

# “The City’s Shame”

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Prostitution in Cleveland, 1866-1915

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# “The City’s Shame:” Prostitution in Cleveland, 1866 to 1915

Abstract

by

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Beginning with the formation of the police department in 1866 and ending with the closure of the vice district in 1915, this thesis looks at the various attempts of groups within Cleveland, Ohio to control prostitution. The efforts varied from the passage of ordinances and attempts to regulate the business of prostitution to philanthropic attempts at reforming the prostitutes themselves. The Police Department, City Council, Board of Health, mayors, reformers, philanthropists, and journalists in Cleveland were among those commenting on the city’s prostitution problem. Each group suggested different solutions. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the city shifted in its stance on prostitution, evolving from tacit tolerance of prostitution to systematic elimination.

## Introduction

Prostitution, loosely defined, was (and is) the exchange of sexual favors for money or items of monetary value. At the close of the nineteenth-century, prostitution seized the attention of reformers throughout the United States. Prostitution embodied a number of social evils to reformers, including the immorality of the city, the threat of venereal disease to innocent wives and infants, and the fear that white women were being sold into prostitution (commonly referred to as “white slavery”). Despite these evils associated with prostitution, the fact remained that for many women involved, prostitution was simply a form of work. Yet the decisions of these women were often overshadowed by the actions of others reacting to their existence.

In 1871, a local newspaper, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, detailed the bittersweet story of a “charming young girl,” who after briefly living as a prostitute in the city, “became disgusted with such a life of shame” and “desired to return to a life of virtue.” The majority of the article then went on to elaborate the struggle of the young girl to escape her life as a harlot: “she packed her trunk, and was ready to leave, but the woman who ‘runs’ the establishment, probably loth [sic] to part with one who brought her so much gain, detained the girl’s baggage, claiming that she owed her \$28 for the use of a room.” Packing the trunk is the only action the girl is credited with taking. The rest of the article details how, luckily for the young girl, others intervened on her behalf. For example, a young man interfered and secured her luggage. Then, when the brothel keeper attempted to sue her for the \$28, the girl was again saved by the actions of another as the judge dismissed the case on the grounds that the money demanded was not actually rent, but commission for prostitution and therefore illegal. And again, after that ordeal, at the time of the article’s printing, the young man who had secured the girl’s luggage was suing the brothel

owner for \$300 on the girl's behalf (\$250 for the commissions she had previously paid to the woman and \$50 for damages to her trunk).<sup>1</sup>

The elaborate story of this prostitute, despite the article's focus on her plight, failed to give the girl agency, portraying the girl as a passive participant and consistently highlighting the actions of the young man. The article implies that had it not been for the young man, the prostitute would have failed in her attempt to "return to a life of virtue." This article from the *Plain Dealer* is representative of the larger issue of studying prostitution in Cleveland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prostitution existed and even thrived in Cleveland from 1866 to 1915, with numerous women living and working in the city as prostitutes. However, the voices of these women are largely absent from the historical record. Instead, the story of prostitution in Cleveland must be learned from the remnants of these women's interactions with various city groups, such as the police, city council, philanthropies, and citizens.

From 1866 to 1915, prostitution was allowed to exist largely unhampered in the city of Cleveland. For nearly fifty years, city police, government officials, philanthropists, reformers, and citizens debated how best to handle prostitution in the city, with each group demanding to assert their authority on the issue. Yet because the groups differed so greatly in perspective, there was no consensus on how to handle prostitution. To elaborate, government officials sought to institute policy, while police determined how to enforce the policies; philanthropists and reformers established themselves as the moral authority by determining how (and if) the city should help prostitutes. And, all the while, the newspapers critiqued these groups' various actions, attempting to establish themselves as the authority on public opinion. The differences in view between the groups caused the city of Cleveland to repeatedly alter its policies toward

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<sup>1</sup> "Desired to Return to a Life of Virtue," *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Jan. 12, 1871.

prostitution. The reaction to prostitution evolved in three stages from 1866 to 1915. From 1866 to 1878, the presence of prostitution was begrudgingly tolerated; from 1879 to 1899, groups demanded something be done about the prostitution problem; and, finally, from 1900 to 1915, prostitution was systematically eradicated. This transition was fairly typical of cities in the United States at this time, with other large cities at first tolerating the existence of prostitution and then calling for its elimination; hence Cleveland generally followed the national trend with a few minor variations.

This thesis is divided into three sections, with each examining how policemen, city council members, philanthropists and reformers, and journalists reacted to prostitution; sources include police reports, city council records, philanthropic group records, and city newspapers. The first section studies Cleveland from 1866 to 1878, when Cleveland grew as a city and prostitution grew with it. Various groups within the city established their opposition to prostitution, but overall, tolerated its existence. This was, perhaps, the most harmonious time among the various groups. The second section explores the years from 1879 to 1899, when prostitution was no longer treated as a minor nuisance. Once a disreputable vice district formed in downtown Cleveland, there were numerous calls for the elimination of prostitution from city groups, each with different ideas on how to go about it. Finally, the third section traces the systematic elimination of prostitution in the city, specifically within the vice district, from 1900 to 1915. The section begins by looking at the actions taken by Police Chief Kohler and Mayor Tom Johnson to eliminate prostitution. By the early twentieth century, groups within Cleveland were no longer willing to tolerate prostitution, nor were they satisfied with mere discussion of how to handle prostitution. This determination to eliminate vice in the city led to the closure of

the established vice district in 1915 under Mayor Newton Baker, which officially ended prostitutes' ability to operate openly in the city.

