

**ORGANIZED RIGHTEOUSNESS AGAINST ORGANIZED VICIOUSNESS:  
CONSTRUCTING PROSTITUTION IN POST WORLD WAR I  
MONTREAL**

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## **Abstract**

The first decades of the twentieth-century featured a full-scale assault on prostitution and Red Light Districts in cities across North America. The Committee of Sixteen's efforts to erase 'commercialized vice' from Montreal reflect moral regulation projects as they have been recently theorized. The Committee's members represented a range of commercial, feminist, social and religious institutions with various agendas. This thesis considers how prostitution is constructed to mobilize a diverse range of social actors at specific times. Examining the press of the time, as well as reports and speeches produced by the Committee over its seven-year history reveals how members constructed prostitution as a symbol and scapegoat for multiple, sometimes contradictory, contemporary concerns and anxieties in the years following World War I. This discourse served to further marginalize the very women the Committee ostensibly sought to 'rescue'.

## **Résumé**

Les premières décennies du vingtième siècle ont été marquées par une attaque sous tous azimuts contre la prostitution et les quartiers réservés dans l'ensemble des grandes villes nord-américaines. Les efforts déployés par le Comité des seize pour débarrasser Montréal du « vice commercialisé » s'inscrivent dans des démarches de réglementation morale qui ont été décrites par certaines analyses théoriques récentes. Les membres du Comité représentaient un certain nombre d'institutions commerciales, féministes, sociales et religieuses animées de différentes intentions. Le mémoire examine en quoi les constructions en matière de prostitution ont contribué à mobiliser un éventail diversifié d'acteurs sociaux à des époques spécifiques. Un examen de la presse de l'époque de même que des rapports et des discours produits par le Comité au cours de ses sept années d'existence montre de quelle façon ses membres ont fait de la prostitution un symbole et un bouc émissaire de multiples préoccupations et angoisses contemporaines – parfois contradictoires – dans les années qui ont suivi la Première Guerre mondiale. Ce discours a eu pour effet de marginaliser davantage les femmes que le Comité cherchait soi-disant à « secourir ».

## Acknowledgements

Many factors contributed to my decision to return to graduate school nearly two decades after completing my BA. Foremost among these were the women I met while working at Stella. These women shared details of their lives with me which were sometimes surprising and which often demonstrated profound resilience. Their stories were never reflected in the headlines and quotes about street prostitution in the daily press. This project began with these women's experiences.

This thesis required tracing the scraps, encounters and ghosts which combine to form a history, the one I chose to tell. My supervisor, Will Straw, has a knack for such quests. He also possesses the ability to determine what's necessary, what's missing and what needs to be done. I appreciate his generosity in sharing that wisdom with me. I also wish to acknowledge Viviane Namaste, with whom I share community work, ideas and an ongoing pursuit of the obscure. Jonathan Sterne helped me unpack some of what history might be, and suggested some future paths.

This project could never have been realized without a number of archivists. I particularly want to thank the team at the municipal archives and the staff at the Mount Royal branch of the Bibliothèque nationale de Québec. They not only eagerly sought out whatever strange bit of information I asked for, they contributed documents I had not imagined finding.

I want to thank Andrée Lévesque who shared her time and ideas with me as I embarked on this project. I also want to acknowledge Tamara Myers' work which has charted some of this territory.

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Finally, I want to remember my mother, Lorna Herland, and my brother, Barry Herland, neither of whom were around when I decided to return to school, but both of whom contributed to my decision to do so. Of course, none of this could be possible without the indulgence and encouragement of Eleanor Brown, whose love for old books and the secrets they hold defines our home.

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## Introduction

The first two decades of the twentieth century unleashed ‘unprecedented assaults’ on organized prostitution across North America.<sup>1</sup> The presence of Red Light Districts preoccupied governments, social reformers, parents, educators, legislators, religious leaders, journalists, police officers, doctors, and women’s organizations, evidenced by the fact that 43 different North American cities had published formal vice reports in the decade before 1917.<sup>2</sup> By that year, the Red Light Districts in 200 cities were closed down.<sup>3</sup> Montreal’s district continued to flourish despite the half dozen Royal Commissions and judicial inquiries related to prostitution it had conducted by 1925. Coverage of these investigations filled newspapers alongside reports of brothel raids, stories of missing young women, new programs to treat venereal disease, and opinions on changing gender roles. For many, these stories coalesced and the prostitute became at once ‘a symptom and consequence’ of urban tensions.<sup>4</sup>

From 1918 to 1926 the fight to clean up Montreal was led by the Committee of Sixteen. The Committee typified Progressive era attempts to use scientific rational principles to counter the disorderly, chaotic and criminal forces they saw as characteristic of modern cities. Montreal’s Anglophone elite — doctors, social reformers, religious authorities, business leaders, and lawyers — made up the Committee and led the battle of ‘Organized Righteousness against Organized Viciousness.’<sup>5</sup> By tracing the Committee of Sixteen’s efforts to eradicate prostitution in Montreal, this thesis will explore the discursive ways in which ‘symbolic agents become the target of social anxieties.’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Strange (1995) *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City 1880-1930*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 145.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Rosen (1982) *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Committee of Sixteen (1919) *Some Facts Regarding Toleration, Regulation, Segregation and Repression of Commercialized Vice*, Montreal, 48.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Thomas Connelly (1982) *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 39.

<sup>5</sup> Committee of Sixteen (1918) *Preliminary Report of an Unofficial Organization upon the Vice Conditions in Montreal*, Montreal, 42.

<sup>6</sup> This phrase, borrowed from Jeffrey Weeks, is considered missing in most accounts of moral panics by Kegan Doyle and Dany Lacombe (2003) “Moral Panic and Child Pornography: the Case of Robin Sharpe” in *Making Normal: Social Regulation in Canada*, Deborah Brock, ed. Scarborough: Nelson Thomson Learning, 288.

Many studies have considered why prostitution so preoccupied decision-makers at the dawn of the twentieth century and through the Progressive era.<sup>7</sup> Mariana Valverde is amongst those scholars who have challenged the conventional notion of moral panics. She acknowledges that they develop by coalescing 'different discourses, different fears, in a single image.'<sup>8</sup> However, she argues that it is reductionist to 'explain' them by "translat(ing) the apparently irrational content of a particular panic into other, more 'rational' categories." Instead, she emphasizes the importance of unpacking the rhetoric used.<sup>9</sup> This process helps to uncover "the complex ways in which a moral issue that appears to be singular serves as the site for social debate on a number of important and interrelated issues."<sup>10</sup> This also opens the door to uncovering contradictions, or fissures, within such projects. Alan Hunt has suggested that moral panics involve a relationship with social anxieties but not always a conspiracy of the press or the state.<sup>11</sup> Following these arguments, this thesis considers how prostitution is constructed to mobilize a diverse range of social actors at specific times. I am less interested in *why* prostitution became a concern in post World War I Montreal than in *how* the Committee of Sixteen was able to successfully capture the public's attention by harnessing the discourse around prostitution to other contemporary fears.

My own interest in the issue comes from having worked with prostitutes'<sup>12</sup> rights groups in Montreal during the 1990s. I was struck by how community concerns about the presence of prostitutes have remained constant over nearly a

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<sup>7</sup> For Canadian sources see: Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, and Mariana Valverde (1991) *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc. Studies specific to Montreal include: Andrée Lévesque (February 1989) "Eteindre le *Red Light*: les réformateurs et la prostitution à Montréal entre 1865 et 1925, *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* XVII:3 as well as essays in: Andrée Lévesque [1989] (1994) *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec 1919-1939*, Yvonne M. Klein, trans. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc. and Tamara Myers (1996) *Criminal Women and Bad Girls in Montreal, 1890-1930*, PhD Dissertation, McGill University. Please refer to citations for Constance Backhouse and John McLaren in the bibliography for more general discussions of prostitution legislation in Canada throughout the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. For American sources see: Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood* and Connelly *The Response to Prostitution*.

<sup>8</sup> Mariana Valverde *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Mariana Valverde, (1990) "The Rhetoric of Reform: Tropes and the Moral Subject," *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, Volume 18, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 90.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Hunt (1999) *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 19.

<sup>12</sup> I am keenly aware of the rhetorical shift to the term 'sex workers' in order to underscore the work of prostitution, as well as solidarity between those in different sectors of the industry. However, in the interests of historical context and continuity, I have chosen to use the contemporary term 'prostitute' throughout this thesis.

century of social and political change. These concerns persist despite enormous transformations in sexual mores, gender relations, definitions of family, and a prime minister who pronounced that 'the state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation.'<sup>13</sup> During public hearings, in March of 2000, held in Centre-Sud, a Montreal neighbourhood with a large presence of street prostitutes, resident after resident linked prostitutes' presence to drugs, to the threat they posed to non-prostitutes in terms of crime and disease, to property values and to the legitimacy of the community and those living and working in it. Others insisted prostitutes needed support, specific services, and help in order to leave the streets. Occasionally, the need for this support would include the qualification that these resources should be made available in someone else's backyard.

The question of whether prostitution is an unfortunate inevitability which should be managed in a way which would cause the least harm, or whether prostitution is a symbol of societal inequities which should be eradicated as a first step to universal equality, preoccupied Victorian society, Progressive era decision-makers, and continues to guide activists and legislators today. This polarization extends to those who seek to address the 'problem.' Any attempt to set boundaries on prostitution or its manifestation is understood as endorsing its existence, while any attempt to suppress it earns the label of narrow-minded puritan. The extreme polarization of these two understandings of the same phenomenon suggests that they are intended to operate on a symbolic level. These depictions require constructing prostitutes as either diseased temptresses or hapless victims. The enduring and totalizing aspect of these positions, coupled with the difficulty of establishing any sort of middle ground, indicates how precisely the discourse around prostitution has been constructed.

Phillip Corrigan's work on moral regulation has influenced a number of Canadian scholars.<sup>14</sup> Although some have criticized his overemphasis on the state as

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<sup>13</sup> This citation comes from Angus McLaren (1999) *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: a History*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 173. This entire volume presents a survey of the changes in sexual mores referred to here.

<sup>14</sup> Brock's 2003 volume *Making Normal* is dedicated to Corrigan, and Mariana Valverde edited a special issue of the (1994) *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 19:2 which foregrounded his theories and was later reprinted as Valverde (1994) *Studies in Moral Regulation*, Toronto: University of Toronto.



the source of moral regulation projects,<sup>15</sup> his major contribution to this growing body of knowledge is his articulation of ‘normalization’ as a key process in such projects. The influence any group can have on another is directly related to how easily they can frame their purpose as ‘common sense’ and a desirable, even necessary, state of affairs. Corrigan argues that this leads to investigations which are based ‘on *forms* (of relations and of thought), on ways, on the manner through which...’.<sup>16</sup> This notion frames this project, which is concerned with Michel Foucault’s call to address the ‘how’ of power, in terms not of its manifestation, but of the means through which it operates.<sup>17</sup> Historians have recently considered what this challenge means to their own work. Joan W. Scott describes it as “study of processes, not of origins, of multiple rather than single causes, of rhetoric or discourse rather than ideology or consciousness.”<sup>18</sup> Mitchell Dean outlines some potential sources for this investigation when he considers ‘the panoply of social security, educational, and medical practices concerned with the promotion, shaping and regulation of conduct of free individuals.’<sup>19</sup> This attention to the construction of knowledge and discourse is critical when dealing with a group like prostitutes, whose presence evokes multiple anxieties. Once prostitutes are constructed as ‘abnormal,’ the credibility of their own voices is invalidated. They become the screen upon which fears are projected. The larger the range of ‘problems’ the prostitute represents, the less credible her own opinions or perspectives.

Hunt, in his comprehensive overview of moral regulation projects in Britain and North America over the last 200 years, focuses on discourses related to sex and sexuality, acknowledging a debt to Foucault’s work unmasking the social history of sexuality and as something constructed, and not inherent.<sup>20</sup> The prostitute, existing

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<sup>15</sup> Mitchell Dean, “‘A Social Structure of Many Souls’: Moral Regulation, Government and Self-Formation” in *Studies in Moral Regulation*.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Corrigan (1981) “On Moral Regulation: Some Preliminary Remarks,” *Sociological Review*, 29:2, 331.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, (1982) “The Subject and Power,” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Dreyfus, Hubert L., and Paul Rabinow, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 217.

<sup>18</sup> Joan Wallach Scott (1988) *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York: Columbia University Press, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Dean, “A Social Structure of Many Souls,” 148.

<sup>20</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 21. Hunt is just one of many scholars whose research concerns overlap questions related to sexuality, particularly prostitution, and moral regulation. See also Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water and Strange, Toronto’s Girl Problem*. Deborah Brock considers some of these questions in *Making Work, Making Trouble: Prostitution as a Social Problem*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Her more recent compendium, *Making Normal*, includes the work of several other scholars with similar interests, including Mary Louise Adams, Gary Kinsman and Dorothy E. Chunn. For Foucault’s theories see, Michel

on the boundary between work and play, pragmatism and passion, embodies 'unnatural' sexuality. She remains threateningly outside of conventional behaviour and society. In contrast to the homebound domestic goddess, prostitutes were 'public women,' a doubled meaning which Hunt recognizes as a reference to both her presence on public thoroughfares and her accessibility to multiple men.<sup>21</sup> Somehow, the two became conflated such that a woman in public lost the right to respectability.<sup>22</sup> Angus McLaren emphasizes this by stating that "(t)he dominant morality did not of course accurately reflect actual social conduct, but it could and did restrain it."<sup>23</sup> This public/private distinction did not pertain to men in the same way, since the public realm was considered their domain. For that reason, male prostitutes were identified and treated very differently and are beyond the scope of this project. A female prostitute's presence "always already confirms associations between class, immorality and disease and the need for police and public health intervention."<sup>24</sup>

As an 'unofficial', non-governmental, volunteer organization, the Committee of Sixteen was neither strictly secular, nor strictly religious. The Committee of Sixteen is a classic example of moral regulation as it has recently been theorized. Most theories of moral regulation acknowledge the intention of the dominant group to control other groups or individuals in society.<sup>25</sup> Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo challenge the outdated notion that the state operates as 'a kind of hammer poised over the people'. Instead, they modify the social control hammer to a model of moral regulation, which they describe as 'restrictive, yet full of holes,' like a net or web.<sup>26</sup> Hunt defines moral regulation as a fluid process which almost invariably invites resistance, can function either from the top down or the bottom up, and

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Foucault [1976] (1980) *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, Robert Hurley, trans. New York: Pantheon Books. For a more recent consideration of the constructed nature of sexuality, see McLaren *Twentieth-Century Sexuality*.

<sup>21</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Lucy Bland (1992) "Female Vigilantes of Late-Victorian England," in *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality*, Carol Smart, ed. Toronto: Routledge, 43.

<sup>23</sup> McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Carol Smart, *Regulating Womanhood*, 30-31.

<sup>25</sup> John McLaren, Robert Menzies and Dorothy E. Chunn, eds (2002) *Regulating Lives: Historical Essays on the State, Society, the Individual, and the Law*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo (1997) *Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867-1939*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 4-5.

operates on both discursive and material levels.<sup>27</sup> Moral regulation implies a decentred, ongoing process which Valverde warns is “too complex to be captured by resorting to the hackneyed model of one class (or one gender) unilaterally repressing its class or gender enemy with Machiavellian tactics.”<sup>28</sup> All of these theorists start from Foucault’s principle that ‘power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, but is instead produced in a kind of causal conversation.’<sup>29</sup> McLaren discusses ways in which dominant groups imposed marginal identities on those they wished to exclude as deviant. Yet, even as the dominant group establishes its margins, it also provokes those outside of them to create sub-cultures which celebrate their marginality and reinforce their own communities.<sup>30</sup>

Although the construction of prostitution has remained fairly polarized over the last century, the reasons used to justify whether prostitution should or should not exist, represent a range of attitudes and values. While remaining mindful of the gaps in how moral regulation operates, and the potential for resistance, it would be a mistake to consider the Committee of Sixteen as a loosely allied coalition of equals attempting to exert power that they lacked the authority to wield. Even though the Committee did not necessarily incorporate law-makers or governmental control, they did represent Montreal’s English-speaking elite and wielded a disproportionate amount of influence. By combining different arguments the Committee of Sixteen reinforced its moral regulation project. Medical science was backed by religious authority and laws were developed to serve moral ends. Carol Smart discusses the “complex ways in which the discourses of law, medicine and social science interweave to bring into being the problematic feminine subject who is constantly in need of surveillance and regulation.”<sup>31</sup>

Foucault defines power as ‘a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions.’<sup>32</sup> Reformers sought to

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<sup>27</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, 94.

<sup>30</sup> McLaren *Twentieth-Century Sexuality*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Smart, *Regulating Womanhood*, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 220.

improve individuals by (identifying and) removing the underlying causes of inappropriate behaviour.<sup>33</sup> The process relied on a fairly straightforward domination of public discourse: ‘middle-class opinion makers... voiced their concerns, plans, demands, and ideology through local newspapers, pamphlets, and journal articles, and in civic and public meetings and conferences.’<sup>34</sup> Moral regulation can invoke or influence law makers, but that legislation is not the only, nor even the first, tool employed. In fact, Foucault argues that the law and the state represent ‘the terminal forms power takes’<sup>35</sup> and that to focus exclusively on them obfuscates the full range of power struggles and relationships.

This thesis considers Foucault’s challenge to focus on an instance “of discursive production”, a process which requires that other voices be silenced, manipulated or adjusted in consequence.<sup>36</sup> That people might join forces against a perceived common target, as with the Committee of Sixteen, does not necessarily erase the different perspectives and understandings they bring to the issue. For instance, feminists were extremely critical of a double standard which punished women more severely for prostitution-related charges than their (male) clients. They demanded the same penalties for both parties in the transaction—a radical move towards equality. Moralists were able to read this proposal as conservative, a call for men to be as pure and circumspect as women and to renounce all sins of the flesh.<sup>37</sup> Hence, the illusion of common ground on which to forge an alliance. Recognizing the potential differences between those who intend to regulate, and those receiving the messages, helps to deconstruct the totalitarian image of moral regulation.<sup>38</sup>

This project argues that movements, and individuals, are more complex and tend to contradict themselves as much as they move towards the goals they seek. George Chauncey, in his excellent account of gay New York at the turn of the

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<sup>33</sup> Carol Lee Bacchi (1983) *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 86.

<sup>34</sup> Freund, Michaela (2002) “The Politics of Naming: Constructing Prostitutes and Regulating Women in Vancouver 1939-45” in McLaren et. al, *Regulating Lives*, 233.

<sup>35</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, 92.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>37</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 124.

<sup>38</sup> The concept of numerous voices within government and amongst those being governed by it is explored in Pat O’Malley, Lorna Weir and Clifford Shearing (November 1997) “Governmentality, Criticism, Politics,” *Economy and Society*, 26:4, 505.

twentieth century, cautions against a reading of history that presumes that “change is always ‘progressive’” and can be traced as “a steady movement toward freedom.”<sup>39</sup> Both Hunt and Valverde argue for a response to prostitution which moves from a moralistic social purity movement towards a medicalised social hygiene approach.<sup>40</sup> Other historians trace a shift to frame women as ‘deliberate temptresses instead of innocent fallen girls’<sup>41</sup> over the same period of time, roughly from 1880-1920. However, both these narratives pit the state-judicial apparatus against poor, disorganized, defenseless prostitutes, with neither the resources nor the credibility to evade the legal, social and religious authorities ranged against them. They share assumptions that changes imposed on the sex trade are always negative, that male power is inherently more exploitative than female power, and that prostitutes are incapable of determining their own working conditions. Others have been suspicious of this unidirectional reading of history and have developed a counter-discourse in which prostitutes exhibit remarkable survival skills in the face of all odds. These accounts represent the other extreme, emphasizing ‘women’s agency in rejecting or reshaping the stigma of the trade.’<sup>42</sup> The institutions and organizations which address prostitution are equally one-dimensional, either staffed by radical feminists or pleasure-snuffing prudes.

Instead, the process is both more nuanced and complex. Remaining mindful of the multiple positions of those embarking on moral regulation projects, and the myriad meanings the targets of those projects carry, makes me suspicious of such absolute accounts of victory or defeat. Attempts to shut down prostitution rarely operate as intended. In fact, as John McLaren has noted, evidence suggests ‘that practitioners and customers merely readjusted their habits to deal with more draconian enforcement patterns.’<sup>43</sup> While the period following World War I marks a moment when the discourse against prostitution was particularly shrill across North

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<sup>39</sup> George Chauncey (1994) *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*, New York: BasicBooks, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 77, and Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, 47.

<sup>41</sup> Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*, 90. See also Myers, *Criminal Women and Bad Girls*.

<sup>42</sup> Philippa Levine (December 1993) “Women and Prostitution: Metaphor, Reality, History” *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d’histoire*, XXVIII:3, 480.

<sup>43</sup> John McLaren (1986) “Chasing the Social Evil: Moral Fervour and the Evolution of Canada’s Prostitution Laws, 1867 – 1917,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Society/Revue canadienne de droit et société*, Vol. 1, 151.

America, it would be a mistake to consider that discourse seamless. I am as interested in the spaces between intentions and outcomes as in the 'results' of these efforts. Thus I remain conscious of the 'intended, semi-intended, unintended and indeed perverse effects' of their actions.<sup>44</sup> In particular, I will consider how the members of the Committee influenced each other and were influenced by the ways prostitutes continued to operate within the terms the Committee established, but peripheral to its authority.

Just as prostitution carries loaded meanings for those who address it, it also does for historians who document political, cultural, and social events involving prostitutes. By concentrating on the discursive construction of prostitution in post World War I Montreal, I consider the ways that knowledge is socially constructed, both by those who record it, and by those who interpret those records.<sup>45</sup> Historians have used prostitutes to illustrate particular aspects of economic, social, and gender relations. The symbolic force of prostitution has been used to represent everything from exploitative labour conditions to unequal relations within marriage.<sup>46</sup>

There has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are: verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences.<sup>47</sup>

It would be almost impossible to write about prostitution nearly a century ago without considering how its symbolic weight impacts on the sources available today. Most information comes through sensational press articles, staged court room dramas, and the biased investigations of social reformers and police reports written to appease public pressure. Even first person accounts are filtered through one of these artificial perspectives. Sifting through this material requires remaining mindful of these influences. 'Hard' evidence is difficult to identify (do arrest records reflect the extent of prostitution, or the extent of police attention? Does the term 'prostitute'

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<sup>44</sup> Dean "A Social Structure of Many Souls," 153.

<sup>45</sup> Mary Poovey (1988) *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Levine, "Women and Prostitution," 480.

<sup>47</sup> Hayden White (1978) "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 82.

always refer to the exchange of sexual services for money, or to unsanctioned expressions of female sexuality?) and its interpretation exposes the presumptions of those presenting the information. However, in tracing the discursive construction of prostitution, it is these very biases and presumptions which inform this research.

Sexuality...has been continually shaped and reshaped by social and economic forces. Stories, myths and parables were needed to make sense of the myriad of changes occasioned by modernization. If a culture is to be understood it is necessary to know why at a particular time certain sexual stories or images were produced and accepted and how they were related to larger social developments.<sup>48</sup>

This became evident when researching this project. Seven dailies published in Montreal in the years during and after World War I, as well as a number of weekly papers. These papers represented different segments of the French and English populations. Initial research involved reading the *Star* cover to cover from 1917, when the idea for the Committee of Sixteen developed, through to the Committee's last press mention in 1926. The *Star* was the obvious starting point for this research since, as the largest English language paper, it was most interested in the activities of a group of leading members of the English community. The paper's publisher was also a supporter of the Committee's activities. In addition, the *Star* provided the most consistent, overall coverage of crime, entertainment and municipal politics, providing multiple entry points for prostitution to be considered. After identifying moments when prostitution made headlines, or when the activities of the Committee were covered, I returned to the other newspapers publishing in Montreal at the time to see how they covered the same events. By considering the discourse between and among these perspectives, a clearer picture of prostitution in Montreal and of the Committee of Sixteen's impact emerges.

