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FORMS AND REFORMS OF WHOREDOM: Notes  
on the Sociology of Prostitution  
and Moral Enterprise\*

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for his influence, both specific and diffuse, on  
the approach taken in what follows.

It seems clear that one accompaniment of the rise of sociology to a station of respectability has been the fall of sociological interest in various unrespectable topics. As a consequence, prostitution--like poverty, homosexuality, genocide, revolution, etc.--has received very little systematic attention in the sociological literature, while a good deal of moralistic and journalistic material continues to accumulate to fill a seeming demand. Perhaps some profit may be gained from approaching prostitution as a variety of social deviance, a behavior which has various forms of organization, and which acts upon and is acted upon by its sometimes hostile social environment.

Of late the emergent point of view in the sociology of deviance seems to be that which draws attention to the societal reaction to behavior.<sup>1</sup> One adherent, Howard S. Becker, articulated this perspective on deviance as follows:

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<sup>1</sup>Among the first to take steps in this direction was Edwin M. Lemert in 1948, "Some Aspects of a General Theory of Sociopathic Behavior," Proceedings of Meetings of the Pacific Sociological Society, Vol. 16, pp. 23-29. He elaborated this point of view in Social Pathology, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951. Only recently, however, have I seen enthusiastic support in the literature. It is odd that sociologists have waited until now to emphasize this viewpoint; Durkheim long ago took a similar position--see The Rules of Sociological Method, page 70, and The Division of Labor in Society, page 81.

Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender". The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.<sup>2</sup>

If the "social" in social deviance is emphasized, then the focus is on a group of deviants "who come together into a sub-community or milieu,"<sup>3</sup> and who are thought of as "outsiders" by the greater community.

This emphasis on reaction to deviance promises to give the field a needed theoretical re-orientation, but it can also result in a misleading polarization of interests--on the one hand, an interest in the forms of systematic deviance, and, on the other, an interest in the societal reaction. Research from either angle is greatly needed, of course, but it is quite possible that between the two. What kind of a relationship is there between the social organization of a deviant behavior

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<sup>2</sup>Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance, Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1963, page 9. Also see John Kitsuse, "Societal Reaction to Deviant Behavior: Problems of Theory and Method," in H. S. Becker (ed.), The Other Side: Perspectives on Deviance, Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1964, pp. 87-102.

<sup>3</sup>Erving Goffman, Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963, page 143.

and the nature of the reaction to it in the immediate social context? To what extent may a deviant sub-culture be seen as a response to a given degree of social reaction? It is needless to say that questions such as these cannot be adequately dealt with in a brief discussion such as this, but a thread of curiosity concerning them runs through what follows.

These notes aim, on the most general level, at simply exercising a straight-forward sociological perspective on prostitution; that is, given what is found in the literature, what does whoredom look like to a student of sociology? A good portion of this discussion will therefore consist of a conceptualization and sketchy description of the principal forms that prostitution has taken in the United States during this century. Then the focus will shift to the changes that have come about in prostitution and to the people who have been the opponents of marketed sex. Finally, some speculative observations will be made about the chain of action and reaction that has existed between prostitutes and their enemies and the conditions and consequences there appertaining. It must be emphasized that these notes are of an unabashedly exploratory nature.

The first problem, then, will be to formulate a sociological perspective on the nature of prostitution, on what prostitution is. Perhaps the most inclusive definition has been advanced by Fernando Henriques:

Prostitution consists of any sexual acts, including those which do not actually involve copulation, habitually performed by individuals of their own or the opposite sex, for a consideration which is non-sexual. In addition, sexual acts habitually performed for gain by single individuals, or by individuals with animals or objects, which produce in the spectator some form of sexual gratification, can be considered acts of prostitution. Emotional involvement may or may not be present.<sup>4</sup>

This definition provides a useful backdrop for an important distinction--that between prostitution as a type of behavior, generally conceived, and prostitution which is a variety of social deviance. The definition given by Henriques is one that views prostitution in the former sense. In that sense an extremely wide range of persons would be included under the heading "prostitute": those who submitted to the mandatory sexual behavior connected with religious worship among certain peoples of antiquity--e.g., the Phoenicians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Babylonians<sup>5</sup>--the privileged heterae of classical Greece, the strip-tease dancer, the "kept woman", the habitual "gold-digger", and even the "gigolo", to mention a few. Here it is necessary that the observer consider or impute the motivational aspects of particular

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<sup>4</sup>Prostitution and Society, New York: The Citadel Press, 1962, pp. 17-18. This book deals with primitive, classical, and oriental forms of prostitution, as Henriques defines it.

<sup>5</sup>See Jean Graham Hall, "The Prostitute and the Law," British Journal of Delinquency, 9 (1959), pp. 174-181, for a brief look at the history of prostitution.

kinds of social action when he delineates the subject matter, and the criteria for inclusion are independent of time and place.

Prostitution as a variety of social deviance, on the other hand, calls for a considerably more limited focus. Taken in this sense, what is of paramount interest is the conceptualization of prostitution formulated by the members of a given society. Which behavior is labeled and stigmatized as prostitution in a given society? With this approach, therefore, what prostitution is becomes problematic; it is an empirical question. This paper aims only at enlarging upon what prostitution is from this point of view; put another way, the interest here is with those members of society who are called "whores".<sup>6</sup> Prostitution will now be discussed as it has appeared in the United States during the Twentieth Century.

#### The Organization of Prostitution

In a variety of organizational forms the practice of prostitution in this country has been the practice

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<sup>6</sup>I take it that the male prostitute or "hustler" is generally thought of neither as a "whore" nor as a prostitute, but simply as a type of "queer" by members of the "straight world". Only certain hustlers themselves, it seems, view their activity as something other than a kind of homosexuality--see Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "The Social Integration of Peers and Queers," Social Problems, 9 (1961), pp. 102-120, and the novel by John Rechy, City of Night, New York: Grove Press, 1964.

of a personal service occupation.<sup>7</sup> In pattern the role of the prostitute is quite similar to that of the physician or the dentist; as deviant occupations surely the abortionist, the quack, and the fortune-teller are close relatives. Some other deviant service occupations are those of the paid murderer, the "strong-arm", and the professional arsonist. Like members of other established occupations, whores typically maintain a subculture that hangs around and regulates the daily round of activities; by dint of their situation as deviants, prostitutes may have particular needs for a subculture in the face of sometimes pressing social control measures against them. Along with formal social control directed at "the girls", various changes in American society during this century have meant various changes in the practice of prostitution.

