

Spring 2013

Moving Beyond "Slaves, Sinners, and Saviors": An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of US Sex-Trafficking Discourses, Law and Policy

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Recommended Citation

Baker, Carrie N., "Moving Beyond "Slaves, Sinners, and Saviors": An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of US Sex-Trafficking Discourses, Law and Policy" (2013). Study of Women and Gender: Faculty Publications, Smith College, Northampton, MA.
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Moving Beyond “Slaves, Sinners, and Saviors”:
An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of US Sex-
T r a f f c k i n g D i s c o u r s e s , L a w
C a r r i e N . B a k e r , S m i t h C o l l e g e

Abstract: This article analyzes stories and images of sex discourses, including government publications, NGO materials, and popular press, to explore the similarities and differences among these discourses. It examines how sex trafficking is framed using a rescue narrative that reiterates ideas about gender, sexuality, and nationality, relying heavily on patriarchal and humanitarian narratives. It argues that mainstream public policies focus on criminalizing sex traffickers, while suggesting alternative frameworks that empower rather than punish. It concludes that the dominant criminal justice approach to trafficking, which focuses on punishing traffickers—will not alone end the problem of sex trafficking. It argues that addressing the structural conditions that create populations vulnerable to trafficking is essential to dismantle inequalities that are the root causes of trafficking.

Keywords: sex trafficking, public discourses, rescue narratives

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Awareness of sex trafficking has increased significantly since the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000. We now regularly hear about it in the *New York Times*, *Hollywood Reporter*, and *Time*. Like Kam Neeson, Hollywood actors like Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore, with their Real Men of Hollywood, and survivors like Rachel Lloyd and Somaly Mam, who tour the world. Even government-sponsored educational campaigns are at the forefront. A plethora of activist organizations are working on the issue, including Justice Mission in Washington, DC, Shared Hope International, and the National Campaign Against Trafficking in Women, Equality Now, and Girls Education Initiative. These activists come from a range of political perspectives: some are feminist, some are evangelical, some are progressive, and some are conservative. One of the key sponsors of the TVPA was conservative Newt Gingrich, who was also supported by the National Organization for Women.

The diverse social movement against human trafficking occurred in other countries, particularly countries in States in Eastern Europe and Asia. The focus was primarily much less attention. Gradually, the problem came to be involving not only non-citizen victims but US citizens. how sex trafficking has been framed in mainstream public trafficking activists, the media, and Hollywood tell stories of sex trafficking and particular solutions.

This article will examine anti-trafficking stories and Based on a review of a wide range of anti-trafficking trafficking advocates, and the media, this article analyzes common themes as well as distinctions among these discourses. government, anti-trafficking advocacy organizations, and framed sex trafficking using a common, gendered rescue narrative of a helpless female victim from a cruel trafficker. This narrative (2005, 4) relies heavily on patriarchal and orientalist discourses and girls who are trafficked and of their powerful and dominant cultural beliefs about femininity, masculinity, and justice solutions to sex trafficking. The second part of the article addresses sex trafficking, which focuses on empowering women. The criminal justice approach is an important part of an effort to change the conditions that make women and girls vulnerable to trafficking. The criminal justice approach to trafficking—the state rescue narrative—alone ends the problem of sex trafficking, but that public policy can create populations vulnerable to trafficking and empower women that are the root causes of sex trafficking.

Rescue Narratives in Anti-Trafficking Discourses

Rescue narratives have a long history, articulated in a 1973 book, "The European Rule" (1973), Talal Asad argues that colonizers used narratives of interracial sexual assault to justify colonial rule in Middle East. The brutal oppression of colonized men (Woolliacott 2000) and paternalism—the state's denial of the freedoms and responsibilities of what is considered or claimed to be the "other"—are central to the narrative. Abu-Lughod (2002) and Ann Russo (2006) have shown how the narrative of women was used to justify the US invasion of Afghanistan. The narrative to mobilize and justify interventions into the hierarchies of power.

