

MODERN WOES: EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN REFORMERS'  
CRITIQUE OF THE "NEW WOMAN" AND MODERN URBAN LIFE  
IN ANTI-SEX TRAFFICKING FICTION

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ELIZABETH ROSE TRAFTON  
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Elizabeth Rose Trafton, Candidate for the Master of Arts Degree

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ABSTRACT

In the early twentieth century, when American authors of so-called "white slavery" literature wrote about their fear of white middle-class young women being sexually enslaved and trafficked, they also revealed their fears around the wider changes sweeping through American society. During the Progressive Era, a new moral panic was engulfing the United States. The movement against what reformers described as "white slavery" was one prominent response to Americans' fears. In the 1980s, historians debated the myth versus reality of so-called "white slavery." Later, historian Mara L. Keire reinterpreted the movement against the purported trafficking of white women when she viewed the fiction reformers wrote in response to the problem with the same credibility as vice commissions. This project compares literature by these authors in terms of purity-based rhetoric against modernity. This project will examine four works of what scholars have described as "white slavery" literature written between 1909 and 1912. These white, male middle-class authors exhibited a deep uneasiness for modernity and, as a result, the developments they saw as connected to it: increased urbanization, changing cultural norms, and changes in women's

societal roles. They feared the erosion of the traditional American way of life as people lost sight of “appropriate” morals going into a new American era. They defined “white slavery” as a modern urban problem that was hidden behind an enticing urban glamour. In contrast, these authors portrayed rural life, and the people that lived there, as the antithesis to urban life, and thus modernity, in order to invoke connotations for their audiences of a simpler, more positive imagined past.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “Modern Woes: Early Twentieth-Century American Reformers’ Critique of the “New Woman” and Modern Urban Life in Anti-Sex Trafficking Fiction,” presented by Elizabeth Rose Trafton, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

### Supervisory Committee

Diane Mutti Burke, Ph.D., Committee Chair  
Department of History

Sandra Enríquez, Ph.D.  
Department of History

David Trowbridge, Ph.D.  
Department of History



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 1912, Dr. Carle C. Quale proclaimed to the Chicago City Council: “the most brutal desperate and degrading chapter in history is now being written, and it is that of the unfortunate female slaves.”<sup>1</sup> He was referring to so-called “white slavery,” or the fear that young white women were increasingly victims of sex trafficking. Quale, and other authors of what scholars have described as “white slavery” literature, created Progressive Era parables that decried what they considered to be a scourge on modern American society. These stories were most likely fictional but all cases sensationalized what they believed to be a real problem in modern American life. The authors intended their narratives to work to alert and inform white middle-class parents and their daughters to this threat and to protect the virtues of white middle-class young women who were a primary intended reader of the literature. However, in the same works, these authors also revealed their fears of the wider changes sweeping through early twentieth-century American society.

At the turn of the twentieth century, a new moral panic was engulfing the United States. Many white middle-class Americans were expressing fears of women’s changing roles in society, increased urbanization, the presence of blatant vice within cities, and other developments they saw as connected to modernity. The growth of the movement against “white slavery,” which peaked between 1907 and 1914, was one response to these fears.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carle C. Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery* (The Hamming Publishing Co., 1912), <https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:537649>.

<sup>2</sup> Jessica R. Pliley, “Trafficked White Slaves and Misleading Marriages in the Campaigns Against Sex Trafficking, 1885-1927,” *Federal History*, no. 11 (2019): 66.

Eventually, this concern was addressed on a national level, with the passage of federal legislation such as the White-Slave Traffic Act of 1910, otherwise known as the Mann Act, which criminalized the transportation of women for the purpose of sex work.

The concept of “white slavery” was, according to historian Kristofer Allerfeldt, “overwhelmingly seen as the kidnapping, brutalization and sexual enslavement of girls and women for systematic exploitation.”<sup>3</sup> The term “white slavery” was, and still is, problematic and charged. Present-day human sex trafficking is, in a way, a form of modern slavery as the people that are victims of it are not free to choose to leave. However, the term “white slavery” would of course not be used to refer to human sex trafficking of present day, even if its victims are sometimes referred to as enslaved. In fact, usage of the term “white slavery” to refer to real human sex trafficking during the early twentieth century would also be inaccurate. While the term “white slavery” was in use as early as the seventeenth century, it was then most commonly used in reference to exploitive work practices.<sup>4</sup> It was not until the late nineteenth century when the term gained its sexual connotation and was used in relation to human sex trafficking.<sup>5</sup> The choice at the time to use the term “white slavery” to describe this myth was directly connected to American racial-based slavery, which had only recently legally ended with the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution in the mid-nineteenth century. In reality, however, repression of Black Americans in law and practice was accelerating at the turn of the twentieth century with the codification of Jim Crow laws and

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<sup>3</sup> Kristofer Allerfeldt, “Marcus Braun and ‘White Slavery’: Shifting Perceptions of People Smuggling and Human Trafficking in America at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Global Slavery* 4, no. 3 (2019): 344.

<sup>4</sup> Pliley, “Trafficked White Slaves and Misleading Marriages in the Campaigns Against Sex Trafficking, 1885-1927,” 64-5.

<sup>5</sup> Pliley, “Trafficked White Slaves and Misleading Marriages in the Campaigns Against Sex Trafficking, 1885-1927,” 63-4.

an increase in racial violence and continues in many forms in the United States through to the present day. This connection between the terms “white” and “slavery” created a kind of shock value for the white Americans who heard it. While types of indentured labor, especially of racial and ethnic minorities, was also still a concern in the United States at this time, due to the passage of past federal legislation such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Peonage Act of 1867, it did not provoke early twentieth-century white middle-class Americans in the same way as the myth of “white slavery” did.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, white native-born middle-class Americans were significantly triggered by the increased migration of non-“white” peoples into and within the United States during the early twentieth century and, as a result, the term “white slavery” also reflected the nativist and racist views this incited. The Progressive Era was a time when the racial classification of “white” was in fluctuation. Native-born white middle-class Americans negatively reacted to the increased immigration of peoples from Eastern and Southern Europe, who were not immediately labeled or viewed as “white,” to the United States.<sup>7</sup> In addition, this period also saw the beginnings of the Great Migration, the increased migration of African Americans, mostly from the South, to Midwestern and Northern cities.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, during the Progressive Era, the term “white slavery” was most often used rhetorically to refer to the real situation of white women moving to American cities in search of work and who sometimes became sex workers, and the belief that these women were actually tricked or sex trafficked by nefarious actors rather than engaging in sex work due to lack of economic opportunity or by choice. Fears of the possible traffic of white middle-class

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<sup>6</sup> Allerfeldt, “Marcus Braun and ‘White Slavery’,” 358-9.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Donovan, *White Slave Crusades*, 5-6.

young women, while not an entirely new anxiety in the Progressive Era, was so obvious that reformers and non-reformers alike created “white slavery” literature that was used to both terrify and inform their readers in equal measure.

Early twentieth-century “white slavery” literature followed in a long tradition of popular narratives of the perils of white women who were captured or seduced as found in Indigenous captivity narratives and seduction literature from early periods. Indigenous captivity narratives became popular in the United States beginning in the colonial period with the publication of Mary Rowlandson’s *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* and retained an interested audience into the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> These narratives typically focused on the experiences of white women who were captured and held by Indigenous people but who eventually escaped and returned to their “civilized” lives. Likewise, seduction literature, such as Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple*, published in 1794, enjoyed the same type of popularity in the United States in a similar period.<sup>10</sup> These popular narratives featured sensationalized stories about young white women “ruined” or “lost” and were meant to serve as cautionary tales for their readers.<sup>11</sup> In Indigenous captivity narratives, anxieties over the unknown and identity culminated in works where the untamed wildness and the Indigenous “other” took center stage.<sup>12</sup> Seduction literature included salacious details about naïve young women tricked by rakish men or “fast” women into “ruin,” often ultimately leading to their deaths, and were intended both to entertain and serve as cautionary tales for their readers.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Kathryn Zabelle Derounian, “Puritan Orthodoxy and the ‘Survivor Syndrome’ in Mary Rowlandson’s Indian Captivity Narrative,” *Early American Literature* 22, no. 1 (March 1987): 92.

<sup>10</sup> Angela Monsam, “Charlotte Temple, an Autopsy: The Physiology of Seduction,” In *Death Becomes Her: Cultural Narratives of Femininity and Death in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Elizabeth Dill and Sheri Weinstein (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 74.

<sup>11</sup> Monsam, “Charlotte Temple, an Autopsy,” 74-5; June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 7.

<sup>12</sup> Namias, *White Captives*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Monsam, “Charlotte Temple, an Autopsy,” 74.

“White slavery” literature was, ultimately, an evolution of these two genres. The new major difference between “white slavery” literature and its predecessors, however, was that it added a modern twist to these parables by setting them in the urban world.

