

*Before Their Makers and  
Their Judges:  
Prostitutes and White Slaves in the  
Political Cartoons of the “Masses”  
(New York, 1911-1917)*

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“PUTTING THE BEST FOOT FORWARD,” a political cartoon by John Sloan, appeared in the June 1915 issue of the *Masses* (fig. 1). A departure from the more standard depiction of the prostitute as fallen woman, this cartoon sympathetically examines the limited economic choices that might lead a woman into prostitution in New York City in the 1910s. In the cartoon, two figures stand outside a delicatessen trying to earn a living. A male amputee sits on the ground. He holds a hat in his hand to collect donations, as well as what might be a box of pencils or cigars. A prostitute stands beside him, a woman wearing a ruffled shirt, slightly sheer skirt, and a hat with a large bow. She gracefully lifts her skirt to reveal her lower leg and her pump-adorned foot. She places her other hand provocatively on her hip. Her pose is a slight *contrapposto*, with her weight on her unexposed foot and her head tilted over her shoulder. She places her left hand provocatively on her hip. Her expression is confident, seductive.

The visual meaning of the image contradicts the understood meaning of the caption, and satire emerges from this dissonance. To put one's best foot forward is to promote one's greatest assets in order to succeed. In the cartoon, Sloan creates a visual play between these two figures, both of whom quite performatively use their legs as advertisements about their positions, thereby putting their “best feet forward.” His disability and her



Drawn by John Sloan.

### Putting the Best Foot Forward

Fig. 1. John Sloan, "Putting the Best Foot Forward," *Masses*, June 1915.

sexuality represent the best of what each has to offer if they are to gain financial support from the society around them. Both figures use what would typically be perceived as their disadvantaged positions to attempt to get ahead, and Sloan's cartoon might at first appear to equate the female figure's selling of her body to the male figure's begging. Yet there are interesting contrasts between them. One difference is in their facial expressions. While the amputee appears desolate at his lack of control over his own future, the prostitute seems to be in control and intent on her independence. This woman represents neither of the two types of prostitutes most often described by reformers, legislators, and producers of mass culture at this time: the withered victim of predatory practices, preyed upon by organized cabals of evil men and drawn despite her will into a life of commercial sex, or the fallen woman whose sinful desires led her to a life of immorality.

Numerous historians have studied Progressive Era prostitution, focusing on the obsessive attempts of social reformers to combat it as well as exploring the lives of the prostitutes themselves. More recently, historians, including Christopher Diffie, Brian Donovan, Mara L. Keire, and Margit Stange have contributed significantly to our understanding of the plethora of cultural productions, including journalistic exposés and melodramatic novels and films, associated specifically with the panic over "white slavery"—the purported kidnapping of innocent young (white) girls into a life of forced prostitution.<sup>1</sup> These latter scholars ably demonstrate the ways in which these productions contributed to and heightened the sense of alarm around forced prostitution. Little scholarly attention has been paid, however, to oppositional voices on issues surrounding prostitution, including but not limited to the issue of white slavery. Too often it has been surmised that the reformers' tone of moral panic over prostitution and white slavery (terms often used interchangeably in the period), as promulgated in mass culture, held sway over their audiences. There were, however, critics of the popular representations of prostitution. Throughout this period, socialists, communists, and others who were indignant over the effects of industrial capitalism in American cities decried the economic conditions that led women into prostitution as well as the difficult economic circumstances facing single, young working

women in the city. Socialists generally bemoaned prostitution as an inevitable by-product of capitalism, critiquing both the commodification of women's bodies and the economic structure that did not offer women legitimate opportunities to earn a living wage.

The artists and writers of the *Masses* were among these socialist critics, and from the political cartoons in the journal that address the topic of prostitution, we see an alternate point of view on the subject than that presented in the contemporaneous mainstream media. Reading these images against the representations of prostitution found in popular culture reveals much about the ways that the editorial board of the *Masses* understood and represented the meanings of prostitution in their own time.<sup>2</sup> The *Masses* cartoons explore the economic and social conditions that limited some women's choices to live independent economic and sexual lives, while leading other women into prostitution. These artists (and, in turn, their viewers) understood prostitution to symbolize the double standard by which women were held accountable for their sexual lives but men were not. As well, they were aware of the obstacles women faced in their desire to achieve independence via a living wage. Finally, they registered the ways in which working-class women's desire for increased geographic mobility challenged bourgeois notions of ideal womanhood.

My arguments owe much in content and method to the groundbreaking work of Nan Enstad in her 1999 book, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Enstad demonstrates the ways that reformers and labor leaders pressured working-class female strikers to conform to "existing ideals of what a political subject looked like" in their efforts to ensure that these women be taken seriously as political actors. Enstad emphasizes the importance of paying attention to working-class women's popular and material culture as evidence of the ways in which these women formed their own subjectivities in the face of these pressures. For example, working-class women created elaborate versions of upper-class women's fashions, notably, highly decorated hats, in order to define themselves as "ladies." But the middle-class reformers and labor leaders discouraged such fashionable display and represented these women instead as more somber and rational. Enstad writes that their "efforts to cast the women in the

most ‘positive’ light contributed to a widespread failure to recognize the diversity of political subjectivities.” In turn, “historians, drawing principally on labor union records, have replicated this failure.”<sup>3</sup>

In this essay, I make a similar argument regarding single, working-class women’s sexualities in the same period. While reformers had vested interests in casting doubt on the virtue of single, urban, working-class women and so spread fear regarding the perils of the great “social evil” of prostitution, we can see instead from the cartoons in the *Masses* a broader range of female subjectivities. 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. In order to see this picture, we need to carefully examine previous assumptions. For example, Suzanne L. Kinser claims that “in 1910 women who smoked were often considered prostitutes.” Her interpretation relies on sensational writing from the period that articulated the prostitute as everything that the ideal woman was not—as one who smoked, drank, exposed herself, and used obscene language. The conclusion drawn that smoking signified prostitution perpetuates the image of the prostitute that reformers wanted their contemporaries to see.<sup>4</sup>

From the turn of the twentieth century until U.S. entry into World War I, prostitution held a central and symbolic place in the minds of Americans. Throughout the Progressive Era, reformers set their sights on prostitution as a social ill that they believed to be the chief symptom of many of the problems of urbanizing U.S. society, and the burgeoning mass media and cultural productions of this time seized upon this idea and circulated it to the wider public. These reformers claimed single, urban women’s virtue to be dangerously imperiled by the pernicious sex trade, which was responsible for what they believed to be the exponentially increasing number of prostitutes in U.S. cities. Most likely, the number of prostitutes did not increase in this era relative to the population at large. Explosive urbanization meant that there were simply more people—and among them more prostitutes—living in the city. But the numbers are hard to evaluate, and the figures for white slavery are even more difficult to assess.<sup>5</sup>

As native-born Americans shifted the population of the United States from rural to urban and immigrants poured into U.S. cities from abroad,

young, unmarried women made their way to cities in search of livelihood and adventure. Even though most of these women were single and attempting to support themselves, employers paid below subsistence level. Male bosses presumed that the money young women earned was “pin money,” extraneous to their sustenance, which they believed to be provided by husbands or fathers. These young, working-class women agitated for labor rights, pursued new forms of sociability, and created new patterns of consumption—in short, they made lives for themselves against the odds of extreme gender discrimination in employment. Most of these women accepted meals, movie tickets, and other “treats” offered by attentive male suitors in return for varying degrees of physical affection. Some of these women earned at least part of their income via casual prostitution, occasionally trading sex for money while maintaining wage-earning positions. Certainly, some women worked exclusively as prostitutes, an occupation that provided far better wages than the sweatshop. In sum, for economic reasons, single, working-class urban women engaged in a wide variety of behaviors that all might in some way be described as prostitution. But in contrast to the widespread fears regarding forced prostitution, it would be difficult to assess whether women’s participation in commercial sex was a matter of choice, necessity, or coercion.<sup>6</sup>

Fears regarding prostitution, forced or otherwise, fed on grave concerns about urban, working-class women’s expressions of their sexuality and their increasingly unfettered presence in the public sphere at the turn of the century. As Christopher Diffie writes, “we must conceive of [the response to prostitution] as the nucleus within a larger reweaving of the public and private under the auspices of erotic peril.”<sup>7</sup> During the Progressive Era, middle-class white women identified various means to legitimate their public presence in ways that allowed them to venture beyond the domestic sphere but did not threaten their virtue. By contrast, the prostitute was a public, sexual woman in need of containment. For reformers, the prostitute represented a threat to their own claims to civic influence and public space. The moral panic propagated in large part by reformers around prostitution in this era can thus be understood as their response to this sense of threat.