In the United States and Europe, the rescue narrative was used one hundred years ago, in turn-of-the-century campaigns by policy makers, advocates, and the media in stories about immigrant men or men of color. This discourse generated by anxieties about female sexuality and autonomy, as well as restricting women's mobility in the interest of protecting them. Congress passed the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910, outlawing the interstate transportation of women for "immoral purposes," particularly interracial, consensual sexual behavior (Woolliacott 2000).

As in the past, rescue narratives have been powerful in the fight against trafficking of women and girls. The rescue narrative that depicts the evil trafficker or pimp who abducts, deceives, or lures

a prison-like brothel and controls her with brutal violence. The trafficker is often a man of color or from a foreign country. In this narrative frame, the solution to sex trafficking is rescue. This rescue narrative appears, in different degrees, in anti-trafficking organizations, and the news media, as

The US Government

The United States government has been explicit in framing trafficking as a rescue mission. The name of the law itself—the Trafficking Victims Protection Act—reflects this. The US government has used the language of rescue in its anti-trafficking campaign. The US Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families' "Look Beneath the Surface" Campaign to Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking. This campaign asks people to become rescuers by helping identify potential victims. One poster shows a woman called "Look Beneath the Surface," one poster shows a woman seated in a chair, leaning away from a looming person.



Source: US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, "Look Beneath the Surface" Campaign. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/er>

The text on the poster reads, "Ask the right questions and look for clues. You are vital because you may be the only outsider with the opportunity to speak with a victim." The poster suggests that the woman is a victim of trafficking, but it does this by using traditional gendered language of rescue and aggression, and the need for rescue. In another Rescue & Restore Campaign poster, a woman is portrayed with little clothing, her lips painted



Source: US Department of Health and Human Services, Administrative Restoration Campaign. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/er/>

Both of these women are attractive, sexualized, and lovable. The image, accompanying text encourages the viewer to rescue victims of human trafficking." The brochure, directed at social service organizations, then states, "Many victims know what is being done to them is wrong" (US Department of Health and Human Services 2003). The message is that the victim needs another person to inform her. The posters and brochures construct women as helpless and in need of rescue, who "know best" (Kempadoo 2005, xxiv). The viewer, on the other hand, is powerful, and potentially heroic.

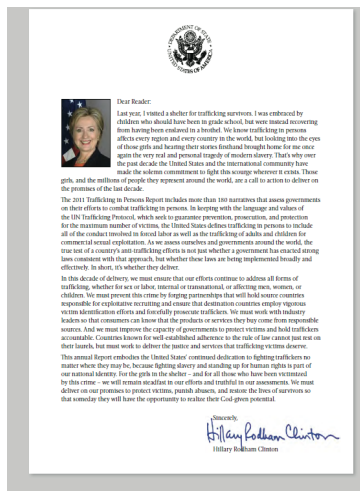
The theme of innocence and female vulnerability appeared in 2003, the Federal Bureau of Investigation established the "growing problem of domestic sex trafficking of children" (FBI Investigation 2013). Children are certainly innocent and their rescue is commendable. Still, the framing of the problem as one of innocence is striking.



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Violent Crimes Against Women and Children. http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/vc_majorthefts/cac/innocence

In the above image from the FBI's homepage for the Innocence Lost Initiative, the silhouette of a girl with pigtails placed next to a sexualized image of a woman taps into American cultural anxieties about the loss of virginity. This portrayal is powerfully mobilizing, but

A final example of the government's use of female vulnerability appears in Trafficking in Persons Report (US Department of State 2011) by the US Secretary of State as required by the TVPA, to have passed criminal laws against trafficking and are effective. Under the Bush administration, TIP reports focused almost on girls and evaluated the anti-trafficking efforts of countries. This has changed under the Obama administration. In 2010 the report evaluates US progress on fighting trafficking on female victims and sex trafficking abroad. The second



Source: US Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report
[organization/164452.pdf](https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/164452.pdf).

