

INFECTIOUS AGENTS OF RACIAL DEGENERATION: LEGISLATING VICE,  
HYGIENE, AND PROSTITUTION IN THE BRITISH METROPOLE

by

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A thesis submitted to the  
Graduate School-Newark  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Graduate Program in History  
written under the direction of  
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and approved by

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Newark, New Jersey

May 2012

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Infectious Agents of Racial Degeneration: Legislating Vice,  
Hygiene, and Prostitution in the British Metropole

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Nineteenth-century British debates on prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Acts contained racialized rhetoric. In their discussion of white prostitution and the C.D. Acts in the metropole, regulationists and repealers alike utilized disease discourses that indicated not only a moral infection of the prostitutes' clients, but also racial infection that led to the degeneration of the race.

Regulationists advocated state control over women's bodies, because only state intervention could protect military and civilian men from sinful and diseased women. They believed that prostitution was an unfortunate but necessary social evil to be managed, not eradicated. In gathering support, regulationists relied on misogynistic arguments that questioned the racial superiority of white prostitutes.

Repealers came to the same racialized conclusions from a different perspective and thus saw different solutions. Repealers argued that men owned women's bodies as well as governed the economy, and were thus responsible for what

happened to them, including resorting to prostitution. Repealers believed that prostitution was *the* great social evil and must be eradicated. Anglo-Saxon men's immoral sexual choices led to prostitution, which victimized women, and thus men's racial superiority was called into question.

Regulationists made their accusations down the social ladder, a strategy that was par for the course for oppressors controlling the oppressed. Men with every social privilege blaming the inferior race, class, and gender were unsurprising. Repealers, however, inverted that logic and challenged the privileged male regulationists by making their accusations up the social ladder. Whiteness was a social currency that repealers wielded in a subversive way to shape British law in favor of white working class women. By asserting the value of the whiteness of the disenfranchised white groups of women and the working class, repealers gained rights for them by distancing them from the racial Other in an empire built on whiteness. In the British Empire, Anglo-Saxon whiteness served as the currency for social power. By wielding the power of whiteness, repealers transgressed traditional race, class, and gender hierarchies, effected a change in the law, and embarked on a path to establishing further women's and working class rights in the metropole.

To Jezebel and Lilith.

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## Introduction

"The amount of social evil arising from syphilitic maladies, statistics cannot measure... but we do know that the disease prevails to an extent that is perfectly appalling; and that where there are 50,000 prostitutes scattered over the country (a vast majority of whom are, or have been diseased), spreading infection on every side of them... We must take into account...the certain but incalculable deterioration of public health and of the vigour of the race..."<sup>1</sup>

Race, class, gender, the relationship between the metropole and colonies, the interplay of morality, hygiene, and disease combined in unique and complex ways to impact debates about prostitution in the mid nineteenth century. Politicians, physicians, women's rights activists, and religious societies alike used racialized rhetoric in their debates on prostitution, which were framed by the debates on the Contagious Diseases Acts, or C.D. Acts.

The history and links between gender and prostitution, and the links between race and prostitution in the colonies, are clear and well-researched, but the history of the connection between race and prostitution in the metropole, especially in the nineteenth century, is lacking. However, scholars have shown that debates about race and gender in other arenas were hotly contested in the

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<sup>1</sup> William Rathbone Greg, *The Great Sin of Great Cities* (London: John Chapman, 142, Strand, 1892), 25, <http://books.google.com/books/reader?id=cBG72nuzLOAC&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&pg=GBS.PA25> (accessed April 29, 2012).

nineteenth century. The overtly racist tones on the topic of prostitution in the colonies in that time period were part of a much broader debate about racial hygiene and racial anxiety relating to Anglo-Saxon, and by extension British, superiority. This paper analyzes the discourse surrounding race and prostitution in the mid nineteenth century, at the crux of fixations on moral purity and racial purity.

Victorian standards held that moral purity was equivalent to racial purity, and the maintenance of moral/ racial hygiene determined the superiority of Anglo-Saxon whiteness and British rule. In the arena of prostitution, this Victorian racial logic implied that "white" prostitutes muddied the Anglo-Saxon race because of their lack of moral and physical hygiene. Conversely, as supporters of women's rights would argue, it was actually the male clients of prostitutes who tainted the purity of the Anglo-Saxon victim of white slavery with his immoral choices and diseased body.

The British government made numerous attempts to regulate prostitution and venereal disease, and this infringement of personal liberties in the colonies was well-established and even expected. That sort of management of the private lives of Victorians in the metropole,



however, was unprecedented and unwelcome. This level of state regulation of prostitution at home changed the game for Victorians. It led to a national uproar and nearly two decades of debates. The significance of these debates is that each side used racialized language to castigate the other side. While racializing working class women was easy for privileged white men to do, the other side racialized those privileged white men, blaming them for the racial downfall of the fallen women.

The opposite sides of the prostitution debates, regulationists versus repealers, agreed on plenty of common ground. They agreed that prostitution was immoral and unhygienic but disagreed on the solutions to these problems. The debates came down to a disagreement over whose bodies were diseased (and thus less white), and who should be in charge of controlling them.

Regulationists, all men, advocated state control over women's bodies, because only state intervention could protect military and civilian men from sinful and diseased women. They believed that prostitution was an unfortunate but necessary social evil to be managed, not eradicated. They supported the regulation of prostitution in garrison towns and wanted to expand that regulation to the civilian population. Regulationists contended that prostitution was

a healthy outlet for natural male sexuality, but venereal disease was harming the men that prostitution was supposed to be helping. The best way to protect male clients was thus to regulate the agents of contagion: prostitutes. In gathering support, regulationists relied on misogynistic arguments that questioned the racial superiority of white prostitutes.

Repealers, however, comprised of both men and women, came to the same racialized conclusions from a completely different perspective and thus saw different solutions to the problem. Seeking bodily autonomy for women, repealers argued that men owned women's bodies as well as governed the economy, and were thus responsible for what happened to them, including resorting to prostitution. Repealers believed that prostitution was *the* great social evil and must be eradicated. Anglo-Saxon men's' immoral sexual choices led to prostitution, which victimized women, and thus men's racial superiority was called into question.

In Victorian Britain, class was a racialized construct and Anglo-Saxon whiteness was as tied to morality as it was to biology. In their discussion of white prostitution in the metropole, officials utilized disease discourses that indicated not only a moral infection of the prostitutes' clients, but also racial infection that led to degeneration

of the race.

Before the paper advances further, a brief discussion on word choice is in order. In Victorian England, the words "prostitute" and "prostitution" were standard. Likewise, in the historiography, those words are also standard today. However, the terms "sex work" and "sex worker" are making their way into the discourse as well, partially to remove the stigma attached to the idea of prostitution. Sex worker, however, also denotes a degree of agency. A sex worker chose her line of work and is content to practice it. A prostitute, by contrast, was driven to prostitution by coercion, either by a person or by hard economic times. For this reason and to maintain continuity between historical writing, the historiography, and this work, this paper uses the term "prostitute" not to denigrate the women or their profession, but to convey how little agency the majority of them had. Additionally, the words "feminism" and "feminist" did not enter the British lexicon until the 1890s,<sup>2</sup> so the terms supporters or advocates of women's rights are used instead.

Prostitution in the British Empire boasts a rich historiography, especially in the fields of social, urban, colonial, and women's and gender histories. The connections

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<sup>2</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 13-5.

between race and prostitution are well-covered in the colonies. Philippa Levine's *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* is a comparative analysis of four British colonies to examine the similarities and differences in their treatment of prostitution and venereal disease. She strongly emphasizes the differences between C.D. Acts in the colonies and the metropole, but in doing so, elides the similarities. Levine advances but does not explain the idea that even "white" prostitutes were less white because of their trade.

Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* is a social and legal history of prostitution in the metropole in the mid to late nineteenth century. She emphasizes the distinctly military origins of the Contagious Diseases Acts and traces the evolution of the Acts and the various reactions to them. She also describes what day to day life was like for the average prostitute.

*Purifying Empire* by Deana Heath argues that regulation of obscenity in the British Empire was to combat racial degeneration of Anglo-Saxon men. Heath's framework articulates that in Victorian culture, moral impurity was inextricably linked to hygiene and race. Moral purity maintained racial purity, on an individual as well as

national level, and maintaining Anglo-Saxon racial hygiene through the regulation of moral hygiene was of the utmost importance to maintaining the might of the British Empire.

*Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, by Anne McClintock, extensively uses psychoanalysis to describe the interplay of race, class, and gender in the British colonies. McClintock articulates the relationship between cleanliness and racial purity. She shows Victorian fears of racial degeneration were bound up in an obsession with being clean, free from both dirt and disease, agents that would taint purity of the Anglo-Saxon race.

This paper builds on the idea Levine advanced in *Prostitution*, that white prostitutes made white men less white. Levine did not pursue this concept analytically, and her sources for this statement are sources dating from the early nineteenth or early twentieth century, outside the scope of this paper. This analysis focuses on the nineteenth century and expands the analysis by showing how Victorians came to beliefs about race and prostitution in the metropole as well as showing the gender battle between male politicians and women's rights activists. My paper builds on Levine's argument by taking the existence of racism in the prostitution debates and situating it in the

broader debates of racialized hygiene and morality in the era, as well as applying Heath's analysis of morality and race to the issue of prostitution. By providing more historical context and by further extending Heath's conclusions from a British women's and gender history perspective, my paper will enrich Heath's and Levine's arguments. Using Walkowitz's framework of regulationists and repealers blaming specific genders for high prostitution rates, Heath's argument that immorality led to racial impurity, threatening the superiority of Anglo-Saxon whiteness, McClintock's argument that bad hygiene led to racial impurity, and expanding Levine's statement that white prostitutes in the metropole made Anglo-Saxon people less white, I argue that regulationists and repealers contended that immoral women and immoral men, respectively, were to blame for high prostitution rates and tainting the Anglo-Saxon race. The significance of this argument is that the debates took a preexisting racial debate of the C. D. Acts and mapped it onto class, re-inscribing the racial Otherness of the working class. Additionally, not only does this paper show that debaters used the traditional argument of working class women polluting upper class men, but more significantly, repealers argued that upper-class men were polluting the race of working-class women, completely

inverting existing race and class hierarchies and turning against the men of their own class in solidarity with whom they perceived to be their race.

This paper draws on a variety of sources, namely medical texts, newspaper articles, reports and statistics collected from the period. To excavate regulationist arguments, this paper uses a close reading of a medical text written by Dr. William Acton, a prominent, if not the most well-known, regulationist physician of the time, as well as texts by other physicians including an article from the prominent medical journal *The Lancet*. For repealer arguments, this paper uses Josephine Butler's writings including her work *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* and an address to fellow repealers. A letter to Butler from a prostitute brings out a seldom-heard voice in the historiography. Additionally, rescue society texts and pamphlets reveal strong repealer arguments especially narratives of female victimhood and comparisons of prostitution with slavery.

I will begin the paper by providing a general overview of Victorian culture and values in the mid to late nineteenth century. Then I will delve deeply into Victorian concepts of race as a mix of religion and science, a complex combination of performative behaviors, and a

possession not only of individuals, but of society and nation as a whole. Next, I provide a background of Victorian prostitution in the metropole and its conspicuous lack of a legal or even social definition. From there, I describe the origins and tenets of the C.D. Acts, starting in the colonies and tracing their advance into the metropole and their threat to move from strictly military towns to the civilian population. It is in this context that the debates about prostitution and the C.D. Acts take place. Next, I will discuss how regulationists used racialized, misogynistic arguments in their defense of the C.D. Acts, showing prostitutes as agents of racially-degenerative disease and vice. From here, I will transition to the racialized anti-C.D. Acts arguments that repealers used to paint upper class white men as the racially-inferior, vice-ridden party. Finally, I will draw my conclusions as to the significance of the overall racialized context in which the prostitution debates occurred and demonstrate that whiteness was a social currency that repealers wielded in a subversive way to shape British law in favor of white working class women.