In what follows, five organizational forms of "the business" will be examined. Each is, so to speak, a pure type; in reality variations and combinations of these types often appear along with other modes of operation unlike any of these. The five arrangements are the brothel, the call house, the bar girl system, streetwalking, and the call girl system. In the same

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<sup>7</sup>One writer has dealt with prostitution wholly in the terms of occupational analysis--Travis Herschi, "The Professional Prostitute," Berkeley Journal of Sociology, 7 (1962), pp. 33-49.



order these arrangements could be placed along a very crude continuum of complexity of social organization.

The brothel form of prostitution is the old-line, traditional form of "the racket" in the U.S.; in popular parlance this is the "whorehouse". Most of the information about brothels must come from the period of this century during which they flourished in American cities-- up to about 1915. These were the days of the segregated districts or "red-light" zones when the business of prostitution was officially confined to certain areas of cities.<sup>8</sup>

The brothel is distinguished from other kinds of prostitution arrangements by the relative stability and permanency of its operation and by its particular structural features. The pure type of brothel comes close to being what Goffman called a "total institution"<sup>9</sup> in that the girls eat, sleep, and work in the same place, but they do occasionally leave the house for recreational activities. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that the brothel prostitutes were commonly called "inmates"

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<sup>8</sup> See Howard B. Woolston, Prostitution in the United States, Vol. I, New York: The Century Company, 1921, Ch. 4, "The Segregated District," for a description of this practice before World War I. This is not to say that something like the segregated district does not appear today in many urban areas, nor is it to suggest that the brothel has totally vanished from the American scene.

<sup>9</sup> Erving Goffman, Asylums, Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1961, pp. 4-6.

by the social commentators of the day.

The brothel operates very much like an elaborate barber shop. During working hours the girls sit around waiting for customers; when a customer arrives he makes a selection from the several girls<sup>10</sup> and contracts for the sexual service. Midway between the customer, or "John", and the girl stands the madam, the manager and usually the proprietor of the house. In a sense, it is really she with whom the John contracts for his pleasure, since the girl is responsible to her, while the madam's foremost obligation is to the customer. When business is being carried on, her roles are those of the arbiter, the hostess, the cashier, and the general overseer. She is the boss of the operation; whores and Johns alike are answerable to her. When disputes arise she decides the outcome. Sometimes she will employ a "bouncer" as an enforcer of her commands, but she is more likely to attempt to "cool out" troublesome Johns.

Complementary obligations and expectations mold the organization of the brothel into a functioning whole; compliance with norms by the parties concerned affords the patterning of a profitable business enterprise. Norms regulating the behavior of the girls were sometimes

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<sup>10</sup>Woolston, op. cit., found that, before WW I, the average number of girls per house was 5-6, and the range 2-16, page 134.

even formalized into a list by the madam of the house. A few examples from the "Rules for the Monte Carlo", 1917, are worth noting:

Prices, \$3.00, \$5.00, \$10.00, \$15.00 and \$20.00 according to length of time.

Parlor hours Eight to Four. All girls not busy must be in the parlor at proper hours.

Girls are allowed one night off each week. Any girl starting argument in the parlor will be sent to her room.

Girls must not tell men in the parlor to leave as landlady will attend to that.

Girls must not argue with men in the parlor, as landlady will settle all arguments.<sup>11</sup>

The "landlady", of course, is the madam of the house. It can be seen here that the relationship between the girls and the madam is as employees to employer. One of the last rules on the list emphasizes who calls the shots: "Any one not living up to these rules and don't like the management of this house can vacate." The typical madam takes fifty per cent of the girls' earnings.

In return for complying with the house rules and for giving the madam her cut of their fees the girls receive the all-important middleman service provided by her. Not only are they given the physical accommodations necessary for the work, but the madam plays the role of mother hen to the girls with regard to the police, and she provides access to the sine qua non of prostitution--

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 341-342. There were no less than thirty-one rules on this particular list.

the Johns, or "tricks".

Besides a hard core of regular customers, the brothel girl can expect to benefit from the occasional Johns who are steered to the house by various sometime participants in the organization--cab-drivers, bartenders, waiters, poolroom attendants, porters, and bellboys have been especially active in this regard. Some madams may also have "steerers" or "advertising agents" who work on a nearly full time basis in search of customers. These touts generally work on a commission basis; a cut is taken from the madam's share along with occasional tips from the Johns themselves.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the solicitors of various kinds, the pimp should also be mentioned. The brothel prostitute, like most prostitutes in general, typically supports or helps to support a pimp. Yet, interestingly, it appears that his role is essentially a supportive one. The pimp seems to provide important socio-emotional moorings for the prostitute, important enough that she is apparently more than happy to give over most of her net earnings to him. Though pimps usually stay away from the brothel proper, the mere existence of these relationships is not without interest to the madam. On the one hand, the girl with a man is likely to be more dependable and responsible because of her financial obligations, but, on the other hand, the influence of the pimp can easily reach the point at which the madam's authority over the

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., page 99.

girl is undermined.<sup>13</sup>

The point here is only to draw attention to some of the more salient characteristics that distinguish the brothel from other methods of running the business. It seems that the comparatively complex nature of the brothel's organization is dependent for its survival upon a good measure of freedom from serious disruptions to it. With so many roles being performed, a fairly smooth coordination of them becomes necessary before the business can realize a net gain for all concerned. This means that, as with any business, personnel selection must be undertaken with care and strict control must be maintained within the organization. It also means, and certainly to no less important degree, that it must be situated in a social environment that harbors minimal threats to the organization's existence, while at the same time, one that offers maximal

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<sup>13</sup>Speaking of "outlaws", or girls without pimps, an experienced prostitute explains: "No madam would hire her. Why should she? After all, a free girl couldn't be so dependable. Money wasn't so important to her, and she didn't have to put herself out if she didn't want to. Why should a madam take a chance on her when there was always a girl who had to have money for her man." John M. Murtagh and Sara Harris, Cast the First Stone, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957, page 129.