Invoking the trope of the oppressed and veiled Third World helpless female figure, head tilted, hands clasped around a box. On the next page is a photograph of and letter from these contrasting images are a good example of what Elizabeth Teo calls "the traditionalism of third world women that [is] counterproductive in the contemporary West" (2007, 140). Clinton's letter to a shelter for trafficking survivors—children who had been trafficked—addresses labor trafficking as well, the initial image and letter and call on the United States to stop traffickers, "because it is part of our national identity." Clinton calls on the United States to protect victims, punish abusers, and restore the lives of survivors to realize their God-given potential." Clinton frames the report around the world and promotes criminal laws and prosecution. The above images are typical in government anti-trafficking reports, women in need of help and frame the state, as well as women's rescuers.

Activists against trafficking also use a rescue narrative of helpless girls, and they expand on the rescue story. Organizations like Shared Hope International (SHI), and Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS), in New York City, have brought attention to the issue of TVPA defines severe forms of "trafficking in persons" as the provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of commercial sex is present or when the victim is transported across national borders is not required for conduct to be considered trafficking. Such as SHI and GEMS are fighting to raise awareness about prostitution, framing this exploitation as sex trafficking. Testifying before Congress in 2010, GEMS founder and executive director for ignoring domestic minor sex trafficking (Subcommittee on

To counter society's victim-blaming attitude toward similar organizations focus on the theme of the threat to a worthy victim, and traditional sexual and gender roles. A worthy victim: she is virginal and never complicit in her sex trafficking. The victims as so young they couldn't possibly be held responsible for their trafficking. At a trafficking conference in Portland, Oregon in 2010, the SHI founder, Linda Smith, and one of her staff members testified. The phrase "commercial sexual exploitation of children" is used to describe sexual exploitation of any minor, including girls as old as 18 (see reports on whether states have criminalized domestic minor sex trafficking in 2011). Similar to the FBI's Lost Innocence National Initiative, GEMS emphasizes the emphasis it places on innocence.

Innocence is portrayed in movement advocacy materials. GEMS produced a film about adolescent girls in the commercial sex industry (Schisgall and Alvarez 2008). Most of the girls featured in the film with this poster:



Source: Girls Educational and Mentoring Services. <http://www.gems.org>

The pink Mickey Mouse socks and white sneakers powerful.org promoted a Shared Hope International petition encouraging the Super Bowl Committee to take action to prevent child sex trafficking. The image of a young girl, pouting:



Source: Patrick Schmitt (Director of Campaign Innovation, Change.org), 2011. <http://www.change.org/petitions/ask-the-super-bowl-committee-to-stand-up-and-protect-children>.

By focusing on such young girls, the producers of these images are silencing the voices of older women too.

Another way in which advocacy groups represent innocence and in need of someone to take action for them is silencing image from the website of a Texas-based anti-trafficking organization.



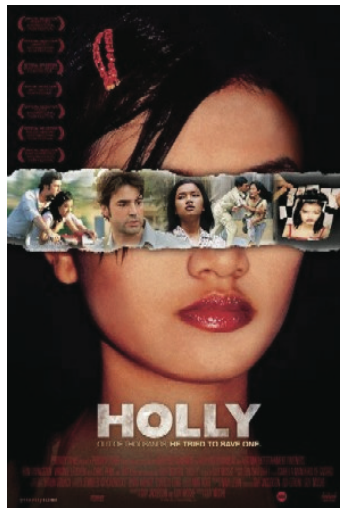
Source: Beauty Will Rise. <http://beautywillrise.org>

In this image, dark male hands cover the mouth and gra women too are portrayed silenced in this way. A woman's image of a woman with her mouth covered by the hands of a man is a powerful image to say it for her!"



Source: Human Trafficking News Daily: Newsfeed on Global Human
pages/human-trafficking-news-daily-newsfeed-on-global-hu

Alternatively, women and girls are portrayed as blind victims of child sex trafficking in Cambodia made by an Israeli filmmaker Moshe:



Source: Priority Films. <http://priorityfilms.com/dvd>

In 2006, a white middle-aged American man named Patrick Holly who had been sold by her impoverished family and work as a prostitute (Moche 2006). These images portray their vulnerability and helplessness, along with their innocence and evil is presented in a documentary film produced by several activist organizations in Atlanta.