### **Victorian Culture**

The British Empire reached its peak in Victoria's



reign, and Victorian culture was imperialist and nationalistic in nature. Additionally, an important aspect of Victorian culture was its jingoistic style: Victorians were fiercely proud of themselves, their culture, and their empire, all of which were, according to themselves, by far the best that humankind had to offer.

Based on the social changes made coming out of the eighteenth century, Victorian culture was influenced by a movement away from aristocracy and toward the people, and though Victoria was important enough to lend her name to the culture, the people of Britain were stepping into the limelight, as agents of social change, capitalism, and empire itself. Victorian culture was also a product of, and a reaction to, the French Revolution.<sup>3</sup>

Victorians were very conservative in their manner and beliefs. This conservative nature was manifested quite clearly through the established gender roles of the nineteenth century. A doctrine known as the separate sphere ideology came to dominate Victorian social construction. The idea was that each sex inhabited its own proper sphere. Men belonged in the public, political sphere, and women remained secluded in the home, the private sphere.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), 153-4.

<sup>4</sup>

Kent, *Gender and Power*, 147-8.

Victorian women's place in the private sphere ensured that they did not have opportunities in the public sphere (except for working class women, of course, who were ignored whenever possible by polite Victorian society). Denied a vocation with which to support themselves, the only option open to women was marriage. After the Industrial Revolution, marriage became less about property and more about love--ostensibly. However, under the English law of coverture, a woman and all of her belongings became her husband's property as soon as they were married. Additionally, after marriage, a woman was no longer in charge of the money she had. Her property became her husband's property, and she herself became her husband's property.

Separate sphere ideology, the reigning gender paradigm of Victorian Britain, dictated that each gender belonged to its own particular sphere. Men's sphere was the public domain of politics and careers; women's sphere was hearth and home. While obviously impossible to actually put into practice--working class women had jobs and men were the heads of households--the doctrine illuminates the Victorian ideal of men as leaders and breadwinners and women as mothers and nurturers.

In a clever loophole, middle and upper class women

harnessed their supposedly innate womanly qualities to nose their way into the public sphere and certain leadership positions. Social housekeeping was a project for well-to-do English women to act in the public sphere while staying comfortably within the domestic sphere of nurturing. Common examples were campaigns for reduction in violence toward animals and opening hospitals, basically ways to improve, heal, and clean society. Since social housekeeping tapped into women's "natural" traits of nurturing and caring, it was the perfect way for women to become active in the public eye. Thus, many women carried out social housekeeping tasks such as nursing, campaigning for better education, and better treatment of women.<sup>5</sup>

Social housekeeping societies had an interest in sex workers. As part of their project, social housekeepers and moral reformers wanted to rescue fallen women. The London Rescue Society, or LRS, was a prominent society that aimed to save and rehabilitate prostitutes, cleaning them up and getting them off the streets. As will become apparent in the next section, social housekeeping was also a form of racial uplift as it sought to rid society of vice and

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<sup>5</sup> Jane Slaughter and Melissa K. Bokovoy Houghton, *Sharing the Stage, Biography and Gender in Western Civilisation, Volume II* (Boston: Mifflin Company, 2003), 153; Kent, *Sex and Suffrage*, 194-5; Maragaret Oliphant, "The Condition of Women," in *'Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors,'* ed. Susan Hamilton (Orchard Park: Broadview Press, 1995), 233.

venereal disease.

### **Victorian Racial Theory**

The theorists who arguably had the greatest impact on Victorian concepts of race were Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Charles Darwin, and Herbert Spencer. Spencer's economic theory of survival of the fittest justified empire, race, and class hierarchies through the use of "social Darwinism." Rather than identifying institutionalized inequalities, social Darwinism blamed the innate inferiority of blackness and the working class for their position at the bottom rungs of society. Social Darwinism, however, more closely reflected the evolutionary theory of Lamarck: while Darwin essentially argued that those who were already the fittest were the ones who survived, Lamarck argued that one must first become the fittest in order to survive. While Darwin's theory fed the national ego that Anglo-Saxons were the survivors, Lamarckian evolution gave voice to the nagging fears that Anglo-Saxon superiority could slip at any moment. Social problems such as "disease, malnutrition, and alcoholism," as well as prostitution, all detracted from the fitness of the Anglo-Saxon race. The combined theories of Lamarck, Darwin, and Spencer helped to create the Victorian mindset of the

racial superiority of white people and the class superiority of the upper class, as well the nagging insecurity that it was all a delicate balancing act that must be strictly maintained.<sup>6</sup>

According to Victorian racial theory, race was performative. It was not enough to be born with a certain skin color, one had to continually earn and prove one's race through appropriate actions. New scientific theories melded with traditional religious beliefs to create a hybrid concept of race that combined both morality and hygiene. Morality and hygiene were deeply intertwined in Victorians' minds. Pure morals meant good health, and vice versa. If one engaged in an immoral deed, an appropriate physical ailment appeared. Venereal disease in particular seemed a fitting punishment to the immoral and unhygienic act of engaging in prostitution.<sup>7</sup>

Victorians placed a premium on the morality and racial purity of middle and upper class white men in particular, because they were the ones who ran the empire. These men were the key to the future of the empire and so they must

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<sup>6</sup> Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 209-10; Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women* (Washington Square: New York University Press, 1993), 1; Deana Heath, *Purifying Empire: Obscenity and the Politics of Moral Regulation in Britain, India, and Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 71.

<sup>7</sup>

Heath, *Purifying Empire*, 5.

especially be safeguarded.<sup>8</sup> For the nation to be at its strongest, its middle and upper class white men must also be at their strongest, meaning at their purest, healthiest, and whitest.

The nation itself became a gendered and raced body, naturally male and white.<sup>9</sup> The White Man's Burden began at home by maintaining himself and his own morality and hygiene first and foremost, for the sake of the race, the nation, and the empire. Race and nation became practically interchangeable as the might of the empire was completely contingent on the superiority and purity of the race.

The connections between hygiene, race, and morality are rendered explicit in advertisements for soap. Pears Soap in particular offers several clear examples, literally in black and white. In the first example in Appendix A,<sup>10</sup> the ad depicts two children, one black and one white. The little black boy is taking a bath with Pears Soap, and the soap has turned his skin white. Only his unsubmerged head remains black and, the implication is, dirty. The delighted white child holds up a mirror for the bathing child to joyfully admire his complexion. The newly-white child's

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<sup>8</sup>

Heath, *Purifying Empire*, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Heath, *Purifying Empire*, 82.

<sup>10</sup>

Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 213.

happiness makes it clear which skin tone, and state of cleanliness, is best.

Another Pears Soap advertisement, found in Appendix B,<sup>11</sup> depicts a white man in colonial garb washing his hands. The image is captioned "The White Man's Burden is spreading the virtues of cleanliness." The White Man's Burden, the civilizing mission, was to spread the good news that good hygiene is a part of having good morals. Soap was a national tool for converting the uncivilized dirt of blackness into the civilized moral cleanliness of whiteness.<sup>12</sup>

The final soap ad, in Appendix C,<sup>13</sup> depicted a group of "uncivilized" looking African men coming across a rock with the message "Pears Soap is the best" painted on it, to show how white men "discovered" and claimed the land in Africa, and were spreading civilization, or whiteness, through hygiene. Soap, the harbinger of whiteness, was the message left for Africans to find. Even though African land

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<sup>11</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 33.

<sup>12</sup>

Gail Bederman's argument set forth in *Manliness and Civilization* is a useful analytic framework for analyzing racialized discourse. Bederman articulates an excellent analytical framework in which she explains that late nineteenth-century discourse on civilization was highly gendered and racialized. "Civilization" became code for white, and terms such as "savage" and "barbarian" were code for nonwhite. Reading texts through Bederman's framework makes white authors' implications become clear. While Bederman analyzes the United States, her framework is applicable to the British Empire as well.

<sup>13</sup>

McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 225.

was already inhabited, the message left for the African men to come across lent the impression that British were there first, blazing the trail for civilization and leaving signposts in their wake for the Africans to follow. Making their whites whiter through the virtue of soap, the British paternalistically led the way for Africans to do likewise as they lagged behind the British on their journey to civilization.

The logic of this racial cleanliness principle is carried one step further through the sketches of Arthur Munby. Arthur J. Munby was a devoted diarist from 1859 to 1898, detailing Victorian life from politics to coal mines. A jack of all trades, he was a "minor poet, respectable civil servant, barrister, teacher, and amateur artist" whose poems, sketches, and exploits reflect the dominant racial theory of Victorian culture.<sup>14</sup> According to historian Derek Hudson, "the overriding preoccupation in the diaries, nevertheless, remained Munby's concern for working women in general, and especially for manual workers of the roughest kind, such as colliery women, fisher-women, farm workers, milk women, and acrobats... the deed-boxes also contains dozens of photographs of women, many of them commissioned

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<sup>14</sup> Derek Hudson, ed., *Munby, Man of Two Worlds: The Life and Diaries of Arthur J. Munby, 1828-1910* (Cambridge: Gambit, 1972), 2-3.



and sometimes posed by himself".<sup>15</sup> Munby essentially fetishized working women in a way that reveals racial preoccupation as well.

McClintock describes how Munby discussed working class women in his diary: "he takes special note of the 'black-faced' dustwomen; calls women 'fair coolies,' and refers often to working women's 'black work.'"<sup>16</sup> His fascination led him to sketch numerous working class women in a racialized form. In Appendix D,<sup>17</sup> Boompin' Nelly, a colliery woman, appears as a hulking black figure. The dust from the coalmines settled on her skin as both filth and blackness. Literally dirty, Boompin' Nelly also dirtied the race by virtue of her working class status.<sup>18</sup>

These soap advertisements make it clear that in the late nineteenth century, Victorians saw blackness as indicative of dirt and lack of hygiene, and Munby's sketches illustrate that the reverse was true as well: dirt and a lack of hygiene, even by people otherwise considered white, rendered them less white. This association naturally applied specifically to lower class white people. Essentially, not only was blackness considered unclean, but

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<sup>15</sup>

Hudson, *Munby*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 108.

<sup>17</sup>

McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 107.

<sup>18</sup>

Hudson, *Munby*, 179; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 107.

uncleanliness was considered black. The cleaner one was, the whiter one was, and the dirtier, the further from white an individual was.

The Anglo-Saxon view of Irish people further illustrated the hierarchy of pale-skinned people is clearly visible in Appendix E,<sup>19</sup> which shows how the Irish were considered "white negroes."<sup>20</sup> The ape-like face of the Irish man and woman in the image demonstrate their likeness, according to the Anglo-Saxon English, to Africans. On the racial superiority scale, Irish people, despite their pale skin, registered closer to Africans than Anglo-Saxons because of their perceived lack of morality, hygiene, and class.

Morality was bound up with hygiene and disease. When Victorians spoke of morality, they spoke of both hygiene and race. Discourses of morality and hygiene were discourses of race. Superior morality was key to superiority of race. Pure morals meant pure and disease-free Anglo-Saxon whiteness. Prostitutes, then, were triply damned. The trade they plied was deeply immoral, the practically unavoidable venereal disease they carried, and the fact that they were working class all worked against

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<sup>19</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 53.

<sup>20</sup>

McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 52.

prostitutes' status of whiteness.