For the point of view of the pimp as a disruptive force see Polly Adler, A House Is Not a Home, New York: Popular Library, 1953, pp. 107-108.

proximity to customers. The relation to the environment is particularly crucial given the highly visible character of the brothel and its goings-on; that is to say, then, that it is a highly vulnerable establishment. If the human resources requirements are satisfied, the fate of the brothel therefore rests with the temper of its social context. More will be said in this regard later.

The call house is a second form of prostitution that can be extracted and delineated from the available descriptions of the trade in the United States. It is actually rather difficult to draw a line between the brothel and the call house; it could be said that the two differ from one another more in process than in form. It seems that the people of the sub rosa world that prostitutes inhabit have their own "technical" way of distinguishing between them: "After my arrest in 1935, I never had girls living in, and it would be technically correct to describe me from that time on as a call house madam."<sup>14</sup>

In this situation it is obvious that the madam serves the same functions in the endeavor as she did in the brothel; only now she no longer reaps the profits from the room and board that she previously received,

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., page 257. Another distinction made in the trade is that between a "sleep-in" and a "sleep-out"--Murtagh and Harris, op. cit., page 229.

and tight control over the girls is considerably weakened. Still, they remain dependent upon her. It is the madam's address and the madam's phone number that the Johns know, and it is in the madam's bedroom that some measure of safety can be found. Often, however, the call house serves only as a central employment or booking agency with the madam as manager, while the sexual contracts are consummated elsewhere--usually at a hotel, motel, or an apartment.

American prostitutes and their fellow-travelers, like the families of their host society, can be stratified by income, prestige, or whatever. Probably the most revealing stratification would be in terms of the fees they charge to their customers. Surely the fee is the best indicator of a whole set of other factors that add up to the prostitute's place in the status hierarchy of whores,<sup>15</sup> for the amount of the fee will say a great deal about the social characteristics of the men who patronize her. The fee, however, is not necessarily an indicator of the prostitute's net income; it only says something about the way the business is run and for whom it is run.

Brothels typically are lower priced than call houses, but this does not mean that their profits are also lower. One brothel girl was well aware of this,

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<sup>15</sup> See Harold Greenwald, The Call Girl, New York: Ballantine Books, 1958, for some of these other factors.

and so was her pimp: "Jack may object if I work in a call house. There's not enough money in it. And, besides, I never worked in a high-class house. I probably wouldn't know how to get along with a better class of men."<sup>16</sup> There are low-priced call houses just as there have been high-priced brothels. The low-priced call house would not differ markedly from a brothel at the same price level. With low prices there must be a high volume of trade before the business can be profitable. This means that the low-priced call house madam would probably call a set of girls to her house for the evening, and each would service a number of Johns in one evening.

On the other hand, a higher-priced call house, such as the one Polly Adler ran in New York City, would be characterized by a considerably different process. Unlike the low-priced brothel or call house, the girls do not sit on reserve in the house; instead, at the request of a John the madam calls, by phone, a girl whom she chooses with a view toward satisfying that

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<sup>16</sup>Adler, op. cit., page 235. What this girl says also points to what is probably the most important reason why there is so very little upward mobility in the status hierarchy of prostitution--a good deal more than physical attractiveness is necessary for a girl to compete at the higher levels of whoredom. She must be aware of and able to comply with the "ceremonial rules" of the upper stratum members of society at large. Some girls, such as the one quoted above, may simply prefer, taste-wise, to deal with men from the lower strata.



particular John. This is a relatively intricate and time-consuming process, one that can be managed only by a high-priced house because of the low volume of business it necessitates. But it should be noted that such a high-priced operation is less visible to outsiders in the immediate environment than is a high volume establishment. Without a stable of girls lolling around all night, as there is in the brothel, vulnerability to police raids drops significantly. If all liaisons are arranged by telephone, then police access to an overview of the whole operation is limited to wire-tapping and inside informants.

A third form of prostitution might be called the bar girl system. This arrangement is not at all so clearly described as the previous forms that have been discussed. Perhaps it is best to say that this form is more a diffuse pattern, better approached in quite general terms than in specific ones. The bar girl system typically includes what the police and moral reformers have commonly called the "house of assignation". Ordinarily this is not likely to be a "house" in the usual sense; more likely it is a hotel (sometimes called a "hot-bed hotel" by prostitutes), a rooming house, or an apartment. It is the routine setting for the fulfillment of a contract that the prostitute forges elsewhere--in a bar, taxi dance hall, nightclub, or something similar.

Compliance with fairly clear-cut norms on the part of the several parties concerned makes for a recurrent pattern of behavior which distinguishes the bar girl system from other forms of the business. The parties contract in one situation and proceed to the house of assignation where a third party, either directly or indirectly, enters into the business transaction. If it is a hotel, and this has often been the case,<sup>17</sup> direct cooperation by the management is generally the rule, and necessarily so. In the case of the apartment or rooming house it remains highly probable that the landlord will be aware of what is going on, and he will profit accordingly by collecting inflated rents.

Nothing of much worth has been said regarding the organization of the marketing process, with its presumably surreptitious identity exchange, that precedes the movement to the house of assignation. A priori, however, it seems reasonable to assume that at least two conditions must be present. First, the marketing process has to be routinized to a certain degree before the prostitute can maintain a predictable income, and, secondly and probably flowing from the first condition, some form of cooperation, if only in the form of tolerance, seems necessary from the person

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<sup>17</sup>Woolston, op. cit., page 139.