Source: Whitestone Motion Pictures. <http://whitestonemp.com>

Told as a Tim Burton-style allegory, this short film preys on angelic young girls into his candy shop, where he has them turn into candy, which he then sells to men. The candy-shop owner is effeminate, wearing garish, tight-fitting clothes, white makeup, and a top hat. He is his apprentice, but the boy realizes what is going on. In a scene where the boy and the man are fighting, the man forces the boy to eat a lollipop. The boy then uses the machine to transform the girls back into the shop and returning them to their parents. The boy's rescue of the girls reestablish normative masculinity. This rescue and rescue is an extreme case of the rescue narrative, worthy victims as innocent and helpless. This represents the obscure many victims of trafficking, such as underage girls coerced into commercial sex because of poverty or drug addiction, in a room or chained up. This film also represents a common trope seen in Hollywood: white males fighting to save young girls.

Anti-trafficking activist organizations commonly use this film. Shared Hope International has a program called The Defenders USA, a trafficking movement. The Defenders USA website invokes the film as saviors and rescuers (Shared Hope International 2011). The website has a "restore a girl" by making a donation. The website has a photo of a girl with the quotation, "He rescued me," next to it. The girl became a defender." Another image caption appealed, "Be a defender. Asks men to pledge not to buy sex. Past pledge cards have been in the following positions:



Source: The Defenders USA, Shared Hope International. Accessed 15 June 2012. <http://sharedhope.org/>

The young women are posed looking up at the viewer, or and bare-shouldered. The current pledge card and a T-shirt



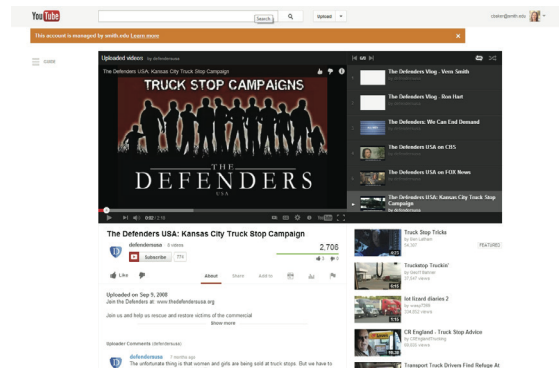
Source: The Defenders USA, Shared Hope International. <http://sharedhope.org/uploads/2012/12/Take-the-Pledge-card.pdf> and <http://sharedhope.org/>

Again, the girls are vulnerable, hunched over in a bed. In contrast to the images of vulnerable girls, The Defenders are strong and heroic rescuers and saviors. In 2010, The Defenders used money and recruit men into the anti-trafficking movement. They used highly masculinized graphics, language, and even



Source: The Defenders USA blog. Accessed 15 June 2012. <http://sharedhope.org/> current blog can be found at <http://sharedhope.org/>

In this image, a white arm with clenched fist grabs two are in boxy, all-capital letters. Another example is a video directed at truckers, which is posted on YouTube aggressively, legs apart and arms linked, with "The De



Source: The Defenders USA, YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X94Fy7R57mr&list=PLBXQ1dWQ>.

A brochure currently linked to the Defenders USA website is titled "Time to Man Up."



Source: The Defenders USA, Time to Man Up. <http://sharedhope.org/the-Defenders.pdf>.

The Defenders USA blog has posts titled "A Man to Fight Trafficking," which uses expressions and images portray men as strong, aggressive. The brochure, titled "Time to Man Up," calls on men to be "everyday heroes" using



Source: Truckers Against Trafficking. Accessed 28 May 2013. <http://www.truckersagainstrafficking.org>

As one commentator has said, men are coaxed into participating by being “granted the role of heroic rescuers and saviors” (2007, 139).