Moral, physical, and racial hygiene, on both national and individual levels, were the keys to the success of the British Empire. A diseased person indicated unhygienic habits, impure moral choices, and a reduction of racial superiority. A diseased nation indicated the same. Disease-spreading and immoral prostitutes threatened the racial superiority of Anglo-Saxon men running and serving the British Empire; the CDA were necessary to cut down on unhygienic venereal disease and control immorality-spreading agents, prostitutes.

Anglo-Saxon superiority was in a permanent state of crisis, perpetually under siege, and always just about to be lost. The slightest infraction on Anglo-Saxon whiteness was thus dire, because all it took was one last straw. Prostitution threatened to be a sizable final straw, but the most pressing question was: was it female prostitutes' seduction of helpless men into an immoral, unhygienic activity that threatened the race, or was it the immoral, unhygienic man who victimized a helpless woman driven to prostitution by dire circumstances?

### **Prostitution in the Metropole**

Victorian society held multiple definitions of what

constituted prostitution, but the law did not define prostitution at all. Thus, the popular conceptions of a prostitute, likely something different to each Member of Parliament, police officer, client, and prostitute, mattered.<sup>21</sup>

Definitions of what constituted prostitution and who constituted prostitutes varied widely. If anyone according to the law could potentially be a prostitute, the limits of the C.D. Acts were extremely unclear and left many women afraid for their personal liberty and safety.

Statistically, the average prostitute in the metropole was a single working class woman, typically in her late teens or early twenties, who had lost one or both parents. Prostitutes most likely worked in bustling towns and port cities, particularly London and Plymouth. Plymouth had the highest rates of female poverty as well as the highest percentage of prostitutes.<sup>22</sup> Fully forty percent of single women between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine who lived alone were registered prostitutes. While estimates of the numbers of prostitutes vary wildly and even at the time, statistics were assumed to be faulty, William Acton

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<sup>21</sup> Nancy Boyd, *Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill, Florence Nightingale : Three Victorian Women Who Changed Their World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 41.

<sup>22</sup>

Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 154.

compiled a chart of the number of prostitutes in the metropole for the first half of the nineteenth century, found in Appendix F.<sup>23</sup>

Some women prostituted on the side and held another job such as a seamstress or cook, and some women prostituted full-time. Many women prostituted only when they were younger, or only a few times, and many retired to other jobs when they got older or got married.

Some people went so far as to contend that marriage itself was a form of prostitution. As Catherine Gasquoine Hartley described it, "marriage is itself in many cases a legalized form of prostitution." That is to say, a typical Victorian woman relied on her relationship with a man to provide for her needs. Although coverture was repealed in the mid-nineteenth century, the cultural idea that the wife somehow belonged to the husband persisted to a certain extent.<sup>24</sup> Given that prostitution was never defined in the C.D. Acts, fear of soldiers' wives being targeted under it was a legitimate concern to have.<sup>25</sup> If all of these women

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<sup>23</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 16, 18-19; William Acton, cited in Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 79.

<sup>24</sup>

Catherine Gasquoine Hartley, *The Truth About Woman* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1914), 342; quoted in Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 80; Kent, *Gender and Power*, 250-1.

<sup>25</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 106.

could and were considered prostitutes, the C.D. Acts' vagueness left many women threatened.

These middle and upper class women were shocked and outraged at the sudden implication that they could be prostitutes because typically, prostitutes protected wealthier women's virtue by providing the sexual services middle and upper class men "needed" but could not expect from higher class women.<sup>26</sup>

Venereal disease ran rampant among prostitutes and their clients. Venereal disease was so pervasive in the metropole and abroad that special facilities called lock hospitals were established specifically to treat venereal disease. Doctors performed invasive examinations using a speculum, or "steel penis"<sup>27</sup> which was at the time a newly invented tool that understandably scandalized society. Deemed improper for virtuous virgin women, use of the speculum was only considered appropriate for immoral women who had no virtue to threaten in the first place.<sup>28</sup> When prostitutes stayed in lock hospitals for treatment, often for months at a time, they served as free labor for the

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<sup>26</sup> Paul McHugh, *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 17; Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 102, 130; Trevor Fisher, *Prostitution and the Victorians* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 48.

<sup>27</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 146.

<sup>28</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 56.

hospital, performing chores such as laundry. They were essentially quarantined, morally and physically, during their mandatory stay.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Contagious Diseases Acts**

Prostitutes' venereal disease exams and their time spent in lock hospitals were legislated by the notorious Contagious Diseases Acts, or C.D. Acts. The C. D. Acts determined much of the discourse on prostitution in this time period. Everyone, for and against, seemed to have an opinion. Several versions and amendments to the C.D. Acts passed, so they were clearly popular in certain conservative circles, but they aroused quite an uproar in other groups, such as liberal politicians, women's rights activists, religious groups, and social housekeepers.

Solicitation was technically legal.<sup>30</sup> Legislation in the mid to late nineteenth century concerned how to handle prostitutes, not how to get rid of them. While there were other laws passed related to prostitution, such as the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861, and the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, the C.D. Acts loom largest in

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<sup>29</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 62; Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 28-9.

<sup>30</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 14.

the legal history of prostitution precisely because they did not seek to end prostitution, but rather manage it, thus condoning it. Signed into law in the metropole in 1864, expanded throughout the 1860s, then and repealed there in 1886, the C.D. Acts sought to control the spread of venereal disease. Originally, the C.D. Acts were designed for the military in the metropole, although their jurisdiction eventually spread to additional towns and the colonies as well.<sup>31</sup>

The C.D. Acts provided the British military with a "system of regulated prostitution" through the state. This system was in effect in both the metropole and in the colonies, and by the nineteenth century, one-third of sick British soldiers suffered from a venereal disease. Though intended to curtail the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, the C.D. Acts ultimately did little to change the rates of infection.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> As McHugh points out, the C.D. Acts are frequently ignored as preventative medicine both by repealers as well as in modern scholarship (24). While this angle is an interesting one, it is telling that privileged men were overwhelmingly the supporters of the Acts, and women and liberals opposed. Preventative medicine was a growing field and important to contextualize the Acts within the changing field of medicine, but that theory elides critical race, class, and gender inequities.

<sup>32</sup> David J. Pivar, "The Military, Prostitution, and Colonial Peoples: India and the Philippines, 1885-1917." *Journal of Sex Research* 17, no. 3 (August 1981): 256, 261, 256; PP, vol. XIX (1871), *Report of the Royal Commission, "Minutes of Evidence Presented to the Commission,"* 533; quoted in Margaret Hamilton, "Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 16.



The C.D. Acts unsurprisingly privileged men over women. Initially, the C.D. Acts enforced check-ups on men as well, but their immediate protest led to the Acts targeting only women. After all, so the logic went, the compulsory examinations were degrading to the men, but prostitutes were already so degraded that one more act of degradation did not make a difference.<sup>33</sup> When the C.D. Acts failed, officials blamed the prostitutes themselves. Their unruliness, deception, and lack of cooperation were at fault.

#### **Racialized Origins: C.D. Acts in the Colonies**

Since the C.D. Acts exclusively regulated women's health and activities, they were obviously gendered from the outset. The Acts were also racialized: the C.D. Acts, and the lock hospitals they mandated, expressly categorized and targeted prostitutes and clients by race. The biologization of race, vice, and hygiene triply pathologized prostitutes of color.

Conveniently eliding any formal definition of prostitution, British officials abroad considered women who so much as offered friendship and home-cooked meals prostitutes, as well. Loose definitions of prostitution

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<sup>33</sup>

McHugh, *Prostitution*, 17.

indicated clearly how British officials perceived colonial women of color to be significantly inferior to themselves.<sup>34</sup>

British officials saw prostitution in the colonies as evidence of racial inferiority, but argued at the same time that the privileged and healthy white male sex drive was key to colonial conquest. British officials believed that people of color engaged wantonly in unrestricted sexual activity, which produced an abundance of prostitutes. The unhealthy, uncivilized sexuality of women of color provided an outlet for healthy and natural white male sexuality. Without prostitutes, British men feared that life in the colonies would be dangerous without an outlet for their "aggressive, active [sex drive] itself vital to colonial conquest." The effects of colonial prostitution were inverted: as British might became stronger through the perceived salutary effects of colonial prostitution, the colonized people became weaker through moral degeneration.<sup>35</sup>

Colonial logic unsurprisingly contained fallacies. Colonial administrators "needed" prostitutes but women should not be prostitutes. It was a clear example of the patriarchal slight of hand that put all responsibility and blame on women's shoulders, especially women of color, not

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<sup>34</sup> Philippa Levine, "'A Multitude of Unchaste Women': Prostitution in the British Empire," *Journal of Women's History* 15 (2004): 159.

<sup>35</sup>

Levine, "'Multitude,'" 159- 160.

on the white men's. Further, prostitution was supposed to serve white male health, but the venereal disease it harbored actively worked against male health. An institution for bolstering white male hygiene was also their hygiene's greatest threat. Colonialists' (ultimately ineffective) solution was to regulate infectious prostitutes to keep venereal disease in check, leaving white men free to reap the perceived benefits of prostitution without the threat of contamination.

The first C.D. Ordinance in 1857 applied to Hong Kong. It required brothels to be registered and for prostitutes to submit to compulsory internal exams.<sup>36</sup> This colonial predecessor to the C.D. Acts controlled women as well as racial minorities, categorizing brothels and sufferers of venereal disease by race and treating them accordingly in segregated lock hospitals. For example, specific brothels catered strictly to white clientele, and prostitutes with white customers went to a different hospital than those with clientele of color.<sup>37</sup>

British colonial officials expanded this Ordinance to Malta and Corfu 1861, established the Indian C.D. Act in 1868, and implemented varying types of C.D. Ordinances and

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<sup>36</sup> Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 40.

<sup>37</sup>

Levine, "'Multitude,'" 160; Levine, *Prostitution*, 40, 37.

Acts through the 1860s, 70s, and 80s in Quebec, Ontario, Ceylon, Jamaica, Queensland, Barbados, the Cape colony, Yokohama, Osaka, Tokyo, Nagasaki, New Zealand, Trinidad, Singapore, Malacca, Shanghai, Tasmania, and Fiji.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike the unofficially recognized status of brothel-keepers as informants in the metropole, the British officially maintained brothels in the colonies and then held them up as an example of the inferiority of the colonized people. This example is one of many in which British oppressors blamed the oppressed for their oppression, a common argument by regulationists.<sup>39</sup>

While the C.D. Acts ultimately expanded to civilians in the colonies but restricted to garrison towns in the metropole, the prevailing misogynistic and racialized logic carried over into the metropole. Officials provided no clear definition of prostitute, endangering any woman alone on the street. Lock hospitals segregated contagious agents to protect imperialist white, upper-class male hygiene and the racial hierarchy. Last but not least, regulationist logic blamed the oppressed, not oppressors, for their own oppression.

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Levine, *Prostitution*, 40.  
<sup>39</sup> Levine, "'Multitude,'" 161.

### **Racialized Logic: C.D. Acts in the Metropole**

The C.D. Acts were ultimately ineffective because they regulated women's sexuality and subjected women to mandatory gynecological exams, but did not equally enforce men's sex lives in garrison towns. Though the purpose of the Acts was to reduce the spread of venereal disease, they only policed half of the sexual population in the compound. Thus, the soldiers had sex outside the compound, contracted diseases, and then spread them to the prostitutes on the military base. The prostitutes would then be subjected to tests and quarantines while the infected soldier continued his business as usual. On the sexist nature of the Acts, Member of Parliament Sir Harcourt Johnstone observed in 1875, "I maintain that this House would not pass an Act that would compel a registration of men, and keep them on the register for a year—an Act that would arrest men coming out of brothels and require from them a voluntary submission..." A repealer made similar commentary, stating, "Let your laws be put in force, but let them be for male as well as female." She and her fellow repealers perceived the sexual inequality of the Acts and used this injustice to fight to get the Acts repealed. <sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Margaret Hamilton, "Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 17.