In addition, several of the Committee's annual reports, research papers and speeches were published as pamphlets or books and those sources were consulted. However, since this thesis is interested in the discursive construction of prostitution within the public sphere, press accounts are favoured over original texts in order to better understand how the average Montrealer would have been exposed to these

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<sup>48</sup> McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality*, 5.

events. Similarly, although the transcripts of speeches or inquiries were consulted, when possible, for the most part, quotes were taken from press reports of these events. Two historians in particular, Andrée Lévesque and Tamara Myers, have addressed the Committee of Sixteen within the context of their research,<sup>49</sup> although not within the framework of moral regulation projects.

This project attempts to build on these works by addressing the specific ways that the discourse around prostitution was constructed to reflect contemporary anxieties during the short history of Committee of Sixteen. The second chapter places the emergence of the Committee of Sixteen in the context of Montreal in 1918. Its constitution as a tool of moral regulation and the competing constituencies it represented will be mapped out. The next chapter considers the first few months of the Committee's existence, the strategies it adopted and the 'problem' of prostitution it constructed in its initial reports. The fourth chapter examines a point midway in the Committee's existence when its mission becomes complicated by opposition from unexpected sources. The fifth chapter charts a desperate attempt by the Committee to recapture public support. Finally, an analysis of the 1924 Coderre Royal Commission on police corruption and prostitution highlights the different positions of members of the Committee and the larger Montreal community. This project follows the lead of a growing number of social historians and cultural critics concerned with the way discourses and narratives are used to determine 'human agency, action and experience in the material world.'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See Lévesque, "Eteindre le *Red Light*," Lévesque, *Making and Breaking the Rules*, and Myers, *Criminal Women and Bad Girls*.

<sup>50</sup> Catherine Stimpson's forward to Judith R. Walkowitz (1992) *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, x. Similar approaches are adopted by Valverde, *The Age of Light Soap and Water*, Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, Smart, *Regulating Womanhood* and Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*.



## Chapter II: The Birth of the Committee of Sixteen

It is to be borne in mind that Montreal is a city of about three-quarters of a million inhabitants, with an increasing foreign population, and more than the average of criminal element, owing to the fact, not given full consideration, that it is a great shipping port, and, for that reason, the problem of dealing with vice and crime is more difficult than is the case of cities situated inland and with more or less homogenous population.

*Controller Ross, Montreal Administration, March, 1918*<sup>1</sup>

Local papers printed this response to the Protestant Ministerial Association's newly formed Vice Committee. These explanations were appended to Controller Ross's<sup>2</sup> complaints about the city's lack of a Crown Attorney to focus on vice. In short, the conditions the Vice Committee found so deplorable would easily be remedied if Montreal's population was more orderly and its administration cared more for law.

Controller Ross was ostensibly responding to an advocacy group, but his excuses were for the benefit of a community still reeling from a report on Montreal produced by the New York Bureau of Municipal Research that had been leaked to the press in January 1918. The team of American experts had been invited (reluctantly by some municipal officials) to study Montreal's government with an eye to improving its efficiency.<sup>3</sup> Although unimpressed by the overall management of the city (which was chronically in debt and had been placed in the hands of a Board of Control),<sup>4</sup> the New York Bureau was particularly critical of political interests running the Montreal police department. The report accused the police force of relying on brothel raids to fill city coffers with fines and of far less appropriate ways of managing crime.<sup>5</sup> Montreal's flamboyant Mayor Méderic Martin dismissed most of the report as an expensive rehash of old news. But Provincial Premier Lomer Gouin announced that municipal power would be handed

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<sup>1</sup> "Needs A Crown Attorney to Deal with Vice Here," (March 2, 1918) *The Montreal Herald*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Use of first names (or even initials) in press accounts, election coverage or reports was extremely rare during the period covered by this thesis. Although every effort has been made to determine complete names for those discussed, this was not always possible.

<sup>3</sup> "La Maire va en appele au peuple," (le 11 juillet, 1917) *La Patrie*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> "Administration of Montreal City to Take on New Form," (October 26, 1921) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 21.

<sup>5</sup> "Much Can be Saved with Increased Efficiency says Research Bureau," (February 15, 1918) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

over to an Administrative Commission, of his choosing.<sup>6</sup> Mayor Martin was furious and ran again for spite, vowing to overturn the new structure, and Gouin himself, if necessary. Martin was reelected mayor in the April election and settled in to try to rebuild his power base, despite the presence of the Administrative Commission.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, on the recommendation of the New York Bureau, a Director of Public Safety took over management of Montreal's police and fire departments and the municipal Recorder's Court.

Under the new Municipal administration, Joseph Tremblay began his term as Director of Public Safety in the spring of 1918, parachuting cronies from his old job with the Fire Department into key positions on the police force. He also began a high profile series of raids in the Red Light District, arresting dozens of people each night. One evening in August he set a pile of confiscated slot machines and other gambling equipment ablaze in the Champs de Mars square.<sup>8</sup> Despite the grandstanding, Tremblay's realm was under increasing fire from a newly formed police union which resented his mass firings and personnel changes. The situation came to a head that December when the police dramatically staged a three-day strike. Tremblay and his administration were packed off and no new Public Safety Director was named.<sup>9</sup>

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In the first decades of the twentieth century, Montreal was one of the largest cities in North America and growing at an exponential rate. Besides a steady stream of new arrivals from across the ocean and from nearby rural communities, the city expanded by annexing nearby smaller towns. In 1914, the city's population was just over half a million, within six years; it had swelled to 807 000.<sup>10</sup> Montreal's economy grew with its population. In 1911, 61 000 Montrealers were factory

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<sup>6</sup> "Montreal to Have a Commission of Five: Mayor a Figurehead," (January 30, 1918) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> "Revanche de Sir Lomer," (le 15 avril, 1918) *Le Devoir*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> "\$10,000 Worth of Gaming Machines Made Merry Blaze," (August 6, 1918) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> "Men Are Told Three Are Fired and Stop Strike," (December 14, 1918) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> "Heavy Decrease in Numbers of Foreign People in Montreal," (July 24, 1920) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

workers. A decade later, that number had doubled to 119 000. By 1921, the garment trade was the leading industry in Montreal, employing one quarter of the city's workers.<sup>11</sup> Whereas young working-class women of previous generations would have gone into domestic work, new service and clerical opportunities were increasingly available. Women's labour was less likely to be domestic. Unmarried women spent 50-60 hours/week in an office, store, or on a shop floor, but when their shifts ended, they were unsupervised, with neither family nor employer to monitor their activities.<sup>12</sup> Young women were attracted by the anonymity and autonomy afforded by the city.

Many could afford to spend their time off in the growing number of movie theatres, ice cream parlours, amusement parks, cafés, cabarets and dance halls, generally in the company of men.<sup>13</sup> This unchaperoned mingling of the sexes allowed young women to meet men of different classes and different backgrounds.<sup>14</sup> Even those more liberal in their attitudes towards women couldn't help but be alarmed by these changes. Family and community, both of which were scattered if not erased by the mobility and size of the city, no longer played the same role in determining appropriate contacts for young women. A curious elision which developed in the later years of the nineteenth century points to the discomfort this freedom produced. The words social and sexual became interchangeable, although the former was generally used in mixed company. Thus, the social purity campaigns of the 1880s were concerned with keeping sexual activity confined to marriage, while the social hygiene campaigns of the 1920s were about venereal (or social) disease prevention as well as sexual education. Prostitution itself was characterized as the 'social evil.' I would argue that for many people, increasing opportunities for mixed social contact were translated directly into increasing opportunities for mixed sexual contact and the euphemism expressed a cultural anxiety. Angus McLaren has suggested that this elision was intended to draw attention to the public threat the

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<sup>11</sup> Pierre Anctil (2002) *Saint-Laurent: Montréal's Main*, Québec: Septentrion, 39-40.

<sup>12</sup> Carolyn Strange (1995) *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City 1880-1930*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 5.

<sup>13</sup> George Chauncey (1994) *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*, New York: BasicBooks, 117.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Rosen (1982) *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 159.

sexual other (prostitute, pimp, procurer, etc.) posed to all of society. The suggestion was that private activities could have far-reaching repercussions.<sup>15</sup> As heterogeneous spaces opened up, discourses about sexuality also developed publicly. Mark Thomas Connelly has argued that increasingly visible attempts to suppress prostitution simultaneously reflected an openness to sexual matters and a backlash against it.<sup>16</sup>

The attention focused on prostitution before and during World War I may have been a result of changing sexual contacts due to the changing work and leisure relations of the period. However, it was also typical of a wave of Progressive reform sweeping across North America. Alan Hunt has characterized the essence of Progressivism as one of civic idealism,<sup>17</sup> thus placing the New York Bureau of Municipal Research squarely within the spirit of the period. Progressivism was an attempt to “transform society into a well-run corporation by applying the iron rules of industrial production to the social order. ‘Efficiency,’ ‘control,’ and ‘planning’ became the key words in their program.”<sup>18</sup> The New York Bureau’s determination to replace chaos with order suggested an optimistic capacity for improvement of the current situation. The Progressive spirit was articulated as a faith in ‘scientific’ principles “predicated on the conviction that society’s and man’s behavior can be controlled and regulated; that man and his environment are both perfectible.”<sup>19</sup> This led to a professionalisation of social work and a new level of ‘expert’ who could investigate, analyse and report on issues that concerned reformers.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, the issues which ‘concerned’ reformers were those they found challenging, which leads us to Progressivism’s concurrent impulse for a traditionalist return to a ‘simpler’ time. This element was articulated as a distinctly

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<sup>15</sup> Angus McLaren (1999) *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: a History*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Mark Thomas Connelly (1980) *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 19.

<sup>17</sup> Alan Hunt (1999) *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 129.

<sup>18</sup> Carol Lee Bacchi (1983) *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 55. See also Mark Thomas Connelly *The Response to Prostitution*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Egal Feldman (Summer 1967) “Prostitution, the Alien Woman and the Progressive Imagination, 1910-1915,” *American Quarterly*, XIX:2, Pt. 1, 192.

<sup>20</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 133. Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution*, 16 and Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 36.

nativist and nationalist discourse.<sup>21</sup> In fact, John McLaren has argued that reform movements in Canada have tended to stress a ‘response to a perceived move away from cherished, traditional, values,’ over more radical impulses in similar movements in Britain.<sup>22</sup> Although he was speaking about Victorian moral reform, the principle persisted in the Canadian context. Mariana Valverde describes social purity as an attempt to regulate morality specifically ‘in order to preserve and enhance a certain type of human life.’<sup>23</sup> Hunt has commented on the combined concerns of prostitution, saloons and police corruption which roused anti-vice leagues across North America.<sup>24</sup> Andrée Lévesque describes the connection between “divers projects pour épurer l’administration municipale, éliminer la corruption et améliorer la qualité de vie.”<sup>25</sup> The New York Bureau’s report on Montreal traced an obvious connection between those problems.

John McLaren has characterized the years leading up to World War I in Canada as “a period of high nationalism in which fears about the weakening of the racial integrity and strength of various peoples reached panic levels.”<sup>26</sup> This contributed to the popularity of eugenic ideas. These theories, following a social Darwinist model, suggested that weakness, both physical and moral, and detrimental behaviour, were genetic. Encouraging the ‘right’ people to reproduce, and discouraging reproduction among people who exhibited anti-social or undesirable traits, would strengthen the nation.<sup>27</sup> Eugenic theories dovetailed with the Progressive mission to make man’s behaviour and society ‘perfectible’. They also provided a medical/scientific rationale for ideas that had previously been considered religious or moral, and perhaps less suited to ‘modern’ times.<sup>28</sup> The Reverend

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<sup>21</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 129.

<sup>22</sup> John McLaren (1986) “Chasing the Social Evil: Moral Fervour and the Evolution of Canada’s Prostitution Laws, 1867 – 1917,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Society/Revue canadienne de droit et société*, Vol. 1, 129. Constance Backhouse acknowledges a similar trend in (November 1985) “Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminating Society,” in *Histoire sociale/Social History*, XVIII:36, 392.

<sup>23</sup> Mariana Valverde (1991) *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 130.

<sup>25</sup> Andrée Lévesque (February 1989) “Eteindre le *Red Light*: les réformateurs et la prostitution à Montréal entre 1865 et 1925,” *Urban History Review/Revue d’histoire urbaine*, XVII: 3, 191.

<sup>26</sup> McLaren, “Chasing the Social Evil,” 143.

<sup>27</sup> Angus McLaren (1990) *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc.

<sup>28</sup> Alan Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 181. Although these ideas, involving manipulation of reproduction were less popular in French Catholic Quebec [Tamara Myers (1996) *Criminal Women and Bad Girls in Montreal, 1890-*

Evanston Hart, one of the founding members of the Protestant Vice Committee and President of the Prisoner's Aid Association, published a pamphlet decrying the 'five master evils' (the nastiest of which was the social evil). In it he described three girls in a hotel tea-room "enjoying their cigarettes in company with a couple of young men. To one side was a table with empty wine glasses. What kind of mothers will such girls make? What kind of a race will spring from such stock?"<sup>29</sup> Reverend Hart's reaction demonstrates the connection between disapproval at changing social relations and concerns for the future of the Canadian people and the Canadian nation.

Thus, in Montreal, in 1918, changing economic opportunities, as well as pseudo-scientific concerns about the health and welfare of future generations, naturally focused attention on young women's behaviour.<sup>30</sup> Montreal's Juvenile Court reported a 40% increase in female delinquents in 1917 over the previous year.<sup>31</sup> Young women were also notoriously 'dazzled by uniforms.'<sup>32</sup> Soldiers were returning from the front, often requiring medical and financial support, housing, and jobs that the city was straining to provide. They also were returning to sweethearts, eager to start families and return to 'normal' after their war experiences.

Perhaps because of the increased traffic in Montreal's port bringing men home from Europe, in October of 1918 the city was hit hard by the Spanish Influenza epidemic. Thousands were infected and schools, churches, dance halls, and other public places were ordered closed.<sup>33</sup> Many Montrealers experienced insecurity at the combination of shifting relationships, overburdened resources, disease, and the waves of returning soldiers. Hunt points out that the British Vice Society was formed in the eighteenth century "in a climate of patriotic fervour" when "an increased emphasis upon the idleness and criminality of the lower orders was articulated through discourses of degeneration and demoralization."<sup>34</sup> Valverde

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1930, PhD Dissertation, McGill University, 188], there was certainly an ongoing concern with preserving and maintaining the French Catholic 'race'.

<sup>29</sup> E.I. Hart (1919) *Wake Up! Montreal!: Commercialized Vice and Its Contributories*, Montreal: The Witness Press, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem* and Myers, *Criminal Women and Bad Girls*.

<sup>31</sup> "Enquete sur la moralité à Montréal," (1e 18 juin, 1918) *La Patrie*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> "To Study Social Matters in City," (June 28, 1918) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> "Stores Ordered to Close Doors by 4.30 Daily," (October 8, 1918) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 69.

quotes a reformer from an earlier era as explaining that ‘the connection between disease, dirt and degradation is closer than most people realize.’<sup>35</sup> Those ideas persisted and by the 1910s the link between ‘disease, vice and crime’ was solid in the popular imagination.<sup>36</sup> Prostitution became a shorthand for many of these concerns since it conveniently evoked

other unresolved ills and problems of the day: the unrestricted immigration, the rate of venereal disease, the anonymity of the city, the evils of liquor, the growth of a working-class urban culture, and, most important of all, the changing role of women in society.<sup>37</sup>

The possibility for reformers to link so many anxieties to the existence of prostitution ensured that the issue would provoke emotional reactions. Valverde has suggested that ‘if prostitution had not existed, the social purity movement would have had to invent it,’<sup>38</sup> because it so ideally meshed the need to regulate gender, class and sex.

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During the summer of 1918, many members of the Protestant Vice Committee were amongst the officers of a brand new organization, the Committee of Sixteen.<sup>39</sup> This organization was intended to rally a larger segment of the community than the Protestant Churches alone could reach. The Committee of Sixteen’s Chairman, Reverend Herbert Symonds, took great pains to describe the group as having “been chosen from many social agencies without distinction of race, language or religion.” The Committee’s composition was described as “(b)usiness men, and representatives of the professions of medicine, law and the church.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 46.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>37</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, xiii.

<sup>38</sup> Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 79.

<sup>39</sup> “Committee Will Fight Vice Here,” (August 3, 1918) *Montreal Daily Star*, 3. The Committee didn’t bother to mask its inspiration, taking its name directly from New York’s similar Committee of Fifteen, later Fourteen.

<sup>40</sup> Committee of Sixteen (1918) *Preliminary Report of an Unofficial Organization upon the Vice Conditions in Montreal*, Montreal, 10. As many newspapers of the time pointed out, this broad-based coalition was actually predominantly Anglophone and middle-class, with only a handful of members who were not Protestant. But their intention to appear united across religion and affiliation is clear from the language used.

Reverend Symonds had long espoused radical causes. He had spoken publicly against racism despite the popularity of eugenic beliefs and the racially-tinted nationalism of wartime. He also went on record with his proposal to take the word 'obey' out of the marriage ceremony and was an officer of the Montreal Suffrage Association.<sup>41</sup> He found himself working with another champion of women's rights, Eleanor Tatley, President of the Montreal Local Council of Women.<sup>42</sup> Both had celebrated the granting of federal suffrage a few months earlier. Another member of the Committee, Bella Hall, later became active in the Communist Party.<sup>43</sup> The Reverend Hart, who had been so scandalized at a local tea-room, also signed the initial report. He had previously spoken out against the criminality of immigrants, as had John Bradford, of the YMCA.<sup>44</sup> Representatives of charitable institutions and hospitals found themselves allied with local businessmen and a prominent Rotarian. The range of positions covered by the two dozen initial members of the Committee was vast.

Valverde describes 'the social purity movement' as including "church people, educators, doctors, and those we would now describe as community or social workers, who engaged in a sporadic but vigorous campaign to 'raise the moral tone' of Canadian society, and in particular of urban working-class communities."<sup>45</sup> Yet, she places that era just before the turn of the century, eclipsed by a more 'scientific' social hygiene movement during the time that the Committee was formed. Although, the Committee would use 'scientific' measures, the moralizing impact of its efforts remained prominent. Carol Lee Bacchi argues that suffragists, and those interested in women's equality were not always in agreement with social reform movements which relied on more traditional, conservative

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<sup>41</sup> "Dr. Symonds Says Word for Hindus Admission Here," (July 6, 1914) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 8 and "Clergy Differ Over 'Obey' in Wedding Form," (November 20, 1916) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 1. See also Catherine L. Cleverdon [1950] (1974) *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 222.

<sup>42</sup> The Montreal Local Council of Women was actually a coalition of women's groups and individuals, primarily Protestant and Anglophone. [Tamara Myers *Criminal Women and Bad Girls*, 19.]

<sup>43</sup> Andrée Lévesque (1995) *Résistance et transgression: Études en histoire des femmes au Québec* Montreal: Editions du remue-ménage, 93.

<sup>44</sup> "Reverend Dr. E. I. Hart in 'Den of Lions'," (January 28, 1918) *The Gazette*, 5 and "Citizens' Mandate to Suppress Vice," (November 4, 1918) *The Gazette*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 17.



notions of women's role as housekeepers and custodians of moral order.<sup>46</sup> And whereas the latter might have much in common with religious leaders, the former were far less likely to, making the Committee's Chairman, Reverend Symonds, an anomaly.

Hunt describes the 'umbrella effect' in which "some specific social problem serves to mobilize an array of different social forces that otherwise would not only have had no contact, but might have lined up as part of opposed social blocs."<sup>47</sup> This concept is crucial to community mobilization and is typical of how combating prostitution remains a 'unifying project'.<sup>48</sup> This process also serves, at least initially, to mask differences in tactics and targets.

The Committee announced its intention to combat commercialized vice, not vice in and of itself. The Reverend Hart explained the distinction in his self-published pamphlet, which lauded the Committee of Sixteen and even borrowed their 'organized righteousness' slogan. He explained that vice was a private habit which 'can only be successfully dealt with by moral and religious forces,' whereas commercialized vice involved 'unscrupulous persons' who 'make money out of the vicious inclinations of their fellows.' The latter could be countered by law backed by 'resolute public opinion.'<sup>49</sup> By focusing on the public aspects of prostitution, in particular the exploiters who required legislative attention, the Committee was able to identify a target equally reprehensible to radical and conservative reformers. In addition, there was no need for moral or religious intervention, which might divide potential members. By deliberately attracting the broadest base of support, the Committee presented a multi-sectorial, united front which could be "a great deal more coercive than ... [when] taken separately."<sup>50</sup> They also avoided the problem of pronouncing on prostitutes themselves. This compromise coalition contributed to a fragile unity which was vulnerable to particular challenges.

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<sup>46</sup> Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred?*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 9-10.

<sup>48</sup> Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 77.

<sup>49</sup> Hart, *Wake Up! Montreal!*, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 48.

### Chapter III: Preparing for a Determined Campaign

The Committee wasted no time and within three months their *Preliminary Report of an Unofficial Organization upon the Vice Conditions in Montreal*, established their course “towards stimulating public opinion to attack and suppress commercialized vice and towards the making of public provision for the care and reformation of the victims of its exploiters.”<sup>1</sup> Declaring that the ‘spectacle of triumphant vice is intolerable,’<sup>2</sup> the report proceeded to outline the parameters of this unacceptable situation in Montreal. The 50-page report was reprinted in the *Star* under the banner headline “Deplorable Vice Conditions Roundly Denounced By Influential Committee of Montreal Citizens Who Conducted Investigation in Recent Weeks.”<sup>3</sup> The Committee’s ‘hand-grenade’<sup>4</sup> was seized on by all the newspapers as civic, police and public reaction was sought.<sup>5</sup>

The Director of Public Safety, Joseph Tremblay, stepped up his raids in the Red Light District, arresting up to 300 people a night and inviting members of the Committee to observe his efforts.<sup>6</sup> The arrests provoked a lukewarm reaction from Committee members who considered raids and the imposition of fines as ‘the licensing of disorderly houses for revenue purposes,’ as per the pronouncement of New York Bureau’s investigation.<sup>7</sup> The fines would hardly deter the profit-gouging exploiters who ran the Red Light District. A reprint of the New York Bureau’s earlier revelations on the lax state of law enforcement in Montreal accounted for the first fifth of the Committee’s report. Mayor Martin tried to downplay the report by claiming that it was an attempt to discredit ‘a French-Canadian and Catholic city’ and expressed his disappointment in Father Gauthier, the only French Catholic

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<sup>1</sup> Committee of Sixteen (1918) *Preliminary Report of an Unofficial Organization upon the Vice Conditions in Montreal*, Montreal, 42. The report defined commercialized vice as ‘vice systematized and artificially stimulated for the profit of a third party,’ 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> (October 29, 1918) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> “Vice Revelations Given in Report,” (October 30, 1918) *The Gazette*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> The report continued to make headlines even though World War I essentially ended on November 11, days after the report was released.

<sup>6</sup> “Order to Clean Up Montreal Resorts Follows Upheaval,” (November 26, 1918) *The Herald*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report*, 14.

sitting on the Committee.<sup>8</sup> This divisive use of linguistic differences was a fairly common feature of Montreal life at the time. Mayor Martin himself had been criticized for his ‘constant use of the race cry’ during his first mayoralty race in 1914.<sup>9</sup> When one of the aldermen raised the Committee’s report again at the December 1918 council meeting, Mayor Martin suggested a modified form of segregation under municipal control ‘since neither the Catholic nor the Protestant Church could approve the policy.’ Martin agreed that the city could not touch money raised by fines but thought it could be used to build a hospital. He also condemned the Committee a second time, maintaining the position that if they were seriously concerned with stamping out vice, they should be working ‘secretly’, not seeking publicity and publishing reports.<sup>10</sup> This would prove to be one of the more frustrating challenges for the Committee over the long term. Although they could increasingly manage the discourse around prostitution, it was harder to counter arguments that the discourse did not belong in a public forum in the first place.

Despite municipal resistance, the Committee steadily increased in influence through 1919. They become a regular presence in the local courts, taking it upon themselves to advise the police and Recorders on particular cases. On at last one occasion, when the Municipal Recorder asked why a particular house had been raided, Captain Roch Sauvé replied that the Committee had told him to.<sup>11</sup> In January, the Committee added five workers to their initial staff of two. Most of the new workers were expected to help with case work. By February 1919, the Committee released a second report of 70 pages. This document announced the addition of several more members to the Committee, including three more Francophones. The report also included renewed pleas for donations, since the Committee had raised only a quarter of the \$20 000 they had solicited in their first report.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Says Vice Report Discredits City” (November 28, 1918) *The Gazette*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> “Ald. Martin Angry at French Papers,” (March 31, 1914) *The Gazette*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> “‘Devil’s Money’ to Build Hospital,” (December 3, 1918) *The Gazette*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> “Neuf maisons de desordres sont vidées,” (le 3 mars, 1919) *La Presse*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Committee of Sixteen (February 1919) *Some Facts Regarding Toleration, Regulation, Segregation and Repression of Commercialized Vice, Montreal*.

