorium during an evening arranged by the "Moon Glide Club." We shall not dwell upon the qualities of the two clubs, as we are not acquainted with them. However we are concerned with the insinuations cast upon the two halls, as we consider them as our own. We are ready to concede the fact that much of the entertainment of our dance halls needs moderation, but we shall not admit that conditions are such as described in the articles. . . .

We take exception against similar attacks because they are indirectly aimed at our girls of whom it cannot be generally contended that they drink immoderately, permit improper familiarity to the men in their company, or conduct themselves publicly in a manner not fit for decent women. Our Czech girls frequent, as far as our knowledge goes, orderly entertainments only, which they can enjoy without detriment to their reputation. They are usually chaperoned by both parents, or at least by their mothers, who certainly are their best guardians. The girls from our middle-class and from the laboring strata do not need any one to control their behavior. Their bearing decidedly does not call for any of the diverse morals commissions, not to mention the supervision of the *Chicago American*. They have enough judgment to regulate their own deportment.

We have already admitted that there are exceptions. They are, however, scarce. They are to be looked for in clubs and club affairs, which are in no way connected with the owners of the places. Our halls should be stricken from the list of objectionables. More so, as there are many others available for sound criticism, particularly those of the so-called better American societies, some of which could be pointed at as the very hotbeds of sin, ill behavior, and scandalous revelry. These places are not even remotely considered for an entertainment by our girls, who would blush for shame and recoil on their threshold.

Are places such as these unknown to the *Chicago American*? Is that paper ignorant of their existence in some fashionable hotels within the [L]oop, where the indulgent closing hour initiated veritable orgies to which the attention of the police had to be called? How about the cabarets in some downtown hotels where the Merriam Commission uncovered debauchery that defies description? Does the *Chicago American* know nothing of the club rooms of the wealthy, the "creme of society," the unbridled carousals which remind one of the one time "Red Light District," where ladies in gorgeous attire imbibe until they sink into a drunken stupor and are

then brought home by gentlemen in dress suits and patent leather pumps, equally paralyzed, and who are not necessarily their husbands[?] Were the *Chicago American* an honest sheet, it would expose these places before all others as those for which an institution like the morals court has been established. This court would, however, prove utterly inadequate if all that mire should be brought before it. Immorality and scandalous behavior are not rampant among the immigrant population, for that privilege has always been enjoyed by the upper and rich classes, simply because these latter have a monopoly on immunity.

After all, we would not worry about the whole [incident] if it were not for the probability that the *Chicago American*, after an aggression against one hall, will proceed against all of our own halls. Bearing this in mind we rise in protest in behalf of the Czech halls. We know too well how much sacrifice and toil was the price of the creation of our halls. We know equally as well, how much these localities have contributed to our national, economic and social life and do not, therefore, intend to silently stand aside and endure what a Pharisaic paper, foreign to our tongue, has to say about our places of assembly.

### 7. Emma Goldman Analyzes "The Traffic in Women," 1911

Our reformers have suddenly made a great discovery—the white slave traffic. The papers are full of these "unheard of conditions," and lawmakers are already planning a new set of laws to check the horror. . . .

To assume that the recent investigation of the white slave traffic (and, by the way, a very superficial investigation) has discovered anything new, is, to say the least, very foolish. Prostitution has been, and is, a widespread evil, yet mankind goes on its business, perfectly indifferent to the sufferings and distress of the victims of prostitution. As indifferent, indeed, as mankind has remained to our industrial system, or to economic prostitution. . . .

What is really the cause of the trade in women? Not merely white women, but yellow and black women as well. Exploitation, of course; the merciless Moloch of capitalism that fattens on underpaid labor, thus driving thousands of women and girls into prostitution. . . . [T]hese girls feel, "Why waste your life working for a few shillings a week in a scullery, eighteen hours a day?"

Naturally our reformers say nothing about this cause. They know it well enough, but it doesn't pay to say anything about it. It is much more profitable to play the Pharisee, to pretend an outraged morality, than to go to the bottom of things. . . .

Nowhere is woman treated according to the merit of her work, but rather as a sex. It is therefore almost inevitable that she should pay for her right to exist, to keep a position in whatever line, with sex favors. Thus it is merely a question of

Emma Goldman, "The Traffic in Women," in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Co., 1911), 183–200.



degree whether she sells herself to one man, in or out of marriage, or to many men. Whether our reformers admit it or not, the economic and social inferiority of woman is responsible for prostitution. . . .

It would be one-sided and extremely superficial to maintain that the economic factor is the only cause of prostitution. There are others no less important and vital. That, too, our reformers know, but dare discuss even less than the institution that saps the very life out of both men and women. I refer to the sex question, the very mention of which causes most people moral spasms.