Opposition to the C.D. Acts came from multiple sectors of society, from within Parliament to Florence Nightingale and John Stuart Mill, to the Workingmen's National League, who feared for the safety of the women of the working class. Another group, the Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, or LNA, did exactly what it sounds like it ought. Women, especially, were opposed to the Acts as they felt a more personal connection to the victims as women. As the movement for social purity, including anti-prostitution, swept through Britain, women (the Victorian keepers of purity) naturally flocked to support the cause. Eventually, the agitation to repeal the Acts paid off, and the C.D. Acts were repealed in 1886 in the metropole.<sup>41</sup>

A combination of factors led to the creation of the Acts, and though they eventually expanded across the globe, their origins were comparatively small. The public did not initially know about the C.D. Acts because they were passed quietly and discreetly.<sup>42</sup> The first Acts in the metropole, passed in 1864, applied to eleven garrison towns, each of which required a lock hospital within a fifty mile radius. The Acts were expressly for military towns, the goal being

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<sup>41</sup> Pivar, "The Military," 256.

<sup>42</sup>

McHugh, *Prostitution*, 38.

to improve morale in army by providing clean, quality prostitutes to the soldiers. According the 1864 Acts, police held the power to detain a woman they suspected was a prostitute. Then, prostitutes could either submit to a gynecological exam or go before a magistrate and defend her case as to why she was innocent. Usually, they opted to go straight to the exam to avoid court. If a prostitute were found to have a venereal disease, she had to go to a lock hospital for three months, until cured. In 1869, the Acts were expanded to encompass eighteen towns, and increased the mandatory stay at the lock hospital to one year.<sup>43</sup>

These measures were for the express protection, health, and morale of the military. The push for military sanitation reform originated from Florence Nightingale's sweeping transformation of soldiers' conditions during the Crimean War. Regulationists perceived the Acts to be a continuation of the salutary effects of those reforms and approached Nightingale to help select the team of medical men and draft their instructions for carrying out the Acts. Disgusted by what she perceived as the state's support and enabling of vice, she declined. She was the sole, quiet opposition to the Acts for the next five years as they crept their way into the country.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> McHugh, *Prostitution*, 36.

<sup>44</sup> McHugh, *Prostitution*, 38, 55; Boyd, *Josephine Butler*, 236.

By 1866, the Association for the Extension of the Contagious Diseases Acts began petitioning to extend the Acts to the civilian population because they ostensibly worked so well. Significantly, supporters pointed to colonies where regulation supposedly worked.<sup>45</sup> One testimonial compared "regulated Tahiti with unregulated Honolulu."<sup>46</sup> The mechanics of quarantining a racialized, racially contagious Other were already in place and successful in other colonized spaces; the British Empire voted to adopt these racialized measures and apply them to a class coded as a racial Other: working class women prostitutes who were agents of immorality and contagion.

In 1869, the C.D. Acts extended to five new districts. Additionally, the new provisions called for the detention of unfit women, extended jurisdiction of the Acts, and it made the Acts effective indefinitely. In 1869, the Acts spread new legal, medical, police intervention into lives of poor.<sup>47</sup>

The first organized opposition to the C.D. Acts also appeared in 1869 in the form of the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. The debate

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<sup>45</sup>McHugh, *Prostitution*, 39.<sup>46</sup>McHugh, *Prostitution*, 39.<sup>47</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 86-88.



over prostitution generally and the C.D. Acts specifically boiled to regulationists, who supported the Acts, and repealers, who did not. According to the upper class male logic of the regulationists, prostitutes guarded upper-class women's virtue because they provided for the sexual needs of upper-class men that women of higher social standing could not respectably provide.<sup>48</sup> Considered a "necessary evil" and "inevitable," the C.D. Acts and the men who passed them condoned prostitution by choosing to regulate rather than outlaw it. Men fulfilled natural needs by frequenting prostitutes, and considered the reduced morality and hygiene of the prostitutes acceptable collateral damage. These fallen women sacrificed themselves to the greater good of the preservation of morality and hygiene, and thus racial superiority, of upper class women.<sup>49</sup>

Repealers, on the other hand, believed that prostitution was an unnecessary evil to be eliminated. Blaming men's vice for the demand for and practice of prostitution, repealers contended that prostitutes' clients, and the regulationists who sanctioned them, were

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<sup>48</sup>McHugh, *Prostitution*, 17.<sup>49</sup>Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 23.

the true agents of vice and racial degeneration.<sup>50</sup>

Many repealers were supporters of women's rights. Josephine Butler headed the movement in Britain for morality-based, or anti-vice, reforms, notably against prostitution, and naturally stepped in as a spokesperson for the repealers. As the founder of the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, (LNA), she provided the charismatic, moral drive for the movement.<sup>51</sup> Butler already had experience campaigning for higher education for women, but when she learned of the miserable condition and mistreatment of prostitutes, she determined to make bettering their lives her cause instead. She and others within this movement campaigned for changes in the laws regarding prostitution.

Butler contended that men would never understand her arguments against prostitution and so women must lead the way.<sup>52</sup> She was also a staunch advocate of working-class involvement. She identified as middle class despite her aristocratic family, which enabled her to walk among all the social classes gathering popular support. Butler passionately supported the working class and they cared

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<sup>50</sup> Some repealers were fine with the C.D. Acts in colonies, but not in metropole. While moral and sanitary concerns were racial concerns, white prostitutes could be resuscitated into white; colonial prostitutes could not, so they were held to a double standard.

<sup>51</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 21-24; Boyd, *Josephine Butler*, 41-3.

<sup>52</sup> McHugh, *Prostitution*, 21-22; Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 115, 102.

deeply for her.

Butler drew the connection between unemployment and prostitution. Repealers used that connection to show that poverty, not sin, was the root cause of prostitution. Rather than sinful temptresses, repealers saw prostitutes as helpless victims of economic hardship. Economic hardship caused by men specifically.<sup>53</sup>

Repealers used "branch associations, mass public meetings, petition campaigns, and electoral leagues", moving from the margins to the center of politics, dominating the Liberal Party between the years 1870 to 1886. They contended that the C.D. Acts amounted to state sanctioned vice, supported suppressing open prostitution.<sup>54</sup>

Other repealer groups included social housekeepers such as the London Rescue Society (LRS) as well as religious societies. Sharing the belief that the C.D. Acts were state-sanctioned vice, these groups also preferred to eliminate prostitution rather than manage it, as well as rescue the fallen women from their current unfortunate state of affairs.<sup>55</sup>

The LNA and other social housekeepers took preventative

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McHugh, *Prostitution*, 18-22; Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 132.

<sup>54</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 90, 135.

<sup>55</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 91, 100.

measures, for example by meeting young women at train stations and steering them clear of people waiting to take advantage of them and sell them into white slavery. Additionally, the LNA worked with prostitutes, going so far as to give them tips on fighting police.<sup>56</sup> These measures clearly demonstrate whose side the LNA was on, who they saw as the victims, and who they saw as the transgressors. They repeatedly took the side of young women, protecting them from the men who would otherwise abuse them.

The regulationist versus repealer debate was largely fought over competing facts, statistics, and science. Each side had their own physicians and statisticians who, every few years, produced competing, conflicting results as to the efficacy of the Acts.<sup>57</sup> By the 1870s, commissions and reports came out favorably on the side of the C.D. Acts, much to the dismay of the repealers. They began a renewed attempt at drumming up popular support by visiting towns most affected by the C.D. Acts. In 1883, compulsory exams were removed from the Acts, and they were ultimately repealed in the metropole 1886.<sup>58</sup>

Misogynistic racialized logic pervaded the passage of

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<sup>56</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 135, 8.

<sup>57</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 111, 97.

<sup>58</sup> The LNA continued its crusade until 1915, opposing the Acts in the colonies.

and desire to expand the C.D. Acts. Officials provided no clear definition of prostitute, endangering any woman alone on the street. Lock hospitals segregated contagious agents to protect imperialist white, upper-class male hygiene and the racial hierarchy. Last but not least, regulationist logic blamed the oppressed, not oppressors, for their own oppression.

### **Regulationists**

Regulationists believed that prostitutes maintained the virtue of middle and upper class white women, and their sacrifice to that cause was worth the price. This notion did not, however, prevent regulationists from placing all the blame on these fallen women when questions of morality, hygiene, and race came to the fore. Male clients were only fulfilling a natural and acceptable urge; boys will be boys after all. Prostitutes, on the other hand, were committing unnatural, immoral, and unhygienic acts. Regulationists saw the C.D. Acts as merely "the first stage in the creation of a moral and sanitary utopia,"<sup>59</sup> which they hoped to continually expand until all prostitutes were under its reach. The regulationists' biggest fear was that if prostitutes continued unchecked, they could rampantly

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<sup>59</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 70.

spread venereal disease to the upper echelons of society. In their works, regulationists somewhat confusingly supported prostitution while reviling prostitutes themselves. Regulationists' disgust toward prostitutes was not, for them, at odds with their support of the institution of prostitution.

Venereal disease, a herald of immorality and unhygienic practice, was a clear threat to the superiority of the race, especially if inflicted on upper class men. Unless regulated, prostitutes would bring the race and the nation crashing down like a house of cards. They must, regulationists argued, be controlled and cordoned off from the rest of society as agents of contagion and instigators of degeneration or else their dirt, their blackness, might catch and spread. Since men were the victims of disease that immoral, disease-ridden women spread, only women's activities needed be controlled according the Acts.

McClintock lays out these ideas about controlling racially infectious agents in her framework of Victorian racial theory, arguing that

"the social power of the image of degeneration was twofold. First, social classes or groups were described with telling frequency as 'race,' 'foreign groups,' or 'non-indigenous bodies,' and could thus be cordoned off as biological and 'contagious,' rather than as social groups...Poverty and social distress were figured as biological flaws, an organic pathology in the body

politic that posed a chronic threat to the riches, health, and power of the 'imperial race.' Second, the image fostered a sense of the legitimacy and urgency of state intervention..."<sup>60</sup>

Thus, not only did the Acts quarantine disease, they quarantined infectious agents of racial inferiority. The Acts cordoned off a racialized Other into lock hospitals for the sake of the safety of purer Anglo-Saxons. The C.D. Acts mandated the racial segregation of infectious inferior racial subjects into mandatory treatment centers, safely partitioned to protect superior upper class men from contamination until their treatment was complete and they were deemed "cured" of racially degenerative disease.

In addition to the racialized poor hygiene infectious disease indicated, the vice inherent in venereal disease rendered it an even bigger threat to whiteness. In the 1881 *Report from the Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases Acts*, there was something particularly threatening about venereal disease, even amongst other infectious disease. A regulationist interrogator interviewed a doctor about the state of his hospital just before the Acts went into effect and a lock hospital was built nearby. The doctor explained that venereal disease patients were sent to "foul wards," and the interviewer nearly panicked,

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<sup>60</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 48.

asking incredulously, "And you permitted that state of things, itch patients to be mixed up with [venereal disease patients]? [...] Were they...mixed up higgledy piggedly?"<sup>61</sup>

An infectious diseases ward was not enough, an entirely separate building needed to quarantine the particular contagion of the ultimate threat to racial purity, venereal disease. Too dangerously infectious for even other infectious diseases, racial degeneration needed its own hospital, staff, and walls to segregate the infectious racial Other. Moral and religious instruction to prostitutes at lock hospitals was not in addition to physical treatment, it was a part of their physical treatment. The ills of poor morality and hygiene were both treated within the confines of lock hospitals as a regimen for restoring some of their racial superiority.<sup>62</sup>

Supporters of these measures were vested in the superiority of the race and wanted to expand the Acts to the entire population, arguing that the Acts protected the health and race of the nation. One of the most staunch

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<sup>61</sup> Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. *Report from the Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases Acts. Parliamentary Papers* (1878-79) VIII 397, (1880), 255, <http://archive.org/details/reportfromselec00grea>, (accessed April 29, 2012).