Forced prostitution in particular was at the center of many debates and discussions about urban women's lives. Fears over white slavery reached the pitch of a moral panic by the mid-1910s. Reformers distributed pamphlets and published articles on the topic. Novelists and filmmakers profited greatly from its popularity as a topic for books and films. Legislators responded by passing significant legislation meant to combat this scourge. The Mann Act, also known as the White Slave Law and enacted in 1910, was the most far-reaching legislative attempt to counteract white slavery. The law purported to regulate the movement of women between states for purposes deemed to be illicit. As Diffie describes, the Mann Act and other antvice legislation of the period enabled progressives "to police working-class women's sexuality in particular and working-class culture more broadly." Specifically, the Mann Act symbolized "the fear," as Mark Thomas Connelly writes, "that the ever-expanding accessibility to the means of geographical mobility was undermining traditional methods of controlling sexual behavior." Able to move freely about the urban environment, daughters' behavior could no longer easily be controlled by parents or kept in check by the community. The Mann Act responded to fears engendered by this freedom by attempting to limit women's unrestricted movements in the city.<sup>8</sup>

The artists of the *Masses* responded in turn to these public anxieties surrounding prostitution in their political cartoons for the journal. Graphic satire offers historians a unique source from which to gauge attitudes held by a group of people in a particular time and place. Political cartoons not only rely on readily agreed-upon figures, but they also encapsulate in a very quick manner a complex of political and social ideas, distilling them into one illustration with accompanying caption. The cartoon presents its topic in a pithy and condensed form and comments upon it, often with humor, adding new knowledge or a point of view that had not been previously considered. The image in a political cartoon typically employs a kind of shorthand, an iconic typing of the figures represented. The text then offers another layer of meaning, as it creates a relay between the image and the voice of the author.<sup>9</sup> Because of this dense *encoding*, political cartoons may be thickly *decoded* in reverse, providing a rich source from which to assess the author's, and reader's, position on a topic.

The *Masses* was a small-run journal produced in Greenwich Village by a group of prominent bohemian radical writers and artists. Socialist in predilection but not an official organ of the party, the magazine was idealistic and humorous, literary and journalistic. As Floyd Dell, one of its editors retrospectively described, “it stood for fun, truth, beauty, realism, freedom, feminism, revolution.”<sup>10</sup> The *Masses* experimented with this combination, resulting in a unique publication that attracted a range of Left-leaning, well-known writers and artists of its time. Its editorial board included Dell, Max Eastman, John Reed, and Mary Heaton Vorse and artists including Cornelia Barns, George Bellows, K.R. Chamberlain, Glenn O. Coleman, Stuart Davis, Robert Minor, Boardman Robinson, John Sloan, Alice Beach Winter, and Charles Allan Winter. Of these artists, some went on to become better known as painters, among them Bellows, Davis, and Sloan; and others, including Robert Minor and Art Young, had vibrant careers as political cartoonists. The magazine began publication in 1911 and continued until 1917, when it folded due to the prosecution of its editors under the U.S. Sedition Act for the publication of antiwar and pacifist pieces.

Many scholars have noted the high quality of the writing, imagery, and design of the *Masses*; in particular, the visual aspects of the magazine were its hallmark. Among the artists involved in the publication were a number of individuals who would later become known as members of the Ashcan School of American art, a movement whose innovative contribution was its focus on everyday urban life. Associated by their political philosophies and the content of their images more so than by their formal styles, these artists, under the common tutelage of Robert Henri, believed it was their duty to expose the underbelly of modern urban life. Indeed, curators, critics, and audiences often considered the work of Ashcan artists offensive. Their art focused on the quotidian—street life in New York, working-class people (including prostitutes), and the economic inequities of the rapidly modernizing city. Via their innovative form of American realism, artists, including Sloan, Bellows, and Davis, observed New York City and produced visual social commentary in keeping with their socialist critiques of American life.<sup>11</sup>



In part, these artists' paintings, lithographs, and drawings evidence these critiques; it is, however, their political cartoons that assemble their most pointed and sharp political views. They produced illustrations and political cartoons at the time for a number of mainstream mass-run magazines, but many of them stated that it was for the *Masses* that they felt most free to fully express their opinions.<sup>12</sup> This owed in part to the fact that the *Masses* did not accept commercial advertisements. As cartoonist Art Young wrote, "having a free hand on the *Masses* to attack the capitalist system and its beneficiaries loosed energies within me of which I had been unaware. . . . I didn't have to think about whether a picture might offend an advertiser and thus violate business office policy."<sup>13</sup> The collective editorial process of the board of the *Masses* resulted regularly in text and image combinations that were biting, salient comments on issues often avoided by other publications.

In addition to "Putting the Best Foot Forward," Sloan produced a significant number of cartoons on prostitution for the *Masses*—in fact, most of the cartoons on the subject in the magazine are his. As well as prostitutes, working-class women figured in many of Sloan's images. Before moving on to consider his and others' *Masses* cartoons on the topic of prostitution, it is worth taking some time to consider Sloan's paintings and drawings of women, in particular because his pictures of working-class women and prostitutes have been the focus of a number of scholars' work.

Sloan grew up in a family that often faced economic hardship. Having moved to Philadelphia from rural Pennsylvania to work at a newspaper, he eventually studied art formally at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. He was immediately drawn into artist Robert Henri's sphere of influence, and Henri remained a mentor of Sloan's for many years. Henri developed a following among young artists who felt that the approach of the Pennsylvania Academy was too traditional and formulaic. Henri encouraged the artists who studied with him to explore the world beyond their studios. This circle of artists was energized by Henri's idea that, as Sloan biographer John Loughery describes, "the art of the new century was going to have to be less effete, less genteel, more energetic and inclusive of the range of modern experience."<sup>14</sup>

Sloan began his career as a story illustrator, combining his artistic interests with income-earning positions. Before it was economically viable to use photography to illustrate current events in newspapers, the papers employed illustrators whom they often sent to the scene of an event—be it a fire, robbery, scandal, or other newsworthy item—and paid to produce a sketch for the paper. Artists could rely on a fairly steady income from this type of work up until about 1910, when photographs replaced illustrations. Unable to continue to earn a living from this type of work, Sloan and others around him followed Henri to New York City, where they simultaneously pursued careers as painters and also became involved in the socialist politics of Greenwich Village, where some of them lived. Sloan's early experience as a newspaper illustrator influenced his later style as an artist, reappearing in his use of realism, as well as the sketchlike style of many of his drawings and prints.<sup>15</sup>