The Committee's second report was an overview of various responses to prostitution: toleration, regulation, segregation, and repression. Using the research, conclusions, and even recommendations of similar Committees operating in the US and England, this report reprinted copious quotes from other studies (sometimes these quotes were pages long). The inter-reliance and mutual reinforcement of these documents justified the 'normalizing' arguments they presented. The exercise was intended to reinforce the Committee of Sixteen's position that repression was the only possibility for Montreal. Many of the quotes were taken from Abraham Flexner's *Prostitution in Europe*. This study had been commissioned under the auspices of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s Bureau of Social Hygiene in New York City. The resulting book catalogued the ineffectiveness of regulation as practiced in Europe and became the bible of Progressive reformers everywhere who sought to prove, in an oft-quoted assessment, "that regulation does not regulate, that segregation does not segregate and that systems of medical examination are not only a farce, more or less honestly administered, but are probably worse than useless."<sup>13</sup>

The repetitive quotes and arguments of the second report were part of the Committee's appeal for the 'fearless and outspoken' support of 'all well-disposed people.'<sup>14</sup> This reliance on public opinion was central to the utopian Progressive project, operating on "the guiding conviction that once an evil was made public and exposed, 'society' would spring to eliminate it."<sup>15</sup> The first report sketched out 'intolerable' conditions in Montreal, the second brought the weight of experts from around the Western world to pronounce on the situation. The Committee buttressed these descriptions of different (failed) attempts to manage prostitution by making vague references to the local situation. For instance, the imminent introduction of police supervision of brothels in Montreal is evinced by "rumours that certain 'madams' are vying with one another to redecorate and renovate their establishments in order to bid for the favor of the police authorities."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., quoting Jerome D. Green, Director of the American Social Hygiene Association, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report*, 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Thomas Connelly (1982) *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Some Facts Regarding Toleration...*, 18.

In keeping with the polarized discourse around prostitution, the Committee argued that any policy of toleration was a failure “to conceive of prostitution as more than the immorality of two willing individuals, [... it] neglects to take into account prostitution as involving physical and moral ruin to some, and ill-gotten profit to others.”<sup>17</sup> Mark Thomas Connelly has aptly pointed out the irony of a Progressive position, so intent on the ‘imposition of order, stability, control, and predictability’ in almost every other social realm, from government to education, absolutely rejecting any hint of such an approach in connection with prostitution.<sup>18</sup> Mariana Valverde also discusses moral regulation as acknowledging regulation’s connotation of ‘preserving and shaping something and not merely suppressing it.’<sup>19</sup> Connelly argues that Progressive era controls were rejected precisely because any management of prostitution implied its endorsement. As usual, prostitution’s slippery ability to evoke any number of anxieties served to set it apart. Any position which did not directly oppose prostitution was tantamount to encouraging it and challenged the very foundation of matrimony and monogamy within North American society.

In their first report, the Committee of Sixteen set out to prove the effects of this inevitable ‘physical and moral ruin’ by presenting “a thorough scientific study of existing conditions...in an unsensational, constructive and co-operative way.”<sup>20</sup> Carol Smart discusses how this type of social investigation demonstrated Foucault’s model of the interdependence of the principle of right (traditional law and authority) and the principle of normalization.<sup>21</sup> The one was specifically intended to bolster and shape the other. The Committee was following an already established tradition of using social investigation to present social problems. The first vice report dated back to 1902 and a steady number of them had been published, circulated, and used to support each other since that time. Official investigations and reports were

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>18</sup> Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution*, 87.

<sup>19</sup> Mariana Valverde (1991) *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report*, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Carol Smart, *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality*, Toronto: Routledge, 12.

characteristic of attempts to address prostitution in the Progressive era, and the Committee produced several. How one reads the reports themselves is entirely subjective. Some consider the material to be ‘comprehensive’, others characterize them as ‘self-serving records that mirror reformers’ attitudes’.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps their most accurate characterization is that they address prostitution “*as it was constructed* by men and a growing number of professional women vested with the authority to define it.”<sup>23</sup> These reports’ pages of arrest statistics, interviews with women in jail or reformatories, descriptions of activities in Red Light Districts, and authoritative arguments for prevention and suppression, were credited with shutting down Districts in the cities they scrutinized. Carolyn Strange has remarked on their role as ‘sober statistical foils’ for the white slave narratives.<sup>24</sup>

Although white slavery was a concern in England from the 1880s, it reemerged in North America as a problem early in the twentieth century. The International Council of Women met in Toronto in 1909 to denounce the situation and urge action from their respective governments.<sup>25</sup> This lobbying led to a resurgence of white slave narratives and they continued to circulate in the press and in books and magazines over the next decade. Teresa Billington-Greig, in a 1913 article criticizing the stories’ pervasiveness, aptly captured their ability to exploit the fear that, despite education and other precautions, a woman ‘might be carried off against her will at any time.’ She expressed incredulity at the sheer number of such stories and the interchangeable elements they contained. “The tales of drugged handkerchiefs, sweets and flowers had so many variants as to create the impression that the homes of the country must be decimated of their daughters by drugging.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> George Chauncey considers the reports ‘ironically’ comprehensive in (1994) *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*, New York: BasicBooks, 140 while Ruth Rosen (1982) *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, xvi cautions against their self-serving nature, as does Connelly in *The Response to Prostitution*, 112.

<sup>23</sup> Carolyn Strange, (1995) *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City 1880-1930*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 23.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>25</sup> John McLaren (1987) “‘White Slavers’: The Reform of Canada’s Prostitution Laws and Patterns of Enforcement, 1900-1920,” *Criminal Justice History*, Vol. VIII, 75.

<sup>26</sup> Teresa Billington-Greig [April-July, 1913] (1967) “The Truth About White Slavery,” *The English Review*, XIV, New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 429-430.

Any time a girl or woman under the age of 25 lost touch with family, another white slavery abduction headline appeared.

For instance, a front page *La Presse* article began: “Nos postes de police sont assiégés depuis quelque temps par des parents qui viennent demander à nos agents de rechercher leur fillettes disparues.” It went on to describe a suspicious young man who had been keeping company with a 15-year-old girl in the months before her disappearance. Ironically, on page 5 of the same paper, a tiny blurb reported that a young woman reported missing a few days before had turned up in Ontario. She had left ‘de son plein gré’ for a job in the States. Border guards had turned the underage girl back. She had continued on to Ontario to make her fortune. The report ended, “certains journaux ont prétendu que l’enfant avait été enlevée par un jeune homme dans des circonstances romanesques, mais ce rapport n’est pas exact.”<sup>27</sup> These reports appeared as often as the abduction ones, though tucked towards the back of the newspapers. The overall impression remained that homes were ‘decimated of their daughters,’ and parents continued to panic. Billington-Greig, after mentioning her own decision to run away at 17, reminded her readers that “there are hundreds of feasible reasons why girls and women should desire to leave their homes, and dozens that will explain why, having left home, they may desire to remain undiscovered.”<sup>28</sup>

In December of 1917, Montreal again found itself preoccupied with white slavers. This time, the Reverend Dr. George Hanson alerted the media to the growing number of cases involving men and women injecting girls in department stores, movie theatres, and on public transit with hypodermic needles. The injector/procurer would then claim to be a relative of the now unconscious young woman and spirit her away, ‘never or seldom again to be heard of.’ Each of Reverend Hanson’s examples featured a husband, companion or relative who arrived in the nick of time and, inevitably, the ‘white slaver disappeared as in the other cases.’<sup>29</sup> The next day a series of officials, from the Police Chief to the owners

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<sup>27</sup> “Soldat accusé d’avoir enlevé une jeune fille,” and “La jeune fille est partie de son plein gré,” (le 4 août, 1916) *La Presse*, 1, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Billington-Greig, “The Truth about White Slavery,” 434.

<sup>29</sup> “White Slavers Have New Device,” (November 14, 1917) *The Gazette*, 6.

of Montreal's major department stores, theatre managers, and the head of the YWCA, all denied knowledge of such situations and each assured the journalist that they would certainly have heard about any remotely similar event. Reverend Hanson insisted on the accuracy of his reports and refused to provide names to protect those involved.<sup>30</sup> Billington-Greig was also unable to find a single documented case of white slave abduction upon sending questionnaires to five dozen police magistrates and rescue workers across England.<sup>31</sup>

The prevalence of these stories, and the reactions they provoked, led some young women to adapt them to their own purposes. Strange cites a series of examples in which young women tried to cover up their own pregnancies outside of wedlock or similar situations with desperate fabrications of procurers, white slavers, or other strangers.<sup>32</sup> More cynically, other young women used the accepted existence of white slavers to mask their less innocent intentions. In the summer of 1919, *La Presse* ran a breathless story revealing that a young woman had lied earlier that year when she'd reported that a Black woman had chloroformed her and deposited her in a brothel in Westmount. The story, which 'faisait dresser les cheveux sur la tête,' was discredited when the 15-year-old was later found in a different brothel, and admitted that her earlier story was invented to cover up some late-night joy-riding. The young woman in question was packed off to a convent. Of note in *La Presse*'s coverage is the way they used racial and linguistic differences to render the story more compelling. Parents could threaten wayward daughters with Black women who would dump them defencelessly in Westmount. When that story proved false, the paper identified its lying protagonist as 'anglaise de naissance.'<sup>33</sup> In a different incident, Diana Lefebvre exploited the widespread belief in white slavers by ingesting iodine to fake her own chloroforming 'to reconcile [her] 'gentleman friend' after quarrel.'<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "Ross Wants Data From Dr. Hanson," (November 15, 1917) *The Gazette*, 8. These stories persisted into 1918, despite repeated denials on the part of officials and protestations from medical authorities that they knew of no substance which could render a woman unconscious upon injection.

<sup>31</sup> Billington-Greig, *The Truth about White Slavery*.

<sup>32</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 70-71.

<sup>33</sup> "Une terrible histoire d'enlèvement imaginé par une jeune Anglaise," (le 31 juillet, 1919) *La Presse*, 9.

<sup>34</sup> "Girl Confesses Assault was a Hoax," (March 1, 1921) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.



The vice reports, in contrast, were filled with carefully compiled tables and statistics, describing how prostitution operated and the vital statistics of those involved. The parallel existence of two such disparate styles of articulating the same concerns has attracted the attention of scholars over the last four decades. Many debate the existence of the white slave trade by comparing information available in vice reports and newspapers with other contemporary sources. Both Mark Thomas Connelly (1980) and Ruth Rosen (1982) published books about prostitution in North America during the Progressive era. Connelly concludes that white slavery never existed in the organized way described by social reformers. Rosen also acknowledges that the interconnected white slavery network some depicted may not have existed, but she blames the ‘more sensationalized accounts’ for undermining ‘the credibility of an entire historical phenomenon.’<sup>35</sup> She not only insists on the widespread existence of white slavery, she states that a refusal to acknowledge it is a denial of “the historical and current reality of male violence against women and to hold women responsible for their own victimization.”<sup>36</sup> This conflict is a classic illustration of how historical data are not necessarily neutral. Rosen cites as proof of the existence of white slavery that more than 1000 people were convicted in the first five years that the Mann Act was in effect.<sup>37</sup> That Act was introduced in the United States to address the traffic in women by criminalizing any attempt to take women across state lines for immoral purposes. However, three-quarters of the convictions were against native-born Americans, not the ‘foreigners’ accused of running the traffic in women. Specifically, the law was often used ‘to prevent black men consorting with white women.’<sup>38</sup> Connelly has pointed out that those who argued for and against tolerating prostitution during the Progressive era often interpreted similar data in very different ways. He concludes that the differences “were based

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<sup>35</sup> Ruth Rosen *The Lost Sisterhood*, 114. For Connelly’s take see *The Response to Prostitution*, Chapter 6. Their disagreement is discussed in Mara L. Keire (Fall 2001) “The Vice Trust: a Reinterpretation of the White Slavery Scare in the United States, 1907-1917,” *The Journal of Social History*, 35:1, 6. Other contributions to this discussion can be found in Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, Alan Hunt (1999) *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Andrée Lévesque [1989] (1994) *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec 1919-1939*, Yvonne M. Klein, trans. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc.

<sup>36</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 114.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>38</sup> Angus McLaren (1999) *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: a History*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 20.

on fundamentally different social and moral assumptions.”<sup>39</sup> Those differences extend to historians, cultural critics, academics, and others who have considered the question of prostitution since then.

The exaggerated white slave narratives often relied on the impeccable authority of their sources (District Attorneys, Reverends, Special Commissioners and the like) and, as the Committee’s reports demonstrate, many ‘professional’ vice reporters “unconsciously brought to their work a jumble of preconceptions” which shaded their presentation and arguments.<sup>40</sup> Mara Keire has argued that the ‘superficial, stylistic differences’ between these two groups mask a common message.<sup>41</sup> Analysis of the contents of the vice reports reveals the shared strategies used by those in both camps. It is equally clear that the investigators presumed that their readership shared their class and race biases, as well as their values.

After promising an ‘unsensational’ account, the Committee’s 1918 report included several pages of the comings and goings of several ‘notorious’ addresses in the Red Light District. The ‘scientific’ aspect of this section of the report seemed to rest on the systematic reference to places as Z-1, Z-2 and Z-3, and to vehicles as Z-10, Z-11 and Z-12. As much as possible, the age, gender and (presumed) occupation of those witnessed was carefully noted. This section culminated in descriptions of the bustling business apparently enjoyed by a number of brothels during the 1918 Thanksgiving weekend. This despite the official closings of schools, shops and churches because of the Spanish Influenza epidemic. The investigation is summarized as:

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, in five adjoining houses on Cadieux Street, 10 women, 168 men, including 2 American and 4 British sailors and 10 soldiers, were seen to enter, and 7 drunken men and 1 drunken woman were observed among those leaving.<sup>42</sup>

The investigators underlined that this report could not adequately convey the conditions witnessed by Committee members, which were ‘beyond description’.

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<sup>39</sup> Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution*, 87.

<sup>40</sup> Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*, 107.

<sup>41</sup> Keire, “The Vice Trust,” 6.

<sup>42</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report*, 25.

The section ends helplessly with the assertion that “imagination halts at the threshold of these houses.”<sup>43</sup> Apparently the stalwart investigators confined themselves to the other side of the street. The surveillance is even more inept when it becomes clear that none of the investigators considered monitoring activity after 10:30 pm.

Montreal’s report, like others it patterned itself on, typified a type of bourgeois voyeurism disguised as an objective male gaze.<sup>44</sup> In this way, it echoed the white slave narratives, which also provided a peek at ‘underworld’ activities through a veil of outraged horror. Foucault says “(t)he medical examination, the psychiatric investigation, the pedagogical report, and family controls may have the over-all and apparent objective of saying no to all wayward or unproductive sexualities.” However, he observes that these tools (and the vice report could easily fit among them) also evoke the pleasure of spying and revealing previously hidden information.<sup>45</sup> These reports, commissioned, published, passed around, quoted and copied from city to city, marked the ‘beginning of what might be termed a collective act of ritual humiliation by urban America.’<sup>46</sup> The intention was to provoke change, but change could not be realized without knowledge, and knowledge could only arrive in the form of carefully presented statistics intended to elicit a specific response. This process has been described as “social science as ‘applied Christianity.’”<sup>47</sup> Valverde has argued that drawing a distinction between morality and science is a recent phenomenon, and would not have made sense in the 1910s.<sup>48</sup> This jumble is more insidious when the Committee turned its attention to the ‘victims’ its activities were intended to help.

In an important article signaling renewed interest in Progressive politics and prostitution published in 1962, Roy Lubove argues that this era marked a turning

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>44</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz (1992) *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 16.

<sup>45</sup> Michel Foucault [1976] (1980) *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, Robert Hurley, trans. New York: Pantheon Books, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution*, 92.

<sup>47</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz (1980) *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 37.

<sup>48</sup> Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 44.

point of public perceptions of prostitutes. “Instead of the wicked symbol of diseases and lust, she became a somewhat romantic object of charity, compassion and sympathetic understanding.”<sup>49</sup> Connelly echoes this assessment by marking the Progressive period as one of considering the prostitute as more than just a ‘moral abstraction.’<sup>50</sup> The Committee’s first report trumpeted the ‘vital need’ for “standardized and trained work with girls which will offer treatment for victims of vicious conditions.”<sup>51</sup> Unpacking how the Committee members presented the women who were referred to them reveals that compassion may not have been a major motivation for this attention.

The Committee’s reference to ‘standardized and trained’ work speaks to the nascent professionalism of the investigators who produced such reports. The 1910s and 1920s marked the beginning of social work. Howard T. Falk, one of the Committee’s members, had arrived in Montreal during the summer of 1918 to be the first director of McGill’s School of Social Work. Claiming the authority of a newly formed field of inquiry allowed the ‘case workers’ a lot of leeway in how they approached their subjects. Investigators relied on the young women they came in contact with to validate their beliefs about prostitution and what needed to be done to stop it. They also needed the young women to operate as informants,<sup>52</sup> sketching in the details of the ‘unimaginable’ scenes acted out behind the brothel doors. As Strange points out, there is not enough information available now to ferret out the real experience of the women interviewed. However, the reports do reflect which stories were believed, repeated, and accepted by investigators.<sup>53</sup>

The Committee’s initial 1918 report included several pages devoted to their ‘analysis’ of the 124 cases which had been referred to them in their first months of operation. Here, as in their reports of brothel activity, their own preconceptions shaded the material they presented. The first few pages of this section provide anecdotal reports of a handful of ‘cases,’ each one more distressing than the last.

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<sup>49</sup> R. Lubove (May 1962) “The Progressive and the Prostitute,” *Historian*, 24:3, 318.

<sup>50</sup> Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution*, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report*, 32.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>53</sup> Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*, 12.

One adolescent, prostituted by her own mother and then impregnated by her stepfather, lay dying from syphilis. Another, led astray by 'Fred, a famous procurer,' became overwhelmingly indebted to a brothel keeper who charged her room and board and forced her to buy expensive lingerie at inflated prices from a private distributor. In addition to these expenses, she also owed the money the keeper had paid Fred, and fines incurred in the line of duty. She was thus so 'enslaved' that she was "obliged to take anyone who came, Negroes and Chinamen as well."<sup>54</sup> These stories echo white slave narratives as desperate (and racist) tales of unfortunate young women trapped in untenable situations. Another young woman was inclined to go out late at night and her mother 'to whom the importance of infinite patience and constant supervision had not been sufficiently pointed out' locked her out, sending her straight into the clutches of a 'noted procurer'. This story added the twist of the mother's failure to reinforce decent values. For good measure, the young woman in this story also carried 'a mental taint inherited from her insane father.'<sup>55</sup>

This dual failing of moral character and biological weakness points to one of the contradictions in Progressive discourse about prostitutes. Although, as noted in the Introduction, both Mariana Valverde and Alan Hunt described a transition from blaming vice on moral to biological flaws, this example demonstrates that the two arguments were used together, if not interchangeably. Strange has noted a trend in social survey reports to place a greater responsibility for 'ruin' on the young women themselves, who are attracted by dance halls and cabarets.<sup>56</sup> And yet, doctors argued that biological or environmental weaknesses contributed greatly to her prospective downfall.<sup>57</sup> The Committee's report managed to smooth over the contradiction by asserting that 'Pimps and procurers seem to seek for their prey among the delinquent and defective girls.'<sup>58</sup> Part of the confusion in causality may be attributed to the underlying attempt to 'regulate unruly sexuality which had become perceived

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<sup>54</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report*, 28-30.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>56</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 109.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>58</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report*, 28.

of as both natural (basely instinctual) and unnatural (the result of moral deprivation).'<sup>59</sup> The message to young women, or more specifically, to their parents, was that any perceived step out of line made you a target.

The Progressive impulse to rationalize problems embraced any 'scientific' way to prove that certain women would inevitably become prostitutes or to identify potential 'wayward' girls. This attempt at prevention also served to mark certain young women as problematic, even before they had stepped out of line. As Rosen points out, after 1910, prostitutes became one of the first mass populations to be tested for hereditary and genetic defects.<sup>60</sup> By the end of World War I, compulsory venereal disease testing would be added to the list. Eugenic science already equated moral, mental and physical failings, so 'IQ and VD tests' became an increasingly important way to identify women at risk.<sup>61</sup> Again, preconceptions guided the interpretations of these measures so that 'feeble-mindedness' was the term generally used to explain "both 'inherited strains of degeneracy' – for which the prostitute could not really be blamed – and willful, immoral behavior."<sup>62</sup> Dorothy E. Chunn argues that these scientific tools simply reinscribed older moral discourses by investing them with a scientific veneer.<sup>63</sup> That veneer could come from credible sources. Carrie Derick was an active Montreal feminist, on the executive of the Montreal Local Council of Women (though herself not among the Committee's members), and one of the first female professors at McGill. She was a staunch eugenicist and estimated that 60-70% of Canada's prostitutes were feeble-minded.<sup>64</sup>

The subjectivity with which professional investigators approached a prostitute is evident in the ways they framed their surveys. Most women would have a hard time identifying the reason they turned to prostitution from among choices like: 'tired of drudgery', 'love of luxury' or 'born bad.'<sup>65</sup> These choices, far from

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<sup>59</sup> Carol Smart, ed. (1992) *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality*, Toronto: Routledge, 29.

<sup>60</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Dorothy E. Chunn (2003) "Regulating (Ab) Normal Sex: Anti-VD Strategies in British Columbia/Canada, 1918-1945" in *Making Normal, Social Regulation in Canada*, Deborah Brock, ed. Scarborough: Nelson Thompson Learning, 78.

<sup>62</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 22.

<sup>63</sup> Chunn, "Regulating (Ab)Normal Sex," 68.

<sup>64</sup> Lévesque, *Making and Breaking the Rules*, 62.

<sup>65</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 145.

indicating an increased interest in the prostitute-as-person during the Progressive era, seem designed to underscore the prostitute-as-problem. There is little evidence of compassion in Reverend Hart's description of the typical feeble-minded prostitute as a 'stupid lump of animal flesh, putty in the hands of designing and unscrupulous men.'<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, if a prostitute "appeared to be a victim of deception and of her own ignorance[, s]he was then an appropriate object for the reformer's education and redemptive efforts."<sup>67</sup> Philippa Levine convincingly argues that the very search for some sort of causation for women involved in prostitution operated as "an important pathologizing device."<sup>68</sup> Attempts to measure, explain or delineate women involved in prostitution from other women in the name of 'prevention' were, instead, a way to mark women who could be redeemed from those who could not.<sup>69</sup> In fact, the Committee acknowledged that all the cases they had worked with had been referred to their officers precisely because 'there was a degree of recoverability.'<sup>70</sup>

This search for cause, ostensibly to establish preventative efforts but often as a thinly disguised attempt to determine 'recoverability', has been articulated by Foucault as 'dividing practices.' This concept is defined as systems through which a 'subject is either divided in himself or divided from others' in ways which predetermine the need for intervention like mad/sane or sick/healthy.<sup>71</sup> Interviews, reformatories, missions and even probation officers all played a role in determining whether any given woman could be 'rescued'. Chunn and Judith Walkowitz, following Hunt's lead, have argued that this process created a specific dynamic in relation to prostitution in which 'bad' behaviours, having been identified, serve as

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<sup>66</sup> E.I. Hart (1919) *Wake Up! Montreal!: Commercialized Vice and Its Contributors*, Montreal: The Witness Press, 47.

<sup>67</sup> Lori Rotenberg (1974) "The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitute at the Turn of the Century" in *Women at Work 1880-1930*, Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard, eds., Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 43.

<sup>68</sup> Philippa Levine (December 1993) "Women and Prostitution: Metaphor, Reality, History," *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, XXVIII:3, 482.

<sup>69</sup> Carol Lee Bacchi (1983) *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 98.

<sup>70</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report*, 33.