(or persons) present where the encounter between John and whore takes place. There is some evidence that this "cooperation" was once carried to great lengths. A decade after the turn of the century an investigator for the Vice Commission of Chicago reported: "Certain keepers of disorderly saloons offer protection to prostitutes who solicit in their rear rooms. This consists of paying fines and bailing out offenders who are apprehended by the police."<sup>18</sup> In this situation the protection given the girls was a reciprocation for the increase in business brought by their presence in the saloon.

It seems fair to consider the bar girl arrangement to be a good deal more obsequious and less visible than either the brothel or the call house system. One could think of it as a more slippery set-up, from the point of view of people interested in the social control of prostitution.

In terms of the complexity of the social organization of these forms, it is rather difficult to decide which of the two that remain, streetwalking and the call girl system, should be viewed as the more complex. The dimensions of "complexity" are certainly many when

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<sup>18</sup>The Vice Commission of Chicago, The Social Evil in Chicago, Chicago: The Vice Commission of Chicago, Inc., 1911, page 140. In some cases, of course, owners of bars have paid protection money directly to police officers and politicians, too.

one prostitution system is compared with another: How many different kinds of relationships are there? How many parties or roles are there to these relationships? How complicated or how many steps are there to the organized process in question? What are the sorts of norms and controls that hold the process together? In short, how differentiated is the system?

The conditions necessary for the maintenance of a streetwalking system seem, all in all, to be somewhat more demanding and involved than are those presupposed by a functioning call girl system.<sup>19</sup> Given the sociologically deviant nature of both forms, it may be seen that the streetwalker must continuously cope with two problems that the call girl is not, to the same extent, faced with: She must constantly work at marketing her service, and, because of the visibility of her marketing techniques, she is in a very precarious position with regard to an exposure of her social identity to members and official representatives of conventional society.

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<sup>19</sup> Information on streetwalking must come, perforce, primarily from discussions on the process as it appears in England--see especially C. H. Rolph (ed.), Women of the Streets, London: Secker and Warburg, 1955. Also--Streetwalker, New York: Gramercy Publishing Co., 1959, and John Gosling and Douglas Warner, The Shame of a City: An Inquiry into the Vice of London, London: W. H. Allen, 1960. Rolph's material was gathered before the Street Offences Act of 1959, an anti-streetwalking law which was stringently enforced after its passage.

The standard pattern that the streetwalker follows consists of simply strolling up and down a fairly short distance of a particular street, offering her services to certain men, contracting with the one who shows an interest, and then proceeding to an agreed upon location. But the girl does not carry out this round of activity in a haphazard or desultory manner--it is not just any street along which the streetwalker walks. When streetwalking is present in a city, it is found only in one particular area or several particular areas of that city. This is not just because of official social control policies, but also it is because only in so doing can the girls establish a relatively secure and recognizable tie to a potential market; i.e., the Johns have to know where the whores are. In a city such as London, where streetwalking has become well entrenched and differentiated, girls of various types and price-levels have situated themselves ecologically along with others of like characteristics.<sup>20</sup>

It also seems typical for the girls in an area to form something of a sisterhood and work organization. They will band together against rowdy or abusive outsiders, enforce a minimum neighborhood fee, pressure one another to stay in the group, and they maintain their own argot

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<sup>20</sup>Rolph, op. cit., pp. 46-48. Also--Vice Commission of Chicago, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

and ideology.<sup>21</sup> One could probably find something of the same order among shoeshine boys, newspaper and pencil peddlers, or even panhandlers in urban areas. It should be noted that just such functions as these are served by the madam in the brothel or the call house set-up. And just as the madam would, streetwalkers generally keep regular days and hours. As one girl explained, "When I go off business I won't take anyone else. It's the same as if you opened a shop, if someone came in half an hour after you had closed you wouldn't serve him."<sup>22</sup> Naturally, it is also to the advantage of the girls to maintain ties with regular customers, men upon whom they can depend for a routine and worry-free transaction.<sup>23</sup>

Sometimes called the "aristocrats of prostitution", call girls, too, work within an organized network of normatively circumscribed and carefully controlled relationships. Actually there is no reliable evidence to support the assumption that the call girl system is uncommon at the lower reaches of the American social hierarchy; these girls and their clients may not, as an

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<sup>21</sup>Rolph, op. cit., pp. 135-136.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 77-78. This was also true of the girl and her cohorts in Streetwalker, op. cit.

<sup>23</sup>The police and their significance for streetwalkers and other kinds of prostitutes will be discussed later in these notes.

aggregate, be so "high class" as they seem. But then call girls are not easy to observe; no system of prostitution is less visible to outsiders.

The social network within which the call girl carries on her day-to-day activities seems to be somewhat more closely knit and less accessible to outsiders than are the networks common to other forms of the business. There is no access to the enterprise without the necessary phone number, and there is no full-time middleman role, so it is the marketing process that is distinctive in this operation... No one can contract with a given prostitute unless he has her number or the number of one of the girls with whom she is in a cooperative business relationship. Call girls have reciprocal relationships with other call girls whereby they refer Johns to one another, so it is important that not only Johns but other prostitutes have a particular girl's phone number. Each girl typically maintains a list of Johns who know her number, so that whenever the phone rings she can check to find out whether or not the caller is cleared for admittance. He must either be known by her or by someone with whom she is acquainted, and he must have no black marks against him--one girl explained, "A John who in any way caused trouble or refused to pay, or was even rude was likely to be blacklisted to a point where no reputable call girl

would see him."<sup>24</sup>

Thus it is clear that the role otherwise performed by the madam is, as with the streetwalkers, performed collectively by the girls, and, in addition, the problem of marketing that is handled by the madam is here managed cooperatively among the girls. Every time a girl refers a John to a fellow call girl she is, in effect, acting as a madam; sometimes she even charges the traditional fifty per cent fee for that service.<sup>25</sup> Cooperation between the girls is especially crucial; without it the call girl would face almost insurmountable barriers to establishing a clientele. Hers would be the situation of the physician without friends in the profession, without a shingle on the door, and even without a listing in the yellow pages. And besides, she has to worry about the police and trouble-making clients.