<sup>62</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 86; Mahood, *The Magdalenes*, 28-30. Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. *Report from the Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases Acts. Parliamentary Papers* (1878-79) VIII 397, (1880) <http://archive.org/details/reportfromselec00grea>, (accessed April 29, 2012).



supporters of the C.D. Acts, prominent gynecologist William Acton, penned *Prostitution, Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects, in London and Other Large Cities, with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of its Attendant Evils* in 1857, before the first C.D. Acts passed, but within the context of the legislation of morality more broadly, including obscene materials. In the debates against repealers over the C.D. Acts that came over the next several years, Acton continued to espouse these beliefs, even more dogmatically as opposition increased.<sup>63</sup> Acton thoroughly despised individual prostitutes because they were diseased and unnatural, but he just as strongly supported the abstract idea of prostitution in general, because men needed it. He squarely blamed women for finding themselves in prostitution, and for then spreading disease to blameless male victims.

Acton explained how

"the hardened common prostitute, when overtaken by disease, pursues her trade, as a general rule, uninterruptedly, spreading contagion among men... It is from this class that society may be prepared for, if not expect, contempt and danger to public order and decency..."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 87.

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William Acton, *Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: John Churchill 1870, 75  
[http://books.google.com/books/about/Prostitution\\_considered\\_in\\_its\\_moral\\_soc.html?id=XJsrHfQqL5sC](http://books.google.com/books/about/Prostitution_considered_in_its_moral_soc.html?id=XJsrHfQqL5sC) (accessed April 29, 2012).

In order to shift the blame onto women, Acton was conspicuously forced to use the passive voice in order to elide how prostitutes contracted venereal disease in the first place. He removed men from the picture to leave the image of women prostitutes as the only disease-spreading agents. He then made it clear that men were but the victims of careless infected prostitutes, who flouted public decency for their own selfish ends. Ultimately, if prostitutes continued to go unregulated, Acton feared they would destroy the very fabric of society, leaving nothing but chaos and disorder in their wake.

To really get at the character of prostitution, Acton explained how,

"as a heap of rubbish will ferment, so surely will a number of unvirtuous women deteriorate, whatever their antecedents or good qualities previous to their being herded [into a brothel]. In such a household, all the projections of decency, modesty, propriety and conscience must...be planed down, and the woman hammered out, not by the practice of her profession or the company of men, but by association with her own sex and class."<sup>65</sup>

Acton compared prostitutes directly to excrement, forsaking any of his own projections to modesty and propriety in making his opinion on prostitutes unmistakably clear. He was once again extremely careful to point out that men were blameless in the situation. Significantly, he

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<sup>65</sup> Acton, *Prostitution*, 97.

did not even blame the mere fact of being a prostitute on the deterioration of manners and decency; he blamed it on being a poor woman. This quote is especially revealing in this regard: Acton saw the root cause of the problem of indecency not with men or even the social evil of prostitution, but the mere existence as a poor woman consorting with other poor women. Poor women were the true root of the great social evil.

Acton went on to describe "the surgeon who is generally regarded among our lower classes much as the mysterious 'medicine man' of yet wilder tribes."<sup>66</sup> He quaintly mocked women for fearing and distrusting physicians who forcibly performed internal examinations. Bederman's analysis of the discourse of civilization reveals how, in drawing a direct comparison between working class women and colonized people of color Acton racialized the working class as well as derided what he perceived to be their ignorance. He went on to describe how "the best and purest of our race" ventured into "the lowest dens of filth and pollution, where human filth and degradation ever dragged itself to die" so that "a cure can be suggested, or palliatives can be safely applied" to the "moral sore" of "the great social vice of Prostitution."<sup>67</sup> Reiterating his utter disgust at

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<sup>66</sup> Acton, *Prostitution*, 157.

prostitutes, he juxtaposed them with the "best and purest of the race," showing that prostitutes were the worst and least pure racially. Not only were individual prostitutes' infectious diseases tainting the race, but their high disease rates were a "moral sore" on the body politic, infecting the entire nation by their very existence.

Not only was Acton concerned with the health of the body of the nation at present, but also deeply concerned with the futurity of the race as well, explaining that,

"the Commonwealth's interest in [regulating prostitution] is this—that there is never a one among all of these whose partners in vice may not some time become the husbands of other women and the fathers of English children; never a one of them but may herself, when the shadow is past, become the wife of an Englishman and the mother of his offspring; that multitudes are mothers before they become prostitutes, and other multitudes become mothers during their evil career. If the race of the people is of no concern to the State, then has the State no interest in arresting its vitiation. But if this concern and this interest be admitted, then arises the necessity for depriving prostitution not only of its moral, but of its physical venom also."<sup>68</sup>

Acton here overtly made the argument that the preservation of the race was the reason prostitutes should be regulated. Their moral and physical, and thus racial, poison threatened to taint not only themselves and their current victims, but also their future offspring would be tainted

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Acton, *Prostitution*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Acton, *Prostitution*, 73.

as well. Especially when it came to policing venereal disease, "the race of the people has the greater interest."<sup>69</sup> Once more, he directly linked venereal disease to the futurity of the race. Acton maintained these attitudes and pushed them more fervently throughout the debates against repealers on the C.D. Acts.

Most physicians supported the C.D. Acts. Dr. C.W. Shirley Deakin wrote in *The Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864, '66, '68, (Ireland), '69 from a Sanitary and Economic Point of View* that

"I trust then before many years have passed away England too will have a 'Bureau des Moeurs' with a Minister of Health, at its head, a large and efficient staff of medical officers in every town and throughout the length and breadth of the land as well as sanitary police, entrusted with the working of the C.D. Acts, the Vaccination Act, the Factory Act, and the suppression of public nuisances, obscene literature ... and demoralizing exhibitions of every kind..."<sup>70</sup>

Like the majority of physicians, Deakin supported increased power and demand for more physicians. As privileged white men, doctors put all the blame on the prostitutes they treated. Although doctors also treated men for venereal disease, they saw women as the infectious agents, spreading

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<sup>69</sup> Acton, *Prostitution*, 148.

<sup>70</sup>

C.W. Shirley Deakin, *The Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864, '66, '68, (Ireland), '69 from a Sanitary and Economic Point of View*, cited in Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 69.

disease from man to man.

Deakin additionally supported instigating "sanitary police." So that doctors could do their job more smoothly in compliance with the Acts, they supported better, more powerful police as well. Special police forces working solely for the purpose of enforcing the Acts, "sanitary police" as Deakin referred to them here, would have basically served as (preservers of the) race police. The desire for a special contingent of law enforcement who policed moral, physical, and racial boundaries showed the fear of complete social disorder that regulationists held in regard to unregulated prostitution.

Since most physicians were regulationists, *The Lancet*, a popular medical journal, was by and large a regulationist journal. An 1870 article proclaimed,

"[The State] has a right to decide...when the prostitute shall be incarcerated for treatment...And as there is no body of men to whom the evils that spring from prostitution...are so patent as they are to the members of the medical profession, so there is no body of men that should be so ready to strengthen the hands of authority in any endeavor to diminish these evils, or to restrain the vices from which they spring."<sup>71</sup>

Like most doctors, this article's author located the source of vice and disease solely with the prostitutes. He

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<sup>71</sup> "The Lancet," *The Lancet* 2 (1870) 91.  
<http://books.google.com/books/reader?id=xQkCAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&pg=GBS.PA91> (accessed April 29, 2012).

argued that putting them in a lock hospital conveniently doubled as a punitive measure, safely quarantining the racially-degenerative criminals from the upper class white men they sought to infect and degrade.

Additionally, like most doctors, this article argued that the best solution was putting more power in the hands of men, through the government, the police, and of course, physicians. Since men were the victims of the infectious prostitutes, they needed to be empowered against them. If prostitutes were going to try and taint the superior race of men, men needed to take action to protect themselves and their whiteness.

Not just physicians, but also the military and its supporters were typically regulationist as well. Frederick Walter Lowndes's *The Extension of the Contagious Diseases Acts to Liverpool and Other Seaports: Practically Considered* was essentially regulationist propaganda. On the very first page, he reprinted a telling selection from an obviously biased 1862 report on prostitution and venereal disease in garrison towns. It read:

"Your committee have refrained from entering into the painful details which have come to their knowledge of the state of our naval and military stations at home as regards prostitution. These facts are so appalling that they feel it a duty to press on the Government the necessity of at once grappling with the mass of vice,

filth, and disease which surrounds the soldiers' barracks and the seamen's homes, which not only crowds our hospitals with sick, weakens the roll of our effectives, and swells the list of our invalids but which surely, however slowly, saps the vigour of our soldiers and our seamen, sows the seeds of degradation and degeneracy, and causes an amount of suffering difficult to overestimate."<sup>72</sup>

In typical regulationist fashion, the men were blameless and the prostitutes were the sources of all vice and disease. The filth surrounded the barracks, but was not a part of those barracks. Further, men were positioned as the victims of the racially-degrading, infectious prostitutes. The committee was not concerned about how many women were in the hospital or what depth of poverty she lived in, but frightened only at the number of men who fell ill. Like succubi, the greedy, filthy prostitutes stole men's manly vigour and sapped them of their racial superiority.

Significantly, not only were prostitutes threatening men, they were threatening the military, the vanguard of imperial might. Prostitutes drained the men who maintained the front line of the empire of their racial superiority, putting the very empire in peril. To protect the health,

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<sup>72</sup> Frederick Walter Lowndes, *The Extension of the Contagious Diseases Acts to Liverpool and Other Seaports Practically Considered* (Liverpool, Adam Holden, 48, Church Street, 1876), 1 <http://books.google.co.uk/books/reader?id=BgRbAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader> (accessed April 29, 2012).



strength, and dominance of Anglo-Saxon whiteness, Lowndes argued that the racially-degenerating vice and disease-ridden prostitutes must be quarantined, controlled, and regulated by the state.

Another of Lowndes's works, *Lock Hospitals and Lock Wards in General Hospitals*, provided a history and overview of lock hospitals. Lowndes's descriptions and statistics revealed a regulationist slant. For example, he stated that "lock hospitals are principally for the reception and treatment of persons suffering from diseases, the direct result of their own vicious indulgence." On the next page, a chart indicated how many beds were reserved for men and women in six different lock hospitals across the country. Two thirds of the lock hospitals had no beds for men. Out of all six combined, there were a grand total of forty-five beds for men, and 400 for women. The numbers made it clear exactly whose "vicious indulgence" Lowndes referred to.<sup>73</sup>

According to Lowndes, for

"every [prostitute] taken off from the streets while in a state of disease... a humane act is done to her, since she is prevented from making herself worse. At the same time she is prevented from spreading her disease to innocent as well as guilty people... we have admitted...married women who have all contracted the

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<sup>73</sup> Frederick Walter Lowndes, *Lock Hospitals and Lock Wards in General Hospitals* (London: J.&A. Churchill, 1882), 1-2 <http://archive.org/details/lockhospitalsloc00lown> (accessed April 29, 2012).

disease from their husbands. Could we carry the history further, we should most probably find that these men all contracted the disease from prostitutes."<sup>74</sup>

Although one could infer that Lowndes meant men by referring to "guilty people," he still placed all blame on prostitutes by insinuating that they were the ones who also spread the disease to the "innocent people," their clients' wives, not the husbands. Instead of stopping after describing the men giving their wives a venereal disease, Lowndes went on to blame prostitutes, as though even if the husbands were possibly a little guilty, it was ultimately all the prostitute's fault all along. Lowndes used the data describing the "innocent" venereal disease patients to urge authorities to crack down on the infectious agents. Not the husbands, but rather, the prostitutes took full blame from Lowndes for the spread of venereal disease, even when he admitted that it was men who gave it to their wives.