Utilization of traditional masculinity, however, is not only in Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore’s *Real Men Don’t Buy* but also in public-service announcements featuring celebrities



Source: *Real Men Don’t Buy Girls*, Thorn’s Channel, YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64A6AEEED5718>.

In these videos, the men appear to be doing traditional housework. As the video progresses the viewer realizes that doing laundry involves taking out the trash can and opening a new package of socks, and making a cheese sandwich. After showing their incompetence at these tasks, the men say the words, “Real men don’t buy girls.” The intent is humorous, but it also refuses to engage in a traditionally male behavior—preparing food. These videos challenge demand for commercialized sex from girls and women who are expected to perform gender roles.

The gendered nature of sex-trafficking discourses is often not mentioned or portrayed as victims in anti-sex-trafficking campaigns. Certainly, victims certainly exist (Curtis et al. 2008; Saewyc et al. 2000). A Texas-based anti-trafficking organization, *Beauty Will Rise*



Source: *Beauty Will Rise*. <http://beautywillrise.org>.

The assumption in the text is that only women and children are attributed the invisibility of men in trafficking discourse. In prostitution, “women are victims and men make choices”

Similar to the US government's anti-trafficking position, US media often utilize a rescue narrative that focuses on female innocence and victimhood, whereas government materials tend to focus on the state's role in trafficking. Activists focus on individual men playing the rescuer role, while the media—both in journalistic accounts of trafficking and,

The Rescue Narrative in Mass Media: Journalism and Hollywood

Both journalists and, especially, Hollywood movies use the rescue narrative in addressing the issue of sex trafficking. US media often depict the role of strong men to rescue them, to which is added a portrayal of the nations, as primitive and/or barbaric, thereby positioning the cultures from which trafficked women and girls come as "other." For example, on the NBC Dateline, former Special Representative and CEO of evangelical organization International Justice Mission, Gary Haug, is shown rescuing girls. In the opening scene of this film, NBC Dateline describes the place "an exotic vacation destination, with ancient cities, but also a place of horrendous crimes that go on behind closed doors" (NBC Dateline, "Children for Sale" and its "shameful secret." Trafficking is framed as a problem where white men are the powerful moral figures who rescue. The dominant image from the film is of an American rescuer feeling for

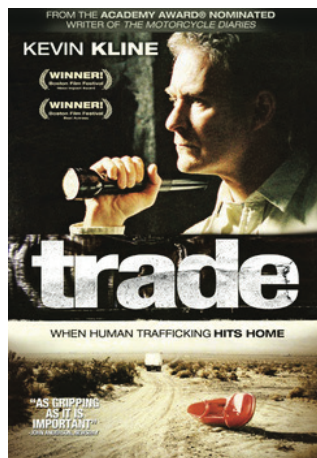


Source: NBC Dateline, Children for Sale (2005). <http://www.nbc.com/dateline/4039095#4039095>.

This recurring rescue narrative configures white men as the "rescuers" (Spivak 1988, 296), often downplaying poverty and the role of the state in trafficking. In doing this, "cultural communities are called upon to enact yet enacting human rights values, not yet as modern or postmodern (who are placed in the role of rescuer)" (Hua 2011, 6). The narrative of trafficking as a problem originating outside of the United States positions the US as a place of rescue.

Sometimes journalists themselves are the rescuers (Hua 2011). Victor Malarek, *The New York Times* (2003) headline about women trafficked from the Philippines, "The New York Times," who has written many columns on sex

about girls in Cambodia, the 2009), and with his wife Sheryl of *New York Times* columns, Kristof himself is a character with John to gain access to brothels in order to save a girl. In one case, Kristof actually bought two girls out of prostitution. Perplexed when one of the girls returns to her brothel, he sought freedom" (Kristof 2005). Attributing her return to a conversation where he warns her that she will die of AIDS like the young women I had just seen, gaunt and groaning, dying of AIDS. Kristof attributes to her being "broken" in a world that is broken. Kristof is unable to save the girl. In another story, a trafficking survivor, leads the viewer into the dungeons of torture and showing several close-ups of a girl whose work of Kristof in raising attention to the abuse and exploitation is certainly commendable, he follows a common journalistic trope of helpless women and girls of color in developing nations. The rescue narrative is particularly strong in Hollywood US coproductions, in which a thirteen-year-old Mexican virgin and her seventeen-year-old brother attempts to rescue their mother and father figure (played by Kevin Kline), who lost his wife (2007).