Sloan had a particular fascination with working-class women and prostitutes. Sloan met his first wife, Dolly, in a brothel in Philadelphia that he had attended somewhat regularly. Historians disagree about Dolly's reason for being in the brothel. She may have been a prostitute, or she was using the location as a meeting point for a liaison with her married lover—brothels were commonly used as sites of assignation for illicit lovers in this period. That Dolly spent a lot of time in a brothel that Sloan frequented is significant, because it indicates that Sloan did not judge women according to the idealized middle-class standard of the time, which deemed a brothel an inappropriate place to meet one's future wife. In fact, even Sloan's friends and colleagues expressed surprise that Sloan would court a woman he met in a brothel.<sup>16</sup> Unlike those around him, Sloan did not judge Dolly for her sexual past.<sup>17</sup>

Working-class women and prostitutes regularly appear in Sloan's work, as evidenced in the recent exhibition "Seeing the City: Sloan's New York." Most of the images in the exhibition feature female figures. A wide range of scholars, including historians and art historians, have written about the preponderance of working-class women and prostitutes as subjects in Sloan's work, among them Patricia Hills, Suzanne L. Kinser, Carolyn Kitch, Laural Weintraub, and Rebecca Zurier. These scholars note that Sloan's attitude toward working-class women and prostitutes, as

represented in his imagery and also in his diary entries, was compassionate. Hills, for example, writes that Sloan's paintings "celebrated the joyousness and camaraderie of women," the "figures treated sympathetically, without condescension." Kinser writes that Sloan's images "treat prostitutes as mature, independent women who were essentially harmless to society." This approach differs markedly from contemporary representations of prostitutes in mainstream culture, which tended to focus on their status as fallen women and their victimization.<sup>18</sup>

Sloan's paintings and prints that focus on urban, working-class women tell us much about his attitude toward these women, and they further inform our reading of his political cartoons that directly address prostitution, as we shall see. Additionally, all of his images of women serve as valuable historical documents about working-class women's lives. In his own writings, Sloan made distinctions between what he considered his art and what he considered the more propagandistic uses to which he put his drawing skills as an illustrator and political cartoonist. Sloan's desire to clearly separate the two was part of his own attempt to, as Hills describes, "reconcile the demands of the working class and socialism, on the one hand, with the demands of tradition, the academy, and a thoroughly bourgeois . . . art establishment, on the other hand." Current definitions of art and propaganda are much more blurred. Indeed, even in his own time, Sloan's division between the two did not always hold up. Many of his published cartoons dealt with themes similar to those found in his paintings and prints. As Zurier describes, "the distinction [between art and propaganda] may not have always been clear in the artist's own mind." Sloan may have stated this difference in his attempts to enjoy a successful career as a painter, but his paintings nevertheless evidence the issues he valued most.<sup>19</sup>

Although scholars tend to diminish the differences between Sloan's art and his cartoons and find his treatment of prostitutes and other female figures to be sympathetic, some of them nevertheless interpret Sloan's women as depoliticized. According to Hills, Sloan's very choice of working-class women as subject matter for his paintings adheres to the conventional demands of traditional art practice. She asserts that, even though Sloan actively supported women's involvement in strikes and the suffrage



Fig. 2. John Sloan, *Three A.M.*, 1909, oil on canvas, 32 x 26 1/4 inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Cyrus McCormick, 1946.

movement, his depictions of women conformed to the “attitude that viewed women as embodiments of innocence removed from the ‘class struggle.’” Similarly, Kinser writes that “Sloan’s paintings and graphics cast no moral judgment on either the prostitute or the social conditions from which she arose.” In contrast, a more careful reading of *all of* Sloan’s

images—paintings, prints, or political cartoons—shows close alignment between these images and Sloan's politics. Sloan's very choice to depict working-class women at leisure is an important statement regarding these figures' agency and ability to experience pleasure in spite of economic discrimination. Furthermore, the fact that prostitutes appear in Sloan's imagery without accompanying moral judgment is itself an important political gesture, as it indicates Sloan's acceptance of them as actors in the urban landscape and signifies that they should not be seen simply as objects of reform. Historian Timothy J. Gilfoyle argues that for Sloan "the prostitute was, in essence, an ordinary working woman. Sloan, in effect, erased the line separating 'loose' women from 'good' women." Indeed, such an erasure must be read as a political act.<sup>20</sup>

Sloan's painting, *Three A.M.*, from 1909 provides an excellent example (fig. 2). In his diary, Sloan describes having spied this scene from his own window; he watched the women in this particular apartment on a number of nights before making this painting.<sup>21</sup> One figure is seated, drinking tea. She is dressed in fashionable attire, her elaborate hat placed carefully on its own chair. The hat, as we have seen, is an important signifier. Hats symbolized working girls' ability to earn money and immigrant girls' accession to being American. Most importantly, working girls used their elaborately decorated hats to challenge bourgeois criticism of their status. They employed fashionable display to position themselves as respectable "ladies."<sup>22</sup> The standing figure, in her nightclothes with her hair down, prepares some food at a stove while smoking a cigarette. The two women seem to be chatting amiably; perhaps they are roommates. The room is furnished quite simply, with no adornments. The seated woman appears to have just come in, as her hat seems to have been just taken off—if she were on her way out, her hat might still be in its place in a hatbox or closet. The scene reads as a very ordinary, everyday scene—two women, up together late discussing their lives.

Current interpretations of the painting are conflicted. Are these women prostitutes, returning from their evening's work, or are they single working women returning from an evening out on the town? Kinser states unequivocally that "the seated woman is a prostitute." According to Kinser, "anyone who viewed *Three A.M.* about the time it was

painted would have been quick to discern the importance of the combination of hat and tenement apartment as signifiers of the woman's occupation."<sup>23</sup> It was, however, actually quite common for working girls to live in a tenement apartment together and to wear elaborate hats. Can we be convinced that she is not just a working girl, returning from an evening out spent either with a date or in pursuit of male companionship? Sloan also mentions in his notes that he has seen two men in the apartment, so it may be that they both have partners.<sup>24</sup>

Other scholars have agreed that numerous readings of *Three A.M.* are possible, none more conclusive than the other. Zurier writes of the painting that "these disagreements of interpretation [regarding the question of whether the seated figure is a prostitute] point to an inherent ambiguity that may be what the artist had in mind when he composed the image."<sup>25</sup> I argue that Sloan's intended ambiguity is precisely the political message of this painting. Middle-class reformers might have in some ways encouraged the belief that single women in the city must be prostitutes, but Sloan replies by giving us a variety of possibilities, demonstrating that one should proceed with caution before making assumptions regarding these women and how they earn their living. In so doing, he also acknowledges that working-class women were exploring their sexualities in ways that challenged traditional values.

From the painting, we cannot be certain about these women's occupations. This image does confirm that working women spent less of their (precious little) disposable income on their flat than they did on their attire and that going out required attention to very carefully considered display, quite different from casual, domestic sociability. As scholars, including Elizabeth Alice Clement, Joanne Meyerowitz, and Kathy Peiss, have argued, despite their meager incomes, these young women had a vibrant working-class culture that included an interest in fashion to be worn going out to movies, restaurants, or dance halls.<sup>26</sup> Many of these women, garment workers themselves, were well versed in the production of such garments and often found some time at work using leftover scraps to embellish their own clothing.