<sup>71</sup> Michel Foucault (1982) "The Subject and Power" in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Hubert L. Dreyfus, and Paul Rabinow, eds. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 208.

signposts to allow those establishing the boundaries to regulate themselves.<sup>72</sup> I would disagree in that the categorizing implicit in the exercise of determining which women “deserved aid, merited forgiveness, required reform, or were beyond redemption”<sup>73</sup> created an objectifying superiority which actually distanced those being classified from those doing the cataloguing. The distancing effect of such categorizing is similar to that experienced by censors who determine what information ‘the public’ may view without ever considering their own apparent immunity to the material. Middle-class reformers could be appalled by what they learned of life in the district, but they could also rest assured that education, options and stronger moral fibre would protect them and their daughters.

Underlying these attempts to measure a woman’s proclivity towards prostitution, be they ‘scientific’ like IQ tests or assessed through her level of shame, or the level of economic or emotional pressure exerted by a procurer or pimp, was another commonality between vice reports and white slave narratives. It was based on the absolute inability for Progressive reformers to conceive of the decision to become a prostitute “as being anything other than irrational and involuntary.”<sup>74</sup> Hunt has noted that white slave discourses made no distinction between ‘exploitation and coercion’.<sup>75</sup> At times the confusion seemed absurd, as when one rescue worker was quoted on her inability to locate a particular missing woman, ‘everything pointed to the conclusion that the girl either voluntarily or by deception was leading an immoral life.’<sup>76</sup> This was reflected in the Committee of Sixteen’s list of problems in relation to the cases they had begun working with:

Moral neglect at home, poor living and working conditions, power recreation, delinquency, illegitimacy, immoral living with men, life of prostitution, inmate of a house of prostitution, victims of pimps or procurers, and the general complicating factors of mental deficiency and venereal disease.

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<sup>72</sup> Chunn, “Regulating (Ab)Normal Sex”, 64 and Walkowitz, *Prostitution in Victorian Society*, 40. See also Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 2.

<sup>73</sup> Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*, 55.

<sup>74</sup> John McLaren “White Slavers,” 64.

<sup>75</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 177.

<sup>76</sup> Egal Feldman (Summer 1967) “Prostitution, the Alien Woman and the Progressive Imagination, 1910-1915,” *American Quarterly*, XIX:2, Pt. 1, 201.



The report adds that three-quarters of these cases involved immorality,<sup>77</sup> begging the question of what the other 25% were actually being studied for. Commercialized vice provided a convenient and popular rallying point, but the reports' contents are more concerned with the women involved than the motives or operations of the exploiters. Ruth Rosen has commented on how these reports managed to be simultaneously blaming and victimizing.<sup>78</sup> Ultimately, it was the circumscribed parameters of the construction of prostitutes which concerned Progressive reformers. Certain women were deserving of sympathy and others were not. The definitions might have been vague but not the boundaries. Reviewing the list of 'causes' in the report, with the additional proviso that 75% involved immorality, it is unclear exactly who the 'recoverable' cases the Committee had catalogued represented. They were apparently not all prostitutes, nor all delinquent.

The Committee's focus on commercialized vice echoed another Progressive era preoccupation. Many anti-vice groups underlined the commercial target of their campaigns both to distance from more easily dismissed efforts to control sexuality, and to reinforce the lack of choice of the women involved. "To middle-class reformers, prostitution became a cultural symbol of the birth of a modern industrial culture in which the cold, impersonal values of the marketplace could invade the most private areas of people's lives."<sup>79</sup> The coercion of 'vice trusts' paralleled the already familiar international white slavery rings.<sup>80</sup> However, despite a clear recognition of the exploiters' interest in prostitution, the Committee of Sixteen, and most other vice investigators, could not consider economic pressure as a factor in women's entry into prostitution. Although the Committee devoted pages to the moral and medical trials and pressures facing the 124 cases they handled, they announced that they had not collected any data 'as to occupation, wages, living conditions, etc' since such a small group could not provide any useful information.<sup>81</sup>

Both Strange and John McLaren comment on this oversight in such reports by pointing out that economic pressures did not fit in with middle-class reformers'

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<sup>77</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report*, 33.

<sup>78</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 48.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>80</sup> Keire, "The Vice Trust," 6.

conviction of the moral dangers of the workplace and the more pressing problems of inadequate guidance as contributing to women's downfall.<sup>82</sup> Also, in presenting the victimization of young women trapped in prostitution, and vaunting their own roles as rescuers and avengers, vice reformers carefully avoided any suggestion that women were in a better position, financially or otherwise, once they found themselves in a brothel. Finally, Hunt adds that shaping the discourse this way "made it possible to refuse to address the complex of economic, social and sexual elements that led women to engage in prostitution."<sup>83</sup>

The relationship between prostitution and economic necessity has underscored differences between historians. Michaela Freund suggests that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, some socialists did blame low wages for women's decision to turn to prostitution.<sup>84</sup> In contrast, Connelly inexplicably devotes five pages of his book to dismissing the argument that economic need led women into prostitution (which he condescendingly refers to as the 'wages-and-sin theory'). He describes this perspective as both widespread and *controversial* during the Progressive era, although he only cites three studies which opposed a direct link between poor wages and prostitution, and each of those acknowledged that low salaries remained a contributing factor.<sup>85</sup>

Far more common among vice reports was the tendency to remain so focused on the moral damage caused by prostitution that any verb which referred to a prostitute as working or making money was placed in quotation marks.<sup>86</sup> The judgment implicit in the problematizing of prostitute-as-employee is not unique among Progressive reformers. Ruth Rosen employs the same tactic throughout her book on prostitution.<sup>87</sup> By drawing attention to this convention, it becomes clear that

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<sup>81</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report*, 33.

<sup>82</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 265, and John McLaren (1988) "The Canadian Magistracy and the Anti-White Slavery Campaign," *Canadian Perspectives on Law and Society: Issues in Legal History*, W. Wesley Pue and Barry Wright, eds. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 330.

<sup>83</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 104.

<sup>84</sup> Michaela Freund (2002) "The Politics of Naming: Constructing Prostitutes and Regulating Women in Vancouver, 1939-45" *Regulating Lives: Historical Essays on the State, Society, the Individual, and the Law*, John McLaren, Robert Menzies and Dorothy E. Chunn, eds. Vancouver: UBC Press, 233. See Chapter IV of this thesis for a local example of this argument.

<sup>85</sup> Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution*, 31-35, especially 33 for conflicting evidence.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>87</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*.

many of the biases which framed reformers' understanding and presentation of the situation and problem of prostitution persisted long after the Progressive era. The refusal to consider prostitution as work helped keep the fight against prostitution separate from a more radical critique of economic structures during the Progressive era, and away from any association with choice, throughout the twentieth century.

The Committee of Sixteen presented their case in the second report in 1919:

the policy of Repression which we advocate includes, in its full scope, constructive, reformatory and preventive measures, as well as those of law enforcement. Repression of commercialized vice, to have its best effects, should be accompanied by means for care of its victims as well as prosecution of their exploiters.<sup>88</sup>

They then summarized the conclusions of a number of similar studies. These recommendations included shutting down Red Light Districts, hiring female police officers to supervise dance halls, parks, and other recreational facilities, establishing hospitals and reformatories for young women 'at risk', the supervision of boarding houses, restrictions on bars, etc., etc. These suggestions required legislative and regulatory changes at local, provincial and federal levels.

A review of the Committee's first months of operation would not be complete without considering the announcement it made the next month (and less than four months after it had expanded its staff). In late March 1919, the Committee announced that it was letting go all of its case workers, preferring to focus on research and legal matters, instead.<sup>89</sup> The Committee announced it would support existing agencies' work with young women and concentrate exclusively on lobbying public opinion and decision-makers. Records no longer exist to explain whether this decision to abandon the 'reformatory and preventive' elements of their program was the result of pressure from other organizations who felt their turf threatened, or a pragmatic decision to maximize the less-than-anticipated subscriptions the Committee received from public solicitations. The decision to focus on matters of law instead of support will be explored in the following chapter.

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<sup>88</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Some Facts Regarding Toleration...*, 68-69.

<sup>89</sup> "Effective Repression Planned Now by the 'Committee of Sixteen'," (March 31, 1919) *The Montreal Herald*, 1.

## Chapter IV: Tragedy in the Underworld

By late spring of 1919, police officers, court officials, philanthropic organizations, and brothel keepers all knew about the Committee of Sixteen's campaign. The extra time Committee members had available, with case work now off their agenda, allowed them to look beyond the lives of individual women. They turned their attention to restaurants and cabbies. Any of the former with a questionable clientele, and any of the latter who ferried such people to 'notorious' addresses (for a generous tip), could expect this information to be transmitted to the appropriate authorities. The result was the refusal of their license renewals.

Mariana Valverde has argued that moral reform and moral regulation blur distinctions between economic, political and moral functions, and that the 'distinction between the state and civil society is a flexible one...articulated differently at the level of rhetoric, at the level of administrative practice, and at the level of people's experience.'<sup>1</sup> In less than a year, the Committee had enough power to interfere with small-businessmen or contractual labourers' ability to earn a living. The Committee convinced Bell Canada to cooperate with them. By June, any brothel which was raided by police had its phone seized. The line could only be restored with a certificate obtained from the Chief of Police.<sup>2</sup>

The summer of 1919 saw heavy raiding in the Red Light District. Usually, inmates (as the women who worked in houses were legally defined) were fined \$10-20, keepers' fines started at \$50 and rarely passed \$100 per charge (though they sometimes faced multiple charges for illegal alcohol sales or similar infractions). Men who were found in houses during raids received fines of \$3-\$10. Usually, they were charged that amount as bail and did not bother to appear the next morning for their hearing. Everyone understood that the bail money was collected in lieu of a fine. Brothel house clients, who rarely gave their real names or addresses, could disappear quite easily. The regular course of events would be altered if the accused was a frequent visitor to the court house, if a brothel worker was also accused of

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<sup>1</sup> Mariana Valverde (1991) *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 166.

<sup>2</sup> "More 'Houses' Minus Phones," (June 18, 1919) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 21.

theft, or if drugs or illegal alcohol sales were involved. In rare cases, a younger brothel employee who aggravated the Recorder by not leaving the district and returning home as promised at her last appearance might be fined up to \$100. Jail sentences were extremely rare.

That summer, it was not unusual for those arrested to appear before the Recorder, and then, once sentenced, to return to their seat and await a subsequent audience stemming from another charge laid perhaps a week or so later. The *Montreal Daily Star*'s publisher, Sir Hugh Graham (later Lord Atholston), was a fan of the Committee and of sensationalism. Coverage of the Committee's activities allowed him to put prostitution in the paper almost daily. One article described the 'brazen house-keepers and their depraved slaves lined up at the bar of justice.' If regular faces were absent, it was because 'the shackles of shame had been broken by death.' The piece decried the fines imposed on those charged as inmates, since any amount would be fronted by vendors or small-time hoods in league with the keepers, who would in turn take the funds out of their employees' future earnings.<sup>3</sup>

This concern was adopted from the Committee, who remained ambivalent about raids because of the disproportionate financial burden it placed on women working in brothels. Keepers were easily able to afford their fines. The Committee members were also aware that fines filled city coffers, which made the municipal administration less motivated to explore other means of shutting down the district.<sup>4</sup> News reports on major raids often included the amount of money (generally in the thousands of dollars) collected in each round of fine-paying or bail-furnishing. The Committee searched for ways to reach the owners of the properties used as disorderly houses. Owners made huge profits with impunity by charging brothel keepers several times the going rent. The city tried to use a recently changed article of the Criminal Code which forbid landlords from 'knowingly' renting to brothel keepers. Police sent letters informing landlords of the activities in their properties that were generally ignored. When pressed, owners could plead that they had been unaware of the evil use of the building in question. This situation frustrated the

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<sup>3</sup> "Crowded Court From District," (June 24, 1919) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> "Fining System of Disorderly Houses Wrong," (June 13, 1919) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

city's prosecuting attorney, Nathan Gordon, who began working closely with the Committee as of his appointment in July of 1919.<sup>5</sup> In conjunction with the Committee, he was exploring the possibility of adapting an American model, the Injunction and Abatement Law. This law provided for the prosecution of landlords whose properties were repeatedly raided as disorderly houses. By 1917, 31 states had adopted some version of the law.<sup>6</sup> The Committee was eager to pass a variation in which private citizens could lay charges. This enthusiasm for American legislation, like the Committee's decision to name themselves after a New York Committee demonstrates that the primarily Anglophone committee members were influenced by American sources. In fact, Flexner's *Prostitution in Europe* allowed some people to equate tolerance with a 'Parisian' attitude, suggesting that the different attitudes were linguistic, as much as regional. However, Committee members, careful not to alienate the majority of Montreal's population, printed all their reports in both English and French, and avoided direct finger-pointing

By the time the Committee released their first annual report in February of 1920, they had a lot to celebrate. They had just succeeded in getting the provincial government to adopt an Abatement law. The city's attorney continued to work closely with them, as did the police and the phone company. They had successfully put a number of restaurants and cabbies of dubious integrity out of business. They were no longer working directly with young women involved in prostitution, but they did support any agencies that were able to rehabilitate 'victims,' and also supported the establishment of a reformatory for women, though they did not consider that task within their mandate.<sup>7</sup> The *Star* ran a story on their first year's efforts, though the *Gazette* and *La Patrie* did not.

The Committee used this report to underscore a problem they had already identified in press releases. The city's two Recorders did not seem to be equally

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<sup>5</sup> "Blames Law re 'House' Landlords," (October 20, 1919) *Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Rosen (1982) *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Comité des Seize (février 1920) *Premier Rapport Annuel – du 5 juillet 1918 au 31 décembre 1919*, Montreal, 6. The reference to rehabilitation appears on 8. The provincial government passed the Abatement law in February, 1920. Although all annual reports covered a calendar year ending in December, they were usually produced in late February of the next year and often included information about events after the period ostensibly covered in the report.

concerned with the extent of commercialized vice in Montreal. Tables included in the report compared the two Recorders' sentencing practices over 1919. Recorder Semple was far more likely to impose jail sentences, or heavier fines, than Recorder Amédée Geoffrion. In what was clearly a deliberately planted piece, the *Star's* front page story expressed outrage at Recorder Geoffrion sentencing a keeper to pay a mere \$25 fine almost at the same moment that Recorder Semple handed out a six-month jail sentence for the same charge.<sup>8</sup> The story did not provide details of either case. Reports also emerged about keepers pleading not guilty before the tougher Recorder Semple, even though it would mean a repeat visit to the court. Pleading guilty before Recorder Geoffrion meant a quick court appearance and a minor fine. The Committee's annual report alluded to tensions between the police who wish to 'mettre la loi en vigueur' but were hampered because 'ses efforts ne sont pas secondés par la Cour.'<sup>9</sup> Whether the police were passing the buck to the courts or genuinely felt that their hands were tied is less significant than the Committee's bias in favour of the law as a panacea for the problems it saw in the district.

Many different theorists have commented on moral reformers' blind faith in legislation.<sup>10</sup> In practice, that faith was often misplaced. The Committee's first two reports had remarked on the problems of venereal disease amongst the women the Committee worked with. At the time, care and treatment were difficult to access and expensive. By the fall of 1919, the federal government had, through the auspices of a new public health bureau, established free testing and treatment clinics for syphilis and gonorrhea across the country. In Quebec, the same measures also required that any one arrested in a disorderly house be tested for venereal disease. Recorders were informed of those results prior to sentencing and would demand the maximum fine from any woman who tested positive. In their first annual report, the Committee noted the unfortunate effect of this practice. Those least able to continue working were the ones condemned to return to the brothels to pay off their heavy fines.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Recorder Semple Gives Woman 6 Months, While Geoffrion Fines \$25," (February 20, 1920) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Comité des Seize, *Premier Rapport Annuel*, 1919, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo (1997) *Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867-1939*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 99 and Valverde *Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 101.

<sup>11</sup> Comité des Seize, *Premier Rapport Annuel*, 12.

Chauncey has illustrated a similar unintended effect when New York City's Committee of Fifteen tried to end prostitution in Raines Hotels. A prohibition-based law forbade the selling of alcohol on Sunday, except in hotels. Saloon managers turned their establishments into hotels by adding beds in the back. For extra revenue, they rented the beds to couples needing accommodation away from home. The Committee of Fifteen thought they had ended prostitution with legislation which stated these beds could be used by men only. Instead, prostitution went elsewhere and the men-only rule facilitated homosexual trysts.<sup>12</sup>

Quebec's February 1920 Abatement law required that the owner of any property found to be a disorderly house would receive notice of the ruling by mail. If the building was still being used for the same purpose 10 days later, any individual could charge the owner under the law. If found guilty, the owner would have to either evict all tenants for 12 months or put up a substantial bond as a promise of good behaviour. Ruth Rosen reports that the laws had mixed results in the states and usually just served to warn the landlord that attention was being focused on them. American landlords would replace the offending tenants with similar ones and those laying charges would have to start all over again.<sup>13</sup> In Montreal, the Committee induced the police to start a flurry of raids, and had the appropriate paperwork sent out. Both *La Presse* and *La Patrie* reported on the stepped up raids in the district without any mention of the Committee or the new legislation. The Committee's secretary, Owen Dawson, laid charges personally against a handful of landlords.

In Montreal, the first charges were laid against Emma Boucher, Mayer Burdyk and Delia Bedard. All three were 'known to police.' Boucher had been dubbed the 'Queen of Babylon' in the aftermath of the New York Bureau's Montreal report in early 1918. The municipal official who had invited the Bureau used their findings to act on a long-standing grudge against police Captain Louis de Gonzague Savard. In a rather overblown investigation, the official had accused Savard of neglecting his duties because of a drinking problem which required

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<sup>12</sup> George Chauncey (1994) *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*, New York: BasicBooks, 160-161.

<sup>13</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 29.



frequent rest cures. He also suggested that Savard had carried on a torrid affair with Boucher for years. The investigation cost Savard his job. However, both Boucher and Burdyk dodged the bullet by quickly selling their properties months before the cases could come to court. Burdyk sold his house to a trust company run by a relative.<sup>14</sup> The third landlord, Bedard, decided to fight in court.

Recognizing that the Abatement law was not the cure-all they had anticipated, the Committee lobbied for changes to the Criminal Code. This time, they wanted to make it easier to jail exploitative brothel keepers, who regularly changed their names and addresses in order to escape stiff sentences. By October 1920, they had convinced the federal government to make a jail sentence mandatory for any keeper at an address where there had been two prior convictions. In this, they were aided in the policy of finger-printing and photographing those arrested in disorderly house raids, procedures introduced in the summer of 1920. Under the new law keepers could be convicted, even if they used a different name or changed houses. Almost immediately, the police began a new round of raids, in order to rack up the number needed to jail the more infamous keepers.

The Committee's ability to direct both provincial and federal legislators did have an impact on profiteers in the district. Within a few days of the Criminal Code change, Owen Dawson received a request for an appointment. Suspicious, he set up the meeting in his offices, and hid a court stenographer in a cupboard. "Vice Ring Tries to Buy Protection from New Vice Law Enforcement" was the resultant headline blaring from the *Star's* pages. The report consisted mostly of a transcript of the conversation between Dawson and Tony Frank, 'well known in police circles'. Frank apparently arrived with a list of 20 houses he wanted spared from the current sweep, and was prepared to give Dawson \$25 for each, for a total of \$500/month. In exchange, Dawson was to ensure that houses were raided 'two or three times a year, so that people will think it is alright', but would be spared the brunt of the new law. Going over the list, Dawson balked at one dubious house, protesting 'there seems to be an awful lot of stabbing going on there.' When police burst in on cue and Dawson indignantly announced that he was not for sale, Frank looked puzzled and

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<sup>14</sup> *Coderre Royal Commission* (1925) Volume I, 451.

insisted he had understood they were discussing the sale of a property.<sup>15</sup> He apparently was not charged with attempted bribery.

In December 1920, as the police completed a third round of raids on their targeted disorderly houses, the Committee faced another problem because of their naïve faith in the law. That was the assumption that any legislation would naturally “be enforced in the spirit which they intended.”<sup>16</sup> Committee members were discouraged when the Recorders agreed that the wording of the law, stating that keepers had to be convicted “more than twice,” meant effectively three prior convictions, and thus, this third conviction would result in a fine, as well.<sup>17</sup> The Committee would have to wait for another round of raids before the anticipated jail terms could be meted out. Given that this decision was made a week before Christmas, it was unlikely that would occur any time soon. However, the Committee’s test case of the provincial Abatement law scored a point when Delia Bedard lost at the Provincial Appeals Court. Her argument that prostitution-related charges should be handled in a federal court, and that the province had overstepped its bounds, was denied. Bedard announced her intention to appeal the decision at the Court of King’s Bench.<sup>18</sup>

By February 1921, the Committee had won another symbolic victory. Flore Harris, with a long and colorful list of charges filed against her as a keeper, had just lost an important appeal of her jail sentence. This victory and Dawson’s win against Bedard had put the Committee in a better mood. The week after their annual report was released, the Committee earned another headline in the *Star* announcing that their efforts in the past year had closed half of the houses in the Red Light District. In addition, 45 to 50 houses had keepers only one conviction away from automatic jail sentences.<sup>19</sup>

Their annual report included press clippings reporting on robberies in houses, to establish the link between criminality and the Red Light District. This

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<sup>15</sup> (October 29, 1920) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> John McLaren (1988) “The Canadian Magistracy and the Anti-White Slavery Campaign,” *Canadian Perspectives on Law and Society: Issues in Legal History*, W. Wesley Pue and Barry Wright, eds. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 348.

<sup>17</sup> “‘House’ Keepers Find Loophole in Code Amendment,” (December 17, 1920) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> “House Ordered to Stay Closed Under New Law,” (December 22, 1920) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> “Vice Ring Now Becoming Scared,” (February 25, 1921) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

would become an increasingly common tactic for the Committee. They often planted stories in the press, and then flashed the clippings at public hearings, during speeches or in their reports, to support their positions. This tactic, like frequent quotes from vice reports and speeches, served to reinforce ‘facts’ in the public imagination, with little evidence. The report also contained a map demonstrating that most juvenile delinquents came from homes within the district. This was a double-edged sword used by Progressive era reformers. Ruth Rosen has pointed out that the presence of visible brothels in ‘lower-class neighbourhoods’ assured the relationship between poverty and immorality.<sup>20</sup> This allowed reformers to bemoan the evil influences and temptations forced upon working-class children on their way to and from school. It also silenced the opinions of working-class women on their own limited choices by suggesting that their fall was the ‘natural’ result of their tainted environment.

The Committee quoted from the new legislation they had helped introduce and promised that ‘Il est evident que ceux qui trafiquent sur l’âme et la chair humaine et les exploitent de passions commencent à s’inquiéter.’<sup>21</sup> This was not demonstrated by the charts in the report, which lamentably illustrated that only 10% of those arrested in disorderly house raids had been sentenced to jail. As was previously discussed with reference to the Mann Act, race was one factor which contributed to a jail sentence. A tiny item in the *Star* a month after the Committee’s report was released was typical. All the brief said was that Maud Moore was sentenced by Recorder Semple to six months’ hard labour on the charge of being a keeper. The only other information published was that the house was on Aqueduct St. and Ms. Moore was ‘coloured’. In fact, when the accused protested that she had no previous convictions, Recorder Semple made it clear that that was no justification for leniency.<sup>22</sup> This despite the trouble the Committee had convincing him to jail other (white) keepers after numerous arrests.

This sentencing bias seems to bear out Rosen’s observation that white prostitutes could be excused as innocent country girls but prostitutes who were

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<sup>20</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Comité des Seize (1921) *Second Rapport Annuel du Comité des Seize 1920*, Montreal, 3.

<sup>22</sup> “Given Six Months,” (March 16, 1921) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 1.

immigrants, dark-skinned or lower class were cast as ‘sinister polluters...invading and infecting the body politic.’<sup>23</sup> While a thorough analysis is beyond the scope of this project, an informal review of news reports confirms the suggestion that “the profile of arrests for prostitution and prostitution-related offences confirms that legal moral regulation both reflected and reinforced existing social norms about gender, race, ethnicity, and class.”<sup>24</sup> The Committee’s members believed that the only thing more disturbing to their intended audience than Black women involved in prostitution was the possibility of different races working, socializing or mingling together. The Committee’s first report alluded to this in the case of Mary, whose clients included ‘Negroes and Chinamen.’ When the Committee had invited an American investigator to go underground and peek at the night life in Montreal, one paper reported his horrified observation that a ‘coloured woman’ was running a house “and had under her direction several white girls.”<sup>25</sup> Given this outrage, it is not unreasonable to conclude that those in authority used the law to “legitimize certain institutions and discourses, the patriarchal nuclear family, [and] racist immigration policies – from the point of view of morality.”<sup>26</sup> The next chapter will consider how this bias was reinforced when drug use became more prevalent.