But normative prescriptions do not end with the exchange of tricks. The interaction between the call girl and her Johns is mutually predictable when business is going smoothly. Strict norms regulating payment of fees for various services are in force, just as with the

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<sup>24</sup>Virginia McManus, Not For Love, New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1960, page 126.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., page 120. For a study of the process by which girls are "hooked up" to this marketing network see James Bryan, "Apprenticeships in Prostitution," Social Problems, 12 (1965), pp. 287-297.



other forms of prostitution;<sup>26</sup> the fee changes according to the nature of the sexual service itself as well as with the time required for performance of it. Call girls especially like to have clienteles of regular Johns with whom transactions are routinized and predictable, given their relative social isolation, while many men like to have certain girls whom they can see according to a set schedule, just as they make their periodic trips to the barber. Often the whole operation is so standardized that neither the John nor the whore mentions sex, money, or the time from beginning to end. Furthermore, a mutual secrecy pact is maintained between the two since both typically could lose a good deal through exposure to certain significant others. A secrecy mechanism is often even used for telephone conversations--the business at hand is discussed in a mutually understood code to protect against possible wire-tapping by the police.<sup>27</sup>

And, like other whores, call girls belong to a mutually protective and supportive sub-community or in-group of their own. Members of the sub-community describe fellow-members as "in the life", "in the racket", "a

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<sup>26</sup> A very high-priced girl enlarged upon her situation in this regard: "The relationship was clearly defined--if he just stopped over at my apartment for an hour he paid one hundred dollars. If we went to dinner first he paid a hundred and fifty dollars. If we went out with clients I was paid a hundred each one I saw, and a minimum of a hundred and fifty for the evening." Ibid., page 119.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Ibid., pp. 127-128.

regular girl", or "one of the girls", with particular emphasis on the word "girl".<sup>28</sup> And, of course, call girls also often maintain relationships with those ever present fixtures on whoredom--the pimps. A dapper, prosperous-looking "old man" is one of a call girl's most impressive and conspicuous status symbols among her prostitute peers.<sup>29</sup>

Of the five major organizational forms that have been sketched here, the call girl system is indubitably the most difficult to observe in action. Also, it is clearly the most modern of the several major forms. What are the social forces that have impinged upon prostitution during the course of this century? And how have changes been wrought in the nature of prostitution as it has been practiced? What, for example, has happened to the old brothel? Something of a socio-historical perspective will now be aimed at the organization of prostitution.

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<sup>28</sup>Greenwald, op. cit., page 23.

<sup>29</sup>Ethnographic material on pimping is nearly non-existent, but see Murtagh and Harris, op. cit., pp. 128-168, and the novel by Colin MacInnes, Mr. Love and Justice, London: The New English Library, 1962. The pimp-prostitute relationship is particularly interesting given the interdependence that exists between the two, a mutual dependence upon deviance. Interdependence and communication between various types of deviants is a topic worthy of investigation. To what extent does a society induce or create chains of deviance? Is there something like an "underworld" or a "grey world" that is perpetuated by the forces of control and that, in turn, must be integrated and self-perpetuating if it is to survive?

The Reorganization of Prostitution

Thus far the approach to prostitution taken in these notes has been by and large a descriptive one. No attempt has been made to understand the "whys and wherefores", the social conditions that accompany the emergence and the decline of these forms. Instead, they have been cursorily examined, as it were, in a socio-historical vacuum; the point has been to describe how the bulk of prostitution has been set up and what the various arrangements of interacting roles have looked like in the United States over the past sixty-five years.

If prostitution is thought of as a variety of institutionalized deviance, then it is likely to vary over time and space in its prominence, quantitatively; that is, one would expect to find prostitution varying in the frequency or extent of its practice in and between societies and communities. For example, one might expect to find that prostitution is less extensive in a society where non-commercial pre- and extra-marital intercourse is widely indulged in than in one where marital ties are very strong and virginity is highly valued.<sup>30</sup> The changing nature of a society's social and

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<sup>30</sup>Kingsley Davis would subscribe to such an expectation-- see "The Sociology of Prostitution," American Sociological Review, 2 (1937), pp. 744-755.

normative structures would, then, presumably mean changes in the amount of prostitution practiced there. Material simply is not available for an investigation into how much justification exists for that presumption.

Leaving the problem of the quantity of prostitution, a question arises about the organizational nature of the practice of this deviance. What kinds of changes have come about in American society that have meant accompanying changes in the forms of prostitution? This question can be dealt with apart from that pertaining to the extent of prostitution, although that is not to say that the two are totally independent of one another.

It has been said, and quite correctly, that "as a society changes, so does, in lagging fashion, its type of crime."<sup>31</sup> The changes that come about in deviance may be viewed as both intended and unintended consequences of social change, just as change itself may be viewed in both respects. Sociologists have typically interested themselves more in unintended and latent social processes than in intended and manifest ones, more in hidden than in obvious phenomena. Students of crime, for example, have commonly explained fluctuations in crime rates in terms of about everything but the most obvious--changes in police procedures. And the way various kinds of

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<sup>31</sup>Daniel Bell, The End of Ideology, New York: Collier Books, 1962 (revised edition), page 129.

crimes are committed and systematized have taken on a different character, too, with changes in law enforcement practices.<sup>32</sup> In short, it is risky to ignore the impact of police work on the frequency as well as on the form of criminal behavior. Then, it had best be added that as a society changes, so does, in lagging fashion, its type of social control. Forms and frequencies of deviance, types of social control practices, and the relevant moral rules themselves all seem to vary together. Each contributes in an important way to the moral profile of a society or group.