Sloan's formal treatment of the standing figure is similar to the manner in which allegorical female figures are often depicted. The painting

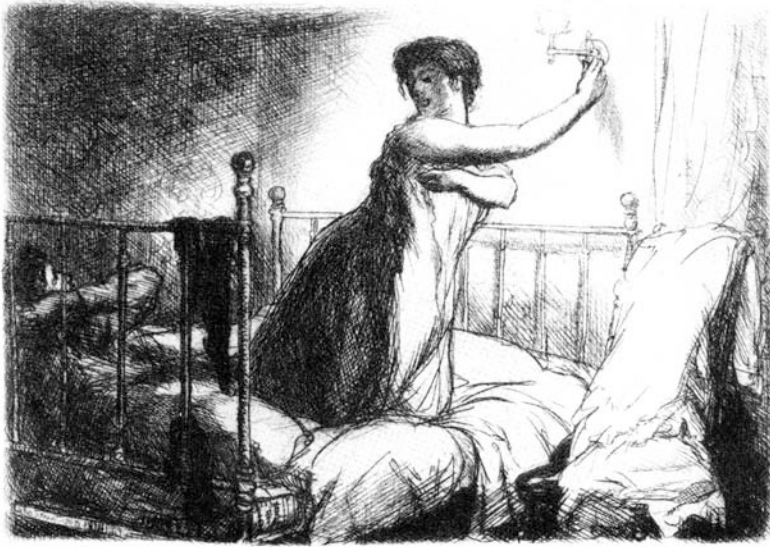
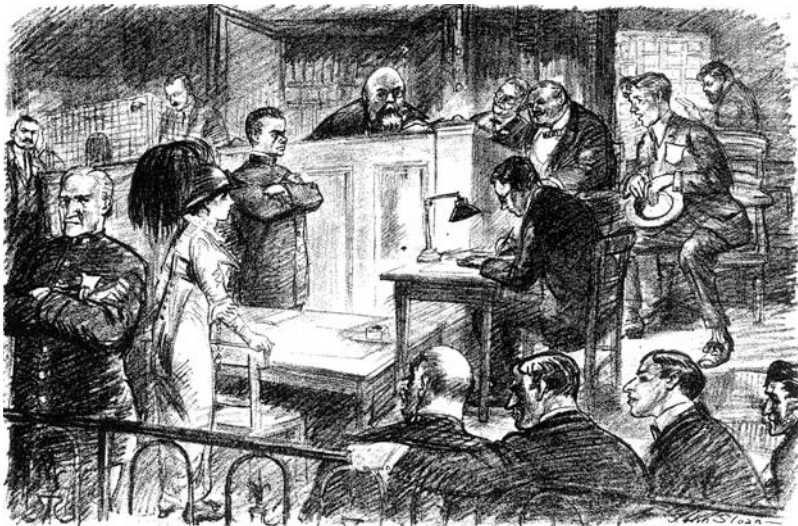


Fig. 3. John Sloan, *Turning Out the Light*, 1905.

“possesses merit of a peculiarly classic sort” in contrast to its “common city subject,” wrote a *New York Times* reviewer at the time.<sup>27</sup> An almost surreal light washes upon her from an unknown source, signaling to the viewer her centrality within the image. While her gown is, on the one hand, falling off her shoulder in an alluring state of dishabille, it simultaneously references the white robes that typically adorn figurative female subjects, often baring one shoulder as they do.<sup>28</sup> The painting’s formal representational tropes, typically reserved for idealized depictions of women, are employed here to portray a working-class woman cooking a meal at three in the morning. This depiction elevates this woman, conferring importance on a subject more typically thought of as marginal.

Sloan’s etching *Turning Out the Light* (1905) is another intimate, domestic scene (fig. 3). The print depicts a man and a woman in bed together, at the end of a day. Her stockings hang over the brass bed and some clothes are next to the bed on a chair. He is lying with his head against the footboard, arms behind his head. They appear to be in mid-conversation. The woman is turning out the light with one hand. With the other, she is intriguingly either holding up her nightclothes or in the process of

taking them off. In this print, we are clearly witnessing a scene of seduction, but beyond that many questions remain. There appears to be a casual intimacy between the two figures, an ease that indicates familiarity. They may or may not be married. The image communicates that sex is a part of everyday life.<sup>29</sup> Hills describes the image as one that demonstrates equality: “The woman, as in most of Sloan’s paintings and prints, is the principal player of the drama—the agent of action rather than the object. Viewing these works with the historical context in mind, we cannot say that Sloan’s political beliefs are irrelevant: He believed in the equality of women and their rights to the vote—beliefs revealed in the content of these [works].”<sup>30</sup> The *New York Times* reviewer identifies “some suggestion of grandeur in the little figure of the girl turning out the light” in Sloan’s etching.<sup>31</sup> Again, a seemingly simple image of an ordinary domestic scene is rife with commentary on women’s standing. The erotic charge of the image lies in its quotidian qualities—not a bourgeois



*Drawn by John Sloan, August 1913*

**The Women's Night Court**  
 Before Her Makers and Her Judge

Fig. 4. John Sloan, “The Women’s Night Court: Before Her Makers and Her Judge,” *Masses*, August 1913.



image of domestic respectability but simply two people sharing a small bedroom.

These scenes differ formally and conceptually from the graphic satire on prostitution produced by Sloan for the *Masses*. In his cartoons on prostitution, the women are obviously and deliberately signified as prostitutes in order to address specific issues. The text or caption associated with the cartoons signifies these women's involvement in commercial sex. This reliance on the text further confirms that a prostitute might not always be recognizable by her appearance. The aesthetic style of his cartoons, created with crayon, is looser and sketchier, as if done more quickly and with less preparation, than his drawings. This style suggests the immediacy of a newspaper illustration and that they are meant to be taken as reportage, much like the drawings Sloan had produced on the scenes for the Philadelphia newspapers in his early career. The captions for these cartoons further direct our understanding of the image, often adding humor or irony to the social or political critique of the cartoon.

In most cases, we move in these cartoons from the intimate interiors of the two works discussed above into public spaces. Although Sloan did complete major canvases of women in public, none of the cartoons on prostitution published in the *Masses* depict the women in private spaces. In the political cartoons, the figures' public locations further mark Sloan's socialist critique of prostitution. The prostitute posed a threat to other women, who claimed rights to public space in their desire for respectability and influence. By imaging prostitutes in public space, Sloan flaunts their visibility. Further, Sloan suggests that women's sexual behavior in private should not be taken as an indicator of their occupation. The interior scenes discussed earlier offer images of quiet domesticity, in contrast to the public scenes of prostitutes, which address the socioeconomic circumstances that these women face in their public lives.

As in "Putting the Best Foot Forward," Sloan often employs a linguistic pun or jibe as a title or caption. "The Women's Night Court" (fig. 4) provides another example in its subtitle, "Before Her Makers and Her Judge." It also deals with the topic of the men involved in commercial sex—be they clients, prosecutors, or onlookers—a topic not often broached in discussions about prostitution. Sloan published "The Women's Night

Court” in the August 1913 issue of the *Masses*. Prostitutes were regularly tried in night courts at this time, and Sloan noted in his diary that he had been sitting in on the night court out of curiosity.<sup>32</sup> The cartoon is preceded by a story by Frank T. Shay, which claimed to be a “mere chronicle” of events in the night court. Shay’s one-page story is told in three scenes, all of which sympathetically describe women’s entrapment by police, their lack of voice within the judicial system, and their victimization as prostitutes. Sloan’s drawing, which occupies a double-page spread and acts as the centerfold of this issue, supplements that story.

