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policing sexuality: the Mann Act and the making of the FBI

Jessica R. Pliley, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2014, 293pp., ISBN: 978-0-6743-6811-8, \$29.95 (Hbk)

In *Policing Sexuality: the Mann Act and the Making of the FBI*, Jessica Pliley argues that the issue of sex trafficking in the United States was popularised through a narrative of white slavery by activists but treated as a problem of prostitution by federal agencies. To combat what was viewed as both a foreign and domestic prostitution problem, the Bureau of Investigation, the forerunner to the FBI, was tasked with enforcing the *White Slave Traffic Act of 1910*, commonly known as the 'Mann Act'. The Mann Act proved confusing to the procedurally driven Bureau, especially the inclusion of the term 'white slavery' and an expansive clause that banned the transport of women and girls across state lines not only 'for the purpose of prostitution' but also for 'debauchery, or "any other immoral purpose"' (p. 1). In tasking the Bureau with the enforcement of not only prostitution laws but also general sexual morality, the Mann Act greatly expanded governmental involvement in policing gender roles.

Pliley, a scholar of women's history, crafts the history of sex trafficking activism in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in eight chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction sets the stakes for Pliley's argument that the Mann Act operated as a significant conduit for governance of gender roles, pressuring women to conform either to the stereotype of 'moral wives and mothers' or else be cast as 'immoral and vulnerable loose women' (p. 5). It is telling that vulnerability is marked in conjunction with immorality, but as is still the case in sexual violence crimes, women were portrayed as bearing some responsibility for their captivity; however, this culpability was substantially mediated by race. Chapter 1 explains how the purity movement in the nineteenth century helped establish the myth of white slavery in the United States, simultaneously perpetuating racist notions about the sexual wantonness or availability of women of colour that resulted in targeted sexual violence of colonised populations, particularly by US soldiers, demonstrating how the image of female purity being protected by anti-sex trafficking laws is essential to norms about white womanhood.

The second chapter covers the increased involvement of the Immigration Bureau, creating what Pliley terms a 'national white slavery squad' (p. 32), while Chapter 3 centres the way anti-immigration activists and social hygiene activists came together to frame white slavery as an imported problem. Unsurprisingly, this leads to what Pliley describes as a 'moral quarantine' (p. 85) in Chapter 4 via the hiring and planting of 'white slave officers' (pp. 88–89) in local communities. Chapter 5 traces the FBI's attempts to establish legal clarity for the term 'immoral purposes', including several victories in front of the Supreme Court that expanded the powers of the Mann Act. Chapter 6 reports on the effects of these broadened powers, including an increased policing of adultery and sexual activity outside of marriage. Because the involvement of the purity movement—which took the form of 'moral reform' societies seeking to both illegalise

prostitution and 'rescue' prostitutes (p. 11)—and anti-immigration activists was so extensive in the early history of the Mann Act, only in the final two chapters does Pliley turn to the topics most contemporary readers would likely think of immediately, the issues of forced and coerced sex and the FBI's direct efforts to combat interstate sex trafficking.

Pliley touches on the transnational effects of United States policy via the involvement of the Immigration Bureau in enforcing the Mann Act alongside the FBI. Additionally, she opens the first chapter by discussing the many places, including Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Cuba, Haiti and the Mexican Border (p. 27), where US colonialism resulted in harsh laws meant to enforce the nationalistic morality of American Christianity. Pliley does not, however, offer a more comprehensive vision of how the Mann Act affected prostitution laws in other countries, despite the fact that there was clear international communication. Pliley opens the book by explaining, for instance, that prior to the passage of the Mann Act, the United States amended immigration policies in order to 'join the 1904 International Agreement for the Suppression of the "White Slave Traffic"' (p. 2). Despite these indications of an international backing to US domestic policy, Pliley's focus remains inward, questioning whether the border itself could truly be secured against immorality.

Pliley carefully charts what should stand as a touchstone account of the Mann Act in the United States for some time. Future researchers can and should, however, take up the ground that Pliley chooses not to explore: tracing the transnational implications of the Mann Act and the transmission of the narrative of white slavery. Despite its domestic limitations, Pliley covers her chosen territory with clarity and authority. In focusing on the Mann Act, Pliley tackles a complicated confluence of race, gender and the development of modern policing and immigration control. Pliley reveals a slippage between the way activists envision policies working and the way they are actually implemented, especially via the FBI and other policing mechanisms, offering a nuanced take on the gendered implications of the white slavery panic that helped birth the FBI.

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