Source: Amazon.com.

In the most typical poster, Kline's character is featured gripping the frame. Across lines of age, race and nationality, the poster promotes a narrative on how to become a man by rescuing his young sister. The movie. The plot is driven by the race to rescue the girl. In another promotional poster for the film, the girl is depicted surrounded by hearts and flowers:



Source: Lionsgate. <http://www.tradethemovie.com/>.

The sign of innocence is represented not only in her dress and her face and shoulders. Her virginity begs to be saved from all directions.

The themes of female sexual vulnerability, the heroic masculine rescue are central to *Taken* (Moccia 2010), which grossed over \$100 million at the office. This film portrays a naive American teenager, who is kidnapped and is eventually saved by her father, a former CIA operative, from Albanian traffickers and their plot to sell her to a wealthy man. The film's director, John Dahl, and producer, Steven Soderbergh, have both worked on other films that deal with the theme of the hypermasculine—willing and able to kill anyone who gets in the way.



Sources: The Movie Blog and IMDb.

In the optional poster to the left, Neeson's character is pulling a gun out of his long leather jacket and looking to the right, he is dark and menacing, photographed from the chest up. The quotation from the film where he threatens to kill his daughter is a central theme of the extremely violent film. The estranged, unemployed father's act of rescuing his daughter. The extreme vulnerability of the daughter and the heroic Neeson character all convey a very traumatic exchange of women between men—the trafficker and the rescuer.

In both of these films, sex trafficking is portrayed in a way where there are only "slaves, sinners and saviors" (Daly 2005) and perpetrators. Victims are almost always female (although sometimes male), helpless, naive, totally victimized, and needing to be rescued by men. In both films, the disruption of patriarchal authority is central to the plot. In *The Whistleblower*, the protectors are men who end up trafficked. The plot development in both films involves the men proving their manhood by rescuing females, thereby reestablishing patriarchal authority. In both films, the rescuers are former members of law enforcement, but rather than seeking justice, they seek vigilante justice. The men in *The Whistleblower* and *Taken* are former law enforcement who should listen to and obey their parents, and stay close to them.

Men are usually the rescuers, but sometimes women are, as in the case of *Human Trafficking*, a female US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent who attempts to save an undocumented woman. In *Human Trafficking*, a Nebraska cop (played by Rachel Weisz) who becomes a peacemaker in the United Nations for covering up a sex-trafficking ring. In both films, the success in these films stands in stark contrast to the success



Source: IMDb

The portrayals of the female would-be rescuers in the two films are also similar. In *The Whistleblower*, the character Rachel Weisz is portrayed as a woman who is not physically imposing. She is shown from the waist up, looking off to the side, warily. In *Human Trafficking*, Mira Sorvino is shown from the waist up, holding a gun with outstretched arms, but she has a distressed expression. In both films, the women look weaker than the aggressive and determined men. In *The Whistleblower* and *Taken*.

When placed side by side, the portrayals of sex trafficking organizations, and the media exhibit some common patterns. In both films, the women are sexually vulnerable and helpless women and girls in need

discourses frame the state or professionals as rescuer on individual male rescuers. Hollywood distinguishes it of the traffcking rescue narrative, where the rescuer and playing outside the rules. In all three mediums, with white Western men rescuing women and girls, often men of color or Eastern Europeans. These stories reite sexuality, and nationality. In this way, ironically and of the activists on this issue, rescue narratives reinf women and girls vulnerable to sex traffcking in the fr