People less directly affected by the regulation of prostitution than physicians and the military also weighed in on the Acts. Essayist William Rathbone Greg's *The Great Sin of Great Cities*, a reprint of his earlier *Westminster Review* article, contained the fire-and-brimstone quote that opened this paper. Greg lamented that

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<sup>74</sup> Lowndes, *Lock Hospitals*, 17.

"The amount of social evil arising from syphilitic maladies, statistics cannot measure... but we do know that the disease prevails to an extent that is perfectly appalling; and that where there are 50,000 prostitutes scattered over the country (a vast majority of whom are, or have been diseased), spreading infection on every side of them... We must take into account...the certain but incalculable deterioration of public health and of the vigour of the race..."<sup>75</sup>

In standard regulationist fashion, Greg cited only prostitutes as carriers of disease, eliding any role men might play. He wove a terrifying image of prostitutes almost vengefully scouring the countryside looking for hapless men to infect with racially-degenerating disease and immorality. Like tens of thousands of succubi, Greg envisioned prostitutes siphoning off the superiority of the race as they plied their trade, instilling a sort of racial paranoia in his readership, seeing vice and degeneration at the hands of immoral women overtaking the country like a plague.

An equally impassioned writer and "social explorer," James Greenwood's *The Seven Curses of London* devoted an entire chapter to the subject of "fallen women." Greenwood was entirely unsympathetic to prostitutes and was a staunch advocate for tighter state control and police power over them. His open contempt for prostitutes became clear in his

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<sup>75</sup> Greg, *The Great Sin*, 25.

typical lurid descriptions of them as the "terrible canker that preys on the heart and vitals of society...the blotches and plague spots that afflict the social body" that must be "dealt with according to the best of our sanitary knowledge."<sup>76</sup>

Using the standard discourse of disease, Greenwood argued that not only were prostitutes a diseased group, they were a disease afflicting national morality and the national (male) body. To cure the disease, the afflicted party, men, needed a treatment plan to manage their illness. Greenwood argued the most effective plan for treating this racially-degenerative social malady was increased powers of police to stop prostitutes before they struck.<sup>77</sup>

As was a frequent pattern with regulationists, Greenwood was sure to explicitly absolve men of any responsibility. In one instance he described about the arrest of a prostitute, he stated outright, "to be sure, the man is not to blame." If his readership entertained any lingering doubts, they could be positive that men were completely innocent, and it was wicked female prostitutes

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<sup>76</sup> James Greenwood, *The Seven Curses of London*. London: S. Rivers, 1869, 200 [http://books.google.com/books/reader?id=NG\\_RTfBwA04C&printsec=frontcover&output=reader](http://books.google.com/books/reader?id=NG_RTfBwA04C&printsec=frontcover&output=reader) (accessed April 29, 2012).

<sup>77</sup> Greenwood, *The Seven Curses*, 223-27.

that committed the great social evil all by themselves. Any male parties involved were their victims.<sup>78</sup>

To show how seriously he took police power and how lightly he took women's personal liberty, he casually described a woman mistakenly arrested as a prostitute. Utterly unconcerned, he explained it was better to be safe than sorry, and stronger powers of police would ultimately serve public health the best.<sup>79</sup>

As the opposition to the C.D. Acts mounted, regulationists countered that it was not just prostitutes who were immoral, but also the repealers, especially women, who dared speak publicly about such inappropriate topics.<sup>80</sup> White male regulationists blamed anyone but themselves, using accusations of immorality as a racialized insult to their opponents. Since regulationists were working on behalf of the race and the health of the national body, anyone opposing them must be working against those things. If anyone dared disagree with the regulationists, they must be weakening the superiority of the race through their disagreement. According to regulationists, the "shrieking sisterhood" had no business speaking about prostitution, an

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<sup>78</sup>

Greenwood, *The Great Sin*, 235.

<sup>79</sup> Greenwood, *The Great Sin*, 235.

<sup>80</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 187.

immoral topic for ladies to discuss. Not only prostitutes, but also their supporters, were subject to regulationist accusations of weakening the race and nation.

### **Repealers**

Racialized language used in favor of the C.D. Acts condemned prostitutes to vice and disease, rendering them as infectious agents spreading racial decay. Repealers used racialized language against the Acts, turning the discourse around on men. Like regulationist logic, repealer discourse began, with Nightingale, as medical and biological and expanded from there to include morality as a necessary component for good hygiene and thus racial purity. Butler, as the driving force behind the organized repealer movement, approached the Acts from a different angle, starting with moral concerns and developing from there into hygiene and then race. If hygiene impacted racial health, and morality impacted hygiene, then moral purity, through hygiene, affected racial purity. Since repealers came from many different movements, not every repealer touched on every contributing factor of racial decline, but their combined discourses worked together to link morality, hygiene, and race to female prostitute victimization and racial degradation. Repealers defended the whiteness of

prostitutes and blamed their male clients for corrupting it. Repealers viewed the C.D. Acts as a system for enabling vice and degrading the whiteness of working class women and by extension the national body. Asserting that prostitutes' whiteness was worth protecting, and that men's vice endangered it, repealers condemned the C.D. Acts as degrading to the race and nation.

Victorian supporters of women's rights were strongly invested in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, engaging in an extremely race and class privileged form of activism which Caine refers to as "imperial feminism" and "feminist orientalism."<sup>81</sup> Supporters of women's rights were racist and very much convinced of Western superiority. They were genuinely concerned with maintaining the might of the British Empire, and this superiority was contingent upon the purity of the Anglo-Saxon race. Perceiving men to be the agents of the immorality and disease of prostitution, they were also the responsible party for weakening the Anglo-Saxon race. Women's rights activists' stock in Anglo-Saxon men's morality and racial superiority was a part of the broader imperialist mission. Repealing the C.D. Acts would make the British Empire stronger and racially better.

Repealers agreed with regulationists that vice and

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<sup>81</sup> Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 90.

disease weakened the superiority of the race and the nation. Even people opposed to the C.D. Acts saw prostitution as poisoning the race. They were not supportive of prostitution or prostitutes, but rather opposed to the C. D. Acts and to gendered oppression more broadly. That is, it was patriarchy's fault that women were forced into prostitution. Prostitution was still a social evil, but the fault of men rather than women, and still immoral and thus racially degenerative. Specifically in this configuration, it was actually upper-class men who were the infected agents degrading the race of working class women.

Significantly, repealers argued that prostitutes did not pollute men, but rather that they were polluted by men.<sup>82</sup> This take on prostitution was the classic breakdown between genders on the issue. Patriarchy enabled men to blame the oppressed class for the faults of the oppressors; women, fighting their own oppression, placed the blame on their oppressors and shifted blame away from the oppressed.

While rich white men passing moral and racial judgment against poor women was hardly out of the ordinary, repealers passing judgment on rich white men in defense of poor women was exceptional. They were in effect claiming

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<sup>82</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 146.



that upper class men were the infected agents, spreading the contagion to working class women, and making them less white. Not only did fallen women fall down the social ladder, they fell down the racial hierarchy, and the men who frequented them were the ones dragging them down. The powerful, well-known repealers, also from middle and upper class origins, essentially betrayed their own class for the sake of preserving their own race.

Repealers argued that upper class men were the unhygienic, immoral ones to scare men straight into good behavior and no longer frequent prostitutes. Not only did repealers blame the clients of prostitutes, they also blamed the politicians who passed the law and the policemen and doctors who carried it out.

Repealers relied on conventional sexist stereotypes of women and co-opted them to achieve their goals. Butler played up women's superior morality as justification for deserving more rights and bodily autonomy. Since women were more moral,<sup>83</sup> they were whiter; men were the immoral ones, driving the demand for prostitutes, and thus they were less white than their female counterparts. Second, repealers used a narrative of female victimhood to get their point across. Prostitutes were victims of immoral men, rendering

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<sup>83</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 117.

men as the guilty party who needed to change their behavior. Sacrificing women's agency to attain better conditions for women, the narrative of victimhood made the unprecedented argument that it was in fact upper class men whose tainted whiteness also tainted working class women's racial superiority through prostitution. More than women, women's whiteness was the true victim of racially-degenerative male vice. The loss of working class women's whiteness was not an acceptable price to pay for prostitution according to repealers. If men wanted to preserve the health of the national body and the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, they must put their own behavior in check and stop polluting what little whiteness working class women could call their own. Everyone's whiteness counted toward Anglo-Saxon might; if men's vice reduced their own whiteness and tainted that of working class women, the downfall of the race would be men's fault.

Repealers argued for an almost complete inversion of race, class, and gender hierarchies. Since the vice of upper class men ran the most rampant, they were the least white. Since working class men were more moral, they were whiter. Whiter still were morally-superior women of all classes. Recognizing that the very leaders of the empire

were the least white, least moral, and thus least able to be at the vanguard of the Anglo-Saxon empire, repealers urged them to correct their racially inferior behavior for the good of the race, the nation, and the empire.

Upper class male repealers turned against their own gender for the sake of defending their race. Morally upstanding upper class white men took pride in the preservation of their own racial superiority through their self control, urging their fellow upper class men to do the same. Working class men stressed constantly over moral concerns, turning against their own gender, enacting their own politics of respectability to conserve the whiteness allotted them as poor men, and working with repealers to enforce better moral and racial behaviors from their upper class counterparts.<sup>84</sup> Upper class women turned against men of their own class and allied with working class men, the purest class of men because they frequented prostitutes the least and had the greatest concern for upholding their own morality.<sup>85</sup>

One impassioned woman, a prostitute, wrote to Butler, confirming the culpability of men and the victimization of women due to the C.D. Acts:

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<sup>84</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 103.

<sup>85</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 141.

"It is *men*, only *men*, from the first to the last, that we have to do with! To please a man I did wrong at first, then I was flung about from man to man. Men police lay hand on us. By men we are examined, handled, doctored, and messed on with. In the hospital it is a man again who makes prayers and reads the Bible for us. We are up before magistrates who are men and we never get out of the hands of men."<sup>86</sup>

While Butler and the repealers frequently got caught up in the image of fallen women rather than actual prostitutes, and the image of themselves as saviors, the voice of this prostitute revealed that in placing responsibility on men, prostitutes, Butler, and the repealers were in complete agreement.

Butler spearheaded the "popular crusade against male vice."<sup>87</sup> She challenged the idea that prostitutes "polluted" men and countered that fallen women were the victims of male vice.<sup>88</sup> Men were polluting the race by frequenting prostitutes. In 1871, Butler's argument in *Sursum Corda: Annual Address to the Ladies National Association* made it clear that she blamed men for the racially degenerating evils of prostitution. She told her audience that "the low moral standard of men is itself the

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<sup>86</sup> Shield, 9 May 1870, cited in Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 128; emphasis original.

<sup>87</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 102.

<sup>88</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 130.