This is not to say, of course, that the pendulum of emphasis should swing away from interest in the unanticipated effects of macro-social change on deviance; that, too, would be risky. Prostitution is a case in point. The forms that prostitution has taken during this century have undergone transformations as a result of both macrocosmic change and conscious, direct official control policies. In the former case the general consequences for prostitution of modernization and urbanization may easily be seen. The emergence of widespread use of the automobile, for example, has meant easier and faster access to whores, more efficient spatial mobility of prostitutes, and new and more flexible

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<sup>32</sup>See, for example, the case of check forgery: Edwin M. Lemert, "The Behavior of the Systematic Check Forger," in Becker, The Other Side, op. cit., pp. 211-224.

marketing operations, but it has also meant more effective police work. The anonymity of city life and changes in certain informal norms regulating the behavior of women in public places have made prostitutes less visible to their enemies; unescorted women on the streets are no longer ipso facto open to suspicion, and changes in women's fashions have eliminated almost completely the gap between the "painted lady" and the "respectable lady". The "liberation" of women has surely had an impact on the demand for madams; it stands to reason that a lot of girls would sooner set up shop on their own without having to split fifty-fifty with a domineering overseer. The entrance of women into bars, too, has opened new avenues to the systemized sale of sex. Without a doubt general social evolution has, then, played upon the organization of prostitution in significant respects.

But it must not be forgotten that prostitution has, for the most part, been illegal in the United States during this century. The simple fact of the existence of these laws and the fact of police enforcement of them are not to be taken for granted; both are end products of social initiative and innovation, a kind of social action which Howard S. Becker aptly characterizes as "moral enterprise".<sup>33</sup> Further, the severity of anti-

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<sup>33</sup>See Outsiders, op. cit., pp. 147-163.

prostitution laws and the degree to which they are enforced are likely to have consequences for the organizational forms that the business manifests in a given locale. When a type of social deviance is illegal the participants must adapt to enforcement policies if they are to succeed and survive. The five forms of prostitution that have been presented differ from one another not only in their complexity but also, and more importantly in this regard, in their visibility and, hence, in their vulnerability to the official agents of social control-- the police. In the last six decades there has been a drift in the practice of prostitution away from the brothel, the call house, and conspicuous streetwalking toward the bar girl system and the call girl system.<sup>34</sup> This drift has in good part accompanied shifts in the focus and stringency of police enforcement of anti-prostitution laws.

The case of Chicago is instructive. Until 1912, there was tolerated in this city a segregated district, a "tenderloin" where various types of brothels and call houses were not at all bothered by the police (except, perhaps, when occasional "presents" were collected). Until that date the great bulk of the prostitutes arrested

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<sup>34</sup>This generalization is based upon a survey of the literature, interviews with policemen (in the course of a study--now in progress--of urban police), and personal observation.

were streetwalkers--these, it appears, were the women the houses had rejected.<sup>35</sup> In 1912, the district was closed, and house girls and madams became officially vulnerable to arrest; it was said by one commentator that this move "scattered prostitutes all over the city."<sup>36</sup> By 1928, the police were seven times more active in prostitution arrests than they were in 1908, and the available data indicate that the average number of girls per whorehouse was two in 1933, as compared to five in 1910.<sup>37</sup> These data, then, suggest that the increase in police activity was having organizational consequences for prostitution, and there is little reason to think that this relationship does not hold true today.

But an understanding of this point of view on the transformation of prostitution cannot be adequate if the police are taken to be the instigators of large-scale moral enterprise against it. A police department as an organization is in general more fruitfully approached as one that reacts rather than proacts. Like any organization it strives to maintain itself in something like an equilibrium in the ever changing currents of its environment. And, given that most of its members are "on the

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<sup>35</sup>Walter C. Reckless, Vice in Chicago, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933, pp. 155-156.

<sup>36</sup>Lee Alexander Stone, The Woman of the Streets, Kansas City, Missouri: Burton Publishing Co., 1919, pp. 57-58.

<sup>37</sup>Reckless, op. cit., pp. 30-31.



street" at any given time, the police organization--in a more salient way than most other complex organizations--maintains a relationship with that social environment, a relationship upon which the stability of the organization depends to a major degree. Since the survival of a police department qua organization is "guaranteed", or is not problematic, it seems reasonable to assume that mere stability and the avoidance of potentially disruptive change are central though unspoken concerns of police officials. Indeed, police departments are notorious for their conservatism. A major policy change brings disruptions both externally--in its relation to the environment--and internally, particularly in the allocation and control of the men. When the police embark upon a massive crackdown on a previously tolerated vice district, new stresses and strains must be faced by the pre-existent organizational structure. What must be explained, then, is why the venture was taken in the first place. If the police organization is largely reactive, then what it reacts to becomes of interest.

The police react to increases and decreases in pressures from certain significant units in their social environment--the public, the organizations that claim to represent public interests, and the local political elites. These units are those to which police officials are, directly or indirectly, accountable, and they are those units, therefore, to whose influence the police

are susceptible. The survival of police officials is not, of course, guaranteed. Public dissatisfaction with the police commonly expresses itself in changes in high level police personnel, not in changes of the organization itself. To no small degree, therefore, American police are tied to the public and its representatives by their very jobs. Chicago can again be entertained as an example, this time of how public pressures have acted upon the police with consequences for the forms of prostitution.