Shay writes about the women almost sentimentally, employing elements of melodrama to enable the reader to see the prostitute as a sympathetic character. By contrast, in Sloan’s drawing, the prostitute, attired in a fancy dress and a hat with a large plume, is decidedly blank. It is difficult to read much about her from her bodily or facial gesture—is she defiant or meek? She does not appear to be particularly angry to have been arrested; nor does she seem to be looking to the court to help her find a way out of her present life. Sloan’s judgments about the characters in this drawing do not focus on her but, rather, on the range of men who surround her—the scornful cop in the foreground, the disapproving judge, the curious men of the jury, or the fresh-faced man on the stand, presumably the man who picked up the woman.

Of paramount importance to the reading of this piece is the caption “Before Her Makers and Her Judge.” It ironically invokes the rhetoric employed by moralizers, who would condemn the prostitute’s life as a sin before God. Sloan’s subject, however, finds herself in the situation of being answerable to this coterie of earthly men. The drawing acknowledges that it is the laws of men—the linking of sexual and economic oppression, the denial of a living wage for women, the double standard that condemns the prostitute but not her client—that have “made” this woman what she is and brought her here to answer before this judge. We are not asked to judge her but, rather, those around her and the circumstances that make this scene a nightly occurrence.

“The Women’s Night Court” provides an important contribution to the debate on prostitution by acknowledging that the male client, the judicial system, and commercial interests all contribute to the popular

prevalence of prostitution. Additionally, by assessing all of Sloan's work that includes images of working-class women and prostitutes, we see a much more complex picture of the constellation of choices available to women in their attempts to live independent lives in the urban environment. Socialism viewed the prostitute as the victim of the capitalist economic structure. Sloan's images took this critique even further, creating images that represented women as individuals with the agency to act as sexual subjects, and described a broad range of possibilities for urban working-class women. These representations contrast starkly with the image we get from the mainstream popular culture of the time, especially in its depictions of white slavery.

The panic over white slavery had reached a fevered pitch by the mid-1910s. Reformers abstracted fears about single women's public place in urban society via the specter of white slavery. For a short number of years, white slavery's appearance in popular culture satisfied a seemingly insatiable public appetite for tales on the topic, so much so that at the opening screening of the film *Traffic in Souls* in 1913, the theater turned away one thousand people! *Traffic in Souls* presented to its viewers the standard white slave narrative in one of the most elaborate filmic productions to date.<sup>33</sup> The film was exemplary of narratives that can also be found in other films, including *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* (1913) and *Little Lost Sister* (1917), as well as novels such as Reginald Wright Kauffman's *The House of Bondage* (1911) and numerous articles and stories.

White slave films typically featured a young, white, female victim, usually but not always native born, making her way to the city where she is inevitably drawn into forced prostitution by a charming, devious male villain. Two types of victims appear: an innocent girl who has fallen under the sway of a treacherous masculine figure or figures and is in need of protection from her own naïveté, held captive in a brothel until she finally gives in to her fate; or, a not-so-innocent girl who foolishly follows her desires for the attentions of men, thereby falling into traps meant to lure her into selling her body.<sup>34</sup> Both types appear in *Traffic in Souls*: the country girl and the Swedish sisters are the first type, as they arrive in the city for the first time and naïvely allow men unknown to them to lead them to lodging that turns out to be a brothel from which they cannot escape. The

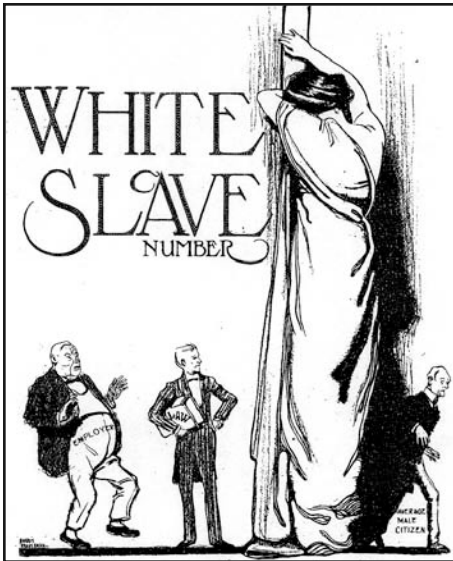


Fig. 5. Barnet Braverman, "White Slave Number," *Progressive Woman*, April 1913.

figure on the cover of *The Progressive Woman's* "White Slave Number" (1913), drawn by Barnet Braverman, communicates shame and sorrow at the plight of contemporary womanhood (fig. 5). She communicates this through her body language, as she hides her face from the employer, the Law, and the average male citizen, each appearing as a male figure whom we assume to participate in the conspiracy that is white slavery. Like the men in *Traffic in Souls*, these figures represent the pervasive nature of men's complicity and participation in the purported trade in (white) women. Here, however, the female figure towers over these men. She stands at more than twice their height and wears white robes draped over one shoulder, much like the figure in Sloan's *Three A.M.* Unlike the women in *Traffic in Souls*, who ultimately must be rescued by men, Braverman's female figure dominates these ruthless men through use of scale and allegory; they alternately cower, recoil, or shy away from her.

The figure is reminiscent of such symbolic female figures as Columbia, Britannia, or Marianne. A common trope of the British and American suffrage movements and female reform periodicals, the allegorical figure

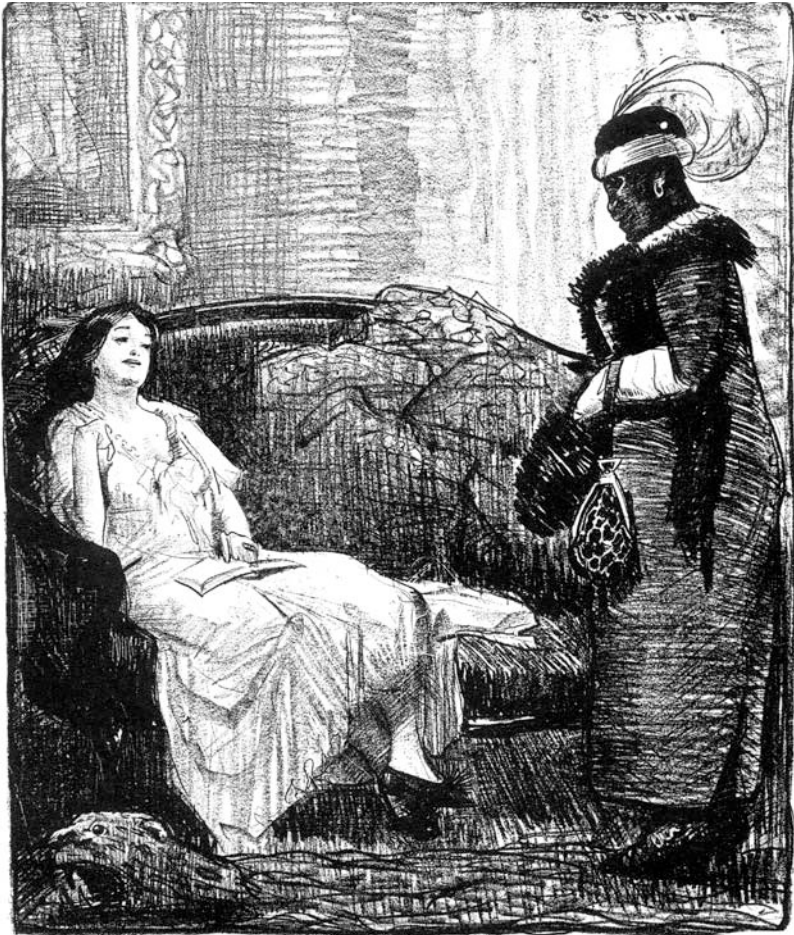
protagonist's sister represents the second type—she is wooed by the attention of a man in the candy store in which she works, only to be kidnapped and led to the same brothel.