Principle cause of [prostitution].”<sup>89</sup> Put another way, the degraded race of immoral men was the root of the social evil, dragging poor women down to their level. In keeping with the female victimization narrative, she condemned the C.D. Acts because they “punish the sex who are the victims of vice and leave unpunished the sex who are the main causes both of the vice and its dreaded consequences.”<sup>90</sup>

Butler detailed her involvement in the opposition to the C.D. Acts in her *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade*. She laid out her stance on prostitution and her concern about the mistreatment of working class women by upper class men. She rhetorically berated an anonymous client of prostitution, or “buyer,” delineating how upper class men victimized prostitutes and caused their racial degeneration:

“You thrust them down lower; you throw them on the last shovelful of earth to hurl them to the abyss; you roll upon them the stone which cannot be removed except by a supernatural effort. ‘Ah! You have fallen, unfortunate creature,’ you say; ‘well, we will complete the work, we will consummate your degradation: that which is already soiled shall be made still more vile.’”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Josephine Butler, *Sursum Corda; Annual Address to the Ladies National Association* (Liverpool: T. Brakell, 1871), *History of Women*, Reel 370: 2574.

<sup>90</sup> Josephine Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1911), 9, 10 <http://archive.org/details/personalreminisc00butliala> (accessed April 29, 2012).

<sup>91</sup> Butler, *Personal Reminiscences*, 210.

Butler accused privileged men of abusing that privilege to drag women down into poverty and despair. By creating and maintaining the demand for prostitutes, upper class men's racially degrading vice forced innocent women into a life of vice as well, tainting the poor women's whiteness until both parties barely had any left. The "soiled" prostitute was made even dirtier by her client, the dirt of nonwhiteness spread from man to victim.

Butler, infamously not one to shy away from delicate topics, brought up the specter of homosexual sex in the military in her condemnation of the C.D. Acts. She accused the navy of scapegoating prostitutes to cover up homosexual activity. Doctors could detain and examine women for years but if men gave each other sexually transmitted diseases, as Butler was convinced with good reason they were, the C.D. Acts and their discriminatory treatment of women were moot. Butler presented a damning case for her belief that homosexual activity spread disease from man to man:

"[disembarking from a ship], 70 men were found affected by recent venereal sores of a bad kind, not one of them having seen the face of a woman for more than a year. To such dissolute soldiers the cowardly official says, 'Inform, inform us of the *woman* who has infected you.' The men ashamed to confess that they had infected each other point to any woman who comes first."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Josephine Butler to Vernon Lushington, P.R.O., Admiralty Papers,

If male vice degraded the race by sex with women, criminal sex with fellow men was the height of racial degeneration. Men's vice beget poor hygiene, draining the soldiers of their white superiority.

Not all repealers were motivated by liberalism or women's rights directly. Some members of Parliament opposed the C.D. Acts purely because they gave too much power to the state.<sup>93</sup> Even this was a personal liberty issue which became a gendered personal liberty issue. Additionally, many social housekeepers were motivated by religion, preserving morality by preaching good Christian values.

In the religiously-motivated *Westminster Review* article "Christian Harem," the racialized tone is apparent by the title alone, and reinforced in the text with the description of "Oriental morality," practiced by men who use prostitution as means of protecting the virtue of middle and upper class women by sacrificing the virtue of working class women. The overt Orientalist connections between the supposedly hyper-sensual cultures of Asia and the men who frequented prostitutes rendered those men less white. In this configuration, women were victims and men were the ones with agency, and thus responsible for the

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Adm.1/ 6148, 12 January 1870, cited in Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 130.

<sup>93</sup> McHugh, *Prostitution*, 25.

degeneration of the race, in this article, for behaving like a colonized man instead of an Anglo-Saxon colonizer.<sup>94</sup>

The author went on to explain the "Christian Harem" as "the maintenance of a class of woman-chattels by...reducing their degradation to a system." Once again, it was men who degraded women, men's racial inferiority that spread to their female victims. The author was disgusted with a corrupt system that led to the racial degeneration of any member of the Anglo-Saxon race, including working class women. The author argued instead that men and women should be equals in virtue, and that men were the ones who needed to catch up to women's superior virtue, just as Butler argued. Since morality was an integral part of racial superiority because it ensured good hygiene, and this author saw women as the more moral, they were also whiter. Men who frequented prostitutes needed to clean up their act to clean up their race.<sup>95</sup>

According to Victorian race and gender hierarchies, white women were roughly on par with black men, i.e., white women's superior race was counterbalanced by the inferior sex, and black men's inferior race was mitigated by being

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<sup>94</sup> "Christian Harem," *Westminster Review* 121 (1884), 115  
<http://books.google.com/books/reader?id=Li2gAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader> (accessed April 29, 2012).

<sup>95</sup>

"Christian Harem," 110, 106.



the superior sex. As Gustav le Bon wrote, "all psychologists who have studied the intelligence of women, as well as poets and novelists, recognize today that they represent the most inferior forms of human evolution and that they are closer to children and savages than to an adult, civilized man."<sup>96</sup> Privileged white men already held this theory to be true, and so repealers exploited these connections between white women and black men to their advantage. Analogies to slavery abound in repealer discourse. Another name repealers called themselves was abolitionists, likening their struggle with the struggle to free black slaves. They referred to their movement as the "New Abolitionist Movement," drawing a direct correlation between black slaves and white prostitutes.<sup>97</sup>

Repealers also described women as subject to the "slavery of men's lust"<sup>98</sup> and prostitution as the "licentiousness of one sex and the enslavement of another."<sup>99</sup> Prostitution rings, at home and abroad, became known as white slavery. While white prostitutes were unsurprisingly racially tainted when victimized by nonwhite pimps and clients in the colonies, repealers argued they

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<sup>96</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 54.

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Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 123.

<sup>98</sup> N.L.J., 1 September 1879, cited in Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 105.

<sup>99</sup>

Butler, *Personal Reminiscences*, 139.

were also racially degraded by white men on the continent. Repealers played slavery as a racialized sympathy card, reinforcing the repealers' argument that women were victims. Shocking exposés of white slavery in popular publications such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* bolstered the abolitionist/ repealer cause.<sup>100</sup>

Slavery comparisons conveyed a double message: that white women forced into prostitution were victims of the men who forced them, and that their victimization at the hands of men rendered them less white. Upper class men's vices made them racially inferior, and their vice was contagious, spreading to working class women through white slavery and dragging them down to racial inferiority as well. Philanthropy, moral reform, and rescue societies working against white slavery thus served as a form of racial uplift. By cleaning up society, they cleaned up the race. Protecting white women from white slavery, and condemning the immoral, racially inferior vices of men, social housekeepers sanitized the Anglo-Saxon race. In Alfred Dyer's pamphlet, *The European Slave Trade in English Girls: A Narrative of Facts*, he asserted that young English girls forced into prostitution experienced "a condition of slavery infinitely more cruel and revolting than negro

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<sup>100</sup>

Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 99.

servitude.”<sup>101</sup> Compared to black slavery, white women forced into prostitution were equated with an inferior race. Configured as racialized victims of male vice, white women’s racial superiority was degraded by male vice.

Another handout, a Christian pamphlet on the history and prevention of white slavery, *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls, or War on the White Slave Trade*, described the perils of white slavery in terms that made the victimization of women and the vice of men clear. While the handout was published in 1910, the pamphlet frequently recounted stories, examples, and quotes from the late nineteenth century. In the pamphlet, William Coote, the Secretary of the National Vigilance Association, defined white slavery as the “enslavement of pure young womanhood, for the gratification of the debased and degraded passions of men.”<sup>102</sup> Men were the ones with degraded, racially inferior passions, contaminating “pure” women with their “debased” vice. He went on to discuss “the disease we were attacking, but also the remedy we proposed.” He used

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<sup>101</sup> Alfred Stace Dyer, *The European Slave Trade in English Girls: A Narrative of Facts* (London: Dyer Brothers, 1880), 6 <http://books.google.com/books/reader?id=zIcIAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader> (accessed April 29, 2012).

<sup>102</sup> Ernest A. Bell, ed., *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls* (London, 1910) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/26081/26081-h/26081-h.htm> (accessed April 29, 2012).

discourses of disease to describe prostitution, and the "remedy" he saw was protecting women from "hideous monster[s] of vice," men. Coote, too, saw men as the vice-ridden and thus racially inferior agents infecting women, who were hapless victims. Men's degradation was contagious, turning pure women into fallen women, their fall not only down the class hierarchy but also the racial hierarchy.

Another social housekeeper, William Booth, Methodist preacher and founder of the Salvation Army, wrote *In Darkest England and the Way Out* looking back in part on his rescue work with prostitutes. The title itself was a racialized reference: "As there is a darkest Africa is there not also a darkest England?"<sup>103</sup> He developed this comparison by likening black slaves to white women prostitutes. He asked his readers, "the lot of a negress in the Equatorial Forest is not, perhaps, a very happy one, but is it so very much worse than that of many a pretty orphan girl in our Christian capital?"<sup>104</sup> His direct comparison of prostitution to slavery aimed to elicit sympathy for prostitutes as victims and to reinforce the racialized nature of prostitution. Further, while he acknowledged that prostitutes sinned by plying their trade, he blamed men for forcing women into the wretched lifestyle and the sins men committed by frequenting prostitutes. Far from believing the clients satisfied natural urges with prostitutes, Booth advanced the position that prostitutes were the victims of male vice, explaining that

"even in the lowest depths [of prostitution], excommunicated from Humanity and outcast from God, she is far nearer the pitying heart of the One true Saviour than all the men who forced her down..."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (London: International Headquarters of the Salvation Army, 1890), 11 <http://books.google.com/books/reader?id=Mo4SAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader> (accessed April 29, 2012).

<sup>104</sup> William Booth, *In Darkest England*, 13.

<sup>105</sup> William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, 14.

The sins and vice of male demand for prostitution was the greater sin, and thus the greater departure from racial superiority.

Not only were men the racial transgressors according to Booth, but they were also responsible for rendering prostitutes less white as well. Booth roused sympathy for "the woman whose degradation [her client] necessitates."<sup>106</sup> It was thus not prostitutes, according to Booth, who degraded the race of upper class men, but rather the vice of those men who degraded the race of working class women. He further lamented that "it is an immense addition to the infamy of this vice in man that the consequences have to be borne almost exclusively by woman." The consequences were, as he described in the quote before, racial "degradation." He reinforced the notion that it was working class women's race being degraded by men by asserting that women alone paid the price for men's immorality. Men's vice tainted working class women, not the other way around.<sup>107</sup>

Also condemning male vice, William Logan's *The Great Social Evil: Its Causes, Extent, Results, and Remedies* was an impassioned repealer's plea to eradicate prostitution by

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<sup>106</sup> Booth, *In Darkest England*, 46.

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Booth, *In Darkest England*, 46.

improving men's morals. Based on the author's "personal investigation" of prostitution in various towns across the country, he described his interpretation of and solutions to the problem of prostitution.

Logan reprinted correspondence written to him on the subject of prostitution which said, "I fear that till men are made morally better than they are at present," prostitution would continue unabated. Logan himself echoed this notion shortly after, insisting that "men are the most guilty parties" in the deterioration of public health and morality. Citing additional sources to supplement his own voice, Logan insisted repeatedly that men were the immoral, unhygienic party contributing to the downfall of the race.<sup>108</sup>

Citing a pastor, Logan described the "hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction" which led to prostitution and the moral and racial decay of society as a whole. Placing the blame squarely on men, it was men's responsibility to change their behavior, rehabilitate their morals and the race, and heal the sick national body.<sup>109</sup>

Logan reiterated the repealer argument that the Acts amounted to state-sanctioned vice, asserting that total

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<sup>108</sup> William Logan, *The Great Social Evil: Its Causes, Extent, Results, and Remedies* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1871) 15, 17, 26 <http://books.google.com/books/reader?id=D44BAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader> (accessed April 29, 2012); Emphasis original.