Reframing the Discourses

The film was based on Yao r2kO OT4i me ar Magazine sex trafficking Landesman, titled "The Girls Next Door." This article sex trafficking into the United States. In the article CEO Gary Haugshen trafcking isn't a poverty issue but a (2004). This perspective reflects the predominant view (Gulati 2011), a view that grows naturally out of the Rescue narratives portray the cause of traffcking to be and the rescuers to be the state, health-care or social hypermasculine vigilantes. This framing, however, obsc and political conditions that create vulnerability to gendered cultural beliefs that devalue women and girls based on race and/or nationality. These are the condit to ameliorate through laws and public policies. The re factors and dominant institutions onto individual, dev trade of centuries past) or, even more remarkably, Afri (2007, 144), in the case of domestic minor sex traffcki

With the support of many anti-traffcking organization justice solutions to sex traffcking. The TVPA focuses prevention—around which the annual Traffcking in Perso of State 2011, 16). The order of the three Ps reflects of the Act's funding is directed toward criminalizatio federal crimes related to traffcking and provided abund few resources are dedicated to helping victims directly to stay in the United States, is very limited, and is against their traffckers, an offer few have agreed to traffckers (US Immigration 2013). Even less has been al (Baker 2012, 1004). The TVPA made only a modest attempt to traffcking by providing limited funds to create eco including microcredit lending programs, job training, 7104(a) (2000)). The Act prioritizes criminal prosecut empowerment of people vulnerable to traffcking.

The TVPA pressures countries around the world to adopt has issued an annual Trafficking in Persons report, in more than one victims on whether it is taking appropriate determined the criteria for evaluation, which include and assisting trafficking victims. The Department of State with these standards. The Act authorizes the President aid to countries that are not in compliance (22 US Code around the world have adopted the priorities set by the example of the criminal justice approach to trafficking sex trafficking, which the United States has supported brothels and send them to government-sponsored "rehabilitation." *Dateline* *Chicago*, for instance, as cited above. The federally funded has sent its personnel to countries like Cambodia and to rescue women and girls from brothels and turn pimps prosecution (NBC *Dateline* 2005).

In response to US pressure and informed by the rescue have strengthened border controls and tightened immigration girls from trafficking. For example, scholar Mary Crawford Nepal, which, similarly to US discourses, portray performance have resulted in policies that restrict the human right to migrate, and do little to address root causes of trafficking (Parreñas 2008). These restrictions on women's rights are than what was intended of the regime in the case of anti-trafficking on Chinese migrants to Canada, Nadita Sharma argues that increasingly repressive state practices of immigration have been "displaced by practices that have resulted in international trade liberalization policies, mega-development labor markets, or war" (Sharma 2005, 89). The anti-trafficking national and international security agenda underlying more assumption about migrants, particularly females, is that after themselves. The result is to dissuade women and harm, thereby reinforcing the gender-biased notion that protection.

Rather than framing sex trafficking as a criminal justice to view the root causes of trafficking as the economic vulnerable to trafficking in the first place. Many argue income inequality and poverty through laws that allow of labor. These policies work to the benefit of corporations (95-117). Neoliberal policies forced on poor countries World Bank have required privatization of state industries and production, which makes populations vulnerable to economic have also pushed the development of tourism (and the that eliminate social services that David et al. 2005, and 59-4

Cynthia Enloe has argued, US corporations collude with labor cheap, to erode labor rights, and to cast aside (38). These neoliberal policies create economies that s populations vulnerable to traffcking. In addition to e states' depriving ethnic minorities of citizenship rig people's vulnerability to sex traffcking. Finally, soc to sex traffcking. Cultural belief systems that devalu male demand for commodified sex are among the root caus traffcking must address these structural factors.

Within the United States, advocates against domestic justice solutions to the problem. For example, as disc legislatures to pass and strengthen criminal laws agai Hope International 2011), as does the Polaris Project justice framing, however, does not address the underly commercial sexual exploitation. As in the international factors play a role in creating populations vulnerable the late 1990s, shortly after the substantial weakenin the passage of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, Atlanta j Hatchett noticed increasing numbers of young girls co charges (Richardson and Boxill 2007, 143). After this l government support went down signifcantly, but not th 2013). In 2010, 20% of children in the United States 200% of the poverty level (Child Trends 2012). The hig diminishing social support services for children in po child sexual abuse, all contribute to commercial sexual traffcking (Estes and Weiner 2001, 3; Anderson 2009).