In their landmark works published in the 1980s, historians Mark Thomas Connelly and Ruth Rosen debated whether these stories of “white slavery” were myths or historical reality. According to Connelly, “white slavery” narratives were ultimately a reflection of American society’s concern about the move of rural people, especially of white young women, to increasingly urbanized centers.<sup>14</sup> He concluded that “white slavery” narratives were more myth than reality as they were overly simplistic and, other than acting as a kind of guide book for young women moving into cities, left much to be desired in terms of a real analysis of prostitution.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Rosen contended that so-called “white slavery” did exist. She also determined that the widespread idea of “white slavery,” and the fascination the public found in these “virtually pornographic” narratives, were used deflect from the real societal and economic problems that pushed women into sex work. Ultimately, Rosen concluded that these narratives painted women as passive.<sup>16</sup>

According to historian Mara L. Keire, past scholars of prostitution have, for the most part, interpreted the “white slavery” scare through the lens of the “rantings of a paranoid social group,” while dismissing “middle-class fears about urbanization, immigration, and women’s increased mobility” as a legitimate connection to the phenomenon.<sup>17</sup> As such, scholars have traditionally seen the more restrained Progressive era vice commission reports

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<sup>14</sup> Mark Thomas Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 117-118.

<sup>15</sup> Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era*, 133.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 133.

<sup>17</sup> Mara L. Keire, “The Vice Trust: A Reinterpretation of the White Slavery Scare in the United States, 1907-1917,” *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 1 (2001): 6.

as the more trustworthy source type compared to the more graphic and overstated “white slavery” narratives.<sup>18</sup> For example, Connelly and Rosen, despite being on different sides of the “white slavery” myth vs. reality debate, based both of their conclusions on the actual existence of wide-spread sex trafficking of white women by emphasizing the inaccuracy of “white slave” narratives and the accuracy of the vice commission reports. Though her study examined “white slavery” literature and vice commissions on equal ground, Keire concluded that the “white slavery” scare was more than the “hysterical expression of middle-class fears” and “anti-vice reformers were not blue-nosed Puritans sniffing out immorality” to prevent urban “fun.”<sup>19</sup> Instead, anti-vice reformers’ work was “neither rhetorically peripheral nor politically ineffective” as they used the “white slavery scare as a catalyst to clean up municipal government and to close down red-light districts.”<sup>20</sup>

Scholars no longer debate about the existence of human sex trafficking during the Progressive Era. Human sex trafficking definitely existed in this period. While it is difficult to determine the exact extent of human sex trafficking during this time, many modern historians agree that the actual number of white victims did not match what was indicated by “white slavery” activists. The movement against “white slavery,” its literature included, was mostly based upon the possibility of white women being sex trafficked, not the actual reality of a widespread traffic of white women. More recent scholarship on “white slavery” has focused on further deciphering the narratives and other propaganda in the context of the era. Historians Amy Lippert and Rachel Schreiber have studied visual depictions of “white slavery” in this manner. Lippert states that reformers used graphic images to make clear to

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<sup>18</sup> Keire, “The Vice Trust,” 6.

<sup>19</sup> Keire, “The Vice Trust,” 21.

<sup>20</sup> Keire, “The Vice Trust,” 21.

their audiences, while urban places and people might be outwardly attractive, they often were “the same ones that sold ‘young girls into a life of shame’.”<sup>21</sup> According to her, non-reformers, motivated by profit, also utilized these same images, making it hard to separate the works of vice reformers from profit-seekers.<sup>22</sup> In her study, Schreiber concentrated on the critical depiction of “white slaves” and sex workers in the socialist New York City magazine, *Masses*. She argued that, despite the doubt that anti-vice reformers sowed on lower class women, “single, urban, working-class women forged new sexual identities in this time and could no longer be classified simply as either virtuous or vice-ridden.”<sup>23</sup> She concluded that within the *Masses*, “the questions raised by prostitution, and the rhetoric employed to decry it, signified the changing ways that women approached living in the city as independent sexual agents.”<sup>24</sup>

Numerous historians have published scholarship that has explored different aspects of American “white slavery” literature such as common themes utilized in the stories and the effectiveness of the works in inciting change in American society. Less focus has been placed on the extent of the fears showcased in these authors’ works in connection to how they viewed the changes occurring in the United States at the turn of the century, however. This leads to the primary question I explore in this project: what underlying fears were American “white slavery” authors displaying in their rhetorically purity-based works? To answer this, I have examined and compared four sources of “white slavery” literature, which includes one novel and three short story/essay collections. These sources were published

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<sup>21</sup> Amy Lippert, “The Visual Pedagogy of Reform: Picturing White Slavery in America,” *Journal of Urban History* 46, no. 4 (2020): 856.

<sup>22</sup> Lippert, “The Visual Pedagogy of Reform,” 865.

<sup>23</sup> Rachel Schreiber, “Before Their Makers and Their Judges: Prostitutes and White Slaves in the Political Cartoons of the ‘Masses’ (New York, 1911-1917),” *Feminist Studies* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 165.

<sup>24</sup> Schreiber, “Before Their Makers and Their Judges,” 190.

between the years 1909 and 1912 and are primarily based in Chicago. Early twentieth-century Chicago was one of America's newer rapidly developing urban centers and, because of that, these authors recognized many modern "flaws" within and around it. Ultimately, this project is about the rhetoric used by authors of "white slavery" literature, not the reality of human sex trafficking during the Progressive Era. These white middle-class male authors, like the majority of white middle-class Americans during this time, were most concerned with the fate of white middle-class young women and girls. While women of color and working-class women in general certainly participated in sex work and were also trafficked during the Progressive Era, most white middle-class Americans were not as alarmed by their participation and victimhood as they were by the many white middle-class women they believed were preyed on and ushered into a life of infamy.<sup>25</sup>

The first work examined, *Ella: a Story of White Slave Traffic*, was written and published by Ojibwe or Chippewa author J. C. (John Couchois) Wright in Harbor Springs, Michigan in 1911.<sup>26</sup> Wright had published various works of poetry and Indigenous folklore before and after *Ella's* publication.<sup>27</sup> However, *Ella*, was Wright's first, and only, foray into "white slavery" literature. He claimed in *Ella's* preface that he had personally investigated "white slavery" in Chicago and that his novel is based on a true account of it.<sup>28</sup> While this claim cannot be verified, *Ella's* status as an outlier in Wright's publication history speaks directly to the level of his concern about "white slavery." *Ella* followed the fictional story of a half-

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<sup>25</sup> To further separate actual human sex trafficking from the myth of "white slavery," I will not be using the term "white slavery" without signifying the concept with quotes. I believe it is important to make this specification as the term "white slavery" minimized both American slavery and the women of color who faced, and continue to face, sexual violence in the United States.

<sup>26</sup> J. C. (John Couchois) Wright and Earl W. De La Vergne, *Ella: a Story of the White Slave Traffic* (Harbor Springs, Mich.: J. C. Wright, 1911), 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> "Poets of Michigan," SOM - State of Michigan (Library of Michigan), accessed July 15, 2022, <https://www.michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan/public/michigan/dig-coll/poets-of-michigan>.

<sup>28</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 5.

Indigenous girl named Ella Winters. At the beginning of the novel, Ella lived in the rural countryside with her cruel aunt and uncle and had a love interest named Bob Blake. Ella is described to the audience as a beautiful orphan, who was in touch with the natural world. At the behest of two sex traffickers, Jimmy the Smasher and Agnes Bartell, Ella journeyed to Chicago with the promise of a respectable job. Instead, Ella found herself trapped in a brothel within the red-light district. Bob traveled to Chicago in an attempt to find Ella and enlisted the help of a sex trafficking victim named Rose Peerson. Ultimately, Bob was unable to save Ella, who died due to the stress put upon her for refusing to “lead a life of shame.”<sup>29</sup>

The second, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery* by Dr. Carle C. Quale, is a short story collection published in 1912.<sup>30</sup> Quale was active in the “white slavery” reform scene in Illinois, and served as the Chief Investigator for the Illinois Senate White Slave Committee.<sup>31</sup> Quales’ work contains “white slavery” parables disguised as real encounters with what he described as “white slaves” or “white slave” traffic that Quale claimed he had. It also contains essays written by Quale about, what he believed, were the causes of and solutions for “white slavery.” Quale suggested several solutions for “white slavery” in his work such as introducing a living wage and clothing censorship boards for women, however, he also believed eugenics played a large part in the extensive sex trafficking of white women. He advocated in his work for there to be widespread education in eugenics, a debunked racially- and ethnically-based scientific belief that placed the blame of societal ills on “bad” genetics, as he believed this step would deal a huge blow to “white slave” traffic.<sup>32</sup> While I utilized

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<sup>29</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 121.

<sup>30</sup> Carle C. Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery* (Chicago, Ill.: The Hamming Publishing Co, 1912), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Carle C. Quale, *The Cause of Damaged Goods: Why there are More Convicts Outside the Penitentiary than Inside* (Chicago: the Modern Press, 1915), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, 79.

other parts of the collection, the narration of two specific short stories is the main focus in this project. In *the Escape of a Girl*, Quale recounted the story a young “Bohemian” woman, who fell into “white slavery” as a new immigrant in Chicago.<sup>33</sup> Whilst working for a well-off family, her naivete caused her to be tricked into “white slavery.” After weeks in a brothel, she was finally able to return to her aunt’s house but was changed for life. In *the Rambling Talk of an Old Sport*, Quale opened his story on a beautiful spring day, where he was taking a walk through the park. His day was interrupted, however, when a “very poorly dressed and dirty” old man approached him.<sup>34</sup> The old man then proceeded to tell Quale his opinion on a number of “problems” in modern American society.

