

# A Short History of Sexual Slavery

February 1, 2007 -- [TheCityEdition.com](http://TheCityEdition.com)

BY ROSEMARY REGELLO

**H**erodotus and other ancient historians tell us the Greeks were famous for carting off young women after battles. The human booty was consigned to lives of servitude, either as concubines or domestic servants.

In Rome, at the height of its far-flung empire, one in every three persons is thought to have been a slave. Like the Greeks, most were captured in foreign wars. While enslaved men toiled as laborers, girls and women were more likely to be channeled into entertainment avenues.

It's interesting to note that prior to 4000 B.C., or what has been dubbed "pre-history", evidence of sexual servitude and slavery are largely absent from the artifacts of human culture. And following the Indo-Aryan invasions into the Near East at around that time, evidence suggests that the temple sexual rites common to the Neolithic Age were converted into a practice far less consensual and now involved the payment of money. Hence, the business of prostitution was born, not of prostitutes, but of pimps.

During the African slave trade, already well underway by the 13th century, women fetched prices much higher than that of men. In the 19th century, the sexual appetite of the southern plantation owner here in the United States also figured into the picture, and this abomination, perhaps more than any other, stirred the con-

science of New England abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose *Uncle Tom's Cabin* helped ignite the Civil War.

By the turn of the 20th century, a white slave trade had sprung up in Europe and North America, involving thousands of young women who were transported as sex slaves, sometimes to Mexico. The White-Slave Traffic Act of 1910 was adopted to prosecute the criminals. Better known as the Mann Act, the F.B.I. has been using it ever since to prosecute anyone who transports a prostitute across state lines. The crime is known as domestic trafficking.

Across the Atlantic, European feminists began raising hell over a century ago because so many of their own governments had been implicated in sex slavery schemes. International treaties were adopted in 1904, 1910, and 1925 outlawing the trade in women.

During World War II, the Japanese army surpassed the inhumanity of even the ancient Greeks when it enslaved a quarter million women in sex camps to service its soldiers. The women came from Korea, China, Burma, the Phillipines and Indonesia. About half died from injuries, illness and starvation at the hands of their captives.

Unlike the concentration camps in Europe, however, the plight of the *jugun ianfu*, or comfort women, went largely unreported in the media. General MacArthur classified official documents implicating Japan to avoid any bad press or public outcry back in the United States. Some of the material was eventually

uncovered and presented in legal proceedings seeking compensation for the victims.

At first denying any government knowledge or complicity in the scheme, Japan eventually issued what many victims thought to be a lame apology. It also established a small, first come-first served "Asian Women's Fund". The Phillipines likewise allocated some money to help a number of its own women who had suffered all their lives, many in silent shame. But the vast majority of victims and their families have yet to receive any compensation for being raped hundreds, even thousands of times.

In 1949, another treaty outlawing trafficking in women was adopted by the international community. Remarkably, the United States was among the few countries that refused to ratify it.

In the 1970's, the U.S. military tossed its trousers into the sex trade when Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara arranged for cities in Thailand and elsewhere to establish brothels for thousands of U.S. servicemen fighting in Vietnam. Of course, it was understood that the women in these ventures were to be paid and not forcibly enscripted.

After the first Gulf War in 1991, the *New York Times* reported on a navy fleet as it dropped anchor at Pataya, Thailand, which had maintained its sex work operation over the years. Thousands of Thai girls were waiting as American service men disembarked from their ships, each provisioned with a supply of taxpayer-funded condoms. (Tipped off in advance about what was happening, some military wives showed up in Pataya as well.)

Sex tourism proved so lucrative for all parties concerned that McNamara brought the business

*continued*

model with him when he served as president of the World Bank from 1968 to 1981. Researchers investigating child prostitution claimed the bank's revamped loan requirements effectively transformed the downtown sectors of many developing countries into red-light districts.

The objective of sex tourism was to entice men in western countries to visit places not normally included on the Club Med circuit. The foreign exchange generated from these excursions allowed debtor nations to pay back their loans to the international banks more rapidly.

Seeming to dovetail with this new initiative were stipulations requiring that loan recipients appropriate vast tracts of land for the purpose of establishing factories operated by foreign companies. The loss of their land forced rural families to leave their farms and move to the cities, where demand for prostitutes was high.

In the 1990s, the mushrooming sex trade caught the attention of nonprofit groups who mustered their forces to address the growing problems of trafficking and child prostitution.

In New York, a feminist group called Equality Now began badgering the state's district attorney to prosecute a sex tourism company called Big Apple Oriental Tours. Although the first case was dismissed by a judge in 1993, the group persisted, and a second prosecution eventually put the company out of business.

Big Apple was one of many outfits arranging sex tours for men to the Phillipines, the Dominican Republic, Thailand, India and Sri Lanka, among other destinations. After their trips, customers routinely swapped details about their experiences and individual prostitutes on the internet.

At the same time, demand for

trafficked foreign women within the United States increased in step with aggressive advertising in so-called alternative weekly newspapers. Prior to the 1980's, prostitute ads had been mostly confined to low-circulation, X-rated newspapers. That all changed when Larry Flint and other purveyors of pornography successfully argued that the Bill of Rights trumped local ordinances banning sexually explicit content.

In Western Europe, the market for sex slaves skyrocketed with the collapse of the Soviet Bloc in 1991. This was the first time since the white slave trade of the 19th century that huge numbers of Caucasian women were bought and sold for the purpose of sex.

In Japan, corporations began offering all-expense-paid sex tourism junkets to Taiwan as a perk to their executive personnel.

Around this time, brothels also became big business in Israel. Owners were importing so many trafficked women from the Ukraine and elsewhere in Eastern Europe that it prompted stories in the *New York Times* and on NBC's *Dateline*.

In response, the United States and the Netherlands jointly funded a media campaign to warn women in Eastern Europe (particularly Ukraine) about scam employment offers and other ruses to disguise the debt bondage schemes of traffickers.

An international conference in Vienna in 1996 called for tougher sanctions, and in 2000, the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime was adopted. About 80 nations signed and ratified the new treaty - also known as the Palermo Protocols - including the United States under the Clinton Administration.

However, Congress made an end-around the treaty by adopting its own legislation, the Trafficking

Victims Protection Act (TVPA), that same year. Rather than protecting victims, as its name implies, TVPA created a giant loophole for traffickers by requiring prosecutors to prove "force, fraud or coercion" with regard to the prostituted women.

By contrast, the international treaty states that consent of the victim is irrelevant in trafficking. Predictably, federal prosecutors have since complained that proving force is nearly impossible, given that the victims are foreigners who entered the country illegally and are considered criminally liable themselves. A special visa enabling a victim to remain in the United States in exchange for her testimony against traffickers, on the other hand, enables defense attorneys to argue that victims are lying for their own personal gain.

Still, the Bush Administration claims it has secured over 100 convictions under TVPA in the last six years. Yet none of the 45 suspects arrested in the highly publicized 2005 brothel raids in California was convicted (or even tried) under the TVPA law.

Since 2000, prostitution scandals involving U.N. peacekeeping troops and defense contractors have been plentiful. In Liberia, U.N. administrators were implicated in a scam where food aid was used to force girls and women into servicing peacekeeping troops and local businessmen.

In 2002, a Dyncap employee testified to Congress that fellow workers stationed in Bosnia had bought girls to keep in their homes as sex slaves. Although the Bush Administration declared a "zero-tolerance" policy regarding such activities, the company went on to receive a no-bid contract the following year to provide law enforcement and prison operations in post-conflict Iraq.