However, more mysterious than the continued reliance on legislation echoed throughout the report was the announcement made by Chairman Symonds when the Annual Report for 1920 was presented. A new Board of Directors of 16 men had been named, “it being felt that the work of combating the vice traffic is a man’s job.”<sup>27</sup> This decision was presented in the first paragraph of the report, which ironically added that their new, all-male Board ‘représente tous les groupes de notre population.’<sup>28</sup> The women listed as members in the previous annual report remained members, but held no positions in the organization. This may be the only contemporary example of an all-male led vice committee. An anomaly since Egal Feldman recognized “in large part the assault on commercialized vice was led by

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<sup>23</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 49.

<sup>24</sup> Strange and Loo (1997) *Making Good*, 54.

<sup>25</sup> “Social Scourge Topic of Report,” (June 21, 1919) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 167.

<sup>27</sup> “Scores Owners of Local ‘Houses’,” (February 23, 1921) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Comité des Seize, *Second Rapport Annuel 1920*. 3.

women themselves, either speaking through their organizations or as isolated individuals.”<sup>29</sup> John McLaren has said that most moral reform work, especially when it addressed prostitution, tended to attract Methodist and Presbyterian churches and women’s organizations like the Young Women’s Christian Association, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the National Council of Women (of which the Montreal Local Council of Women was a chapter).<sup>30</sup> These groups formed the original backbone of the Committee, with university, medical, Jewish and Catholic representatives adding a self-consciously diverse aspect.

It is impossible to determine from existing evidence whether the men asked the women to leave or were trying to cover for a growing disinterest by the women in the Committee. One possibility rests in Carol Lee Bacchi’s argument that women in moral reform movements tended to adopt a conservative, moral custodian position as domestic guardians.<sup>31</sup> Many of the women initially involved in the Committee were quite radical, like the communist Bella Hall and other advocates of women’s equality. They may have been frustrated by the traditional assumptions about gender roles they sensed in the male members of the Committee. Or they may have felt less connected to the legal direction the Committee had adopted over direct work with young women. Both Judith Walkowitz and Valverde have commented on the major role women played in similar movements elsewhere in Canada and in England, where “women were given the possibility of acquiring a relatively powerful identity as rescuers, reformers, and even experts.”<sup>32</sup> Perhaps the provincial government’s refusal to grant women the vote was a more pressing preoccupation, and a more legitimate venue for them to develop public skills and expertise. Having no way to discover what the women involved in the Committee were thinking, we turn to the women the Committee was hoping to regulate.

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<sup>29</sup> Egal Feldman (Summer 1967) “Prostitution, the Alien Woman and the Progressive Imagination, 1910-1915,” *American Quarterly*, XIX:2, Pt. 1, 202.

<sup>30</sup> McLaren, “The Canadian Magistracy,” 329.

<sup>31</sup> Carol Lee Bacchi (1983) *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 29. See also Judith R. Walkowitz (1980) *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*, New York: Cambridge University Press and Judith R. Walkowitz (1992) *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Flore Harris, whose lost appeal buoyed the Committee's spirits when they deposited their 1920 report, proved to be one of their more difficult challenges. News reports of raids might include the names of those charged as keepers; more rarely, those arrested as street walkers or for working in a house would find their names in the paper. Men who were found in the houses were never named in print. Every once in a while, a reporter (who was invariably nameless during these years of unsigned copy) would latch on to a particular keeper and make a point of documenting her (or his) run-ins with the law. Harris had been making headlines for 15 years. Most of the time she was simply listed amongst keepers caught in a raid. But every once in a while, she outdid herself. In 1909, she sparked a simmering feud between the Reverend Arthur French, who was running a very public rescue campaign amongst prostitutes and then-Recorder Dupuis. Harris, who was going by Mrs. Lemire but was also identified as Flora Ethey,<sup>33</sup> defended herself against a keeper charge by claiming that she was living 'a reformed and upright life' and 'keeping a home to which wayward girls could be sent'. Reverend French doubted her story and Recorder Dupuis resented the interference.<sup>34</sup> The two of them got into a very public battle about jurisdiction and Harris slipped through the cracks. The string of aliases helped, but she was certainly not unique on that count. Any woman involved in prostitution generally had a number of names to chose from, not just for the benefit of police, but also to create distance from clients and avoid an accidental revelation to family in news reports. Like Harris, most keepers had French and English names which they used interchangeably. Often, only their court testimony revealed which language they preferred.

In June of 1920 Harris began a feud with Captain Roch Sauvé, whose precinct included the Red Light District. Captain Sauvé's responsibilities put him front and center in most disorderly house raids. Even though such matters were handled precinct by precinct at the time, he was often misidentified in the press as 'head of the morality squad' because of his constant association with those cases. After the raid in question, Captain Sauvé tried to add the charge of assaulting him to

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<sup>33</sup> Both of these names appear in the report cited. Over the years, other aliases emerged and she is traceable, through news clippings, to the Flore Harris discussed here.

<sup>34</sup> "Woman Refused Bail," (January 6, 1909) *The Gazette*, 3.

the charge of keeping a disorderly house. Harris responded by threatening to sue Sauvé for false arrest.<sup>35</sup> Harris must have been a handful to provoke a police Captain to claim in court that he had been assaulted by a woman. Although the Judge dismissed Sauvé's charge, Harris' threatened counter suit was particularly nervy for a keeper. Her feud with Sauvé escalated. When she was raided again two weeks later, her house was burgled while she was at the station.<sup>36</sup>

Harris was very successful keeper, a fact that the press reports seized on. A report on a subsequent charge made much of the fact that she arrived for her court appearance "in a brilliantly painted limousine, driven by a smartly uniformed chauffeur." The report also noted that she had racked up fifteen charges as a keeper in the previous two years and that she had been sentenced to only one month in prison, with fines being her typical penalty.<sup>37</sup> Harris' expenses apparently also included hefty legal fees because her lawyers were able to delay her case repeatedly before Recorder Semple finally meted out three concurrent six-month sentences on different charges. All of these press reports mocked her limousine and her attempts to evade justice. Her failure in Quebec's appeal court produced the sneering observation that she could 'now garage her limousine.'<sup>38</sup>

This was the decision that the Committee had celebrated in their 1920 annual report, but it turned out to be a brief and costly victory. Harris then appealed the decision to the federal Court of King's Bench, as Bedard was doing in the Abatement law case. Justice Greenshields ruled in March 1921, and 'with regret,' that Harris' lawyers were right in arguing that the rulings against her should have been signed by the Recorder, and not the Recorder's Court, as had been the usual practice.<sup>39</sup> The technicality not only liberated Harris, it meant any other charge against a keeper could also be challenged and the 45-50 keepers poised to face their fourth conviction, and certain jail time, would now only be facing their first, under

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<sup>35</sup> "Charged Woman Molested Police," (June 23, 1920) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> "Flore Harris has 'Taking' Visitors," (August 21, 1920) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 33. This was not the first time a keeper was robbed while in jail after a raid. In 1909, Delia Bedard's house was ransacked and set ablaze while she was being processed after a raid. "House Was Robbed and Set on Fire," (January 13, 1909) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> "Raided Fifteen Times This Year," (August 6, 1920) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> "Flore Harris to Stay in Jail," (February 16, 1921) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> "Flore Harris is Once More Free," (March 18, 1921) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 14.

the new designation. The battle between Harris and the Committee, like the ongoing conflict with Bedard, demonstrates that there was a certain truth to Progressive era reformers' concern about exploitative profiteers. In focusing their efforts on those who most profited from prostitution, they also set themselves against those who could afford better lawyers and the inconvenience of protracted court battles. Yet, instead of immediately discouraging the Committee, these hurdles reinforced the necessity of their mission.

As both Philippa Levine and Alan Hunt have acknowledged, a strong characteristic of moral regulation projects is to simply modify and reinforce legislation when it is 'unsuccessful', instead of abandoning it altogether.<sup>40</sup> Others have challenged this reading by suggesting that these projects should not be read as single instances of success or failure, but instead as more organic call-response cycles which recognize the 'multiplicity of voices' both making the rules and working around or challenging them as contributing to the process. This adapts Michel Foucault's model which understands that power emerges when actions on one side produce reactions on the other.<sup>41</sup> Certainly, the more Harris managed to evade arrest and imprisonment, the more Captain Sauvé intended to make an example of her. In reviewing Harris' brushes with the law, her early protestation that she was trying to mend her ways bears further scrutiny. On the one hand, as we shall see later in this chapter, options for women already branded as prostitutes were limited. On the other, pretending to play along with those who seemed to hold all the power was a regular ruse for several women living outside of traditional society. Sometimes, as was the case with Harris, it was a ploy to escape a harsh sentence. At other times, it was a way to access the services and respite which 'rescue' missions could offer.

Maimie Pinzer turned to prostitution as a teenager in Philadelphia after her mother abandoned her as 'incorrigible.' She found herself Montreal in 1913 at age 28 and began a string of failed attempts at 'legitimate' work, some sabotaged by the

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<sup>40</sup> Philippa Levine (December 1993) "Women and Prostitution: Metaphor, Reality, History," *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, XXVIII:3, 489 and Alan Hunt (1999) *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 121.

<sup>41</sup> Pat O'Malley, Lorna Weir and Clifford Shearing (November 1997) "Governmentality, Criticism, Politics," *Economy and Society*, 26:4.



wartime economy. Finally, she tried to set up a home for young women she found on the street in circumstances similar to those she had experienced as an adolescent. Her opinions about traditional 'rescue' work and the peer counseling approach she preferred and pioneered are clearly mapped out in her collected letters to Mrs. Fanny Quincy Howe, a Boston society women Pinzer corresponded with for a decade. For instance, when one supporter suggested she use the name "The Montreal Mission for Friendless Girls," she balked at the proposal because she had no time for "the human jellyfish that is willing to be classed as 'friendless'."<sup>42</sup> But she did adopt the name because of the financial support this benefactor provided. Although only two letters date from after the time the Committee of Sixteen was established, several, including those discussing her attempts to establish a mission, describe Montreal during World War I and are relevant to this project.

Pinzer's strength was her familiarity with the choices available to young women who had 'fallen', or who might fall at any moment. She described one 'smug little Christian' who told her of a Reverend's existing mission. She was assured that this Reverend "wouldn't house a girl a minute if she wasn't respectable." Pinzer decided she would look him up when her house was established and offer to take on those women who didn't 'qualify' for his help.<sup>43</sup> She understood their needs, but also their games. Thus, she mocked traditional measures of rescue and redemption used by moral reformers. She was all too familiar with the girl who "hasn't had a permanent change of ideas about her mode of living; it is only that she hasn't a bed or food, and is willing, for the time, to fold her hands and sing hymns."<sup>44</sup> Other women used different ploys to evade legal repercussions. Anna Charron faced the dreaded fourth keeper conviction in February 1921 and was sentenced to six months hard labour by Recorder Semple. She got a week reprieve to see to alternate arrangements for the care of her three children. Each week she returned to court and was granted one more week to put her children's affairs in order. After seven weeks of this, Harris' appeal decision would have overturned her

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<sup>42</sup> Ruth Rosen, historical editor and Sue Davidson, textual editor, (1977) *The Maimie Papers*, New York: Radcliffe College Feminist Press, 340.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

convictions and set her free. It didn't matter because Charron did not turn up at that hearing nor any subsequent one.<sup>45</sup> Many disorderly houses were often interconnected residences, with more than one door on to the street, each with a different address. Cecile Hebert's 'clever ruse' helped her dodge her fourth conviction "by closing the former entrance, [thus] she was able to alter the house's number."<sup>46</sup>

These subterfuges were inevitable since a "woman's identity as a prostitute or potential prostitute was constructed *through* resistance."<sup>47</sup> This point is important because it follows from the pseudo-scientific evaluations already discussed and the more banal stories of 'difficult' girls being 'locked out' of their parents' home and ending up in brothels or apartments with men. In other words, some young women became prostitutes because their behaviour had already distanced them from 'respectable' society and once there, there was little reason not to do what they were already assumed to be doing. Women in these situations may well have been 'wild' and preferred the relative freedom of brothel life to the limited expectations which shackled them to their parents' world. However, they may have entered the brothel believing that an earlier misstep had removed all other options available to them. In contrast to the melodramatic narratives featuring women being lured, coerced or tricked, most stories demonstrated a fairly fine line between going willingly or being pushed, not by a stranger, but by the real or imagined pressures of home. The economic, social or personal reasons varied from woman to woman, but, once there, it would be a mistake to assume, as so many moral reformers did, that these women were "powerless", or even "friendless." Walkowitz makes this point adeptly when she describes Victorian era prostitution:

Superficially, prostitution seemed to operate as an arena of male supremacy, where women were bartered and sold as commodities. In reality, women often controlled the trade and tended to live together as part of a distinct female subgroup.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> " 'Keeper' Remanded For 'Humanitarian' Ends Has Now Disappeared," (March 23, 1921) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> "Changed Numbers," (February 8, 1921) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Levine, "Prostitution as Metaphor," 488.

<sup>48</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 31.

However, even as Progressive reformers wrung their hands over the exploitative men who ‘enslaved’ so many young inmates, it becomes increasingly clear that they were also severely threatened by the ‘female subgroup’ which prostitution represented. Prostitution remained the “most stigmatized form of female existence outside of patriarchal *authority* and protection” (emphasis added).<sup>49</sup>

Evidence of this solidarity appeared in the letters’ section of the *Star* under the heading “A Tragedy of the Underworld” on March 16, 1921, the very day Harris won her appeal. The extreme rarity of such a voice being represented in the mainstream press during the period demands attention. The first paragraphs described the last year of ‘Goldie’s’ life, a girl who had entered the ‘tenderloin’ ‘reluctantly’ the year before and had just died at age 18. The letter’s author had worked alongside her and mourned her passing:

What is your Committee of Sixteen doing other than to make life still more miserable for us? Maybe if some employers had paid better wages to former employees the latter would not now be the creatures they are. I sincerely think that the graft collecting policeman is above some of the “Holier than Thous” that are pretending to solve an age-long problem by hounding poor beings who would gladly be different if they saw a possible way out of their miserable condition... .

I can write no more, dear sir, my eyes are just a little dim. God bless you if you can see fit to publish this, and forgive you if you don’t.”

“Alice Wilson” (quotation marks in original signature)<sup>50</sup>

This fascinating document represents the attitude any number of prostitutes must have had in relation to their ‘rescuers’. “Wilson” (the quotation marks suggest the name was a fabrication, though her own or the newspaper’s is not clear) captures the hypocrisy of those who would ‘save’ her by suggesting that maybe her situation as a prostitute required less attention than the pressures that led her there. As Constance Backhouse noted:

It was practically useless to attempt to reform prostitutes without simultaneously altering the various factors which drove them to prostitution – poverty, restricted employment opportunities, sexual

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<sup>49</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 46.

<sup>50</sup> “A Tragedy of the Underworld,” (March 16, 1921) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 10.

victimization of young women inside their homes and in society generally, lack of access to birth control and abortion and the all-pervasive sexual double standard.<sup>51</sup>

This observation also begs the question of what was driving moral reformers' fight against commercialized vice. John McLaren acknowledges that although the exploiters were a target of Progressive era reformers, "there was no strong sentiment that prostitutes should be immune from either moral reproach or legal penalty."<sup>52</sup> Even more appalling was the fact that legislation designed to protect women by criminalizing any procuring or enticing into brothels "was denied to common prostitutes or women 'of known immoral character'."<sup>53</sup> Mara Keire has argued that "neither anti-vice reformers nor white slavery activists particularly wanted to save the white slave. They wanted to smash the White Slave Traffic" or at least shut down Red Light Districts in the late 1800s. She goes on to argue that Progressive era reformers had a more holistic approach to the fight.<sup>54</sup> While that may have been true of some reformers involved in anti-prostitution causes in the first decades of the twentieth-century, those impulses were not universal to all of them. Rosen's assessment of this phenomenon echoes Wilson's complaint:

within this diverse coalition, the concerns most effectively legislated were those shared by the coalition's most powerful members. Measures to close red-light districts, keep close surveillance over prostitutes, and control venereal disease were in the interests of the crusade's powerful medical, judicial, business and political leaders; broader concerns about the welfare of the prostitute, the status of women, the double standard of sexual morality or industrial exploitation were not.<sup>55</sup>

Although no member of the Committee responded officially to Wilson's letter, a letter signed by the "Hon-Secy, Catholic Social Services Guild" did appear a week later.<sup>56</sup> Honorary Secretary Barry responded in order to correct the 'false impression' left by the first letter based on her 'experience gained in Social Work

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<sup>51</sup> Constance Backhouse (November 1985) "Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminating Society," in *Histoire sociale/Social History*, XVIII:36, 418.

<sup>52</sup> John McLaren "The Canadian Magistracy," 330.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>54</sup> Mara L. Keire (Fall 2001) "The Vice Trust: a Reinterpretation of the White Slavery Scare in the United States, 1907-1917," *The Journal of Social History*, 35:1, 12.

<sup>55</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 12.

<sup>56</sup> Miss L. E. F. Barry, who held that position, is listed amongst the Committee's members in the Annual Report dated a month before this letter was published.

over a number of years.’ She described the range of domestic, hospital, office or store work available to new arrivals in Montreal (the latter two positions requiring ‘sufficient education’), as well as the array of service agencies that could help. She seized on ‘Goldie’s’ ‘reluctant’ decision to enter prostitution as, ultimately, one of ‘free will’. Barry emphasized that “shirking disagreeable duties, plunging in to forbidden luxuries and excitements is a direct act of disobedience which is invariably followed by severe punishment, often by disgrace and death.”<sup>57</sup> Thus Goldie had inevitably reaped what she had sowed. This model of philanthropy, clearly of the type Pinzer had derided, was typical of the period. Pinzer described another local charity in a different letter to Mrs. Howe: “[They] make those who apply for help confess that they have no right to demand help.”<sup>58</sup> Then, a few pages later, she described Montreal’s particular situation at a time when most philanthropic organizations were Church-run. She was trying to find a place for a young woman who was suffering from gonorrhea. Unfortunately, the woman was Protestant and the Catholic groups would have none of her. The Protestant groups referred her to city institutions, but they were all Catholic and ‘we are right back where we started.’<sup>59</sup>

Barry’s judgment of Goldie’s life and death provoked a third letter in the series. A young woman, who bitterly resented Barry’s sanctimonious assessment, wrote about the stress of poverty in a city like Montreal. She then chided Barry:

Talking about institutions where girls can go and enjoy themselves, is there not always that eternal question, a nice respectable home at the end of an evening’s enjoyment? Are not your institutions full of people of independent means who speak to poor girls indoors but outside don’t happen to recollect ever meeting them before?

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<sup>57</sup> “The Case of ‘Alice Wilson’,” (March 19, 1921) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 10.

<sup>58</sup> Rosen and Davidson, *The Maimie Papers*, 354.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 360. This letter was written in 1916, before federally funded venereal disease treatments were available. However, the buck-passing between different charities remained a problem in Montreal for decades to come. Quebec charitable and social service agencies and institutions, including prisons, hospitals, schools, shelters and missions were organized along religious lines.

She finished up by reminding her readers that “it takes a strong-minded girl to resist the temptation to lead a bad life and enjoy the pleasure of nice dress and a good hearty meal.”<sup>60</sup>

Part of what is at stake here is the question of what might have driven a girl to prostitution in the first place. As was evidenced in the evacuation of economic pressures discussed in the last chapter, the circumstances under which a woman would turn to that source of income were an important factor in determining who the ‘deserving’ recipients of charity would be. Barry clearly believed not only that Goldie’s downfall had been the result of a greedy desire for ‘luxuries’, but that that in itself was proof of her poor character, since, like reformers of the late nineteenth century, Barry thought a ‘respectable’ women would ‘embrace death before compromising her character.’<sup>61</sup> In this, Barry reflected another element that drove Progressive era moral regulation, a reaction to the development of a consumer culture in the early years of the twentieth century. Urban culture shifted society from a production to a consumer base. Prostitutes personified service because their time could be purchased. Yet since they represented dissipation they came to be regarded as ultimate consumers.<sup>62</sup> Thus ‘in the face of the reality of the business with its long hours and hard work, prostitution had to be portrayed not as a form of labour but as an expression of idleness.’<sup>63</sup>

The author of the last letter argued (as had Wilson’s original letter) that poverty, poor shelter and hunger were compelling reasons for compromise. John McLaren states that the unfamiliarity most rescue workers had with the lives of those they sought to save made their assessments completely inappropriate. Women were deserving of understanding if their “story fitted the stereotype of *middle-class* virtue compromised”(emphasis added).<sup>64</sup> In this context, reformers understood a link between poverty and prostitution because girls in poor households were subject

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<sup>60</sup> “One Girl’s Views,” (March 23, 1921) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 10.

<sup>61</sup> Carolyn Strange (1995) *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City 1880-1930*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 53.

<sup>62</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 41. See also Mariana Valverde (Winter 1989) “The Love of Finery: Fashion and The Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse,” *Victorian Studies*. 32:2.

<sup>63</sup> Levine, “Women and Prostitution,” 493.

<sup>64</sup> John McLaren (1987) ““White Slavers”: The Reform of Canada’s Prostitution Laws and Patterns of Enforcement, 1900-1920,” *Criminal Justice History* Vol. VIII, 103.

to a lack of privacy, overcrowding and similar assaults on their character.<sup>65</sup> He criticizes the failure to recognize “the social immorality of consigning working class families, and females in particular, to the type of living conditions and lack of economic opportunity in which prostitution was seen as an attractive option.”<sup>66</sup>

This consideration of the tensions between philanthropic reformers and prostitutes may have been reflected in the very construction of Canada’s laws related to prostitution. “(T)he actual and specific act of commercial exchange for sexual services”<sup>67</sup> has never been illegal in Canada. The crime involved whatever lured or pushed a woman into that situation in the first place, and why she remained there. In Canada prostitution charges were status offences. Tina Loo and Carolyn Strange link this to a Canadian legislative tradition which specifically ties the crime to who you *are* (a prostitute, a child at ‘risk’, etc.) and not necessarily to illegal *behaviour*.<sup>68</sup> Constance Backhouse and McLaren have both noted that women were charged as prostitutes under the vagrancy law, passed in Lower Canada in 1839, which condemned all ‘common prostitutes or nightwalkers’ who could not give a satisfactory account of themselves. In England the charge could only stick if the accused was also behaving in a riotous or disorderly way.<sup>69</sup> Women suspected of prostitution were guilty until they could prove themselves innocent. This legislation conveniently welded behaviour (being in public without an explanation, which is a fairly passive form of behaviour, at that) with prostitution, all of which was specifically gendered as female. The vague character of the charge meant that guilt could be proven through factors like where a woman socialized and with whom, how she dressed, family background, etc.

As if it wasn’t easy enough to charge a woman under the terms of the vagrancy law, the charge itself was broad and not limited to soliciting for the purposes of prostitution. Tamara Myers has pointed out that it was also used against

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<sup>65</sup> Lori Rotenberg (1974) “The Wayward Worker: Toronto’s Prostitute at the Turn of the Century” in *Women at Work 1880-1930*, Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard, eds. Toronto: Canadian Women’s Educational Press, 46.

<sup>66</sup> John McLaren (1986) “Chasing the Social Evil: Moral Fervour and the Evolution of Canada’s Prostitution Laws, 1867 – 1917,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Society/Revue canadienne de droit et société*, Vol. 1, 137.

<sup>67</sup> Backhouse, “Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law,” 395.

<sup>68</sup> Strange and Loo, *Making Good*, 148-149.

<sup>69</sup> McLaren, “Chasing the Social Evil,” 127 and Backhouse, “Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law,” 389.