The third, *Tragedies of the White Slave* by H. M. Lytle, was originally published in 1909 by the Charles C. Thompson Co. in Chicago.<sup>35</sup> Lytle was a special investigator for the Metropolitan Press.<sup>36</sup> His short story collection includes stories he had supposedly heard or gathered from first-hand accounts of young women falling victim to “white slavery” in Chicago. All of the short stories exhibit, as Lytle believed, ways in which young girls could fall into a life of forced sex work. I utilized the narration of two of these stories in this project. In *the Tragedy of the “Want Ad,”* a young woman answered a seemingly innocent ad for a widow’s traveling companion. This ad turned out to be a sex trafficking trap as the elderly widow was, in reality, a procurer for a brothel. However, the presence of the young woman’s brother was able to save her from becoming a victim of sex trafficking. In *the Tragedy of the Maternity Home*, a reporter investigated a murder that had taken place in a

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<sup>33</sup> Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> H. M. Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave: True Stories of the White Slavery Taken from Actual Life. Each One Dealing with a Different Method by Which White Slaves Have Become Innocent Victims to Destruction* (Chicago: the Charles C. Thompson Co., 1909), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave*, 1.

brothel. There he met a childhood friend, who he believed to have died. She, now a victim of sex trafficking, begged him not to tell her family about her circumstances as she was not, and never would be again, the same girl they lost.

The final work I utilized is *The Great War on White Slavery, or, Fighting for the Protection of Our Girls*. Multiple authors made contributions to this work but Clifford Griffin Roe was the primary author.<sup>37</sup> In 1911, Roe worked as a judge and had previously been an assistant state's attorney in Illinois.<sup>38</sup> He was also the president of the American Alliance for the Suppression and Prevention of the White Slave Traffic.<sup>39</sup> He is listed on the title page of this work as the “acknowledged leader in the fight against white slavery.”<sup>40</sup> This short story and essay collection is the work closest to being non-fiction out of all the other sources examined in this project as it seems to contain a number of actual human sex trafficking cases. However, it still includes stories that are most likely fictional. In this project, while I used a number of essays, I only utilized the narration of one short story. In *Home, Sweet Home*, a sex trafficking victim named Mildred Clark longed to leave the brothel in which she was ensnared and return to her childhood home. However, she was trapped until a reporter heard her cries for help, after which she was liberated and finally could return home.

While some “white slavery” literature and other media was created primarily with monetary gain in mind, the authors examined in this project display a deep belief in the real fight against “white slavery.” They unquestionably saw the sex trafficking of white middle-

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<sup>37</sup> Clifford Griffith Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery, or, Fighting for the Protection of Our Girls ... Also Containing a Full Account of the Great Fight for the Suppression of White Slavery and the Great Movement for Purity in Our Homes* (Chicago: C.G. Roe and B.S. Steadwell, 1911), 1.

<sup>38</sup> Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Clifford Griffith Roe, *Panders and their White Slaves* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1910), 8.

<sup>40</sup> Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*, 1.

class women as a real American epidemic and, by publishing literature warning middle-class readers of this threat, these authors likely consider themselves as essential pieces in the eventual eradication of the menace of “white slavery.” Despite the fact that human sex trafficking certainly occurred during the Progressive Era, the “white slavery” panic as exhibited by reformers such as these authors was never just about forced sex work, however. Ultimately, this project will demonstrate that, while “white slavery” literature was primarily filled with rhetorically-based concerns about the protection of white middle-class women’s purity, their authors also contributed to the growing fears of the ills of modern urban life in their works.

## CHAPTER 2

### IMAGINED WOMANHOOD

Clifford Griffith Roe, in 1911, declared: “[White slavery] is intricately interwoven with public and civic morals. Civic morals relate to the morals of men and women as members of society and the defect in civic morals is vice. Vice is a moral fault or failing, especially immoral conduct or habit; the deviation from the right standard, implying a defect of the natural character, or a defect as the result of training and habits.”<sup>1</sup> A significant focus of “white slavery” literature was the “white slave,” or the young white woman who fell victim to forced sex work. Though, for the most part, written as passive victims of “white slavery,” these women, and the parables about them, came to symbolize for “white slavery” literature authors the flaws of modern American society. In their works, these authors openly displayed their anxieties about changing social norms and morality. They contended with shifting ideas about the place of women and men in early twentieth-century American society, along with the changes in sexual behavior that were emerging at this time.

The New Woman, a feminist archetype that emerged in the late nineteenth century, represented progress for some women in the new century. However, while some Americans might have viewed her construction as a sign of advancement, the New Woman also produced fear over the possible erosion of traditional gender roles.<sup>2</sup> According to historian Barbara Antoniazzi, the New Woman and the “white slave” were on opposite sides of the

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford Griffith Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery, or, Fighting for the Protection of Our Girls ... Also Containing a Full Account of the Great Fight for the Suppression of White Slavery and the Great Movement for Purity in Our Homes* (Chicago: C.G. Roe and B.S. Steadwell, 1911), 184.

<sup>2</sup> Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 27-8.

“wayward” women spectrum during the Progressive Era.<sup>3</sup> While “white slaves” were representations of the inherent helplessness of women and promoted the idea that women needed to be protected, the New Woman was a symbol of anti-domesticity and endorsed the collapse of dominant gender rules.<sup>4</sup> As white middle-class women left the domestic sphere for the public sphere, they challenged long-held norms in how white middle-class American women’s lives were patterned. Previously, women were expected to move from girlhood to womanhood to motherhood, and from their father’s homes to their husband’s.<sup>5</sup> In reality, white middle-class women’s proper role had expanded past the home by the turn of the century but, rhetorically and ideologically, these women remained symbols of the American domestic sphere.<sup>6</sup> While white middle-class men became associated with aspects of the industrialized world during the nineteenth century such as through their public lives and work, white middle-class women came to be seen as representations of the home and family.<sup>7</sup> As a result, nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century white middle-class Americans saw white women seeking employment, both at best in “respectable” positions or at worst in sex work, as a failure of their fathers and husbands to provide for their families.<sup>8</sup>

Another great concern for many white middle-class Americans during the early twentieth century was the state of the morality of the nation, as “white slavery” literature authors indicated in their works. Before the twentieth century, the restricted idea that sex was

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Antoniazzi, *The Wayward Woman: Progressivism, Prostitution, and Performance in the United States, 1888-1917* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2014), 10-4.

<sup>4</sup> Antoniazzi, *The Wayward Woman*, 10-4.

<sup>5</sup> Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity* (Lexington: the University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 78.

<sup>7</sup> Carol Srole, *Transcribing Class and Gender: Masculinity and Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Courts and Offices* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 45.

<sup>8</sup> Srole, *Transcribing Class and Gender*, 46.

only for procreation dominated white middle-class beliefs in regards to sexual behavior.<sup>9</sup> That belief was slowly beginning to give way to allow for the acceptance of marital relations also for pleasure by the late nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> However, the change from generally believing in sexual repression toward more acceptance of some sexual freedom threatened the basis on which American society had previously been built upon.<sup>11</sup> In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American society, reputation was important. While a man could recover from a “ruined” reputation, women typically did not have the same luxury.<sup>12</sup> Authors of “white slavery” literature reacted to these ideas of societal morality and women’s purity in their works.<sup>13</sup>

In a call to arms in the opening of *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, Quale told his audience: “let us all unite into one great big host, determined to crush this black serpent gnawing at the very roots and foundation of society, the purity of womanhood.”<sup>14</sup> He introduced the idea that society, as his audience knew it, was in danger. Lytle expressed a similar view in *Tragedies of the White Slave*. In his foreword, Lytle educated his audience on the purpose of his work. Lytle asserted that “if one mother or father may be warned in time,

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<sup>9</sup> Bryan Strong, “Ideas of the Early Sex Education Movement in America, 1890-1920,” *History of Education Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1972): 129.

<sup>10</sup> Strong, “Ideas of the Early Sex Education Movement in America, 1890-1920,” 129.

<sup>11</sup> Strong, “Ideas of the Early Sex Education Movement in America, 1890-1920,” 153.

<sup>12</sup> Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> For literature that addresses gender norms in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America, see: Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Barbara Antoniazzi, *The Wayward Woman: Progressivism, Prostitution, and Performance in the United States, 1888-1917* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2014); Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity* (Lexington: the University Press of Kentucky, 2015); Carol Srole, *Transcribing Class and Gender: Masculinity and Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Courts and Offices* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010). For literature that addresses sexual behavior in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America, see: Bryan Strong, “Ideas of the Early Sex Education Movement in America, 1890-1920,” *History of Education Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1972); Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*; J. Shoshanna Ehrlich, *Regulating Desire: From the Virtuous Maiden to the Purity Princess* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Carle C. Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery* (Chicago, Ill.: The Hamming Publishing Co, 1912), 14.

if one single life may be saved from the traps men make and the lures they bait for the enslavement of the flower and innocence of the nation the author will have been well repaid indeed.”<sup>15</sup> Quale and Lytle both defined white middle-class womanhood as the foundation of American society. They asserted to their readers that white women’s inherent purity was desperately in need of protection, or else society would collapse. By doing so, they displayed not just a fear of sexual “slavery” corrupting womanhood but also how white middle-class women’s changing position in society would transform the American life they, and their readers, knew.