Radical journals also focused on white slavery. Josephine Conger-Kaneko's Chicago-based socialist magazine *The Progressive Woman* focused often on the topic. The magazine made use of the prevalent fears regarding forced prostitution to indict patriarchal society's collusion in the traffic in women.

For example, the allegorical

stands in for womanhood in general, as signified by a particular “feminine sensibility.” As such, the use of allegory relied on the prevalent notion of women as the moral and social housekeepers of the nation, a position that, while claiming to give women a public role in U.S. society, nevertheless perpetuated not only ideas of women’s heightened social conscience compared with men’s, but also their exclusion from equal access to such male domains as wage earning, participation in the writing of legislation (as opposed to influence upon it), or other formative social roles. Ultimately, the allegorical figure is limited in its capacity to substantively challenge a prevailing representation. Although it may galvanize support for an existing position, the allegorical figure cannot, as a result of its burden of symbolism, transform, undermine, or otherwise thoroughly interrogate a position—in this case, women’s position vis-à-vis prostitution.

The *Masses* artists did address white slavery on a number of occasions. Contrary to the popular white slave narratives of fiction and film, however, the *Masses* cartoons criticize the prevailing rhetoric. One aspect of white slavery that was not often addressed was the racial implications inherent in the term “white slavery” itself. The associations between wage work, slavery, and prostitution had been present in the minds of Americans throughout the post-Civil War period. Immediately after the war, freedom was equated with the (male) prerogative to earn a wage and support a family. By the end of the nineteenth century, wage slavery and even the term “white slave” had come to be used to signify one who was not in control of the means of earning one’s living. Depictions of white slaves in the mass press early in the twentieth century most often depicted a sweating male laborer. As early as 1870, the term “white slavery” was used to mean women forced into prostitution; by about 1905, the term signified this exclusively.<sup>35</sup> By the end of that decade, the term had become metaphoric and had lost its connection to the history of American slavery or the relation to property law. Used first in regards to prostitution to signify the material roots of prostitution, it had come to simply stand for the innocent, young, white, female victims of the traffic in women. The very term “white slavery” allowed those who invoked it to overlook or ignore the fact that men, typically white men, forced black women to give them sexual access to their bodies. A cartoon by Bellows, published in the



Drawn by George Bellows.

"BUT IF YOU HAVE NEVER COOKED OR DONE HOUSEWORK—WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?"  
 "WELL, MAM, AH—AH'S BEEN A SORT OF 'PROFESSIONAL.'"  
 "A PROFESSIONAL WHAT?"  
 "WELL, MAM—AH TAKES YO' FO' A BROAD-MINDED LADY—AH DON'T MIND TELLIN' YOU AH BEEN ONE OF THEM WHITE SLAVES."

Fig. 6. George Bellows, "But If You've Never Cooked or Done Housework. . .," *Masses*, May 1914.

*Masses* in May of 1914, critiques the racialized rhetoric of white slavery and portrays the race and class complexities of the prostitution market (fig. 6).

In Bellows's cartoon for the *Masses*, a black woman is seeking employment from a white woman. The white woman reclines on a sofa or divan,

reading a book, surrounded by bourgeois accoutrements. The black woman is dressed in flamboyant attire, a feathered hat on her head, a coat with some kind of fur collar, and a decorative handbag on her arm. As we enter the scene, the white woman questions the black woman's employment experience:

"But if you have never cooked or done housework—what have you done?"

"Well, Mam, Ah—Ah's been a sort of p'fessional."

"A professional what?"

"Well, Mam—Ah takes yo' fo' a broad-minded lady—Ah don't mind tellin' you Ah been one of them white slaves."

The black woman is seeking employment as a domestic. However, she alludes to the fact that her previous work experience has not been as a servant but as a professional—a professional prostitute. Typically, black women in the city were employed as domestics or as prostitutes. By designating herself as a professional, she elevates her previous occupation even while invoking its coerced nature. In addressing the white woman as a "broad-minded lady," she indicates the white woman's complicity in knowledge about the profession, even as the white woman feigns ignorance. Perhaps the white woman is the mistress of a bourgeois home and the black woman hopes to gain her sympathy, and thereby a position, because of her own attempts to reject her misguided past. Another reading suggests that the white woman is a brothel owner, in which case the black woman might be bringing up her past to acknowledge her understanding of where she is.

The reading of this image as set in a brothel is based on the art historical reference Bellows invokes. Western art history is replete with images of reclining women; as well, the image of the black servant accompanying the white figure is "ubiquitous."<sup>36</sup> One painting from the nineteenth century, however, stands out in its depiction of the relationship between these two common figures: Edouard Manet's *Olympia* of 1862-1863. Indeed, Bellows (as well as Henri and the rest of this circle of artists) admired and carefully studied Manet's work.<sup>37</sup> In this painting, a nude woman lies alluringly on a divan, gazing directly at the viewer. In the background, a figure of a black woman, presumably the white woman's servant, holds a bouquet of flowers and looks in the direction of the central figure. At its

initial exhibition in the French Salon, the painting caused a major scandal, because its central figure is a prostitute.<sup>38</sup> In fact, one art historian describes *Olympia* as “the best-known prostitute picture of the Second Empire.”<sup>39</sup> This fact would have been plain to the painting’s viewers, as a result of a range of signifiers, including the string tied around the model’s neck, the camellia in her hair, her pose, and perhaps, most importantly, her direct gaze.

Further research has revealed that the model was a woman named Victorine Meurent, a prostitute who was the model for nine of Manet’s paintings between 1862 and 1874. In addition to this scholarly research surrounding the white model, subsequent work has identified the black woman in the painting as Laure, a servant who also posed for Manet on a number of occasions. The presence of the black woman in the painting further signifies Meurent’s heightened sexuality, for as Sander L. Gilman writes, “one of the central functions of the black servant in the visual arts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was as a marker of the sexualization of the society in which he or she was found.”<sup>40</sup> In the wealthier brothels in New York City in the nineteenth century, black women often worked as domestic servants. Their “exoticism” may even have served as attractions to customers, in the same way that they figured as symbols of sexuality in painting.<sup>41</sup>

In the Bellows illustration, we have two women who differ from each other in important ways, signified by their race, diction, and physical pose. But, we may ask, what do these two women have in common? Despite differences between their class and race, these women share a common language. The woman seeking employment confides in her potential employer, a “broad-minded lady,” about her past. Bellows’s association of these two figures mocks the inability of the reformers of his time, crusaders against white slavery, to bridge or even to see difference. In the eyes of reformers, all prostitutes, white slaves or otherwise, symbolize the ills of Progressive society and so stand in for the diminished status of all women within that society—represented, as in the cover of *The Progressive Woman*, by a single, iconically white, sorrowful woman, whose face we do not even see. By contrast, Bellows presents his viewers with two individuals, who differ from each other in race and class yet speak to each other. Drawn together



in a single image, they invoke signifiers of each other's sexuality and so participate in an economy of women's choices beyond the reformers' view. Bellows acknowledges the paradoxical coexistence of society's condemnation of prostitution with its lack of willingness to truly address its underlying causes; as Judith R. Walkowitz writes, "white slavery encouraged the belief that the sinister forces exploiting women existed outside society, and were not fundamental to its basic social and economic arrangements."<sup>42</sup>

The humor in the piece emerges from the seeming contradiction inherent to a black woman describing herself as a white slave. Bellows's use of the term, in addition to being humorous, critiques the racism inherent in the term "white slavery." Insofar as the term designates the forcing of white women into prostitution and sexual slavery, it implies by default that black women's bodies are always sexually available. Bellows consciously refers here to tropes of the relationships between white, upper-class prostitutes and black women whose occupational choices were still, by the 1910s, largely confined to domestic work and prostitution. The black woman seeking employment in a white brothel requests work as a domestic. Her self-stated qualifications come from her past as a "white slave"—had she been forced into a life of prostitution, or did the exploitative nature of work previously done for white employers enslave her? Either interpretation acknowledges that black women's economic positions in U.S. society were fraught with unappealing choices. Bellows criticizes white reformers' castigation of prostitution but not of the economic realities that made women choose prostitution. Simultaneously, the cartoon situates prostitution as an issue that involves not only gender but race and class as well, and subtly challenges the viewer to see the overlap of those categories.