“women and girls who refused to work and contribute to a family economy, desperate unwed mothers, and women whose behaviour was considered unruly by parents and the community.”<sup>70</sup> Again, resistance could, and often did, lead to criminal charges and the label ‘prostitute’. Backhouse has noted that there is disagreement among theorists about whether prostitution was a temporary stage in women’s lives.<sup>71</sup> One of the arguments that the Committee of Sixteen and other Progressive reformers used against any system of regulation was that registering women as prostitutes consigned them to ‘infamy and degradation’, since they could never shed the label if they wanted to leave ‘the life.’<sup>72</sup> Certainly, a status charge carried the same weight. However, no Progressive era group in Canada concerned with prostitution ever considered lobbying to change the law.

Being labeled a prostitute through the law fixes women’s absolute, irredeemable stake in sexual transactions. In contrast, men carried no identity or criminal specificity as clients and were considered caught in a random, forgivable act. It is precisely by making the woman’s role in prostitution something she *is*, that men could be excused for something they *did*. Abraham Flexner, whose study of prostitution in Europe so influenced anti-regulation forces, had this to say on the identity of men found in brothels:

he discharges important social and business relations, is as father or brother responsible for the maintenance of others, has commercial or industrial duties to meet. He cannot be imprisoned without deranging society.<sup>73</sup>

The implication being that, in contrast, one less prostitute would not be missed. This distinction also unmasks the constructed nature of the discourse. Treating the men and women differently underlines that the crime is as much about the perception of who is involved and why as what is going on. Walkowitz provides

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<sup>70</sup> Tamara Myers (1996) *Criminal Women and Bad Girls in Montreal, 1890-1930*, PhD Dissertation, McGill University, 74.

<sup>71</sup> Backhouse, “Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law,” 399, note 40.

<sup>72</sup> Committee of Sixteen (February 1919) *Some Facts Regarding Toleration, Regulation, Segregation and Repression of Commercialized Vice*, Montreal, 25.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Backhouse, “Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law,” 422. If men are charged at all as clients in prostitution-related crimes, they are almost invariably given lighter fines. This distinction rests at the centre of current arguments against identifying clients through license plates, on posters or discouraging them through intimidation, as some neighbourhood vigilante groups have done in recent decades.



a clue to the roots of this double standard when she quotes the results of a British Royal Commission which concluded, among other things, that ‘with the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain; with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse.’<sup>74</sup> Thus, the inherently pathological and criminal is divided from the normal and ‘natural’.

As summer approached in 1921, the Committee of Sixteen faced a bigger challenge than they had expected. The raids needed to jail the keepers had begun, yet again. In this latest flurry of raids, none of the Committee voices who had initially questioned the financial burden raids placed on inmates could be heard. Perhaps Committee members were still dissatisfied with the raiding system, but it was apparently a necessary evil in the attempt to get to the keepers. At this point, they had instigated several rounds of raids, to activate both the Provincial and Federal legislative changes they had supported. Each raid caught one keeper, but also brought anywhere from four to 15 or 20 brothel workers in with her/him. McLaren acknowledges, “A complex of legal provisions which was designed primarily to attack the exploiters of prostitutes was used predominantly to harass and victimize the prostitutes themselves.”<sup>75</sup>

This was not exclusively a problem with the Committee’s approach, but they were less and less inclined to express concern about this unfortunate outcome. In May 1921, the Committee’s forward-thinking Chairman, Reverend Symonds, succumbed to pneumonia after a routine operation. The English papers devoted columns to his good works and marveled that “he did not hesitate to doff his clerical collar and garb to go round ‘the district’ with a social worker to observe for himself.”<sup>76</sup> His leadership of the Committee would be sorely missed.

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<sup>74</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution in Victorian Society*, 71.

<sup>75</sup> McLaren “Chasing the Social Evil,” 151.

<sup>76</sup> “Reverend Dr. Herbert Symonds Dead,” (May 25, 1921) *Herald*, 1.

## Chapter V: The Basis of a Public Scandal

Over the eighteen months after Reverend Symonds died, the Committee struggled in its efforts to combat commercialized vice. Their annual report for 1921 characterised their mission as an ‘Herculean task.’ It also reported that the round of raids to have keepers convicted four times by the Recorder, instead of in the Recorder’s Court, had ended in December 1921, when Recorder Semple ruled that the accused should have been offered the option of a hearing before the Court of King’s Bench.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the third attempt to use the law the Committee had helped put in the Criminal Code in 1919 had failed. In October 1922, *The Montreal Herald* ran a four part series on page one which began, “Has the Committee of Sixteen Failed for Lack of Support?” The articles castigated public apathy while reprinting some of the juicier ‘case studies’ and statistics from the Committee’s initial reports.<sup>2</sup> That same month, accused brothel landlord Delia Bedard’s case, instigated by Committee secretary Owen Dawson under the provincial Abatement law, was on the docket in the Supreme Court of Canada. Bedard had continued to challenge the injunction, claiming that the provincial law infringed on federal jurisdiction.

In early January of 1923, Dr. Alfred K. Haywood, chief doctor of the Montreal General Hospital and a founding member of the Committee, gave a sensational speech at the Canadian Club. Dr. Haywood began by saying that the Committee was frustrated with public inaction and with municipal officials who ignored the question of vice and considered any attempt to publicize Montreal’s problems as attacks on the good name of the city (a thinly veiled dig at Mayor Martin’s reaction to their initial reports). He announced that the Committee felt that it was time to speak plainly about commercialized vice and the growing drug problems in the city, and that he hoped his speech would ‘form the basis of a public scandal.’<sup>3</sup> It did.

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<sup>1</sup> “Committee of 16 Opposed by Many in Anti-Vice Fight,” (May 12, 1922) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 25.

<sup>2</sup> “Has the Committee... ” (October 19, 1922) *The Montreal Herald*, 1. The editions for October 20, 21 and 23, 1922, all carried similar articles in the series.

<sup>3</sup> “City is Accused of Tolerating, if not Abetting Vice,” (January 8, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

The speech was printed in the *Star* and captured headlines in both the French and English press for months. Dr. Haywood essentially delivered an oral version of the Committee's early reports. His position as a doctor, and his framing of the facts, placed the speech within that uneasy margin between scientific/medical fact and moralistic/melodramatic narrative. He updated the Committee's earlier reports by addressing recreational drug use. He began by describing the effects of various drugs, embellished with statistics on drug overdoses and drug arrest records from Montreal over the previous year. He said most of the incidents were the result of 'revolting dope parties' in which a dozen or so young adults would inject each other with cocaine or morphine and inevitably descend into 'degeneracy and immorality that is most unbelievable.' Conveniently, his speech appeared in the *Star* right next to another article titled "Girl Dies from Drug Poisoning After Dope Party." The same page also featured "Doctor is Held on Drug Charge," "Held on \$1,000 Bail on Narcotic Charge," and "Morality Squad's Net Drew in Varied Catch in Year's Operations." Such stories had been multiplying over the last year, with two similar 'dope party' deaths making headlines in the summer of 1922. In addition, drug arrests and charges had been summarized daily in the *Star* by October 1922.

Dr. Haywood's 'public scandal' dovetailed with a national preoccupation with drug use. In 1920, *Maclean's Magazine* ran a high profile series of four articles on the extent and dangers of the drug traffic in Canada written by Justice Emily Murphy. Justice Murphy was a noted suffragist, and author of a popular series of books in which she personified a 'Canadian Everywoman' called Janey Canuck.<sup>4</sup> She became the first woman to serve as a judge in Canada, presiding over Edmonton's juvenile court in 1916. A second pair of Justice Murphy's articles was published in *Maclean's Magazine* in 1922 to coincide with the publication of her book on the subject, *The Black Candle*. This was the first book on drug use published in Canada and was considered the authoritative tome on the subject.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Haywood quoted statistics from the book in his speech.

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<sup>4</sup> Catherine Carstairs (Fall 1998) "Innocent Addicts, Dope Fiends and Nefarious Traffickers: Illegal Drug Use in 1920s English Canada" *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes*, 33:3, 148.

<sup>5</sup> Introduction to Emily Murphy [1922] (1973) *The Black Candle*, Toronto: Thomas Allen.

Justice Murphy's book provided a reference point for a growing malaise. By the early 1900s, concern over the negative effects of drugs led to stricter controls for their prescription. Both Catherine Carstairs and Mara Keire suggest that these controls were a response to morphine's shift from an upper class medicine to working class recreation.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Carstairs points to a growing perception that soldiers returning from World War I were over-familiar with opiates, because of their introduction to them either in the trenches, or in hospital recovery wards.<sup>7</sup> She adds that public attention shifted to drug use as prohibition gained ground throughout North America. Brewers warned that limiting access to alcohol would increase drug use, and temperance workers were as eager to limit drugs as alcohol. These two groups, usually at loggerheads, were united in condemning the drug trade.<sup>8</sup> Of course, this situation echoes the type of uneasy alliance which formed in the fight against prostitution at the same time. As with prostitution, drugs could rally people across a broad spectrum of political and social positions, since they evoked multiple anxieties: "journalists and reformers linked drug use to every social evil including prostitution, venereal disease, miscegenation, eugenic decline, poor mothering and deficient manhood."<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Haywood painted a vivid picture of drug use in Montreal and its toll on the municipal health system, and then set about linking the problem to commercialized vice. His first argument was to trace the 'usual route' of young girls from 'the most respectable house to the disorderly house.' The short trip entailed "stealing, Chinese cafés, cabarets, Negro and Chinese opium joints and last but the surest of all, the disorderly house."<sup>10</sup> This journey hinted at contemporary concerns about miscegenation and the threat to white nationhood which were already a feature of anti-prostitution campaigns. Dr. Haywood echoed this fear in another anecdote which concerned a young addict who came to his hospital suffering from a drug overdose. He quickly deduced that she had been engaged in prostitution and

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<sup>6</sup> Carstairs, "Innocent Addicts," and Mara L. Keire (Summer 1998) "Dope Fiends and Degenerates: The Gendering of Addiction in the Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century," *The Journal of Social History*, 31:4.

<sup>7</sup> Carstairs, "Innocent Addicts," 146-147.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>10</sup> "City is Accused of Tolerating, if not Abetting Vice," 3.

added, “she admitted to me that color and race were not discriminated against in her clientele.”<sup>11</sup>

The stories of young people destroyed by drug use which featured in Dr. Haywood’s speech were variations on the classic white slave narrative, which was certainly familiar by the early 1920s. Men or women would be introduced to drugs under seemingly innocent circumstances and shortly find themselves ruined. As with prostitution, the situation depended on some kind of deception, weakness or physical threat, since the idea that those who were properly raised could ever willingly find themselves in such circumstances was inconceivable for social leaders of the period. The use of the word ‘slave’, either in the context of white slavery or of being ‘enslaved by the poppy’,<sup>12</sup> underscored this notion of being forced against one’s will or better judgment.

Dr. Haywood drove the connection home by using the Committee’s standard ploy of citing a number of newspaper articles which linked drug arrests or drug overdoses to disorderly house addresses. He also highlighted the commercial excess of the drug trade by describing the profits to be made in trafficking and how, as with prostitution, fines were no deterrent for the exploiters who were growing rich on the ruin of Canada’s potentially best and brightest. Once the links to prostitution were established, he spoke at length about the legal challenges the Committee had faced. He accused the municipal administration of lacking the commitment to end prostitution. He ended his litany of legal hurdles by suggesting that the Records could shut down the Red Light District in a month if they sincerely wanted to do so.

Reaction to Dr. Haywood’s speech was immediate. Almost every newspaper in the city ran an editorial. All of them applauded Dr. Haywood’s courage and urged support for the Committee of Sixteen. Some, like *La Patrie*, challenged the police to hold an immediate inquiry to prove his allegations wrong.<sup>13</sup> Mayor Martin was still in office. Although the position still lacked its previous authority, he was now backed by his own Executive Committee, instead of the province’s handpicked

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Constance Backhouse (1999) “‘Mesaillances’ and the ‘Menace to White Women’s Virtue’: Yee Clun’s Opposition to the White Women’s Labour Law, Saskatchewan, 1924,” *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada 1900-1950*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 142.

<sup>13</sup> “Le Docteur Haywood Accuse,” (le 9 janvier, 1923) *La Patrie*, 4.

Administrative Commission. When newspapers sought his reaction to Dr. Haywood's speech, he hid behind his clipped wings and said, 'I only preside over Council and receive visitors. I have no power and authority.' Alderman Brodeur, an ally of the Mayor, was the Chair of the City's Executive Committee. He tried to deflect the negative publicity by requesting more specific charges from Dr. Haywood and by suggesting that the Recorders' application of the law was hardly a municipal matter.<sup>14</sup> A series of reports suggested an important meeting was rumoured to occur between the Committee of Sixteen and Chairman Brodeur, but the latter insisted that no information be given to journalists.

Others gave speeches or interviews reinforcing Dr. Haywood's information. Lilly Barry, who had been promoted from Honorary Secretary to Director of the Catholic Social Service Guild since she had responded to 'Alice Wilson's' letter, added a few of her own shocking stories to underscore Dr. Haywood's message.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, newspapers ran reports on motions of support coming from a number of religious, social and philanthropic groups in the city, including the Rotarians, Kiwanis, Montreal Methodist Ministerial Association, Catholic Women's League, Outremont and North End Women's Club, Social Service Committee of the American Women's Club, Salvation Army, IODE, Montreal Women's Club, and Cavalry Men's Own Brotherhood. Dr. Arthur Currie, president of McGill University, thought it crucial that City Council should investigate the charges and include the Committee in the process. After an initial insulted reaction, even the policemen's union asked for a Royal Commission, recognizing that that was the only way to dispel the cloud which Dr. Haywood's speech had left over the entire force.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, every Protestant clergyman in the city decided to give a sermon on vice in Montreal. The *Star* ran a synopsis of each sermon under subheadings like "Verge of Ruin," "Prays for City," and "Civic Suicide."<sup>17</sup>

Women's groups were particularly concerned with Dr. Haywood's revelations. When Committee of Sixteen President Dr. Lorne Gilday spoke at one

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<sup>14</sup> "Investigation into Vice Charges Urged by Detective Chief," (January 9, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> "Innocent Girls Lured into Dens by Dope Peddlers," (January 13, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> "Police Ask Probe," (January 13, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> "Vice Conditions are Discussed by Montreal's Clergy," (January 15, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 11.

such meeting, he admitted that the Committee had carefully orchestrated Dr. Haywood's speech since working quietly for four years had yielded no results. He also expressed disappointment with a municipal administration which denied that vice was a serious problem in the city.<sup>18</sup>

Montreal's civic administration continued to stall on the issue. An initial city council debate of an hour and a half yielded a non-decision to read Dr. Haywood's speech more closely.<sup>19</sup> All parties remained ignorant of any follow-up meetings while public pressure mounted.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the issue exploded during the February 1923 city council meeting. Despite the shroud of secrecy over the initial meeting between Chairman Brodeur and the Committee of Sixteen, someone talked. Alderman Creelman accused Chairman Brodeur of having "met the Committee of Sixteen in probably the rudest and most insulting way any body of citizens were ever met by a city administrative body." Creelman went on to suggest that Chairman Brodeur's dismissive behaviour had been motivated by linguistic bias and that if not for the intervention of the Committee's Father Gauthier, the Committee might still be waiting for a civil word from Brodeur. He added that almost weekly letters from the Committee to Chairman Brodeur's office to follow-up this first meeting had gone unanswered.<sup>21</sup> Chairman Brodeur denied the accusations, yet made no move to renew communication with the Committee.

February 1923 also marked the publication of the Committee's fourth Annual Report, which expressed frustration with Chairman Brodeur's lack of attention to the issues presented in Dr. Haywood's speech, and his reluctance to follow-up on their initial discussions. The Committee accused Mayor Martin's Executive Committee of authorizing fewer raids in the Red Light District than the previous Administrative Commission. The report included much of the legal information which Dr. Haywood had presented in January. Opening remarks written by Committee Vice-President Father Gauthier carried a different tone than those written by Symonds during his tenure. Phrases like "everywhere the evil [is]

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<sup>18</sup> "Difficulties of Combating Vice," (January 18, 1923) *The Gazette*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> "Council Sidesteps Any Decision on Local Vice Probe," (January 16, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> "City is Still Making Time on Vice Situation," (February 9, 1923) *The Montreal Herald*, 1.

<sup>21</sup> "Vice Probe Delay Starts Hot Fight Between Aldermen," (February 13, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 7.

spreading and openly displaying itself... [bringing] ruin and death to its many victims,"<sup>22</sup> were particularly lurid. Commercialized vice and drugs were the focus of this report and there was no mention of rehabilitation or resources for prostitutes. In addition, the Committee's directors represented different populations; gone were Falk from McGill and other education representatives. Some medical officials, like Dr. Chipman from the Maternity Hospital, were also missing from the list. Instead, more names from the Rotarians, the Kiwanis and the business community were added, as was former municipal prosecutor, Nathan Gordon.<sup>23</sup> Although not a member, *Star* publisher Lord Atholston was the most generous donor the Committee had, contributing nearly an eighth of that year's annual budget.

With regular headlines in the *Star*, and in every other municipal paper which ran local news coverage, the Committee continued to push their advantage, and agenda. Over the last few days of February and into March 1923, they ran daily appeals for financial support prominently in both the *Star* and *La Patrie*. Each appeal highlighted a particular problem related to the presence of the only remaining Red Light District in North America.<sup>24</sup> The Committee was described as "not made up of 'reformers.' It is composed of members of the clergy, lawyers, doctors and business men, who are actuated by a desire to make Montreal a more healthy city to live in."<sup>25</sup> This was clearly intended to distance Committee members from moralizing puritans by emphasizing the professional, 'scientific' goals of their cause. Each appeal summarized "the fight to the finish between the forces of law, order and decency, and the underworld."<sup>26</sup> The need for money was underlined by the difficulties faced by 'decency' in confronting a district vaguely 'backed by powerful interests and plenty of money.'<sup>27</sup> Within the week, *La Patrie* ran an interview with the Committee's treasurer, who was pleased with the donations which had been pouring in. The Committee also planted an anonymous letter in the *Star*. The letter quoted liberally from documents produced by the Committee and

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<sup>22</sup> Committee of Sixteen (1923) Fourth Annual Report, 1922, Montreal, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon had ceased acting as the city's prosecuting attorney in the summer of 1921.

<sup>24</sup> "Vice in Montreal," (January 9, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 10.

<sup>25</sup> "An Appeal From Committee of 16," (February 28, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> "An Appeal From Committee of 16," (March 1, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> "An Appeal From Committee of 16," (March 2, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.



included some rumours about the easy life enjoyed by certain keepers which probably couldn't have made it into the Committee's more official reports.<sup>28</sup>

The Committee was riding high, earning regular headlines and a groundswell of support. Even *The Axe*, a notorious muckraking weekly, began to support their efforts, although grudgingly.<sup>29</sup> Their initial response to Dr. Haywood's revelations had been a sneering indictment of public apathy under the sarcastic headline "Prostitution Drugs-Disease-Disaster" in letters over an inch high.<sup>30</sup> This attitude persisted, with a follow-up 'insider's' story of prostitution. This article underscored that "exposures of what goes on in the Red Light Districts, has been stamped with the brand of respectability, since Lord Atholstan's (sic) family journal started printing editorials on the subject."<sup>31</sup> By spring 1923, the paper switched gears, calling the \$4 000 annual budget reported in the Committee's 1922 annual report 'a joke'. The article's subhead taunted the public for their lukewarm support which, it accused, "unwittingly exposes lack of desire of prominent Montrealers to rid Metropolis of commercialized vice."<sup>32</sup> *The Axe's* coverage reflected a more Victorian concern for working class female victims of complacent 'prominent' exploiters. It also acknowledged the Committee's role in having successfully pushed prostitution into public discourse.

Although Chairman Brodeur continued to stall on direct negotiations with the Committee, the city reintroduced a morality squad, in March 1923, under Police Inspector Edward Egan.<sup>33</sup> Headlines immediately praised the new regime and continued to call for a thorough investigation of prior police practices. A week later, Committee member Nathan Gordon gave a speech to the Montreal Women's Club

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<sup>28</sup> "Vice in Montreal," (March 2, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> *The Axe's* publisher, John H. Roberts was actually serving time in a provincial jail in January 1923, when Dr. Haywood gave his sensational speech. Roberts had been arrested by a furious Provincial Premier Taschereau when he had printed a rumour suggesting that a young woman's murder remained unsolved because political interests had been involved in her death. The story monopolized headlines through November/December of 1922. An overview of the situation can be found in "J. H. Roberts Held Pending Further Orders of the House," (November 3, 1922) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 4 and 6. By April, 1923 Roberts was released. Although he contributed columns to the paper from jail, it is unclear how many of *The Axe's* multiple articles dealing with the Committee of Sixteen and vice in Montreal published between January and April were written, or approved by him. The more positive support offered in May 1923 suggests that those articles were written by the recently released Roberts.

<sup>30</sup> (January 12, 1923) *The Axe*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> "Girl-Traps A Red Light Victim's Story," (January 19, 1923) *The Axe*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> "The Committee of 16 Joke," (May 4, 1923) *The Axe*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> "Special Squad to Wage War on Vice Throughout City," (March 13, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

which echoed Dr. Haywood's January lecture and was introduced as "Act the Second of the Committee of Sixteen's determined drive against the existence of the drug traffic and commercialized vice... ." <sup>34</sup> That week, the Committee translated Dr. Haywood's speech into French for mass distribution. The publicity led to renewed calls for investigations. The *Star* editorialized that a morality squad would achieve nothing if Recorders continued to hand out \$100 fines to keepers since that was 'less in amount than these women pay for a single gown.' It concluded with the challenge: "there is a disparity in justice when the man with a deck of cocaine gets six months and the keeper of a brothel is let off with a nominal fine." <sup>35</sup>

Amidst this wave of support the Committee continued to issue press releases, until one published in *La Patrie* on March 26, 1923 seriously stalled their efforts. The communiqué put the responsibility for stopping the drug and vice traffic in the district directly on the shoulders of the Recorders, and asked if they avoided handing out jail sentences because they were afraid of the keepers. This charge provoked Recorder Geoffrion to suspend the business of the Recorder's Court for an hour on the morning of April 3 in order to deliver a diatribe directed at the Committee because of their 'impudence which passes all limits.' <sup>36</sup> The Recorder's rebuttal reflected his ongoing frustration since the early days of the Committee's unfavourable comparisons between his sentencing record and that of his colleague, Recorder Semple. Geoffrion's speech was sarcastic, verbose and barely respectful. He explained that he personally favoured the maintenance of tolerated and overseen brothels "to prevent the solicitation of honest women, adultery, the seduction of young girls, sodomy, pederasty, etc."

His first major argument was against those who "preach respect of the law and scorn for the men who administer it." Essentially, he took those members of the Committee who had never studied law to task for their criticisms of his rulings, and those of higher courts. Of course, this did not stop him from challenging medical

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<sup>34</sup> "Systemized Vice Flayed by Lawyer," (March 20, 1923) *The Gazette*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> "The Vice Campaign," (March 21, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 10.

<sup>36</sup> "Maintains Houses Inevitable Evil; Flays Committee," (April 3, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3. All further quotes from this speech can be found in this article, a verbatim reprint of the Recorder's speech. Geoffrion was so proud of his presentation, he also published it as (1924) *The Annual Report of the Recorder's Court of Montreal for 1923*, Montreal: A. P. Pigeon Ltd. It only included a handful of court statistics in addition to this text.

information on venereal disease which Dr. Haywood had used to underline the health risks prostitution posed. Geoffrion was dismissive of what he called Old Maid Law. He raged against 'commercialized virtue and religion prepared with a parliamentary sauce.' This concern was one shared by a number of legislators at the time and Constance Backhouse describes the growing resistance to making "criminal law a tool of social reform."<sup>37</sup> Many of the theorists whose work informs this project, including Alan Hunt, Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, have commented on the legislative aspects of moral regulation projects, and it is worthwhile noting that this relationship was not necessarily a comfortable one.<sup>38</sup> Geoffrion's indignation at what he clearly perceived to be the Committee overstepping its authority underscores the tensions of such projects.