Similarly, in *America’s Awakening*, Roe stated that “at last the realization has dawned that womanhood and manhood are at stake, our homes are in jeopardy, and the stability of the nation is impaired by the rearing of weak and debauched children.”<sup>16</sup> Roe, like Quale and Lytle, based the “stability of the nation” on white middle-class womanhood. However, he also showed concern about white middle-class manhood. In *the White Slave Message from Chicago*, he expressed to his audience some solutions, according to him, for “white slavery.” He wrote that “[white slavery] will never be blotted out until we change social conditions; educate men to a higher standard of right and wrong; and we have wiped out the demand....”<sup>17</sup> By putting male “customers” at the center of the problem, Roe defined women as passive victims of sexual “slavery.” He placed blame on men as the corrupters of young white girls and women. According to Roe, a better moral education for men was needed to solve the underlying causes of “white slavery.” Roe further proposed to his audience that “it

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<sup>15</sup> H. M. Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave: True Stories of the White Slavery Taken from Actual Life. Each One Dealing with a Different Method by Which White Slaves Have Become Innocent Victims to Destruction* (Chicago: the Charles C. Thompson Co., 1909), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*, 372.

<sup>17</sup> Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*, 182.

is necessary to begin at the bottom and gradually build a new foundation and erect thereon a new code of morals for mankind.”<sup>18</sup> Through this recommendation, he defined the morals of 1911 America as deficient. American society, Roe was suggesting to his audience, had changed with the new era in a way that left its current code of ethics unable to combat the current levels of corruption in modern American cities.

Authors of “white slavery” literature were naturally also concerned about white middle-class women’s virtues. For example, near the end of Ella Winters’ story, Wright emphasized the importance he placed on white women’s purity. In *Ella*, Wright symbolized Ella’s purity through a cross necklace that had once belonged to her deceased mother.<sup>19</sup> While held in captivity by her enslavers, Ella refused to perform the work of a sex worker. Therefore, she remained physically pure. However, when her necklace was taken from her, Wright wrote that “she was suddenly possessed of the strength and ferocity of a tigress at bay. She sprang at her accuser's throat and struck and fought until the latter's face was streaked with blood and her hair hung in a tangled mass.”<sup>20</sup> Wright directly contrasted his previous characterization of Ella as kind and docile, with her fierce fight to get her necklace back. By doing so, he stressed his belief in the importance of white women protecting their own virtue.

In *the Escape of a Girl*, Quale depicted a story told to him by a foreign young woman who was able to escape from “white slavery.” While the nameless woman was able to escape her sex traffickers, she informed Quale that, “I was taken to the home of my aunt---ruined for

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<sup>18</sup> Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*, 182.

<sup>19</sup> J. C. (John Couchois) Wright and Earl W. De La Vergne, *Ella: A Story of the White Slave Traffic* (Harbor Springs, Mich.: J. C. Wright, 1911), 19.

<sup>20</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 81.

life.”<sup>21</sup> Through this parable, Quale suggested to his audience that a woman’s worth was based upon the status of her virtue. Without sexual purity, a woman was ruined for life according to most “white slavery” literature. However, he also expressed concerns about the purity of men similar to Roe, unlike the other two “white slavery” literature authors examined in this thesis. Quale told young women to “be sure you know the man you marry and his past life and history. Be sure that he can give you the same chastity and purity which he seeks in you.”<sup>22</sup> He also later expressed: “why should a man have a thousand chances to a woman’s one? The ideal remedy for the evil we are complaining about would be to cure the abnormal lust of men, and thereby remove the prime cause.”<sup>23</sup> Quale voiced regret over the gendered double standard paid toward sexual relations. The call by reformers for white middle-class men to control their sexual appetite was by no way new in the early twentieth century.<sup>24</sup> However, the shift to a more collective agreement on a universal moral sexual standard of purity did not begin to occur until the late nineteenth-century.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, however, Quale still acknowledged his opinion that a white woman without her virtue was ruined. Nevertheless, he also emphasized male purity in the sense that a lack of pure living from her partner could also directly impact a white woman’s virtue.

Lytle suggested similar notions of white middle-class women’s purity to his readers in *the Tragedy of the Maternity Home*. After the reporter heard the story of his childhood friend’s descent into “white slavery,” he begged the young woman to return home to her parents and abandon her life as a sex worker. She informed him that “when a woman falls,

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<sup>21</sup> Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, 80.

<sup>24</sup> J. Shoshanna Ehrlich, *Regulating Desire: From the Virtuous Maiden to the Purity Princess* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014), 42-3.

<sup>25</sup> Ehrlich, *Regulating Desire*, 43.

she falls never to rise again. The thoughts of her evil life are forever a menace to her. They pursue her constantly. She never can resume her former sphere in life.”<sup>26</sup> She later told her friend that “I’m an animal now. The innocent girl that you once knew is now no part of me. I’m all that is bad now. When I leave this life, it will be in death.”<sup>27</sup> Lytle characterized young white women who had lost their purity as animals, dehumanizing them in the minds of his audience. By doing so, he presented his opinion to his readers that vice forever changed a woman, especially if it compromised her virtue. While compromised white women could never regain their purity in Lytle’s opinion, Roe presented a differing viewpoint in the preface of his work. According to Roe, one of the purposes of *the Great War on White Slavery* was to “to open the door of forgiveness to the prodigal daughter.”<sup>28</sup> He ultimately argued against the idea of “ruined” white women as irredeemable after engagement in virtue-altering vice activities unlike several of his colleagues. The basis of “white slavery” literature was that naive young white women were tricked into “white slavery.” These young white women were seen as passive victims as the real cause of “white slavery” was perceived to be failure in societal social mores in general, and not just those of early twentieth-century young white women and girls.

In *the Escape of a Girl*, after the foreign woman recounted her story of escape from “white slavery,” she expressed her hope that her story would help other young women. Quale recorded her as wishing that her story would “serve as an eye-opener to the many light-hearted and frivolous young women who encourage, through their actions, dress and words, the advances and boldness of the panders, thus becoming easy victims for the white slave

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<sup>26</sup> Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave*, 11-2.

<sup>28</sup> Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*, 3.

man.”<sup>29</sup> In this parable, Quale placed some blame on young white women for becoming victims of sex trafficking. He focused on presenting, what he saw as, the loose actions and dress of early twentieth-century young white women as a boosting factor in the increase of “white slave” traffic. He again expressed a similar opinion in *the Rambling Talk of an Old Sport*. In the short story, Quale recounted meeting a down-on-his-luck man in a park. He recorded the old man’s opinions on modern women’s style of dress. Quale wrote the man as saying: “I say, ladies, what is next after hobble skirts? Tights!.... Can you think of any mother who dresses her girls so that a turkey-gobbler would spread all his feathers and make a beeline for them as far as he could see?”<sup>30</sup> Quale blamed modern fashion trends for the troubles young white women might face from the “white slave” trade. That said, he also made a point to not place the same blame on white women of older generations. Mothers, in Quale’s opinion, were a part of the old guard of morality and behavior standards. The young white women referred to in this passage represented the changing culture mores moving through the Progressive Era. Quale attributed changing cultural standards for the moral lapses he perceived young white women as exhibiting.

Later in his work, Quale further asserted that control over what young white women wear would directly combat “white slavery.” He told his readers, as a solution to “white slave” traffic, that “[a censorship] board might be composed of women and could do much to prevent the wearing of indecent and suggestive apparel.”<sup>31</sup> However, Quale, in a reversal of his previous statements, also told his audience that he did not generally have a problem with how young white women dress, “but we find many men so weak-minded that they cannot

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<sup>29</sup> Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, 79-80.

resist the great art display on our streets and still attend to business.”<sup>32</sup> While still acknowledging modern fashion as problematic in his opinion, Quale also brought blame back to modern white middle-class men and their lack of ability to control their behaviors. He intertwined both as agents in “white slave” traffic.

Roe also recognized dangers in the generational divide between white American middle-class women. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Americans feared that the relationship between white middle-class mothers and daughters was in crisis.<sup>33</sup> They believed that these relationships were suffering because of a lack of open communication between mothers and daughters, and a lack of discipline and correct training for young women.<sup>34</sup> At the beginning of *the Great War on White Slavery*, Roe made clear that one of the purposes of his work was “to protect the purity and sanctity of the home.”<sup>35</sup> Roe believed in the divide between the public and private sphere. He raised the concern to his audience that the relationship between mothers and daughters had been tainted by the movement of white American middle-class women further into the public sphere. He lamented for a past in which “mother and daughter sat by the fire and knitted and darned and sewed. Confidences were exchanged and mother and daughter knew each other intimately, while today quite often they are employed in offices, stores or factories.”<sup>36</sup> Roe directly addressed the changes in white middle-class women’s roles in the early twentieth century, compared to earlier American eras. He emphasized that he believed that these changes were negative when he referenced the simpler “olden days.” Young white middle-class women, during this time,

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<sup>32</sup> Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, 79-80.

<sup>33</sup> Linda W. Rosenzweig, *The Anchor of My Life: Middle-Class American Mothers and Daughters, 1880-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 23-6.

<sup>34</sup> Rosenzweig, *The Anchor of My Life*, 23-6.