The dates of the several events in the sequence leading to the close of the red-light district deserve particular attention. On October 12, 1909, Gipsy Smith, an evangelist and reformer, led a march of 12,000 men and women through the Twenty-second Street vice district "to reclaim the region to Christianity". Then, on January 31, 1910, a meeting was called by the Church Federation, composed of clergy representing 600 Chicago congregations, to discuss the problem of "the Social Evil"; they resolved that the mayor be asked to appoint a commission "to investigate" the existing conditions. The mayor appointed such a commission on March 5, 1910; called the "Vice Commission of Chicago", it consisted of thirty prominent citizens of the city. The Commission was officially created by a City Council ordinance on June 27, 1910. Four days later the General Superintendent of Police ruled that the sale of liquor would no longer be allowed

in houses of prostitution. The Vice Commission conducted its first investigation during the year that followed its creation and came out strongly in favor of suppressing prostitution. On September 29, 1912, ten thousand people demonstrated for a "clean Chicago"--three days later the red-light district was closed down by the police.<sup>38</sup>

These several events, of course, are only a sample of the organized activities that preceded the closing of the segregated district in Chicago, the first such closing, incidentally, in the nation. The reason for bringing in this bit of history is simply to illustrate the sort of process that must be recognized if there is to be a rough comprehension of the dynamics involved in the social control of prostitution. The police do not clamp down on a given form of deviance only in order to demonstrate professional competence or to protect the public weal, as their ideology often holds, but, as another side of their ideology maintains, they behave as servants--albeit at times reluctant--of a set of watchful masters. A recognition of the role of certain "moral entrepreneurs", or "do-gooders" (as they may be called by the police as well as by deviants), is necessary to an understanding of the deviance and control dialectic, when deviance is considered that which is so labeled. Then a given behavior

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<sup>38</sup>The Vice Commission of Chicago, op. cit., pp. 1-10, and Reckless, op. cit., preface.

may be viewed as more or less deviant depending upon how active the moral entrepreneurs are in creating and enforcing rules against it. Paradoxically, therefore, deviance is not only minimized and limited by the forces of social control, but it is created and maintained--through the process of labeling and stigmatizing--by those very same forces. It is in this sense that deviance-control may be seen as a dialectical process, a relationship of both conflict and unity, in which each produces, reduces, and reproduces the other. Prostitution is partially elucidated by this perspective.

Almost nothing was done, officially, about prostitution in the United States until the 1870's. At that time do-gooders went to work and demanded the segregation or isolation of whores in limited areas of cities. But not until after the turn of the century did a movement get rolling which earnestly advocated a total suppression of prostitution. The dominant stance moved from toleration to regulation to suppression. It appears that this might be the general cyclical process through which the social control of prostitution flows, to greater or lesser degrees, in given areas of given cities. There has been a trend in the U.S. toward increased suppression, but the cycle seems to continue within that trend, adjustments being made in harmony with the overall trend as time has passed. That is to say that the defining characteristics of any given stage of the cycle change as the trend

continues. For example, in a particular area toleration could mean that prostitutes may work in the bars as long as they stay off the streets. Regulation might mean that they must limit themselves to one or two bars, and suppression would take on the meaning that the girls had better not be caught soliciting at all. Then "things cool off", but perhaps they will not "cool" all the way down to where the last cycle started; "toleration" might now mean that whores are allowed to solicit in two particular bars in the area. Overall, it seems that whores have to worry somewhat more than they used to about the police, so, in that sense, it is harder to make a living in the occupation than it once was, though there may be less competition now, and therefore bigger financial rewards for those who are willing to take the risk.

The people who get the reform process off the ground, then, are not the police. In the final analysis it is the do-gooders who are the dedicated enemies of whores, not the men out patrolling the streets; they, for the most part, only do as they are told to do by others. The bureaucratization of the police has brought, with centralization of the command structure, an increasingly narrow area of discretion, or margin of moral autonomy, for the patrolman on the beat. Further, the task specialization which has taken place within the larger departments has meant that the control of vice is handled almost exclusively by plainclothes bureaus and details. Given

policemen may or may not, as individuals, hold anti-pathies toward prostitution, but their relationships to the police bureaucracy will by and large determine how they will behave toward whores. The do-gooders organize and arouse the public. Typically, it seems that action by the police does not come until after the mayor (who usually appoints the police boss) feels pressure coming from his electorate. A whole bevy of do-gooder organizations emerged early in this century for the purpose of stirring up the public and pressuring the politicians--"committees of 15", vigilance societies, juvenile protective associations, vice commissions, and social hygiene associations, to name a few.<sup>39</sup>

In order to win support these do-gooder groups must have some kind of goods to sell the public--an ideological package. Condemnation alone cannot gather social momentum without a rationale or justification of sorts. Reformers and crusaders usually have quite elaborate reasons why they want to alter the status quo; the anti-prostitution do-gooders have been quite vociferous in

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<sup>39</sup>A process not unlike this is taking place today--the civil rights movement. Here again the police are one of the prime targets of moral enterprise. In effect, the civil rightsers are attempting to create a new variety of officially defined deviant--the bigot. In the South an unsympathetic and indifferent public has naturally been complemented by indifferent or hostile local politicians and policemen; only at the federal level has moral enterprise made substantial progress.

this regard. It is interesting to note the shifts that have come about in the ideological focal concerns of do-gooders during this century. The ideological fuel for the attack on the segregated districts seems to have come from disgust and indignation about the "white slave traffic"<sup>40</sup> which was said to be flowing in the depths of American society. The white slave issue was part of a more general concern about the seduction and corruption of innocent young girls--often said to be farm girls--who were seen as the real victims of prostitution.<sup>40</sup> Legislation and social control efforts were therefore directed not so much at the prostitutes themselves as against the third parties to the business--madams, procurers, pimps, racketeers, etc.

Then, with the advent of World War I came the second major concern--the unhealthiness of prostitution. The affinity between venereal disease and the business was stressed, and so the do-gooders could hook up with the almost sacrosanct "health ethic" of American society. It was this concern, probably more than any other, that kept the American Social Hygiene Association going as the most active and viable of the do-gooder organizations of

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<sup>40</sup>For examples of this ideological stage see Theodore A. Bingham, The Girl That Disappears: The Real Facts About the White Slave Traffic, Boston: R. G. Badger, 1911, and Jane Addams, A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914.

this century. When the effectiveness of the white slave theme died out, it was to the health concern that the A.S.H.A. attached itself; had it not adjusted its focal concern surely it would have rapidly gone the way of decline and fall, as did so many other anti-prostitution groups when the public excitement about white slavery was over.