Race and sexuality exacerbate poverty and increase vu youth experience much higher rates of poverty—over 40% 200% of the poverty level (Child Trends 2012). Native rate of poverty, and many reservations have six times Center for Education Statistics 2008, iii). Predictabl traffcking (Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center 20 acute among GLBT youth, making them especially vulnerab 1), so challenging heterosexist ideologies and institu levels of poverty, in combination with extreme materia sexual objectification of young girls (American Psychol pimp culture (Lloyd 2010), make young people particula The commodification of sex intersects with stereotypical feeds off girls made vulnerable by poverty and a cultu

A comprehensive solution to sex traffcking must incl ameliorate the poverty that makes many people vulneral adequate healthcare, affordable housing, quality scho rather than rolling back labor rights. Particular atte

continuing segregation of women into low-paying jobs, quality child care, lack of paid parental leave, the lack of child-support enforcement. All of these factors contribute to the vulnerability of women and children, making them vulnerable to sex trafficking. In combatting trafficking, the criminal justice system obscures the deeper structural causes of trafficking and

Conclusion

The mainstream discourses around trafficking in the United States are rooted in gender and sexuality, where female sexual purity is in need of rescue, and men are heroic rescuers. These paternalist discourses are also rooted in race and nationality, and can be used to justify racialized violence. In *Dangerous Brown Men: Exploiting Sex, Violence, and Race*, Garret Brown argues that sexualized racism is at the center of the discourses around sex trafficking. Discourses on sex trafficking regularly portray "dangerous brown men" (Bhattacharyya 2008) as threats to innocent femininity, setting up whites and/or the West as the saviors. The focus on sex trafficking over other types of trafficking is performing the political work of bolstering the status quo at a time when this status is being called into question by the war on terror. The cultural work is assuaging anxieties about the world with increasing female migration and decreasing male migration.

To effectively combat sex trafficking, the anti-trafficking discourse must move from framing of the issue as a matter of "slaves, sinners and sinners" to a stronger state and aggressive law enforcement, to a more holistic approach that addresses root causes of trafficking—unjust economic systems and social inequalities. A feminist approach to trafficking must be one that focuses on the needs of the sexually exploited people, rather than on rescuing them. Sexually exploited people are often in need of control over their lives, so activists must be very careful not to reinforce that disempowerment. The rescue discourse must move from harm rather than as subjects deserving of positive attention, to offered selectively and at a cost; it only "stretches to help those who are seen as complicit in their victimization" (Abu-Lughod 2002) or ignores those who are seen as complicit in their victimization. The West's portrayal of Muslim women, Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) argues, is one of "superiority it implies and the violence it enforces" (with the superiority it implies and the violence it enforces). Considering our own larger responsibilities to address the needs of the world in which they find themselves" (Abu-Lughod 2002) rather than using a rescue narrative to frame the problem. In seeking justice solutions to sex trafficking, activists must focus on the need to enhance democracy to empower vulnerable populations.

Public policy needs to address how trafficking is rooted in the global system. In this framing of the issue, solutions to trafficking become

rather than individual, after-the-fact, criminal justice in different contexts, so local, grassroots solutions (Parreñas 2008, 158–66). Policy needs to reflect the is solutions. Particular solutions that address root caus In his excellent film on sex trafficking in Burma, David emotional resonance than doing something about changin and asks less of society than changing those condition hand, requires people to face how they contribute to th privileged, as well as deeply engrained cultural and s than criminal justice solutions, but they are necessary

Notes

1. The expression “slaves, sinners, and saviors” is drawn from the *Journal of American Studies* (2005, 4).
 2. Interview with author, Third Annual Northwest Conference Against Trafficking (attended by author).
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