<sup>35</sup> Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*, 51-2.

experienced more of the public world compared to their mothers' generation. They could potentially attend university, which also challenged common-held beliefs in the deficient intellect of women compared to men, and their choices for employment had expanded past what was considered acceptable white middle-class women's work in previous generations.<sup>37</sup> Roe's expressed concern to his audience that the current state of the relationship between mothers and their daughters spoke to his belief in older, traditional moral values failing to be passed to the next generation because of white middle-class women's expanded public role – all to the detriment of American society.

According to authors of early twentieth-century “white slavery” literature, American society was on the edge of collapse. They were hoping to better protect young white women and girls in the United States by identifying a breakdown of societal morals that needed to be resolved in modern American society for “white slavery” to be eradicated for good. However, these authors were, in reality, reacting to newly educated white middle-class women's expanding public role in American society while also contending with how to consider women's virtue in a time when accepted sexual behavior was also changing. Both of these changes directly challenged long-held gender and cultural norms. The foundation of these authors' concerns was their fear of the loss of male control over white middle-class women, especially as white middle-class women moved into crowded, vice-filled American cities.

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<sup>37</sup> Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America*, 78-9.

## CHAPTER 3

### URBAN NIGHTMARES

In the *Great War on White Slavery*, under the guise of a judge during a sentencing, Clifford Griffith Roe expressed to his readers that “white slave” traffickers were “a monstrous type of the product of our present day civilization under congested conditions in this world city.”<sup>1</sup> To Gustave Lagerman, a human sex trafficker sentenced to five years of hard labor in the Sing Sing prison for second degree assault, a New York City judge named Dike further declared, “incapable of work yourself, you live upon the shame of those who, through affection, fear, or cruelty, have fallen under your baleful influence.”<sup>2</sup> Through this example, Roe directly connected “white slavery” and its trade in young white women to the crowded conditions of modern cities. This serves as only one example of the anxieties early twentieth-century “white slavery” literature authors expressed about the United States’ increasingly urbanized centers. To these authors, “white slavery” was entwined with the modern American city. For “white slavery” to be eradicated, these urban centers needed to be “fixed.”

While the early to mid-nineteenth century might have seen the United States of America’s highest rate of urban growth, American urban population growth was in no way insignificant in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>3</sup> In 1880, the only city in the

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford Griffith Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery, or, Fighting for the Protection of Our Girls ... Also Containing a Full Account of the Great Fight for the Suppression of White Slavery and the Great Movement for Purity in Our Homes* (Chicago: C.G. Roe and B.S. Steadwell, 1911), 176.

<sup>2</sup> Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*, 175-6.

<sup>3</sup> James L. Macher, *Pastoral Cities: Urban Ideals and the Symbolic Landscape of America* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 212-12. Between 1790 and 1850, the urban population in the United States shifted from 5 percent of the overall population to around 20 percent.

United States that had surpassed a population of a million people was New York City.<sup>4</sup> By 1910, three cities in the United States had populations of over one million people: New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia.<sup>5</sup> Due to rapid population growth in urban centers during the period, Progressive Era reformers connected the presence of dense populations in American cities directly to the increased presence of vice and crime.<sup>6</sup> Red-light districts, where legal vice such as gambling and sex work thrived, were prevalent in American cities. For much of the nineteenth century, these segregated districts were tolerated by many “respectable” white Americans as they served as a clear boundary between what was morally right and wrong.<sup>7</sup> These districts were often positioned in neighborhoods with lower rent and, as a result, members of the working class resided there, which included many peoples from racial and ethnic minority groups.<sup>8</sup> Middle- and upper-class white men were often forced to travel to these neighborhoods if they wanted to engage in disreputable activities, as they resided in private neighborhoods further away from working class neighborhoods and vice districts, which was made increasingly possible with the further development of urban public transportation.<sup>9</sup> However, the early twentieth century saw a rise in the middle-class awareness of venereal diseases and, as a result, increased intolerance for urban red-light districts.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Campbell Gibson, “Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990,” Census.gov (U.S. Census Bureau, June 1998), <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/1998/demo/POP-twps0027.html#urban>.

<sup>5</sup> Gibson, “Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990.”

<sup>6</sup> Steven Conn, *Americans Against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 28.

<sup>7</sup> John C. Burnham, *Bad Habits: Drinking, Smoking, Taking Drugs, Gambling, Sexual Misbehavior, and Swearing in American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 177-78.

<sup>8</sup> Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 26-7.

<sup>9</sup> Mara L. Keire, *For Business and Pleasure: Red-light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Burnham, *Bad Habits*, 180.

Nineteenth-century American cities, according to Historian Karen Halttunen, were “worlds of strangers.”<sup>11</sup> With increased urban populations, including a rise in immigration, twentieth-century urban centers could be considered no better. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Americans often found it hard to develop strong communities in cities where population growth and residential mobility was often high.<sup>12</sup> White middle-class Americans exhibited their greatest concern for the single white women who began to move away from their families to pursue employment opportunities in these vice-filled cities. Between 1890 and 1900, single women made up around 70 percent of the female work force.<sup>13</sup> These women often entered the factory or service work force in their teens and continued to work until they married and quit the work force completely.<sup>14</sup> At the turn of the century, while around 35 percent of these women were still residing in their familial homes, 38 percent lived elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Both advocates and detractors for female employment in the public sphere expressed fears that women would become sex workers rather than pursuing legitimate employment opportunities.<sup>16</sup> Their concerns stemmed from the fact that it was often difficult to live independently on female wages as well as the perceived dangers of women living outside of the protections of the domestic sphere.<sup>17</sup> At this time, there also was a thriving young women leisure culture in American cities. Young single women frequented dance halls, saloons, theatres, and amusement parks, which were often in or adjacent to vice

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<sup>11</sup> Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Story of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 34.

<sup>12</sup> Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 35.

<sup>13</sup> Claudia Goldin, “The Work and Wages of Single Women, 1870-1920,” *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 1 (1980): 81.

<sup>14</sup> Goldin, “The Work and Wages of Single Women, 1870-1920,” 82-3.

<sup>15</sup> Goldin, “The Work and Wages of Single Women, 1870-1920,” 83.

<sup>16</sup> Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*, 8.

districts.<sup>18</sup> In all, these locations were outside of what was traditionally considered safe spaces for “respectable” young white women.<sup>19</sup> To counter what many considered to be problematic social behavior, clubs for young white working women that included classes that promoted domestic skills were organized in many American cities in an attempt to keep these women away from what was considered the more harmful urban leisure activities.<sup>20</sup>

J. C. Wright in *Ella: a Story of White Slave Traffic* shared with Roe a comparable apprehension of urban life and its potential perils for young white women. Many at the time believed that the rapid population growth in urban areas had rendered them less livable and more dangerous. Before Ella is convinced by Jimmy the Smasher to leave her aunt and uncle’s home located in the rural countryside for Chicago, she indicated to him that her deceased father had once lived in the city. Ella communicated that, in her childhood, her father had “related such pretty stories about the great city that I have always had a desire to see it.”<sup>21</sup> Wright echoed a similar idea to Roe’s when he identified to his audience a

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<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey Wiltse, “‘I Like to Get Around’: City Girls in Chicago Music Saloons, 1858–1906,” *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 6 (November 2013): 1132-134.

<sup>19</sup> Wiltse, “‘I Like to Get Around,’” 1132-134.

<sup>20</sup> For literature that addresses cities and urbanization in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America, see: James L. Macher, *Pastoral Cities: Urban Ideals and the Symbolic Landscape of America* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Steven Conn, *Americans Against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). For literature that addresses the middle-class in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America, see: Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Story of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). For literature that addresses vice in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America, see: John C. Burnham, *Bad Habits: Drinking, Smoking, Taking Drugs, Gambling, Sexual Misbehavior, and Swearing in American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Steven Conn, *Americans Against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Mara L. Keire, *For Business and Pleasure: Red-light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010). For literature that addresses single working women in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America, see: Claudia Goldin, “The Work and Wages of Single Women, 1870-1920,” *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 1 (1980); Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 35.

<sup>21</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 29.

generational difference between the Chicago her father once resided in against the same city in 1911. While Roe highlighted a more concrete connection between “white slavery” and urban life, Wright focused on invoking an imagined past in his readers’ minds that he then failed to corroborate with evidence. As he indicted in the prologue of *Ella*, Wright felt that he “certainly would not feel that I were doing my full duty toward my fellowmen [if] I fail to hoist a danger signal over these shoals of destruction,” but he also wanted his audience to understand that “it is [not] by any means necessary nor desirable to avoid the environments of city life.”<sup>22</sup> Progressive reformers were largely not anti-urbanization. While they feared what they saw as the dangers in American cities, they also believed modern cities could be “fixed.”<sup>23</sup> “White slavery” literature authors’ anxieties about modern cities were tied to the larger concentrations of vice-related activities that could usually be found within them.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Wright’s presentation of the unsubstantiated claim that Chicago was once a “great” city, while not directly targeted at all aspects of urban life, still indicated a connection between American cities and “white slavery” to his audience. Both Roe and Wright intended these comments on urban life in the past and present to serve as warnings to protect young white women and girls from the dangers they believed existed in modern cities. However, they also revealed the deep uneasiness they felt toward the direction in which American urban centers were developing.