<sup>109</sup>

Logan, *The Great Social Evil*, 113.

suppression of prostitution was the real solution to the moral and racial uplift of the nation, beginning with men exercising self control and not contaminating innocent women with their racially-inferior hygiene and vice.<sup>110</sup>

Continuing this condemnation of male vice and female victimization, Dr. James John Garth Wilkinson was a repealer physician. Male physicians opposed the Acts, although they were the minority in their field. Dr. Wilkinson published his pamphlet *The Forcible Introspection of Women for the Army and Navy by the Oligarchy, Considered Physically* in 1870. He continued the victimization narrative, showing how prostitutes were the victims of male vice, male contagion, and the C.D. Acts which enabled them. He argued, however, that it was not just the clients of prostitution that victimized women, but also the police and doctors who complied with the Acts. He implored his readers to "remember that the steel, that common infector, is indiscriminately put in not to cure disease but to spy it. Not examination of sick women is your game, but espionage of enslaved wombs. Police not in domiciliary visits but police in very bowels...The candle of your Act shines in upon all their insides."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>

Logan, *The Great Social Evil*, 235.

<sup>111</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 108, 130, 146; James John Garth Wilkinson, *The Forcible Introspection of Women for the Army and Navy by*

Whereas regulationists thought that prostitutes' modesty was too far gone to salvage, Wilkinson argued that women were victimized by the C.D. Acts. In his account, it was not the client who necessarily infected the prostitute, but a physician complying with the Acts, who "infect[ed]" the prostitute by assaulting her with the speculum. Wilkinson configured the "steel penis" as the "common infector" that tainted women both morally and physically, and thus racially. Wilkinson blamed the men of his own class and profession for these immoral, unhygienic, and racially-degenerating deeds. He further blamed the C.D. Acts for facilitating those deeds.

Female health practitioners weighed in against the C.D. Acts as well. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first female physician to receive her degree in the United States, and to be recognized in Britain, voiced her strong opinions about prostitution and hygiene. In Blackwell's *Essays on Medical Sociology* she addressed rescue societies in 1881 to condemn the practice of prostitution and to express her concern about men's immorality. Blackwell wanted to improve the morality of the nation by refusing to allow

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*the Oligarchy, Considered Physically* (London, 1870), cited in Leigh Dale and Simon Ryan, eds., *The Body in the Library* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 1998), 77. <http://books.google.com/books?id=d50WXol9fOEC&pg=PA77&lpg=PA77&dq=wilkinson+forcible+introspection&source=bl&ots=y3Wtm6TcvI&sig=EV4eyUuQBrwzI37HNOGeRNaUBEA&hl=en&sa=X&ei=UECPT4-6OqTL0QG1qsTNDw&ved=0CCcQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=wilkinson%20forcible%20introspection&f=false> (accessed April 29, 2012).



prostitution to be seen as a necessary evil.<sup>112</sup>

For Blackwell, "the root of prostitution...is an audacious insult to the nature of men...that they can neither resist nor control their animal nature." Here, she subverted the defense of prostitution as a necessary evil, demonstrating that if such were true, and men possessed no self-control, they were no better than animals. Anglo-Saxon Victorians prided themselves on their civilized sexual self-control; if men could not restrain themselves, and could not rise above such primitive urges, they were not fit to inhabit the upper echelon of the race.<sup>113</sup>

Blackwell described prostitution as "the conversion of men into brutes and of women into machines." As Bederman's framework shows, "brutes" was code for nonwhite, so Blackwell argued that men's prostitution-enabling vices made them racially inferior. In turning women into machines, Blackwell argued that men's racially degenerate vice rendered women into passive objects, victims of men's inferior lust. In her configuration of prostitution, men were racially inferior agents polluting innocent women with their racially-degrading vice.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth Blackwell, *Essays in Medical Sociology* (London: Ernest Bell, 1902)<http://archive.org/details/essaysinmedicals00blacuoft> (accessed April 29, 2012).

<sup>113</sup> Blackwell, *Essays*, 116-17.

<sup>114</sup>

Blackwell, *Essays*, 115.

Blackwell went on to explain how venereal disease was a sexually transmitted disease caused by both vice and poor hygiene. Because of this nature, she argued that any sort of legislation should thus aim to stem the spread of disease, not manage it. Anything less, such as the C.D. Acts, would be "injurious to the nation," she asserted. Amounting to the state sanctioning men to spread disease and vice to innocent women, the C.D. Acts, and the men they enabled, would lead to the downfall of morality, hygiene, the superiority of the race, and thus the nation itself.<sup>115</sup>

Another female health practitioner, Florence Nightingale, renowned nurse, staunchly opposed the Acts as state-sanctioned vice. In a letter to a Member of Parliament, she described how "fortunate it is for this country that its healthy moral feeling" would result in repealing the Acts, because true hygiene and pure morality dictated the abolishment of prostitution, not its sanction. If one supported regulation, she implied, one possessed neither good hygiene nor good morals. Regulationists and men who frequented prostitutes, then, were unhygienic, immoral, and the culprits for the victimization of innocent women and the degeneration of the race.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup>

Blackwell, *Essays*, 123.

<sup>116</sup>

Florence Nightingale to Harry Verney, Wellcome (Claydon copy), cited in Lynn McDonald, ed., *Florence Nightingale On women, Medicine,*

For Nightingale, the Acts signaled “national despair of moral and social progress, expressed in an act of Parliament; it would pronounce the inevitable and continuous degradation—generation after generation—of a large proportion of my sex...” Women *were being* degraded, not inherently degraded. Men who created the demand for and sanctioned prostitution degraded these women—men were the contaminating agents, spreading infectious immorality to helpless women. Men were to blame for the decline in national moral and social progress, not just at the time, but in the future as well. Men’s degrading vice was leading toward the degeneration of the race and the nation. Indeed, “[men sanctioning prostitution] would at once stifle all aspirations after a higher state of social existence and would contaminate, corrupt and deaden the moral life of the whole community.” With the death of moral life, the purity of the race died too, and the Contagious Diseases Acts were to Nightingale a death knell for the morality and racial purity of the nation wrung by the hands of vice-ridden men.<sup>117</sup>

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*Midwifery and Prostitution* (Wilfrid Laurier University), 470-1  
<http://books.google.com/books?id=ofbCmnAZpsYC&pg=PA470&lpg=PA470&dq=florence+nightingale+prostitute&source=bl&ots=rS62WJmFvr&sig=ywp3oXz18yX4mIfD3RwwIxxEmM&hl=en&sa=X&ei=RK6AT7icMeLL0QHguPmUCA&ved=0CGwQ6AEwCA#v=onepage&q=florence%20nightingale%20prostitute&f=false> (accessed April 29, 2012).

<sup>117</sup> Florence Nightingale, *Florence Nightingale*, 470-1.

Blackwell and Nightingale, health professionals, showed that one of their primary concerns was morality. For them, morality was an important component of health, and thus of racial status as well. If the nation were immoral and unhealthy, as they explained it was under the C.D. Acts, the nation was also racially unfit. The only way to make the nation racially fit, moral, and healthy again was to repeal the Acts. Since they saw men's vice as the root of the immorality, men needed to step up and whiten up their behavior.

Repealers defended the whiteness of prostitutes and blamed their male clients for corrupting it. Repealers viewed the C.D. Acts as a streamlined system for enabling vice and degrading the whiteness of working class women and by extension the entire national body. While not every repealer addressed every aspect of racial decline, their combined discourses of morality, hygiene, and race held up a mirror to regulationists' arguments, reflecting their discourses of vice, disease, and racial degradation and reversing them, revealing upper class white men to be the infectious agents of racial degeneration. Asserting that prostitutes' whiteness was worth protecting, and that men's vice endangered it, repealers condemned the C.D. Acts as degrading to the race and nation.

### **Conclusion**

In the mid-nineteenth century British Empire, race was tied to physical hygiene and moral purity. Prostitution lay at the intersection of these three characteristics. The Contagious Diseases Acts framed the discourse of prostitution in the mid-nineteenth century. While prostitution in the colonies more overtly threatened Anglo-Saxon purity, white prostitutes and their clients in the metropole also became less white because of their lack of both moral and physical hygiene. Furthermore, regulationists blamed prostitutes for muddying the Anglo-Saxon race because of their sinful ways, but repealers argued that it was men's lack of morality that was actually threatening the superiority of the race.

Regulationists and repealers alike believed that they were working in the best interests of the race and the nation. Doctors, believing they were healing the race when they healed venereal disease, naturally promoted the C.D. Acts which empowered them to cure venereal disease on a large scale. Politicians, believing that preserving the race was tantamount to preserving the nation, naturally

legislated race-protecting measures such as the C.D. Acts. Supporters of women's rights and many religious societies believed that by placing the blame where it belonged, squarely on the shoulders of the clients, they were protecting the race and thus the nation as well.

The C.D. Acts debates led to smear campaigns accusing the other side of being comprised of racially inferior people and acts. Just as Anglo-Saxon imperialists perceived colonial subjects as racially inferior, Anglo-Saxon men and women accused each other of despoiling the race with their unhygienic deeds. Prostitution, configured as an immoral and thus unhygienic act, led regulationists to accuse white prostitutes of muddying the purity of their race. Conversely, repealers argued that since men owned and controlled women's bodies, men were responsible for the unhygienic system of prostitution, and thus men were the ones tainting Anglo-Saxon purity. During the mid-nineteenth century, Anglo-Saxon men and women arguing against prostitution engaged not only in a gender war, but in a race war, in which the party at fault was stripped of their white superiority.

Regulationists made their accusations down the social ladder, a strategy that was par for the course for oppressors controlling the oppressed. Men with every social

privilege blaming the inferior race, class, and gender were unsurprising. Repealers, however, inverted that logic and challenged the privileged male regulationists by making their accusations up the social ladder. Repealers ultimately swayed the wealthy, white, male hand of the law by challenging the racial superiority of its creators, supporters, and enforcers. To question their ability to lead a nation founded on the superiority of their race, repealers questioned their whiteness and the whiteness of the national body. To prove their whiteness and safeguard the whiteness of the national body, regulationists ultimately repealed the Acts. Further, by asserting the value of the whiteness of the disenfranchised white groups of women and the working class, repealers gained rights for them by distancing them from the racial Other in an empire built on whiteness. In the British Empire, Anglo-Saxon whiteness served as the currency for social power. Regulationists sought to maintain the status quo by denying whiteness to the oppressed classes. Repealers in turn disputed the whiteness of the oppressor class and defended the whiteness of working class women. By wielding the power of whiteness, repealers transgressed traditional race, class, and gender hierarchies, effected a change in the law, and embarked on a path to establishing further women's

and working class rights in the metropole.



Appendix A

Bathing Child Pears Soap Ad



## Appendix B

## White Man's Burden Pears Soap Ad

The first step towards lightening

**The White Man's Burden**

is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness.

**Pears' Soap**

is a potent factor in lightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances, while amongst the cultured of all nations it holds the highest place—it is the ideal toilet soap.

Manufactured by Pears & Co. Ltd.

Appendix C

Pears Soap Is The Best Pears Soap Ad



Appendix D

Munby's Sketch of Boompin' Nelly



Appendix E

Racialized Irish Cartoon



## Appendix F

Police Estimates of Known Prostitutes

	London	England & Wales
1839	6,371	_____
1841	9,409	_____
1857	8,600	_____
1858	7,194	27,113
1859	6,649	28,743
1860	6,940	28,927
1861	7,124	29,572
1862	5,795	28,449
1863	5,581	27,411
1864	5,689	26,802
1865	5,911	26,213
1866	5,554	24,717
1867	5,628	24,299
1868	5,678	24,311

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