In addition to eliding race and class differences between prostitutes, legislation such as the Mann Act attempted to eradicate white slavery in part by drawing clear distinctions between women who worked as prostitutes and women who did not—a distinction that was not always clear. The Mann Act also placed limits on working-class women's geographic mobility. Glenn O. Coleman's cartoon from the February 1914 issue of the *Masses* responds to the Mann Act, exposing its spurious claims of protecting young women from sexual predators, while simultaneously gesturing



Drawn by Glenn O. Coleman.

"ARE YOU GOING TO SEE ME HOME TO JERSEY TO-NIGHT?"  
 "THINK I WANT TO GET PINCHED UNDER THE WHITE SLAVE LAW?"

Fig. 7. Glenn O. Coleman, "Are You Going to See Me Home. . .," *Masses*, February 1914.

toward the difficulty in distinguishing between women who worked as prostitutes and those who did not (fig. 7). The image depicts the interior of a dance hall or nightclub in New York City. Several tables are occupied by couples having drinks, one by two women and a man; there are couples on the dance floor and upstairs in the gallery; and a man is playing a piano. As the evening winds down, a female habituée asks her male companion, "Are you going to see me home to Jersey to-night?" Her

companion replies, "Think I want to get pinched under the White Slave Law?" The female voice in this dialogue is requesting an escort home, and the male voice responds in the negative, using the threat of the Mann Act in defense of his decision.

Coleman's cartoon is drawn in a style that clearly references the dance hall drawings of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. That style combines the sinewy, decorative lines of art nouveau, which also commonly depicted female sexuality as a powerful force, and hints of modern abstraction. The latter is often apparent in the use of bold, flat areas of color or black to emphasize aspects of the composition. This style was often employed in the *Masses*. It is one of the formal features that distinguished the *Masses*' political cartoons from their mainstream Victorian-inspired counterparts. The reference to Toulouse-Lautrec is not only stylistic, however; it indicates as well that the nightclub is a space of sexuality.

Toulouse-Lautrec was a known denizen of such clubs, the most famous being the Moulin Rouge in Paris. He made over fifty paintings of prostitutes, in addition to monotypes, drawings, and lithographs. Being something of a societal outcast owing to his physical deformity, he was not only sympathetic to prostitutes but lived among them as well. Many of his contemporaries produced paintings of prostitutes, and Toulouse-Lautrec had an interest in past painters who took up this subject matter. In fact, he contributed to the fund that enabled Manet's *Olympia* to be purchased for the French state collection.<sup>43</sup> Unlike *Olympia*, however, most of Toulouse-Lautrec's images of prostitutes depict them in public spaces. And, unlike *Olympia*, a painting whose shock value rested in the confrontation between the subject and the viewer, Toulouse-Lautrec's women do not gaze at us; they are painted in scenes of their daily life, often relating to other women. Additionally, he did not exhibit many of these paintings and images; they only became known after his death. (The series of lithographs, *Elles*, was an exception, as he published these in 1896.) Toulouse-Lautrec's dance halls are spaces where sexuality is foregrounded and, like his images of the carnivalesque, depict an urban underworld of pleasure and vice.

The *Masses* cartoon of the dance hall also depicts such a space. The woman's question in the caption can be read in multiple ways—as a simple

request to be escorted on her journey home or as a provocative “line”—the first move in a seduction. The man answers by invoking the commonly understood specter of the Mann Act. If he is stopped for any reason crossing the state line with this woman, he could be accused of being a white slave trader. Whether the man is using this defense because he would prefer not to take her home or genuinely fears the possibility of arrest, is not clear. More important is the fact that the White Slave Law would be commonly invoked in what might appear today to be a typical, likely harmless, and potentially egalitarian conversation about how to end a date.

More ambiguous still, however, is the question of which couple in the image is having this conversation. Most likely, it is the couple in the foreground, closest to the viewer. His back is to us; she is wearing her coat and so appears ready to leave. A trendy hat with a large feather or bow is on her head, and she is heavily lipsticked. She does not, however, seem to be a prostitute—her tired, somewhat slouched body appears to be that of a working girl at the end of her day, not a woman just heading out to pick up men. On the other hand, the couple participating in this verbal exchange could be the one on the dance floor. Again, his back is to us but her sinewy, S-line body gesture, complete with her lifting her skirt slightly to reveal an ankle and what could be read as the flirtatious fluttering of her eyelids, lend themselves far more easily to an interpretation based in the intention of seduction. She might indeed be a prostitute, but she might be any woman initiating a seduction. The conversation could also be attributed to others in the room. What should be apparent is that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to state with any certainty that any woman in the image is a prostitute. Because the lines could be spoken by any of the couples, Coleman implies that everyone is aware of and preoccupied by the limits imposed by the Mann Act. Further, the cartoon draws attention to the continuum of sexual exchanges taking place in such working-class settings as dance halls.

This cartoon leads to several important conclusions. First, by 1914, the Mann Act was widely understood, at least to the readers and writers of the *Masses*, to curtail women and men’s mobility and hence their sociability. Second, single women who explored their sexuality in the urban setting

were not necessarily prostitutes—even if one or another woman in this cartoon might be a prostitute, certainly not all of them are. Most significantly, from this cartoon it becomes clear that by the mid-1910s, women and men were finding new expressions of sexuality that defied older, Victorian-inspired and bourgeois ideals for the sexes that purported to relegate women to private, domestic space, reserving public space for men. These ideals set a double standard in that they regarded expressions of women's sexuality as aberrant while not passing the same judgment on men. The challenge to these ideals as represented in this image contradicts popular representations of prostitution circulating before it and during its time, which depicted one of two types of women—the iconic fallen woman, who stands in for all prostitutes, or the allegorical ideal woman who is shamed at the plight of her lost sisters. Ultimately, this cartoon demonstrates that within urban sites of sexuality, where young women and men spend their leisure time and explore possible relationships, sexual or otherwise, boundaries had been placed on their independence by the white slavery scare in an attempt to contain their behavior. This cartoon clearly supports the idea that the white slavery scare was a manifestation of fears regarding women's geographic mobility and its contribution to new freedoms in their sexual lives. With freedom of mobility and the regular appearance of women as active agents in urban (night) life, it became increasingly difficult to differentiate between virtuous women and sinful women.