“White slavery” literature authors, logically, displayed great concern for young white women in conjunction to their living in an urban setting. Roe described the reality of modern cities, for young white women and girls specifically, as full of struggling “tired, languid

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<sup>22</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 5-6.

<sup>23</sup> Conn, *Americans Against the City*, 25-6.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Thomas Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 115.

girls” during the day and who, by the time night fell, were taken in by the city nightlife with “its glare of lights that bewilder the innocent and make the imitation look real.”<sup>25</sup> Over time, American women progressively became more visible within the urban labor force in semi-respectable employment positions. For example, in the twenty years before 1900, women working in clerical, shop clerk, and factory capacities increased rapidly.<sup>26</sup> For example, by 1900, women held almost a quarter of the jobs in the clerical labor force.<sup>27</sup> Roe illustrated the distinction between the stress of urban life and the exciting façade of urban entertainment to his audience. In a similar fashion, Wright presented Ella as a young woman who desired to leave the rural world for the urban world. Ella was written as a character who was stuck between two contrasting choices for her future at the beginning of Wright’s novel. On the one hand, she could become a nun “so she could devote her life to helping the poor.”<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, she could follow what she yearned to do: “see the great outside world of which she had read and heard so much.”<sup>29</sup> Presented as an innocent notion to his audience at the beginning of the novel, the idea became twisted when the reader learned of Ella’s death in conjunction to her time spent as a “white slave” by the end of the novel. Through this juxtaposition, Wright divulged to his audience that the naivete of young white women blinded them to the dangers of the modern city. “White slavery” literature authors like Roe and Wright were deeply troubled by the notion of young white women experiencing urban life on their own. It is true that single white women entering urban centers for the first time

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<sup>25</sup> Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*, 155.

<sup>26</sup> Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 291.

<sup>27</sup> Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, 291.

<sup>28</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 19.

often were surrounded by strangers.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, in their parables, Roe and Wright both played on this reality by utilizing the purposeful contrast between the presentation of an imagined urban experience against, what they saw as, the reality of urban life and its impact on young white women.

Unsurprisingly, “white slavery” authors like Wright and Lytle tended to present the male experience within the urban world as different to the female experience. In Wright’s *Ella*, the protagonist’s rural love interest Bob decided to leave the countryside for Chicago in an effort to find and protect Ella. Bob instantly found himself out of place in an urban setting.<sup>31</sup> Wright introduced Bob’s first impression of Chicago to his audience as: “finally, he turned into one of the side streets that lead to the heart of the city. It seemed to Bob that some such inscription as, ‘Who enters here leaves hope behind’ should hang over the entrance to these streets.”<sup>32</sup> For his audience, Wright directly contrasted Ella’s positive first impression of the city, and the vice within it, with Bob’s. Wright had Bob immediately recognize the negativity of the city by comparing it to Hell with his reference to Dante Alighieri’s fourteenth-century poem, *Divine Comedy*. While both Ella and Bob are characterized by Wright as being more in harmony with rural life, and thus characters out of their depth in a modern urban setting, he still branded Bob’s awareness of Wright’s urban reality as superior compared to Ella’s. As a result, he defined men as more equipped to deal with the dangers of urban life.

H. M. Lytle echoed a similar idea in his short story collection, *Tragedies of the White Slave*. In the *Tragedy of the “Want Ad,”* Lytle shared a parable about a young woman from

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<sup>30</sup> Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Story of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 35.

<sup>31</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 45-6.

<sup>32</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 46.

Chicago who almost fell victim to “white slavery” due to a newspaper ad. In the tale, the young woman answered a widow’s ad for a traveling companion, unaware that it was, in fact, a plot to lure girls into “white slavery.”<sup>33</sup> Luckily, Lytle informed his readers that her brother “was a man of the world. He knew, as a cosmopolitan must know, of the guile and trickery and fraud and deceit that a great city contains.”<sup>34</sup> Despite both the sister and brother being characterized as “cosmopolitan,” Lytle only categorized the brother as being aware of the dangers of urban life. However, as both of them are initially tricked by the advertisement for a traveling companion, Lytle was also informing his audience that even men well-versed in urban life needed to be weary of falling prey to vice.<sup>35</sup> Both Wright and Lytle demonstrated their belief, and anxiety over that belief, that young white women alone in modern cities were inherently not safe without male guidance or protection. They were, fundamentally, painting these young women as passive victims of “white slavery” and other forms of urban vice, and thus modernity.

“White slavery” literature authors also presented their readers with the hazards of urban living through vivid descriptions of, what they saw as, its beautiful veneer. In *the Tragedy of the Maternity Home*, Lytle began his parable with describing a reporter’s investigation of a murder in a brothel. Lytle, through the reporter, described the brothel as having “velvet carpets that sank beneath the feet covered the floors. Massive paintings by old masters were on the walls. The gilded ceilings radiated the glare of vari-colored lights which studded it.”<sup>36</sup> Lytle marked the opulence of the brothel as being the first thing the reporter, and thus Lytle’s audience, process about the location. Then, he contrasted that beautiful

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<sup>33</sup> Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave*, 24.

<sup>34</sup> Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave*, 28.

<sup>35</sup> Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave*, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave*, 9.

description with the graphic story of a young woman's, the reporter's unnamed childhood friend, induction into "white slavery," which included allusions to a forced abortion and sexual assault.<sup>37</sup> By juxtaposing the two, Lytle lectured to his audience that the glamorous outward appearance of urban life could not be trusted. He made the point that nothing is as it seems, particularly modern cities and the vice with which they were infested.

Wright echoed a similar lesson in his novel through Ella's first impression of the brothel that would become her future prison. After she was persuaded to travel to Chicago, Jimmy the Smasher delivered Ella to an extravagant mansion. Wright described the outward appearance of the brothel to his audience as a "four-story stone building, modernly constructed and of beautiful architectural design, its imposing white front and handsome tapestried curtains presenting a most attractive appearance."<sup>38</sup> He clarified to his audience that "there was nothing to indicate that it was anything other than a fashion-able residence or orderly boarding place."<sup>39</sup> Wright directly connected the outward appearance of the brothel to modern architecture. He went on to depict the apartment where Ella lived until her death as: "there was a large burnished brass bedstead in one corner of the room; several handsomely upholstered chairs were scattered about; a heavy rich carpet covered the floor, and beautiful pictures adorned the walls."<sup>40</sup> Wright, like Lytle, pulled his readers on a journey through the opulence of urban living. He purposely framed Ella's initial circumstances as a representation of the initial glamour of urban life.

Near the end of his novel, Wright finally provided for his audience a contrast to Ella's initial experience with the urban world. A sex trafficking victim named Rose described to

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<sup>37</sup> Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave*, 14-6.

<sup>38</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 39-40.

<sup>39</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 39-40.

<sup>40</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 41.

Bob the difference between her current circumstances opposed to the luxurious conditions in which she initially began her sex work. Wright described the area around Rose's place of work to his audience as: "the basements and back apartments of this row of houses are filthy and dirty beyond description, and the sanitary arrangements are terrible."<sup>41</sup> Through this presentation of a different urban experience, Wright highlighted the dichotomy between the imagined experience of the city and the reality of the city. By 1910, the population of Chicago had reached over two million.<sup>42</sup> Poor planning, as contended by Daniel Burnham and Edward H. Bennett in their 1909 urban improvement proposal for Chicago, had created many problems for Chicagoans at that point.<sup>43</sup> By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Chicago had high levels of smoke, water, and noise pollution, ineffectively designed streets and housing, a population faced with a number of health problems caused by poor handling of the sanitary system, and other ills of early twentieth-century urban life.<sup>44</sup> As originally concealed by the enticing glamour of urban life, Rose's dire circumstances were intended to prove to Wright's audience that vice was what rotted modern cities. Instead, it reveals how Wright, like many other early twentieth-century Americans, found the conditions of modern cities to be almost unlivable.

Authors of "white slavery" literature also exhibited their concerns about the connection they perceived between the wealthy urban elite and "white slavery." In the preface of *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, Carle Quale wrote, "listen, you high-toned, rich society men, judges, lawyers, doctors, business men and presidents. What are you going to

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<sup>41</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 87-8.

<sup>42</sup> Carl Smith, *The Plan of Chicago: Daniel Burnham and the Remaking of the American City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 43.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, *The Plan of Chicago*, 36-8.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *The Plan of Chicago*, 36-8.

do about white slavery?”<sup>45</sup> During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, indulgence of vice was, for the most part, masculine coded.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, a substantial portion of white middle-class Americans held the belief that the upper class sustained vice as they did not showcase similar forms of support against moral corrupting activities as the middle class.<sup>47</sup> As a result, Progressive Era reformers used this class-based rhetoric in their works, as did Quale. In reality, the wealthy white elite of the early twentieth century held similar concerns as the middle class about the morality of American urban society.<sup>48</sup> The contrast, however, was that their forms of urban improvement were less noticeable to the middle class as they focused more on taming the physical appearance of modern cities.<sup>49</sup>

Quale further elaborated on the connection he saw between the upper class and sexual vice. He wrote: “you men higher up, polished and refined, are often the wolves devouring and shedding the blood of the innocent lambs. Do you realize the enormity of your sin, the appalling destruction in satisfying your lust-ridden appetite?”<sup>50</sup> Quale appeared to blame upper-class men for the sustainment of “white slavery.” While Quale seemed to directly address the wealthy elite in these passages, he was not. Instead, he was speaking straight to his middle-class audience and validating their belief in the culpability of the upper class in the perpetuation of “white slavery.” Reformers such as Quale presented simplistic answers to large societal problems to their core middle-class audiences.<sup>51</sup> By connecting “white slavery” to the upper class, Quale gave his audience something to rally against. He was also

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<sup>45</sup> Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Burnham, *Bad Habits*, 278-9.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 215-16.