It is a conceded fact that woman is being reared as a sex commodity, and yet she is kept in absolute ignorance of the meaning and importance of sex. Everything dealing with the subject is suppressed, and persons who attempt to bring light into this terrible darkness are persecuted and thrown into prison. Yet it is nevertheless true that so long as a girl is not to know how to take care of herself, not to know the function of the most important part of her life, we need not be surprised if she becomes an easy prey to prostitution, or to any other form of a relationship which degrades her to the position of an object for mere sex gratification.

It is due to this ignorance that the entire life and nature of the girl is thwarted and crippled. We have long ago taken it as a self-evident fact that the boy may follow the call of the wild; that is to say, that the boy may, as soon as his sex nature asserts itself, satisfy that nature; but our moralists are scandalized at the very thought that the nature of a girl should assert itself. . . .

Society considers the sex experiences of a man as attributes of his general development, while similar experiences in the life of a woman are looked upon as a terrible calamity, a loss of honor and of all that is good and noble in a human being. This double standard of morality has played no little part in the creation and perpetuation of prostitution. It involves the keeping of the young in absolute ignorance on sex matters, which alleged "innocence," together with an overwrought and stifled sex nature, helps to bring about a state of affairs that our Puritans are so anxious to avoid or prevent.

Not that the gratification of sex must needs lead to prostitution; it is the cruel, heartless, criminal persecution of those who dare divert from the beaten paths, which is responsible for it.

Girls, mere children, work in crowded, over-heated rooms ten to twelve hours daily at a machine, which tends to keep them in a constant over-excited sex state. Many of these girls have no home or comforts of any kind; therefore the street or some place of cheap amusement is the only means of forgetting their daily routine. This naturally brings them into close proximity with the other sex. It is hard to say which of the two factors brings the girl's over-sexed condition to a climax, but it is certainly the most natural thing that a climax should result. That is the first step toward prostitution. Nor is the girl to be held responsible for it. On the contrary, it is altogether the fault of society, the fault of our lack of understanding, of our lack of appreciation of life in the making; especially is it the criminal fault of our moralists, who condemn a girl for all eternity, because she has gone from the "path of virtue"; that is, because her first sex experience has taken place without the sanction of the Church.

The girl feels herself a complete outcast, with the doors of home and society closed in her face. Her entire training and tradition is such that the girl herself feels

depraved and fallen, and therefore has no ground to stand upon, or any hold that will lift her up, instead of dragging her down. Thus society creates the victims that it afterwards vainly attempts to get rid of. The meanest, most depraved and decrepit man still considers himself too good to take as his wife the woman whose grace he was quite willing to buy, even though he might thereby save her from a life of horror. Nor can she turn to her own sister for help. In her stupidity the latter deems herself too pure and chaste, not realizing that her own position is in many respects even more deplorable than her sister's of the street. . . .

Much stress is laid on white slaves being imported into America. How would America ever retain her virtue if Europe did not help her out? I will not deny that this may be the case in some instances, any more than I will deny that there are emissaries of Germany and other countries luring economic slaves into America; but I absolutely deny that prostitution is recruited to any appreciable extent from Europe. It may be true that the majority of prostitutes in New York City are foreigners, but that is because the majority of the population is foreign. The moment we go to any other American city, to Chicago or the Middle West, we shall find that the number of foreign prostitutes is by far a minority.

Equally exaggerated is the belief that the majority of street girls in this city were engaged in this business before they came to America. Most of the girls speak excellent English, are Americanized in habits and appearance, —a thing absolutely impossible unless they had lived in this country many years. That is, they were driven into prostitution by American conditions, by the thoroughly American custom for excessive display of finery and clothes, which, of course, necessitates money, —money that cannot be earned in shops or factories.

In other words, there is no reason to believe that any set of men would go to the risk and expense of getting foreign products, when American conditions are overflowing the market with thousands of girls.

## ESSAYS

To what degree did working-class and immigrant women claim a degree of sexual agency? How did they understand their own sexuality, in light of middle-class moral interventions, their own communities' customs, and their everyday lives? Peggy Pascoe, of the University of Oregon, examines one of the worst forms of sexual exploitation for working women, forced prostitution, and considers the experiences of Chinese-American women "rescued" by white female reformers. Moral and sexual redemption came at a price: reformers imposed Anglo-American concepts of womanhood and supervised the marriages of the former prostitutes. As Pascoe shows, Chinese women could use the authority of the rescue missions for their own purposes, navigating between the sex/gender systems of their homeland and that of the American middle class. Kathy Peiss, of the University of Pennsylvania, shows how young working-class women in New York carved out a space of sexual and personal autonomy, despite the limits placed on them at home and work. Engaging in the "sexual economy"—exchanging sexual favors for theater tickets, meals, and the like—they denied they were prostitutes but asserted their respectability. As these articles show, middle-class standards of virtue and vice did not always reflect the experiences and perceptions of working-class women.