But when VD was finally all but wiped out do-gooders had to look elsewhere for a rationale, and not much remained. In 1949, the A.S.H.A. set forth a "case against prostitution" consisting of a list of six reasons why the business should be stamped out; at the top of the list appeared the charge that prostitution strikes at the home and the family.<sup>41</sup> There is just not much left for do-gooders to complain about--that is, not much that has public appeal. However, this must not be taken to imply that there are many do-gooders around today who are upset about prostitution. One does not see whores today as he did earlier in the century; on the surface, at least, there is not much for do-gooders to do.

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<sup>41</sup> "The Case Against Prostitution," Journal of Social Hygiene, 35 (1949), page 166. The remaining five reasons harken back to the themes of past campaigns--injury to public health, exploitation of young people, etc. It is not surprising that these crusaders have stayed away from the ideological fuel of the mental health movement; to impute mental illness is to excuse from moral responsibility, so their usual demand for police crackdowns and harassment would thereby be undermined.



Those changes that have come about in the organization of prostitution as a result of the impact of official social control, then, may be understood as end products of a chain of organizational interaction, the central actors being do-gooders, politicians, police, and whores. Prostitutes have had to cope with, as an immediate concern, the policemen in their surrounding environment. This century's whores have seen that environment grow increasingly unfriendly and dangerous to the maintenance of complex and visible forms of organization. Though something like "informal regulation"<sup>42</sup> probably is the rule today, what the police countenance regarding the practice of the business is now a far cry from what it once was. Since the days of the segregated district it has been necessary for the participants in prostitution to increasingly strive for structural flexibility of the operation and lower and lower levels of visibility. Whoredom has gone underground into a sub rosa organizational network; the brothel, the call house, and open streetwalking are seen very infrequently or not at all in American cities, depending upon the local control

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<sup>42</sup>Lemert, Social Pathology, op. cit., page 264, sees this as the best way of categorizing contemporary control of prostitution. This policy should be seen against other possibilities--toleration, official regulation, and suppression.

policies.<sup>43</sup> Typically the police have from time to time gone underground, too, in order to harass and pursue whores as they carry on their illicit business. An interesting topic for research would be the precarious social integration that exists between prostitutes and policemen in large American cities, for it seems clear that an integration between the two, now close, now distant, does exist.<sup>44</sup> In addition to going underground, whoredom has to some extent migrated--there has been a movement to the suburbs away from the more effective urban police systems and, in some cases, a movement to communities which specialize in "wide open" vice, such as Calumet City, Indiana, Newport, Kentucky, and Hurley, Wisconsin.<sup>45</sup> The recent history of prostitution, in

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<sup>43</sup>Besides drifting toward the bar girl and call girl systems, it is likely that more prostitutes are using marketing techniques unlike any of these major forms. It is reported that girls in England are increasingly working in isolation from the prostitution sub-community and are using new, more mobile techniques, such as soliciting from automobiles--Gosling and Warner, op. cit., page 14. I am told by police officers that there has been some random, direct soliciting of motel guests in metropolitan areas, and it is also possible that more girls are working alone with their pimps acting as procurers. Each of these forms is, of course, very high in flexibility and low in visibility.

<sup>44</sup>See Adler, op. cit., pp. 110-111; McManus, op. cit., page 105; and, in England, L. Fairfield, "Notes on Prostitution," British Journal of Delinquency, 9 (1959), pp. 164-173, esp. page 169; and Rolph, op. cit., pp. 18-25.

<sup>45</sup>Vice communities often seem to emerge on the boundaries between political units where police jurisdiction is overlapping or disputed. The dispersion of prostitution was drawn to my attention by Albert J. Reiss, Jr., in conversation.

short, has been in good part a history of organizational adaption to pressing social control efforts.

The second part of these notes has taken the form of some speculations concerning the kinds of factors that revolve around and encroach upon the control and practice of prostitution. Some features of the process of moral enterprise have been discussed. It is important to emphasize, however, that the existence of prostitution in a society and the coming forth of indignant do-gooders should not be taken for granted. What are the necessary social conditions presupposed by the existence of any form of prostitution? It has often been argued and assumed that prostitution is inevitable in a viable social system,<sup>46</sup> but such a position seems, on the face, culture-bound.

And the rise and fall of energetic moral enterprise against a given variety of deviance should be taken as problematic, a topic for research in itself; a sociological approach to planned social reform is overdue. What was there about early twentieth century America that set the stage for the emergence of anti-prostitution groups in

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<sup>46</sup>See, for example, Davis, op. cit.

major cities throughout the nation?<sup>47</sup> And, why do "crack-downs" occur when they do?<sup>48</sup> How does a ladder of priority of "social problems" take shape in a society? Why has the U.S. seemingly been "tougher" on prostitution than other Western nations? And so on.

At this stage in the game of understanding prostitution, however, what seems to be needed most is simply serious thought and discussion about prostitution, based upon some first-hand knowledge of the sociological nature of this conventionally controversial behavior. A good bit of hard work in the field, then, is the prerequisite to something upon which the broader study of deviance can build a contribution to general sociology.

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<sup>47</sup>It appears that something can be learned by considering the anti-prostitution crusade as one aspect of the broader progressive or reform movement that was getting underway at the turn of the century. What Richard Hofstadter calls the "status revolution"--which he sees as underlying the progressive movement--may therefore help to account for the membership base of the organized drive against vice. See The Age of Reform, New York: Vintage Books, 1955, pp. 131-173. It may well be, in fact, that moral movements are typically underpinned by the status rather than the class or power concerns of their leaders.

<sup>48</sup>With some sociological imagination, one might find part of the answer in this passage from John Steinbeck's Cannery Row, concerning the situation of the Bear Flag, a local whorehouse:

A group of high-minded ladies in the town demanded that dens of vice must be closed to protect young American manhood. This happened about once a year in the dead period between the Fourth of July and the County Fair. Dora usually closed the Bear Flag when it happened. It wasn't so bad. Everyone got a vacation and little repairs to the plumbing and the walls could be made.  
(pp. 90-91)