<sup>48</sup> Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 215.

<sup>49</sup> Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 215.

<sup>50</sup> Quale, *Thrilling Stories of White Slavery*, 25.

<sup>51</sup> Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 215-16.

addressing their concern about the loss of the ability to practice moral self-control in American society.<sup>52</sup> Into the early twentieth century, Victorian ideas of masculinity continued to shape the image of the ideal white American middle-class man.<sup>53</sup> Middle-class white men were expected to be hard working, practice self-control over their sexual passions, live an honorable life, and, additionally, demonstrate their masculinity through physicality, decisiveness, authority, and more.<sup>54</sup>

Lytle made similar assertions about the wealthy elite in *the Tragedy of the "Want Ad."* When a young woman answered the ad for a traveling companion, the "widow" asked her to attend a meeting, unknowingly, at a brothel. According to Lytle, the Arena hotel was "the most notorious, the most terrible assignation house in the city of Chicago," and a notorious location for "white slavery."<sup>55</sup> In his description of the hotel, he wrote: "when honest men are in bed the red lights of the Arena glare onto the boulevard like the bloodshot eyes of a devouring dragon. The gilded sons of fortune tear up before its yawning doors in their high powered motor cars."<sup>56</sup> Lytle went on to write that: "Its music is the popping of champagne corks, the laughter of wine debauched women, the raucous roars of the huntsmen— huntsmen whose sole sport is the slaughter of the innocent, whose only game is the chastity of the maiden."<sup>57</sup> Lytle depicted, in his vivid image of Chicagoan urban vice, a direct contrast between "honest men" and "gilded sons of fortune," or white middle-class and upper-class men, to his readers. He also linked elite men to modern technology. Ultimately,

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<sup>52</sup> Burnham, *Bad Habits*, 20.

<sup>53</sup> Tom Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900-1950* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 33 & 43.

<sup>54</sup> Carol Srole, *Transcribing Class and Gender: Masculinity and Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Courts and Offices* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 122.

<sup>55</sup> Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave*, 29.

<sup>56</sup> Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave*, 29-30.

<sup>57</sup> Lytle, *Tragedies of the White Slave*, 29-30.

Quale and Lytle presented upper class men as cogs in the machine of “white slavery” as their audience saw them as the ones who partook of the fruits of this urban vice.

Not all authors of “white slavery” literature latched on to this same connection, however. In a divergence from Quale and Lytle, Roe did not place the same blame on wealthy men for the prevalence of “white slavery.” Instead, in his work, he praised the “men of affairs” in Chicago for “spending thousands of dollars in an effort to exterminate the panders who supply the market for girls, no sooner is one avenue explored and closed than another one is found.”<sup>58</sup> In a seemingly sincere work aimed at fighting “white slavery,” the omission of blame might have been suspicious. Roe could have held off from making this connection in his work because, as a man who was more high profile in the “white slavery” movement compared to Quale or Lytle, he would have relied on the financial support in the fight against “white slave” traffic.

Authors of “white slavery” literature presented plenty of urban problems to their readers as causes of the sex trafficking of white women and girls. They expressed their concern about the exciting, and sometimes opulent, façade of the crowded, filthy modern American city and showed their audiences how lone young white women could easily fall victim to a “fate worse than death” because of it. White middle-class women in these works were shown as passive victims, who needed to be protected from both their own naivete and the dangers of urban centers. While the urban world and “white slavery” were certainly entwined in “white slavery” literature, these authors also contrasted these concepts with a nostalgic look toward the rural world.

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<sup>58</sup> Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*, 172.

## CHAPTER 4

### PASTURAL DREAMS

As established in the previous chapter, by the early twentieth century, American cities were extremely congested. Additionally, these urban centers lacked the infrastructure needed to support the populations that continued to grow within them.<sup>1</sup> This triggered Americans to turn to a different source of idealization: the rural world. Ultimately, the turn toward the rural ideal was caused by the rejection of the complex world of urbanization and industrialization.<sup>2</sup> Americans felt a connection with the natural landscape of the United States because of the symbolic idea of it.<sup>3</sup> To Americans, the land could be transformed into a landscape of “rural peace and happiness.”<sup>4</sup> As a result, in contrast to how they portrayed urban life, “white slavery” literature authors presented rural life, and people, in a much more positive light to their audiences.

While the further development of American cities was seen as a sign of success for the nation, many Americans also connected the rise of the urban world to the decline of the rural world.<sup>5</sup> Advocates for urbanization worked to marry the best of the rural with the urban to create a better and healthier living experience for urban dwellers.<sup>6</sup> This developed into a movement to soften American urban centers. City parks offered a retreat from urban life without people having to leave the city. Activists for these urban green spaces argued they

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Conn, *Americans Against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 142.

<sup>4</sup> Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 142.

<sup>5</sup> James L. Macher, *Pastoral Cities: Urban Ideals and the Symbolic Landscape of America* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 122.

<sup>6</sup> Macher, *Pastoral Cities*, 123-24.

would promote the health of urbanites and increase property values at the same time.<sup>7</sup> The communal essence of city parks also promoted democracy in urban spaces where class hierarchies were often starkly visible.<sup>8</sup> During the mid-nineteenth century, another movement to preserve some of the United States' natural splendor began to gain momentum.<sup>9</sup> As a result, the first national park in the United States was created in 1872: Yellowstone National Park.<sup>10</sup> Wilderness parks located near urban areas, such as the Indiana Dunes located outside of Chicago, presented an alternative option of entertainment opposed to the dangerous, vice filled activities that the city proper offered.<sup>11</sup> However, in opposition to the formation of more nature-based parks, urban athletic parks were also created. Athletic parks were more modern, artificial spaces created specifically to keep children away from more unclean and morally questionable amusements and activities in the city.<sup>12</sup>

City, wilderness, state, and national parks all promoted a controlled version of nature. Americans idealized the rural, not the wild. The wildness was a symbol of the “unknown” and the fear associated with that, while the romanticized pastoral landscape was comforting in comparison.<sup>13</sup> These spaces allowed Americans to play pretend as frontier pioneers and Indigenous peoples in a relatively safe, controlled environment.<sup>14</sup> During this time, American masculinity and nature were seen as connected. For example, the Boy Scouts of America,

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<sup>7</sup> Colin Fisher, *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> John Evelev, “Rus-Urban Imaginings: Literature of the American Park Movement and Representations of Social Space in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 12, no. 1 (2014): 174-75.

<sup>9</sup> Ney C. Landrum, *The State Park Movement in America: A Critical Review* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2004), 9-10.

<sup>10</sup> Landrum, *The State Park Movement in America*, 33-4.

<sup>11</sup> Fisher, *Urban Green*, 18-9.

<sup>12</sup> Fisher, *Urban Green*, 22-6.

<sup>13</sup> Fisher, *Urban Green*, 10-1.

<sup>14</sup> Fisher, *Urban Green*, 18-20.

founded in 1910, used nature as a tool to teach boys desired qualities of modern manhood such as civic skills and masculine character values for them to then bring back to their urban lives.<sup>15</sup> At the turn of the twentieth-century, the male association with nature allowed men to acknowledge the increased development of the urban, “civilized” world and, with it, modern manhood, by allowing them to periodically escape to a romanticized version of America’s past.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, the rural world came to represent ideal masculinity along with the patriarchal family.

Even though American urban centers had been softened with the integration of nature into these spaces, white middle-class Americans also began to move to the suburbs during the late nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> The suburbs were seen as safer, more controlled environments. The early suburban ideal came to be masculine-coded. While it promoted the need to be closer to the natural world, it also created a retreat for men from the busy urban world, and an idea of domesticity that kept white middle-class women in their homes.<sup>18</sup> Suburban homes represented domestic sanctuaries separated from the dangers both real and imagined in developing American cities. Suburban enclaves also reinforced the idea that white middle-class women’s place in society was to maintain their homes, provide support for their husbands, and properly educate their children in the correct moral values.<sup>19</sup> “White slavery”

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<sup>15</sup> Benjamin René Jordan, *Modern Manhood and the Boy Scouts of America: Citizenship, Race, and the Environment, 1910-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 121-23.