By the mid-1910s, the prostitute had been pushed into the background in a new openly sexual era, try as the reform movement might to keep her image alive via the scare over white slavery. The Coleman cartoon is evidence of this: we might read the single, urban working woman in the foreground as no longer bound by outmoded ideals of virtuous womanhood. The indefinite position of a number of the women imaged in this cartoon is indicative of the new range of possibilities open to them. Of course, prostitution would continue to be one way that women (and men) in the city (and elsewhere) would earn their living. But the anxieties that single women living in the city raised in the minds of those who continued in their attempts to defend their vision of ideal bourgeois womanhood would no longer be sustained by the working

women themselves who were their objects of scrutiny. The plethora of cultural productions warning of the ills of prostitution and white slavery might then be read, not as evidence of white slavery's predominance but, rather, as propaganda intended to deter women from leading independent sexual lives. Moreover, the very currency of the white slavery scare might be understood as a response to the inability of Progressive Era society to control women's behavior. While historians have previously assumed that the representations that circulated posited women's only two choices to be virtue or vice, the editorial cartoons of the *Masses* suggest that more options were available.

Some of the *Masses* cartoons directly address the place of prostitution in U.S. society in the 1910s, such as "Putting the Best Foot Forward" or "The Women's Night Court." Others depict a changing cultural landscape in which the geography of women's sexuality can no longer be clearly charted via distinctions regarding who is, and who is not, a prostitute. All of these images demonstrate that the *Masses* explored the subject in more detail and with more complexity than has otherwise been found in this period. In some cases, this is achieved through the specificity of the situation depicted; in other cases, it is through the productive ambiguity of the image that we see a move beyond the simplistic approach of the mainstream press. For the writers, artists, and readers of 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.

#### NOTES

My gratitude extends to the anonymous readers of this article, whose insights and suggestions greatly improved my work. I would also like to thank Mary Ryan and Judy Walkowitz for their munificent support and attention to my work. The readers of Toby Ditz's gender research seminar in the history department at Johns Hopkins University assisted me greatly in revisions, as did Katherine Hajar, Kate Moran, and Hadley Leach. Attendees at my presentation of this paper at the Institute for Historical Research at the University of London, notably Warren Carter and T.J. Demos, provided valuable insights. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my partner David Gissen, who is central to all that I do.

1. Christopher Diffie, "Sex and the City: The White Slavery Scare and Social Governance in the Progressive Era," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2005): 411-37; Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Margit Stange, *Personal Property: Wives, White Slaves, and the Market in Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); 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): 5-41.
2. The popular culture of the time featured images of prostitutes primarily in the films on white slavery. Although magazines and other mass print forms published countless stories and articles on prostitution and white slavery, few political cartoons from the popular press deal with prostitution. Where such cartoons do exist, they do not tend to image prostitutes themselves.
3. Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2, 86.
4. Suzanne L. Kinser, "Prostitutes in the Art of John Sloan," *Prospects* 9 (1984): 231-54. Kinser cites Mark Thomas Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 46 (whose sources are reformers' tracts, vice reports, and sensational journalism). Kinser is discussing John Sloan's 1909 painting, *Three A.M.*, which will be discussed at length later in this article.
5. The survey that historian Edward J. Bristow describes as "the most systematic attempt to gather intelligence and statistics" yielded the figure of 26,000 prostitutes in New York City in 1910, out of a total population of nearly three million. See Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight against White Slavery, 1870-1939* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 160. A compilation of various vice commission reports finds the statistic that 7.5 percent of 6,000 interviewed prostitutes claimed being forced into prostitution in some way, although the definitions of force were quite broad. Regardless, this figure contrasts sharply with claims made by various white slave narratives that anywhere from 40 to 100 percent of prostitutes were forced into the trade. See Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 134; Connelly, *Response to Prostitution*, 130.
6. See Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage-Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 164; Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, 133.
7. Diffie, "Sex and the City," 419.
8. *Ibid.*, 418; Connelly, *Response to Prostitution*, 128.
9. "Relay" is Roland Barthes's term for this relationship between an image and its caption. See Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in his *Image Music Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 443.
10. Floyd Dell, *Homecoming: An Autobiography* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1933), 251.

11. For scholarship on the *Masses* see, for example, Richard Fitzgerald, *Art and Politics: Cartoonists of the "Masses" and "Liberator"* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973); Mark Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001); and Rebecca Zurier, *Art for the Masses (1911-1917): A Radical Magazine and Its Graphics* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1985). The term "ashcan" was applied later, as a pejorative description of these artists' focus on what many felt to be ugly, inappropriate subjects.
12. See Art Young, *Art Young: His Life and Times* (New York: Sheridan House, 1939), 272; Alex Baskin, "The *Masses*: America's Journal for Art, Satire, and Socialism," in *The Masses*, vol. 1, ii (1911; repr. Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus, 1980); Floyd Dell, "Memories of the Old *Masses*," *American Mercury* 304 (April 1949); and Dell, *Homecoming*.
13. Young, *Art Young*, 277.
14. John Loughery, *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1995), 24.
15. Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 40.
16. Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 251.
17. Loughery, *John Sloan*, 51.
18. Patricia Hills, "John Sloan's Images of Working Class Women: A Case Study of the Roles and Interrelationships of Politics, Personality, and Patrons in the Development of Sloan's Art, 1905-1916," *Prospects* 5 (1980): 160; Suzanne L. Kinser, "Prostitutes in the Art of John Sloan," *Prospects* 9 (1984): 233. Also Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Laural Weintraub, "Women as Urban Spectators in John Sloan's Early Work," *American Art* 15, no. 2 (2001); and Zurier, *Art for the Masses*.  
The exhibition, "Seeing the City: Sloan's New York," originated at the Delaware Museum of Art in October 2007. The catalogue that accompanies the exhibition is: Joyce K. Schiller et al., *John Sloan's New York* (Wilmington: Delaware Museum of Art, 2007).
19. Hills, "John Sloan's Images," 161; Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 147.
20. Hills, "John Sloan's Images," 189; Kinser, "Prostitutes in the Art of John Sloan," 233. Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 282.
21. Bruce St. John, ed., *John Sloan's New York Scene, from the Diaries, Notes, and Correspondence, 1906-1913* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 308-9.
22. Enstad, *Ladies of Labor*, 9.
23. Kinser, "Prostitutes in the Art of John Sloan," 231, 245. Kinser cites the feather in the seated figure's hat and the fact that the standing figure is smoking as evidence of their occupation.
24. St. John, *John Sloan's New York Scene*, 309.
25. Zurier, *Picturing the City*, 302.
26. Clement, *Love for Sale*; Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, 164; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 53.
27. "Many and Varied Talents Displayed at the Exhibition Given by Independent Artists," *New York Times*, 17 Apr. 1910.



28. Many thanks to Hadley Leach for this observation.
29. Loughery, *John Sloan*, 87.
30. Hills, "John Sloan's Images," 175.
31. "Many and Varied Talents Displayed."
32. St. John, *John Sloan's New York Scene*, 313-14; 315-16; 383. Sloan wrote about his observations: "My heart melted one minute and grew red hot the next. These petty offenses with their small fines great sums paid in jail at the rate of one day's imprisonment for \$1.00 fine are dreadfully hard. Poor little women, habitual drunkards, get 'fine \$10.00' off hand with a kindly smile from the judge-good humored! They have no vote."
33. Diffie, "Sex and the City," 414.
34. Stange, "Personal Property," 74-78.
35. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*, 36.
36. Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 79.
37. Marianne Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 50; Zurier, *Picturing the City*, 12.
38. For many years, art historians claimed that the shock value of this painting owed to the painter's innovative use of line and form, until the groundbreaking work of feminist art historians, including Eunice Lipton and Griselda Pollock, addressed the figures themselves that are represented in the image. See Eunice Lipton, *Alias Olympia: A Woman's Search for Manet's Notorious Model and Her Own Desire* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992); and Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999).
39. Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 6.
40. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, 79.
41. Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 271.
42. Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 250.
43. Richard Thomson, "Maisons Closes," in his *Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 205.