Geoffrion was also critical of the Committee for its reliance on American methods and models, the Injunction and Abatement Act being a classic example of an imported solution. Thus, while regulation could be dismissed as 'Parisian,' reform efforts were criticized as 'American.' He characterized the way prostitution was addressed in Montreal as a distinctly local approach (toleration with carefully bounded limits), which combined the best of European regulation and American Puritanism. John McLaren, when writing about prostitution in Canada, has said that to consider Canadian reformers victims of 'moral or social purist imperialism' from the US or England might be overstating the case, but the influences, occasionally at the expense of more appropriate local strategies, are apparent.<sup>39</sup>

Recorder Geoffrion's last critique of the Committee was the potential damage their public campaign had done to Montreal. This concern was somewhat ironic, given that the text of his courtroom speech was delivered to the press and subsequently published and distributed as his court's Annual Report. He blamed the Committee for the fact that 'Montreal was venerated all over as the Sodom of North America.' Closer to home, he suggested that their graphic and constant descriptions

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<sup>37</sup> Constance Backhouse (November 1985) "Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminating Society," in *Histoire sociale/Social History*, XVIII:36, 409.

<sup>38</sup> See for example Alan Hunt (1999) *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 12, and Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo (1997) *Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867-1939*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

<sup>39</sup> John McLaren (1987) " 'White Slavers': The Reform of Canada's Prostitution Laws and Patterns of Enforcement, 1900-1920," *Criminal Justice History* Vol. VIII, 109.

of life in the Red Light District might 'awaken unhealthy curiosity' and attract bored young men and broke young women. The publicity issue was clearly one which the Committee wrestled with, as their defensive justifications for their actions, both in their speeches and reports, suggests.

The Recorder's speech had the effect of braking the Committee's wave of popularity. It is unlikely that anyone was particularly impressed with Geoffrion's opinions, which must have appeared retrograde to many at the time.<sup>40</sup> However, the Committee, and other groups were unsure how to challenge such a powerful official. Most responses were summed up by the next day's headline, "Will not Discuss Court Statement."<sup>41</sup> For the first time since January, coverage of prostitution and vice scaled back and City Chairman Brodeur was not the only official unavailable for comment. However, discussions were taking place behind the scenes.

Some three weeks later, Geoffrion was quoted promoting a Criminal Code amendment which he announced had the approval of the Committee of Sixteen.<sup>42</sup> His modification would allow for indeterminate sentences for any woman arrested on a prostitution-related charge who tested positive for venereal disease. The law would essentially allow the Recorder to give a heavy sentence in such cases, with the proviso that if a prisoner followed treatment and was pronounced cured, she could cut her jail term short. He felt that such a measure would 'give me the power to withdraw from circulation those tainted ones who taint the rest of society.' He added that the system had proven effective in the US and Germany, despite his previous suspicion of 'imported' solutions.

This potential for an alliance between the Recorder and the Committee bears further scrutiny, both in terms of how umbrella coalitions build solidarity, and for what it suggests about the discourse around prostitution. Indeterminate sentences for prostitutes were considered a Progressive measure in the 1910s and 1920s. According to Tamara Myers, the shift from punishment to incarceration to the

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<sup>40</sup> Mara L. Keire acknowledges that even vice reformers agreed on the need for segregated districts in the 1890s, as a way to discourage political corruption and keep vice less visible. That concession had certainly fallen out of favour by the time the Committee was active. See (Fall 2001) "The Vice Trust: a Reinterpretation of the White Slavery Scare in the United States, 1907-1917," *The Journal of Social History*, 35:1, 13.

<sup>41</sup> (April 4, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> "Asks Amendment of Criminal Code," (April 26, 1923) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

possibility of rehabilitation for those who could respond to appropriate models and messages spanned the nineteenth-century.<sup>43</sup> Women who had ‘fallen’, especially those who were still impressionable, might respond to an encouraging environment, but would certainly end up worse than before if locked up with recidivists. The ‘reformatory’ movement was predicated on a change in behaviour and attitude and often was dependent on indeterminate sentencing to be effective.<sup>44</sup> The end result was more frequent, and longer, sentences for women than for men who had been found in similar situations.<sup>45</sup>

Although a reformatory for adolescent girls had been established in Montreal in 1911 (not long after the Juvenile Court was established)<sup>46</sup> the Montreal Local Council of Women had unsuccessfully lobbied, for well over a decade, for a similar institution for adult women found guilty of morals charges. The Committee of Sixteen’s second report had supported the need for indeterminate sentencing in morals cases, where appropriate.<sup>47</sup> In January 1923, in response to Dr. Haywood’s speech, the Reverend Hart had underlined the need for ‘indeterminate sentencing of the inmates ...where they may be cared for physically, mentally, morally and spiritually.’<sup>48</sup> At that time, Dr. Grace Ritchie England, a prominent member of Montreal’s leading women’s groups, spoke about the problems with jail sentences for women arrested in brothels. She suggested a classification system would prevent mixing innocent young girls with ‘hardened offenders.’<sup>49</sup>

The Montreal Local Council of Women never realised their model in Quebec because the women’s prison had been in the charge of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd for decades. Although the Local Council did get Protestant women segregated from the Catholic ones, their numbers remained so comparatively low

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<sup>43</sup> Tamara Myers (1996) *Criminal Women and Bad Girls in Montreal, 1890-1930*, PhD Dissertation, McGill University, 196-197.

<sup>44</sup> Carolyn Strange (1988) “From Modern Babylon to a City Upon a Hill: The Toronto Social Survey Commission of 1915 and the Search for Sexual Order in the City,” in *Patterns of the Past: Interpreting Ontario’s History*, Roger Hall, William Westfall and Laurel Sefton MacDowell, eds. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 268.

<sup>45</sup> Myers, *Criminal Women and Bad Girls*, 224.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>47</sup> Committee of Sixteen (February, 1919) *Some Facts Regarding Toleration, Regulation, Segregation and Repression of Commercialized Vice*, Montreal, 69.

<sup>48</sup> “Pulpit Opinions on Vice Problem,” (January 15, 1923) *The Gazette*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> “Difficulties of Combating Vice,” (January 18, 1923) *The Gazette*, 3.

that a separate institution seemed unnecessary.<sup>50</sup> McLaren has suggested that the nuns were able to get indeterminate sentences of up to five years for their charges.<sup>51</sup> But those policies were not applied to the Protestant women held in a different wing of the prison.

Dr. Ritchie England's renewed calls for such an institution in January 1923 reveal a more complicated motivation than helping young women who had 'strayed' get back on track. She also stated that she "emphatically opposed scattering them to the four winds. Is that fair to the rest of the world? Is it right that these diseased, feeble-minded and immoral women would be thrown out to find a refuge wherever they can?"<sup>52</sup> Many theorists, including Strange, Myers and Mariana Valverde, have addressed the fact that the line between protection and coercion, between 'for your own good' and 'if you know what's good for you,' is elastic.<sup>53</sup> Hunt has described this boundary within sisterhood as class-based, because ultimately middle-class reformers held authority over working-class delinquents. He also characterizes the relationship as 'paternalistic maternal feminism.'<sup>54</sup> In this case, class trumps gender in terms of autonomy and freedom. The question is no longer whether prostitutes should be left alone, but who should have charge of them, and under what circumstances. Thus Geoffrion's more 'laissez-faire' attitude meets reformers' rescue efforts. The underlying assumption that prostitutes require intervention spans the bridge between conservative and radical impulses, merging the one with the other.

A particularly striking example of this blurred boundary comes with the idea of 'breaking in' new girls. Reformers described the instrumental 'breaking in'

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<sup>50</sup> Myers, *Criminal Women*, 235.

<sup>51</sup> John McLaren (1986) "Chasing the Social Evil: Moral Fervour and the Evolution of Canada's Prostitution Laws, 1867 – 1917," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society/Revue canadienne de droit et société*, Vol. 1, 133. See also Backhouse, "Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law, 416-417. Both McLaren and Backhouse discuss indeterminate sentencing of French Catholic women. However, in the context of survey articles on legislation and prostitution. Myers' dissertation, *Criminal Women and Bad Girls*, devotes a whole chapter to women and the Quebec penal/ reformatory system without mentioning this situation. It is possible the legislation regarding French Catholic women was no longer on the books or was not practiced at the time that the women's reformatory movement gained popularity amongst Montreal's Protestant women.

<sup>52</sup> "Difficulties of Combating Vice," (January 18, 1923) *The Gazette*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> Mariana Valverde (1991) *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 128. See also Myers, *Criminal Women and Bad Girls*, 9, and Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*.

<sup>54</sup> Hunt, *Governing Morals*, 148.

process which facilitated a young woman's helpless enslavement in a brothel. According to Rosen, the young woman would be drugged and raped by a client. Instructions on her duties and how to avoid arrest would be provided and, especially in the case of a resistant woman, her clothes and money were taken away, and she was left with transparent gowns, slippers or other clothing unsuitable for the street. Rosen says the woman would be denied unsupervised time away from the house until she 'felt too disgraced, too intimidated, or too demoralized to escape.'<sup>55</sup> Essentially, the woman's will and identity would be crushed. Paula Bartley describes the attempt to 'obliterate all signs of the inmate's physical past in getting rid of their personal belongings.'<sup>56</sup> Myers adds that isolation from others in the house meant that 'the recent arrival surely experienced this as the creation of a dynamic in which she was to a large measure powerless and vulnerable.'<sup>57</sup> However, Bartley and Myers are describing what Myers calls the 'breaking in' process for women *entering a reformatory*. Descriptions of the process were the same but, in this case, it was reformers who sought to cut off the woman's ties with her former life and begin her 'retraining'. It becomes clear that the issue is *who* has control over these women's lives, not whether or not anyone should.

Myers is certain that the reluctance to establish a Montreal Reformatory for Protestant women was financial.<sup>58</sup> However, one of the major objections to the women's project was the indefinite period of incarceration required. Reformers whose intention was to rescue, retrain and cure 'corrigible' cases, needed time to accomplish their purpose. This was at direct odds with a legal model which identifies a transgression, and an appropriate penalty in relation to it. Reformers understood prostitution to be a status offence, the crime could not be erased until the identity was changed (and the stain, or disease, eradicated). Although Geoffrion supported the notion of indeterminate sentences when medical justifications were invoked, he had remained resistant to incarcerating women whose only crime was involvement in prostitution.

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<sup>55</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 129-130. This use of the term 'breaking-in' also appears in Keire, "The Vice Trust," 11.

<sup>56</sup> Paula Bartley (2000) *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914*, New York: Routledge, 38.

<sup>57</sup> Myers, *Criminal Women and Bad Girls*, 282.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

However, even the medical rationale was not considered an adequate justification to withhold personal liberty by other reformers in Montreal at the time. In the spring of 1923, *The Axe* ran an outraged response to the Montreal Local Council of Women's renewed attempts to convince the Provincial Minister of Justice, Sir Lomer Gouin,<sup>59</sup> of the need for a reformatory offering indeterminate sentences for prostitutes. What so outraged the paper was "the proposal seriously advanced by these doubtlessly earnest-minded women that, where or when a woman prostitute cannot be reformed or cured, her imprisonment in one of these suggested reformatories should be for life!"<sup>60</sup> After chastising the members of the Council for their lack of solidarity with their 'sisters' and for ignoring the question of male responsibility in the equation, the author sarcastically suggested:

Why did they not recommend the Minister of Justice to have every fallen woman asphyxiated, placed in a lethal chamber, and pleasantly put to death? It would be infinitely more merciful, more sanitary and which would be a great recommendation to many of the deputation, much cheaper.<sup>61</sup>

It was becoming clearer for the Committee of Sixteen that maintaining control over the discourse around prostitution was key.

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<sup>59</sup> This was the same Lomer Gouin who had served as Provincial Premier and reduced Mayor Martin's powers.

<sup>60</sup> "Too Bad to Live," (May 11, 1923) *The Axe*, 3.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



## Chapter VI: Absolutely Without Result

The Committee of Sixteen was unable to sustain the momentum they had built up before Recorder Geoffrion's rebuke. Those who had pledged support for the Committee took a wait-and-see attitude with Inspector Egan's new morality squad. His raids received regular coverage over the summer of 1923, much like the first year or so of the Committee's existence. By September, Egan was named Chief of Detectives and the coverage of raids diminished. There were no more reports about keepers facing certain jail time through raids, suggesting that the Committee had abandoned that campaign. A tiny article reported that the Committee's new Secretary, Olivier Carignan, had applied to close a house owned by Goldie Frank (no relation to Tony) under the Abatement law.<sup>1</sup> What the report didn't mention was that the tenacious Delia Bedard had died before her opportunities for appeal had been exhausted,<sup>2</sup> and the Committee was once again back at square one.

Concerns about a potentially corrupt police force were renewed almost a year to the day that Geoffrion had delivered his speech. In April of 1924, the city was rocked by a daring bank car robbery, executed at a lonely east end tunnel in broad daylight. One thief and the bank driver lost their lives in the ambush, which netted more than \$140 000. Over the next weeks, police pieced together information on who had been involved. By the end of June 1924, six men, directly implicated in the crime, were sentenced to hang. Among them was Tony Frank, who had attempted to bribe the Committee, and Louis Morel, an ex-police detective. A number of allusions to police receiving protection money and kickbacks from thieves and brothel owners were made throughout the trial and brought calls for a thorough investigation of police practice.<sup>3</sup> Mayor Martin lost his fifth bid for another two-year term just days after the bank robbery and his successor, Charles Duquette, had less of an investment in protecting his administration. However,

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<sup>1</sup> "Invoke Courts to Close House," (January 7, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> "Laws Against Keepers Said to be Too Lenient," (December 12, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 16.

<sup>3</sup> "L'honorable juge Wilson refuse d'adresser des félicitations à la police de Montréal," (le 25 juin, 1924) *La Patrie*, 10.

Chairman Brodeur and the entire Executive Committee which had served under Martin had been re-elected. They were not eager to face public scrutiny.

Finally, in October 1924, Justice Louis Coderre began what would become the biggest investigation of police practice and, ultimately, of prostitution, which Montreal had seen. In all, Coderre heard 287 witnesses, accepted 201 documents as evidence and the final transcript covered 9000 pages.<sup>4</sup> Testimony came from police officers, judges, doctors, politicians, clergy, and brothel staff. Coderre even privately questioned the men waiting on death row for their participation in the bank robbery. Many of those invited to speak were members of the Committee. In fact, the Coderre Commission, which attracted hundreds of spectators daily, was considered 'le couronnement des efforts du Comité des Seize'<sup>5</sup> by historian Andrée Lévesque. The enquiry provides a fascinating microcosm of discussion on prostitution at the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century. By comparing the testimony and perspectives heard, it becomes clear that men of medicine were heavily influenced by morality, reformers relied on science to prove their points, and police officers were aware of the social pressures on those arrested. Those ostensibly on the same side of the debate might hold widely divergent opinions on what constituted the 'problem' of prostitution, and how best to address it.

The Coderre Commission is also noteworthy because of the level of press attention it received. It was not unusual for newspapers to print dozens of column inches a day of court testimony during sensational trials. These reports would pay cursory attention to the number of people present or the atmosphere in the courtroom, but focused on close accounts of the discussion, including arguments between lawyers or humorous asides delivered by those on the stand. The Coderre Commission combined a serious inquiry with a spicy subject at a moment when attitudes about sexuality were changing. It was also a rare opportunity for those who worked in brothels to testify in a courtroom to issues beyond their own guilt.

*La Patrie* included a small sidebar in its October 29 edition boasting about the number of pages devoted to the Commission in every issue, and claiming to be

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<sup>4</sup> "Dismissal of Chief Belanger Asked For By Probe Lawyer," (January 19, 1925) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Andrée Lévesque (February 1989) "Eteindre le Red Light: les réformateurs et la prostitution à Montréal entre 1865 et 1925," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine*, XVII:3, 196.

‘le seul journal à publier des comptes-rendus complets des procédures.’<sup>6</sup> Comparing coverage between papers, and with the Coderre Commission transcripts, proves this is not entirely the case. Some editing occurred. *The Gazette* ran an editorial early in the proceedings suggesting that some witnesses were providing more information than anyone needed to know.<sup>7</sup> Of course, they still ran the offending testimony. In other cases, the witness would ask that the court room be closed, or that journalists refrain from publishing certain explicit or medical details. Even though journalists respected these reservations, most Montrealers heard more about prostitution during the winter of 1924 than ever before.

On the very first day of the Royal Commission, Owen Dawson, now Honorary Secretary for the Committee, took the stand to describe the state of prostitution in Montreal. Dawson had worked in Montreal’s Juvenile Court almost from its inception, as well as at the Shawbridge home for delinquent boys. Basing his information on the research conducted by the Committee, and on his own fact-finding excursions in the Red Light District, Dawson painted a disturbing picture.

Dawson’s ‘sordid’ description claimed that some 300 brothels existed crammed amongst working-class homes, schools and churches in a few square blocks just east of the downtown core. Then he launched into what Mara Keire has termed the ‘subjugation story.’ This was an attempt to explain why prostitutes “apparently free from physical restraint and notoriously resistant to ‘rescue’ – were innocent victims without agency.”<sup>8</sup> He recounted how, based on conversations with keepers, he discovered that ‘girls’ were purchased for \$2-300 and put to work. They earned a fee per 10 minutes spent with a client, the amount of money depending on how fancy the house was. A bell rang up the time, and an elaborate punch card system, monitored by the keeper, kept track of the earnings of each girl. Dawson shocked the court by stating that more than 50 punches could be made in a single card over a shift lasting from 4 pm Saturday to 2 am the next Sunday morning.<sup>9</sup> The punches referred to blocks of time spent with a client, although he suggested that

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<sup>6</sup> “Rapports Complets,” (le 29 octobre, 1924) *La Patrie*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> “The Police Enquiry,” (October 15, 1924) *The Gazette*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Mara L. Keire (Fall 2001) “The Vice Trust: a Reinterpretation of the White Slavery Scare in the United States, 1907-1917,” *The Journal of Social History*, 35:1, 11.

<sup>9</sup> *Coderre Royal Commission* (1925) Volume I, 448.

they represented the number of encounters over a given evening. He then underlined that these earnings were in no way free and clear. The young woman could keep half, with the other half going to the house. In addition, she had to pay board out of her share (maybe \$10/week). On top of that, salesmen would provide clothes, soaps and perfumes at inflated prices which she would have to purchase and have charged against her. These same men would furnish bail or fines after raids, with that money also owed from future earnings. In addition to the keeper and the vendor, cabbies, 'lieutenants' who directed clients from nearby bars and pool halls, pimps, and owners all shared an interest in each girls' earnings. Thus, the woman worked in perpetual debt and rarely had anything to show for her labour.<sup>10</sup>

Keire has suggested that this was a key argument of anti-prostitution work at the turn of the century. In a period when financial trusts and monopolies were viewed with suspicion as an artificial detriment to free market trading, framing prostitution as big business with inflated profits ensured public hostility.<sup>11</sup> Even more effectively when the trusts were described as racially or religiously 'foreign'.<sup>12</sup> These situations also reinforced the difficulty women had in defying such organized exploiters. As powerful as this image is, in practice it makes less sense. Several historians have described the financial operations of brothels. Lévesque explains that at the top of the heap was the landlord, who charged 4 to 10 times the going rent if he or she was aware that a brothel was operating on the premises. Next was a madam, who lived elsewhere and was rarely linked to the house, appearing only long enough to collect her take. Below her was the keeper, who managed daily operations, handled hiring and firing, and kept track of each woman's earnings. The keeper would also pay off the vendors, cabbies, restaurant staff or others who sent business to the house. In addition, she was usually the one who took the fall for raids, and who saw to it that the women's fines and other court expenses were covered. In addition, pimps might live with the madams, collecting a share of their

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<sup>10</sup> "Tells Court Well Known Keepers of Houses Let Alone," (October 9, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Keire, "The Vice Trust."

<sup>12</sup> As, for example, Dr. Haywood had done in his speech the year before. See also Egal Feldman (Summer 1967) "Prostitution, the Alien Woman and the Progressive Imagination, 1910-1915," *American Quarterly*, XIX:2, Pt. 1, 194-196.

earnings. The keeper would be paid out of the madam's half of the prostitutes' income.<sup>13</sup>

Ruth Rosen adds that pimps and procurers also had a share in brothel staff's earnings. Procurers or cadets sold women to brothels for a flat fee. Pimps would split a share of 'their girl's' earnings with the madam.<sup>14</sup> She goes on to say that "with so many powerful interest groups reaping financial rewards from the practice of prostitution — politicians, real estate agents, landlords and owners of saloons and breweries [who got kickbacks from liquor sales] — reformers faced serious economic resistance in their attempts to close down the red-light districts."<sup>15</sup> Certainly this is what reformers like Dawson presented as the hard facts of life in the district. And none of these explanations even addressed payoffs to police officers, one of the concerns which had instigated the Coderre Commission in the first place.

All of this begs the question of how there were any profits to be made at all. With a finite number of women working for a finite number of clients in a finite number of houses, it is unclear that all of these interests could be paid off in a manner which would make continued involvement appealing. Even assuming that a young woman saw very little of her earnings, why would a keeper continue to take such huge legal risks only to turn most of the cash over to an invisible madam? And why would this madam in turn give money to a pimp, who traditionally provided protection, when she wasn't even the one incurring risk? Similarly, why would the keeper continue to pay off a prostitute's outside pimp if the woman was working in her house? Logistics aside, the image of the exploitative and untouchable monopoly living off the bodies of young women remained compelling enough to be shared by both moralistic social purity campaigners and rational anti-vice reformers.

Of course, other factors contributed to a young woman's downfall. Surprisingly, several of these were raised by the former Director of Public Safety, Joseph Tremblay, who had served briefly and instigated a flurry of raids just as the

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<sup>13</sup> Andr  e L  vesque [1989] (1994) *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec 1919-1939*, Yvonne M. Klein, trans. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 121-122.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Rosen (1982) *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 76.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

Committee of Sixteen began their work in late 1918. Tremblay testified that he had questioned many young women on their presence in brothels during his short tenure. Most of them described social constraints, not physical ones, as effectively keeping them outside of respectable society. Several echoed the discouragement of the young letter-writer, quoted in Chapter IV, who described the difficulty of returning nightly to a poor boarding house with no amenities. Ex-Director Tremblay confirmed this:

A woman who works from early in the morning until a late hour in the evening, and comes home to a little, restricted, uninviting place that is all the home she has, and does not find it attractive to spend her evening there, has no other place to go but the street, the movies and the dance halls, many of which are the hunting grounds of procurers.<sup>16</sup>

Tremblay added that once desperation drew women to the district, there was no turning back. Many had told him that their attempts to find decent work lasted only as long as their pasts remained hidden. When their previous employment was revealed, they were usually thrown out.<sup>17</sup>

For the women who worked in brothels, there were reasons to stay beyond the fact that they would have little opportunity to make a new life for themselves outside of the district. Rosen has argued that although women probably saw far less of the \$35 they might make weekly in a brothel vs. the \$6 as a salesgirl, the clothes they wore, the food they ate, the company they kept and the medical attention they had access to were far better than they could have enjoyed on their own. In addition, they had not necessarily commanded more respect when they had worked as salesgirls or laundresses.<sup>18</sup> Many retraining programs for former prostitutes attempted to remake them as domestic servants. Sending them out into service replenished dwindling ranks of women willing to do the work and ensured they could be closely monitored.<sup>19</sup> The irony of this was that servants were isolated

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<sup>16</sup> "Low Wages and Lack of Proper Amusement Blamed," (December 11, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 157.

<sup>19</sup> Carolyn Strange (1988) "From Modern Babylon to a City Upon a Hill: The Toronto Social Survey Commission of 1915 and the search for Sexual Order in the City," in *Patterns of the Past: Interpreting Ontario's History*, Roger Hall, William Westfall and Laurel Sefton MacDowell, eds. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 268.

within the home they served and often at the mercy of the sexual advances of their employers. The connection between the seduction of domestics and their inevitable 'fall' into a house in the district was a classic tale.<sup>20</sup> It seems unlikely that many women would want to leave the sociability and community a brothel could provide to return to the loneliness and dependence of domestic service. Lori Rotenberg has argued that for a young woman working as a prostitute, her income, like that of a doctor or lawyer, depended on her ability to choose clients and negotiate fees within the marketplace. Rotenberg suggests that prostitutes may have willingly traded some of their autonomy in exchange for the social and legal protection a brothel offered.<sup>21</sup>

Reformers' insistence on a narrow construction of prostitution which complemented their beliefs and intentions ultimately distanced them from the very population they claimed to want to help. Dawson, while eager to demonstrate how poorly treated prostitutes were, had witnessed and encouraged a number of raids through the Committee. During the same testimony in which he expressed horror at the exploitation of women in brothels, he had no compunction about framing these same women as a health risk. When discussing inadequate protection from venereal disease for clients who would trust faked medical certificates, he remarked that the back of one certificate claimed the bearer earned between \$200-\$250/weekly.<sup>22</sup> No one during the Commission questioned the figure, which would have required a minimum of 80 clients in an exclusive \$10 house, a fairly unlikely scenario, given that that price represented a week's wages for the average worker. Reformers simultaneously argued that women were financially enslaved within the brothel system and found it more lucrative than traditional, yet inadequately paid work. The indebtedness of brothel workers served a shifting rhetorical purpose. Alongside the exploited innocent and the depraved source of contagion also existed the capricious decadent. Evoking arguments similar to those used by his nemesis, Reverend Hart,

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<sup>20</sup> Carolyn Strange (1995) *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City 1880-1930*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 36. Also, Committee of Sixteen (1918) *Preliminary Report of an Unofficial Organization upon the Vice Conditions in Montreal*, Montreal, 37.