<sup>16</sup> John Pettegrew, *Brutes in Suits: Male Sensibility in America, 1890-1920* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 29-31.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret S. Marsh, *Suburban Lives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Marsh, *Suburban Lives*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 85-8.

literature authors latched onto this masculine-coded societal connection to nature and rural communities and utilized it in their works.<sup>20</sup>

Early twentieth-century “white slavery” literature authors’ focus on the rural ideal can first be seen in Wright’s introduction of Ella’s love interest Bob to his audience. He described Bob as “a big, good-natured country lad, awkward but honest,” whose “great heart responded more to the life of the fields and woods and he did not share her desire to know the world.”<sup>21</sup> Wright depicted Bob as a sympathetic man with a good moral character. He intentionally created a character with which his audience could connect. He then used Bob’s connection to the rural world to link the audience’s perception of that world with positive, desired morality. Wright also made a similar connection with the character of Ella Winters. Wright first introduced Ella to his audience with three facts: “seventeen, well educated, and very beautiful.”<sup>22</sup> He then wrote that “the squirrels and birds were her companions and so gentle and sweet was her disposition that she seemed like one of the wild flowers that lightly swayed as she passed among them.”<sup>23</sup> Wright characterized Ella in the same sympathetic,

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<sup>20</sup> For additional literature that addresses the American pastoral ideal, see: James L. Macher, *Pastoral Cities: Urban Ideals and the Symbolic Landscape of America* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). For literature that addresses the American park movements in nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see: Colin Fisher, *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015); John Evelev, “Rus-Urban Imaginings: Literature of the American Park Movement and Representations of Social Space in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 12, no. 1 (2014); Ney C. Landrum, *The State Park Movement in America: A Critical Review* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2004). For literature that addresses American masculinity in connection to nature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see: Benjamin René Jordan, *Modern Manhood and the Boy Scouts of America: Citizenship, Race, and the Environment, 1910-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016); John Pettegrew, *Brutes in Suits: Male Sensibility in America, 1890-1920* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007). For additional literature that addresses the American Suburbs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see: Margaret S. Marsh, *Suburban Lives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> J. C. (John Couchois) Wright and Earl W. De La Vergne, *Ella: A Story of the White Slave Traffic* (Harbor Springs, Mich.: J. C. Wright, 1911), 20 & 22.

<sup>22</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 19.

morally positive light as Bob. He made sure to cement in his audience's mind Ella's own positive connection with nature and rural life.

Wright continued this trend when he went on to describe the Michigan countryside in which Bob and Ella lived at the beginning of the novel. He depicted the landscape through the passage: "the resplendent July sun displayed the scenery of this far-famed landscape in a most fascinating manner. The luxuriant foliage surrounding the town was fragrant and inviting and the transparent waters of the harbor reflected like a large mirror the beauties of the scene."<sup>24</sup> Wright also purposely described where Ella lived before leaving for Chicago in a positive light. However, Wright contrasted these positive rural connections to Jimmy the Smasher, Ella's eventually sex trafficker. Wright depicted Jimmy to his audience as "unscrupulous in his love affairs and for a money consideration would stoop to almost anything which involved little or no manual labor."<sup>25</sup> Painted as product of urban living, Wright characterized Jimmy as sexually immoral and lacking a work ethic in opposition to the good moral characters of Ella and Bob. Wright also showed how Jimmy's connection with rural life differed from the protagonists of his parable. "But the loveliness of nature," Wright wrote, "could cause him no ecstasy nor compel him to be more gentle and considerate in his dealings with his fellow men."<sup>26</sup> He wrote that Jimmy's thoughts "were of the city and its hubbub; of the pleasure and excitement amid the glamour and music of the 'red light district,' or an evening's entertainment at some Chicago west side resort."<sup>27</sup> Wright highlighted Jimmy's indifference to the beautifully set scene in the novel. He emphasized the beauty and idyllic life of the countryside, and then juxtaposed rural life with Jimmy's

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<sup>24</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 25-6.

<sup>25</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 25-6.

<sup>27</sup> Wright and De La Vergne, *Ella*, 25-6.

perception of Chicago as exciting and full of pleasures related to vice. With this stark contrast, Wright ultimately marked Jimmy as an unsympathetic character and antagonist to his audience.

Roe also made contrasts between urban and rural life. In *Home Sweet Home*, a “white slave” named Mildred described her idyllic domestic life before her descent into urban vice while sitting in a luxurious room. As Mildred sobbed and stared into her vanity mirror, Roe wrote that “she [then] saw those other things that went to make for happiness in childhood; there was the sitting room in the old homestead; she saw the big log burning in the fireplace and her brothers and sisters playing near the fire.”<sup>28</sup> Roe showed that Mildred longed for the simpler, and therefore easier, rural life of the past as she sat in her current luxury-filled circumstances as a sex trafficking victim. In *Procuring Country Girls For City Resorts*, Roe also focused on depicting the rural landscape in a positive light. He wrote that young white middle-class women and girls should “stay rather at home where all is pure, beautiful and really grand, for no artisan can build forests and mountains like the great Creator has given you.”<sup>29</sup> While he characterized the rural landscape as pure, Roe also covertly made the comparison between urban architecture and the same scenery. By citing God as the architect of the rural landscape, Roe planted the idea in his audience’s minds that, in comparison, urban architecture was extremely modern and was in direct contrast to their God’s will.

In opposition to how the reality of modern cities, and the vice within them, was characterized in the same works, “white slavery” literature authors like Wright and Roe portrayed rural life, and the people that lived there, as the antithesis to urban life and

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<sup>28</sup> Clifford Griffith Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery, or, Fighting for the Protection of Our Girls ... Also Containing a Full Account of the Great Fight for the Suppression of White Slavery and the Great Movement for Purity in Our Homes* (Chicago: C.G. Roe and B.S. Steadwell, 1911), 28.

<sup>29</sup> Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*, 156.

modernity. These authors promoted the connection between the rural world to the concepts of purity and cleanliness, and characterized the urban world as impure and unclean, in an attempt to provide their readers with an antidote to the rapid changes impacting American society. As a result, they purposefully invoked positive connotations of rural life that represented a more “balanced” world, where white middle-class women remained in the domestic sphere and were controlled by their fathers and husbands.

CHAPTER 5  
CONCLUSION

“Slowly the awful fact that a great dismembered, disjointed business of trading in the bodies and souls of its daughters has dawned upon a busy, hustling, commercial nation,” Clifford Griffith Roe conveyed to his audience in *The Great War on White Slavery*, “its people, too busy making money, had allowed this nauseating white slavery to develop and grow right under their very noses unnoticed until its smell became so terrible that it was sickening.”<sup>1</sup> On the surface early twentieth-century “white slavery” literature preached against sex trafficking, however, hidden in its roots was the fear of change, especially in regards to the role and place of white middle-class women in modern society. Authors of this literature had trouble contending both with the rapid growth of America’s urban centers, along with their blatant vice districts, and the increased presence of the lone young white women found within them. These works were both intended to critique modern society, and white middle-class women’s place within it, and serve to inform these women and their parents about the horrors of the modern urban world. Ultimately, this literature was about attempting to gain back control of white middle-class women at a time in which they were gaining newly found freedoms.

Young white middle-class women, in contrast to past generations, enjoyed new opportunities in urban America that allowed them to engage more fully in public life. “White slavery” literature authors aspired to save white middle-class women from themselves by

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford Griffith Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery, or, Fighting for the Protection of Our Girls ... Also Containing a Full Account of the Great Fight for the Suppression of White Slavery and the Great Movement for Purity in Our Homes* (Chicago: C.G. Roe and B.S. Steadwell, 1911), 372.

painting them as passive victims in a society that was rapidly changing. As a result, “white slavery” authors focused on protecting and better educating young white middle-class women and girls to battle an overblown threat, while also seeking comfort for themselves and their readers in an imagined masculine-coded pastoral world that took a nostalgic look backwards to America’s past. These authors aimed to preserve a past where white middle-class men governed the private sphere and whose presence dominated the public sphere, ultimately trying to protect themselves and their place in modern American society.

However, they also realized, on some level, that they would not be able to stop many young women from leaving their homes and traversing urban spaces on their own, therefore these authors sought to frighten young women and their parents into approaching the new modern urban world with great caution. Accordingly, these authors hoped that these warnings would introduce further limits to young women in public spaces and, thus, maintain the white middle-class male dominate status quo that they felt was in danger of being broken.

Studying how authors of “white slavery” literature opposed the ills of modern urban life does not just offer clarification to the “white slavery” phenomenon during the Progressive Era but also sheds some light on similar forms of opposition to modernity in other eras of American history. Future scholars could continue this research by also comparing and contrasting the opinions of “white slavery” literature authors on forms of popular culture such as theatres, dance halls, music, party culture, certain literary tropes, and more, in light of anti-modernity inclinations. “White slavery” literature based around different urban centers in the United States such as New York and Philadelphia could also be compared by future historians. In addition, scholars could examine more forms of “white slavery” media like theatre dramas, films, newspaper op-eds and stories, to compare and

contrast the works in relation to anti-modernity stances. Future scholars could also compare American “white slavery” literature to foreign literature of the same nature. For example, England had a similar “white slavery” movement in the early twentieth century and produced some works of literature on the subject. Finally, American “white slavery” literature authors’ resistance to modernity could be compared to American media that opposed the existence of “white slavery” to examine the degree in which common fears did or did not overlap. This media might have exhibited more progressive views in regards to women and modernity as a result of the push back against the “white slavery” phenomenon.

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## VITA

Elizabeth Rose Trafton was born on July 23, 1997, in Kansas City, Kansas. She attended Sumner Academy of Arts and Science, where she graduated in 2015. In August 2015, she began attending University of Missouri-Kansas City in Kansas City, Missouri. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History in 2019. She then entered into the Masters of Arts program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in the Department of History in Fall 2019. Upon completion of her degree, Elizabeth plans to begin a career in a history-related field.