<sup>21</sup> Lori Rotenberg (1974) "The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitute at the Turn of the Century" in *Women at Work 1880-1930*, Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard, eds., Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 53-54.

<sup>22</sup> "Tells Court Well Known Keepers..." 15.

Recorder Geoffrion would later testify that young women became prostitutes because they had too much liberty, with waning parental supervision leading them straight into the temptations of night clubs.<sup>23</sup>

The question of rescue remained the default solution of those testifying at the Coderre Commission, regardless of where they positioned themselves politically in relation to prostitution. Chairman Brodeur remained hostile to the Committee and chastised past and current members during his testimony. However, like many Committee members, he also supported a refuge house for women after they completed their jail sentences to reduce the rate of recidivism.<sup>24</sup> Ex-Director Tremblay supported a house of refuge for retraining of brothel women, so that they could take their place in respectable society. "Those who refused to try to earn an honest living, would have to be permanently detained, he supposed."<sup>25</sup> In this, he adopted a perspective favoured by the Montreal Local Council of Women, a group which would seem far removed politically from a law enforcement official.

The ex-Director added that young women taken from brothels should be returned to their homes, with the proviso that 'it would not do to send a woman back to her home, in a diseased condition.'<sup>26</sup> The Committee's Dr. Haywood testified to the need of some sort of refuge home for women, once the district was closed down. But he saw it linked specifically to 'treatment of all diseased women, voluntarily if possible, and under compulsion if necessary.'<sup>27</sup> Both representatives of law and medicine shared an elastic notion of liberty when dealing with prostitutes. It was their common construction of prostitution which allowed the overlap. Philippa Levine has suggested 'medical parlance was thus captured by the moralists, just as judicial and penal themes found expression in health policy.'<sup>28</sup>

This also hints at another preconception shared by many who worked directly with prostitutes at the turn of the century. Conflating prostitution and

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<sup>23</sup> "Changes in Law on Vice Needed Recorder Says," (December 24, 1924) *The Gazette*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> "Thinks Refuge House for Victims of Vice Would be Big Help," (December 9, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> "Low Wages and Lack of Proper Amusement Blamed," 15.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> "Suggested Red Light District Be Closed Up," (January 6, 1925) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Philippa Levine (December 1993) "Women and Prostitution: Metaphor, Reality, History," *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, XXVIII:3, 491.



disease was a convenient way to excuse or explain prostitutes' refusal to 'reform'. Illness recast prostitutes as victims, while also offering a medical (read scientific) explanation for their inability to save themselves. Venereal disease offered another way for reformers to distance from moral arguments while maintaining the same regulatory intentions.<sup>29</sup> Legislation to regulate prostitution had often been justified as a public health measure. But it was World War I that provided the pretext for acting on that connection. Jay Cassel reports that 28.7% of Canadian soldiers overseas were found to have venereal disease, nearly double the Australian rate of infection, and five times England's.<sup>30</sup> This led to concern about what would happen when the men returned home. The Committee of Sixteen had emerged at the height of this concern and their first report described the necessity to 'clean up vice conditions in Montreal for our returning soldiers' as nothing less than 'patriotic'.<sup>31</sup> In 1918, the year the Committee formed, the Defence of Canada Order was amended to include the regulation that no woman with venereal disease could have, or invite, sex with a member of the military. The penalty was arrest, forced medical testing, and incarceration.<sup>32</sup> Within a year or so, this had expanded into legislation which provided free treatment centers across the country and mandatory testing for anyone facing sex charges.

Even though Dr. Haywood asked that women leave the court room before he testified, enough information was printed to provide a rudimentary education on venereal disease to those who read it. Dr. Haywood's testimony, supported by his medical credentials, served to buttress reformers' arguments on a number of fronts. He discussed the 'enslavement' of young women in brothels in terms very similar to Dawson's. He joined feminists when he challenged the hypocrisy of the double standard by noting that women were never allowed to see the medical certificate proclaiming the clean bill of health of their clients. However, much as he expressed concern over the health of prostitutes, he wasn't open-minded enough to refute the

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<sup>29</sup> Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo (1997) *Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867-1939*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 80.

<sup>30</sup> Jay Cassel (1987) *The Secret Plague: Venereal Disease in Canada 1838-1939*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 123.

<sup>31</sup> Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report*, 19.

<sup>32</sup> Strange and Loo, *Making Good*, 92-93.

popular image of prostitutes as sources of contagion. He suggested that the medical exams prostitutes were subjected to after arrest were as haphazard as the ones that contributed to the European model's ineffectiveness. He testified that the medical examination of prostitutes 'degrades the doctor who is asked to do it.' This judgment demonstrates that moral reservations around prostitution persisted, even among medical personnel, into the supposedly 'scientifically' influenced social hygiene period. He was also clearly scandalized when he related the efforts of one brothel keeper to arrange regular certified examinations for her staff through the hospital: 'They were to pay us a liberal sum for that work.' He made it clear that the hospital was in no way prepared to enter into such a partnership.<sup>33</sup> Haywood's contradictory position, at once expressing feminist support of prostitutes while confirming their degrading effect on those who they come into contact with, illustrates the complexity of umbrella coalitions. Those with differing perspectives continued to influence each other, adopting and adapting each other's positions and prejudices to suit their own ends. An obvious example of this was medical personnel's reluctance to advocate the use of condoms. Although medical evidence proved the condom's effectiveness in preventing infection, this could not outweigh its association with birth control and vice.

These contradictions were underscored when Dr. Antoine-Hector Desloges took the stand. Dr. Desloges was responsible for implementing the venereal disease program in Quebec in the early 1920s. He demonstrated that his medical expertise would not be subsumed to his moral principles. Early in his testimony he stated that prostitution was the direct cause for the transmission of both syphilis and gonorrhea. Levine has commented on how the "literal transmission of disease was, and remains, a marvelously symbolic vehicle for imparting blame to marginalized groups."<sup>34</sup> Dr. Desloges testified that every woman who had relations with more than ten men would become infected, and used as proof the fact that all women in prison for prostitution were infected with a venereal disease. When a lawyer pointed out that all women who tested positive for venereal disease were automatically sent

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<sup>33</sup> *Coderre Royal Commission*, Volume 2, 1154-1160.

<sup>34</sup> Levine, "Women and Prostitution," 492.

to jail, making it extremely likely that those in jail would be infected, Dr. Desloges did not seem to consider the information significant. He categorically dismissed condoms, arguing that they “would only encourage promiscuity under a false guarantee of safety,” and also suggested that ‘the kiss was a danger and should be abolished.’<sup>35</sup>

The early 1920s brought young “women who willingly swapped an evening of dancing or a movie for sexual activity.” This liberation of casual sex meant that women who participated were labeled ‘occasional prostitutes’.<sup>36</sup> After WWI, men were less likely to name a prostitute as the source of their infection, and increasingly named casual partners. The existing equation of venereal disease and prostitution was so pervasive that this did not take the pressure off prostitutes.<sup>37</sup> Instead, the category simply became more elastic, with ‘amateurs’ becoming the real threat.<sup>38</sup> Dr. Desloges took this conflation one step further. He testified that “public prostitution was considered as that conducted in houses of public prostitution, known as such, while the term clandestine prostitution covered all women outside of marriage.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, prostitution encompassed all sexual relations outside of matrimony.

Throughout the Coderre Commission, calls for increased regulation of prostitution grew more insistent. Dr. Haywood, whose concerns for women in brothels put him on the more liberal end of the spectrum of Committee members, testified that ‘absolute suppression’ had never been seriously attempted in Montreal. He said he ‘might be willing to recommend regulation’ if suppression did not achieve the desired result after a sincere trial.<sup>40</sup> In fact, both the forward thinking Dr. Haywood and the conservative Dr. Desloges argued that the law should be applied equally to men and women in the case of prostitution, and there should not

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<sup>35</sup> “Punish Women and Men on Vice Charges Alike,” (December 30, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 11.

<sup>36</sup> Tamara Myers (1996) *Criminal Women and Bad Girls in Montreal, 1890-1930*, PhD Dissertation, McGill University, 120.

<sup>37</sup> Angus McLaren (1999) *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: a History*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Mary Spongberg (1997) *Feminizing Venereal Disease: The Body of the Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century Medical Discourse*, New York: New York University Press, 179.

<sup>39</sup> “Settlers Affected by Disease Menace Health of Dominion,” (December 29, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 15.

<sup>40</sup> “Suggests Red Light District be Closed Up,” 21.

be a sexual double standard which guided sentencing.<sup>41</sup> Ironically, this renewed reliance on proper law enforcement led several witnesses, including Father Gauthier, Owen Dawson, and former Chief of Detectives J. A. A. Belanger to fondly remember Tremblay's term as Director of Public Safety and his superior methods for raiding brothels. Belanger testified that Tremblay shut 75% of the city's brothels.<sup>42</sup> Dawson added that Tremblay's efforts left the district looking like 'Mount Royal Cemetery at midnight.'<sup>43</sup> Committee members had forgotten their reluctance to endorse Tremblay's raids at the time, along with their concerns about the unfair burden fining had placed on brothel staff.

Although Tremblay's campaign was lauded in hindsight, even his efforts had not eradicated prostitution six years before Coderre's investigation. The Committee had frequently blamed the Recorder's Court for not backing police efforts. In response, Recorder Amedée Geoffrion monopolized the hearings for the four full days around Christmas 1924. As during his speech from the courtroom some twenty months earlier, Geoffrion quoted philosophers, religious leaders, authors, and his own predecessors on the bench to validate his opinion that prostitution was 'inevitable'. He saw his judicial role as one of containment, not suppression, and even bragged during his testimony that he could close all the houses in Montreal within a month, but he did not want to and so he fought against the efforts of the police in order to keep them open.<sup>44</sup> As he had during his last attack on the Committee, he sneered at the 'good people who take it for granted that the precepts of the law and those of moral virtue are invariably one and the same'<sup>45</sup>

Geoffrion's opinions sparked immediate reaction. The *Star's* editorial acknowledged Geoffrion's extensive study of the issue but chided the Recorder's refusal to 'sink his own personal opinions and administer the law strictly in accordance with the statute.'<sup>46</sup> Although it was easy to criticize Geoffrion's

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<sup>41</sup> For Haywood, see "Suggests Red Light District be Closed Up," 21, for Dr. Desloges, "Punish Women and Men on Vice Charges Alike," 11.

<sup>42</sup> "Low Wages and Lack of Proper Amusement Blamed," 15

<sup>43</sup> "Tells Court Well-Known Keepers of Houses Left Alone," (October 9, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 15.

<sup>44</sup> "Recorder Says he Could Have Closed Resorts," (December 26, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 1. Geoffrion's testimony was also published on December 22, 23 and 24.

<sup>45</sup> *Coderre Royal Commission*, Volume 8, 7729.

<sup>46</sup> "Recorder Geoffrion Gives Evidence," (December 23, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 10.

unpopular opinions in light of the mounds of evidence and anecdotes related by members of the Committee, it is unclear how a strict adherence to the law, given the social and structural stigma that remained against prostitutes, would actually improve their lives. As has been pointed out, the Progressive reformer's program, "despite their rhetorical concern for victimized women, materially worsened the lives of prostitutes."<sup>47</sup> When Dawson was cross-examined, the lawyer pointedly asked him what he 'proposed to do about vice where it was not commercialized.' Dawson immediately replied that the vagrancy act took care of 'women who live by vice [by choice].'<sup>48</sup> One of the few witnesses during the Coderre Commission to express genuine concern about prostitutes was Dr. Archambault, a colleague of Dr. Desloges who operated the venereal disease clinic at the Notre Dame Hospital. He argued that what was needed was 'a system which would protect the prostitute and repress prostitution and that regulation, unfortunately, did the exact opposite.'<sup>49</sup>

His opinion was seconded by a very unlikely source. John Swail had played piano in a number of houses (including ones run by Emma Boucher and Tony Frank's partner Anna Herscovitch) over his 35 year career until retiring two years before, at age 58. Swail's insider account of brothel life (or pleasure palaces, as he preferred to call them) suggested that houses were managed very differently than Committee members had described.<sup>50</sup> Swail said that during the war, young women would show up at houses asking for work, and were in no way influenced by seducers or procurers. He also denied that any woman had ever been bought or sold. On the contrary, women who found themselves living beyond their means in a house might convince a young man to pay off their debt by promising to accompany them to New York and working out a partnership. With the debt covered, the women would ditch their 'partners' on the train and return to Montreal, free to set up elsewhere.

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<sup>47</sup> Keire, "The Vice Trust," 20. For a similar comment on the Canadian context see John McLaren (1986) "Chasing the Social Evil: Moral Fervour and the Evolution of Canada's Prostitution Laws, 1867-1917," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society/Revue canadienne de droit et société*, Vol. 1, 151.

<sup>48</sup> "Could Get Wine and Women at any Time of Night in Local Café," (October 10, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 15.

<sup>49</sup> "Repression of Vice Favoured by All Authorities," (December 30, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 22.

<sup>50</sup> "Former Pianist in Resorts Gave Views to Court," (November 9, 1925) *The Gazette*, 6.

Swail testified that most keepers kept drugs out of their houses as a matter of course, but that some women would plant drugs in their lovers' pockets when they tired of them. He even countered a charge Dawson had made that brothel workers who fell out of the keepers' favour were the ones 'caught' in raids. Swail testified that keepers were tipped off when raids occurred, but they tended to send the inexperienced women out to nearby restaurants and let those who knew how to handle themselves get arrested. Swail did not necessarily think life in a brothel was the best choice for a young woman, but he criticized ex-Director Tremblay's wholesale raiding, pointing out that no one offered an alternative to the women when they left jail 'hungry and there was no place to go.' Swail believed that they should have been offered viable options. Rosen expresses similar disappointment with the impact that closing red light districts had on the women who earned their living there. "Freed prostitutes faced a 'free,' sexist labour market as unskilled and stigmatized workers."<sup>51</sup> Swail made it infinitely clear that he had little respect for the Committee of Sixteen or their efforts, though he preferred to hold his tongue.<sup>52</sup>

There was one more point upon which everyone who testified before the Coderre Commission agreed. Recorder Geoffrion freely acknowledged that "social vice was an evil which if not necessary... was at least inevitable."<sup>53</sup> Nathan Gordon, the former city prosecutor turned member of the Committee, testified that although "it was impossible to stamp out vice or houses of vice" by closing down the district, 'the traffic in bodies' might be slowed.<sup>54</sup> This point was also made by Dawson during his testimony.<sup>55</sup> Dr. Haywood agreed. When asked whether such a move would spread vice across the city, he countered by stating that it already was.<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, no one was really convinced that there could be an end to vice. They were debating how best to manage it, and who should be given that responsibility.

Testimony and closing remarks wound down in mid-January of 1925. Coderre released his final report in March of that year. The *Star* ran his conclusions

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<sup>51</sup> Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 30.

<sup>52</sup> "Former Pianist in Resorts Gave Views to Court," 6.

<sup>53</sup> "Evil is Increased by Repression, Says Member of the Bench, Quoting History," (December 22, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 30.

<sup>54</sup> "Laws Against Keepers Said to Be Too Lenient," (December 12, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 16.

<sup>55</sup> "Tells Court Well Known Keepers of Houses Let Alone," 15.

<sup>56</sup> "Nouveaux faits personnels à reveler au sujet du Chef de Police," (le 29 octobre, 1924) *La Patrie*, 13.

over six full pages of a Saturday edition. Coderre condemned a number of police officers and recommended that the current Police Chief be relieved of his duties. Although even he conceded that there were always a number of prostitutes who would continue to operate, Coderre agreed wholeheartedly with Dr. Haywood's suggestion that suppression be absolutely enforced before any legal modifications be introduced, the latter being "a retreat in face of the evil."<sup>57</sup>

Three days later, still smarting from Coderre's refusal to allow him to rebut those who challenged his initial four-day testimony, Recorder Geoffrion once again expressed his indignation from the bench. Announcing that he would 'neither submit to the findings of Judge Coderre, nor resign his position,' Geoffrion used his courtroom as a platform for his beliefs, while mocking Committee members and other religious leaders who had refuted his December testimony.<sup>58</sup> That September, Geoffrion left on what would be a year-long tour of Europe. When he returned, he was set to work sorting through the city's myriad and contradictory by-laws. He retired without hearing another case.<sup>59</sup>

Mayor Duquette's administration balked at Coderre's findings, and at the \$80 000 price tag attached to the lengthy inquiry. Mayor Martin was reelected in April of 1926. The city set about trying to prove that it had never really authorized the Royal Commission and could neither be bound by its results, nor expected to cover its costs. The case wended its way through the courts for years, and Coderre's recommendations were long forgotten. Perhaps because of this stonewalling, or simply at frustration over Dawson's admission during the Coderre Commission that the campaign of the Committee of Sixteen "had been absolutely without result. They had spent \$40 000 and achieved nothing..."<sup>60</sup> the Committee of Sixteen disappeared. Montreal's brothel system existed intact throughout the 1930s, and eventually closed down during World War II.

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<sup>57</sup> "Probe Findings Bring Administration of Force Under Fire," (March 14, 1925) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 59.

<sup>58</sup> "Will Not Resign Or Accept Report, Geoffrion Asserts," (March 17, 1925) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Geoffrion's youngest daughter, Marguerite Lescop, oversaw the publication of a curious document, commemorating the life of her father. The volume combines the full text of Recorder Geoffrion's March 17, 1925 speech with a selection of poems he wrote during his subsequent European tour. Amédée Geoffrion (2001) *Voyage rimé* Montreal: Editions Lescop.

<sup>60</sup> "Could Get Wine and Women at any Time of Night in Local Café," 15.

## Conclusion

Although the Committee of Sixteen successfully harnessed “the Parliament, the pulpit and the press, the three chief public agents of irrational emotion,”<sup>1</sup> they did not succeed in shutting down Montreal’s Red Light District. It is beyond the scope of this project to consider the full range of linguistic, political or cultural features of Montreal society which may have contributed to their failure. Certainly, as an emotionally, and politically charged subject, prostitution was a powerful tool for many people attempting to embarrass or challenge enemies. The existence of prostitution could be used to challenge a municipal administration’s authority, or the morals of a linguistic population. There were few people in 1920s Montreal publicly willing to concede any place to prostitution. Mayor Martin and Recorder Geoffrion were obvious exceptions, but neither had enough power to dictate the application of federal laws. Ultimately, the Committee lost its war of words in their attempt to influence ‘public opinion.’

The history of the Committee, suggests that ‘agreement’ masks multiple goals and intentions. *Why* prostitution should not exist in Montreal depended on who you asked, as did the concerns they brought with them. Ruth Rosen wrote that “the elimination of prostitution symbolized the dream of improving all women’s lives by ending the sexual exploitation of women and challenging patriarchal values in both the private and public spheres.”<sup>2</sup> This assessment says as much about how Rosen defined the ‘problem’ as it determines the conditions for its successful eradication. This utopic goal would be stifled by more pragmatic solutions to simply shut down the district, while admitting, “As long as there were men and women there would be houses of vice and men who would go into them.”<sup>3</sup> Underlying questions of whether women in brothels were the cause or result of the social evil were rarely addressed in campaigns against prostitution. Yet these opinions had serious repercussions on how to approach the problem. “Since a single regulation

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<sup>1</sup> Teresa Billington-Greig [April-July, 1913] (1967) “The Truth About White Slavery,” *The English Review*, XIV, New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 428.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Rosen (1982) *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 67.

<sup>3</sup> “Laws Against Keepers Said to be Too Lenient,” (December 12, 1924) *The Montreal Daily Star*, 16.



has so many different levels of operation, involving very different social groups, it cannot be assumed to have a single target or a single meaning.”<sup>4</sup>

The Committee of Sixteen’s battle against ‘commercialized vice’ gave it a brutal, exploitative target on which to focus its efforts. However, the Committee increasingly evacuated all responsibility for the impact its campaign would have on the ‘victims’ of the trade. While regularly paying lip-service to the need for a refuge or reformatory to house, retrain, or support women who had been working in brothels, the Committee abandoned any active efforts in that direction early in their activities. Alan Hunt has argued that this contradiction is a particular element of moral regulation involving prostitution:

It is important to understand disjunctions between discourses and practices: thus while anti-prostitution discourses were directed against male patrons and economic exploiters, the practices amounted to increased surveillance of street prostitutes.<sup>5</sup>

This observation has been echoed throughout this text by Mariana Valverde, Ruth Rosen, Carolyn Strange, Tamara Myers, Maimie Pinzer, John Swail, and “Alice Wilson”.

There are many ways in which the Progressive era produced the model moral regulation project. From the outset of their campaign, members of the Committee of Sixteen were invested in harnessing public opinion as the key to change. A united, ‘common sense’ commitment to improvement through reform and prevention seemed the obvious path to erase ‘organized viciousness.’ Those on the Committee challenged the apathy their efforts met among law makers or the wider community, but they never doubted their own role as moral custodians.

The post War period was marked by an attempt to explain the prostitute, instead of merely condemning her. But explanation did not imply understanding. The Committee’s ‘explanations’ were built on a shaky, although mutually reinforcing foundation of medical, moral, presumed and projected causes. Over a decade, those factors which might lead a young woman to prostitution (like

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<sup>4</sup> Mariana Valverde and Lorna Weir (September 1988) “The Struggles of the Immoral: Preliminary Remarks on Moral Regulation,” *Resources for Feminist Research/Documentation sur la recherche féministe*, 17:3, 33.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Hunt (1999) *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 187.

‘feeble-mindedness’ or a lack of moral supervision) became proof of her status as a prostitute. The causes of prostitution multiplied and demanded the paternalistic intervention of reformers and professionals. Reformers’ focus on the growing ‘problem’ blinded them to the possibility that young women were developing very different ideas about sexual and social relations than had existed before the War. At the same time, Reformers could not consider economic or social factors which might lead women to prostitution, since they had identified a narrow set of physical and mental determinants. For instance, Lucy Bland describes an anti-prostitution campaign in Victorian England:

Closing brothels largely resulted not in the reclamation of prostitutes, but in the prostitutes’ homelessness and increased harassment on the streets. However, rather than seeing this as a failed project, the repressive purity feminists interpreted it as an example of the hardened, unreclaimable nature of the prostitutes concerned.<sup>6</sup>

In like fashion, although the Committee moved the problem of prostitution into public discourse they ultimately fixed the prostitute herself as the unresolvable problem. Everyone condemned the keepers and exploiters but there was less agreement on how young women had ended up in the district. Although there was no question that she could remain there, once she was out of the brothel not everyone thought she should return to ‘respectable’ society. Some believed that might be possible with a suitable period of seclusion and ‘retraining.’ Others felt that the medical or character flaws which led her to prostitution would remain with her always. With no real options, there was little reason for young women to consider leaving brothels, as Swail had argued before the Coderre Commission. The Committee of Sixteen turned to the law to enforce and justify their position. The more difficult that proved to be, the more determined the Committee became to bend the law to its will. In so doing, they ignored solutions like those presented by Teresa Billington-Greig in 1913 — “education, a changed social outlook, [and] a gradual reorganisation of economic conditions.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lucy Bland (1992) “Female vigilantes of Late-Victorian England,” in *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality*, Carol Smart, ed. Toronto: Routledge, 51.

<sup>7</sup> Billington-Greig, “The Truth About White Slavery,” 429.

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