The decision of reformers to focus on the elimination of prostitution was a result of changes to the social structure across the country. Following the Civil War, immigration, industrialization, and urbanization transformed the United States, leading to massive growth and change. Immigration led to a more diverse population, with people coming from Eastern, Central, and Southern Europe. These newcomers brought with them different languages and cultures. These immigrants flocked to cities across the country looking for jobs, with many of them finding work as industrial workers.

New divisions also arose between laborers and owners of businesses as they no longer worked side-by-side nor attended the same community functions. Those who could afford it left the city for the suburbs. The industrial working class was increasingly foreign, while the upper-classes were typically white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, as a result of urbanization, the United States shifted from a society of small agrarian communities into a nation dominated by densely packed and highly populated industrial cities. This resulted in a feeling of social confusion across the United States as communities attempted to adjust.

Out of this massive growth came a period of reform and municipal oversight that historians have come to call the Progressive era. During this time, white, Protestant, middle-class reformers reacted in fear against social changes, such as the shift of the population to the cities, unrestricted immigration, and young women leaving home to seek new opportunities. Progressive reformers wanted to use the government to eliminate various perceived social ills.

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hall and Wang, 1982), 79.

Although it is arguable that progressive reformers did not successfully affect national policy until the 1900s, prior to that, reformers worked, with much success, to institute change in their respective cities.<sup>3</sup>

Efforts to eliminate prostitution were one such reform movement initiated locally, since laws against prostitution were generally handled at the municipal level. For example, the city of St. Louis, Missouri regulated prostitution through licensing for a few years in the 1870s.<sup>4</sup> However, St. Louis was an anomaly, and most American cities chose to outlaw prostitution. Yet the illegality of prostitution did not prevent its existence. In fact, in New York City, the police formed an elaborate relationship with prostitution that allowed some degree of control without abolishing its presence.<sup>5</sup>

As Timothy Gilfoyle explains in his book on prostitution in New York City, *City of Eros*, the business of prostitution affected multiple aspects of city life. This can be seen, for instance, by following the money. Men (upper or lower class depending on the brothel) paid prostitutes for their services. Many prostitutes then paid madams or pimps who provided them with business and protection. These madams and pimps then often bribed police officers and/or city officials and also paid rent to a property owner (who, again, could be a member of the upper or lower class).<sup>6</sup> Outside of looking at the money, prostitution again affected multiple aspects of urban life. For example, others in the city, such as middle-class reformers, spoke out against the presence of prostitution. Ruth Rosen, in her book, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*, explains that movements by reformers to eliminate prostitution represented a search

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<sup>3</sup> Jackson Lears *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 195-196.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1987), 147.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 251.

<sup>6</sup> Gilfoyle. 53.

for order in a changing society. Reformers targeted prostitution as it embodied the threat of immorality and potential exploitation awaiting women in the city.<sup>7</sup>

Like other industrial cities, Cleveland drastically changed between 1866 and 1915. From 1860 to 1870, Cleveland's population more than doubled, increasing from 43,417 to 92,829. What started as a small commercial town became a booming industrial city, ranking sixth in the nation by 1910.<sup>8</sup> In addition, one third of Cleveland residents were immigrants in the early 1900s.<sup>9</sup>

As Cleveland grew in the nineteenth-century, so did the presence of prostitution. From 1873 to 1878, the number of recorded houses of prostitution nearly doubled, from 42 to 81. By the 1880s, a vice district developed in downtown Cleveland around Ontario Street, Lakeside Avenue, Superior Avenue, and East 12<sup>th</sup> Street, with Hamilton Avenue particularly thriving.<sup>10</sup> In Cleveland, like New York, prostitution engaged multiple levels of society. The city government, women's associations, men's associations, doctors, and newspapers all commented on prostitution and how to handle it. These groups, while offering different solutions, generally progressed together in various levels of acceptance of prostitution in the city, eventually shifting from reluctant tolerance to calls for complete elimination.

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<sup>7</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982), xii-xiii.

<sup>8</sup> "The History of Cleveland Timeline," *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, <http://ech.cwru.edu/timeline.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Carol Poh Miller and Robert A. Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History, 1796-1996*, Second edition (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1997), 101.

<sup>10</sup> "Vice District Segregated," in "Prostitution: Cleveland, 1915-1948," *Cleveland Press Collection*, CSU; Daniel Kerr, "The Reign of Wickedness:" *The Changing Structures of Prostitution, Gambling and Political Protection in Cleveland from the Progressive Era to the Great Depression*, 1998 thesis, p.8.

## 1866-1878: “The Gates of Hell”

From 1866 to 1878, the United States was in the midst of a period when many considered prostitution a “necessary evil.”<sup>11</sup> Across the nation, the presence of prostitution was quietly tolerated as it provided an outlet for perceived male sexual “needs.” However, even while the public viewed it as “necessary,” prostitution was still an “evil” with the potential to corrupt young men and women. This distinction resulted in efforts to control the spread of prostitution. Some cities, such as New York, discussed controlling the spread of prostitution with regulation.<sup>12</sup> Cleveland, however, was a few years behind New York (as was most of the nation) and did not seek to regulate prostitution until the early 1880s. Instead, in the late 1860s and 1870s, Cleveland groups made efforts to limit the spread of prostitution through passing legislation and expressing opinions of how to handle prostitutes in the city, with very little action overall.

From 1866 to 1878, groups within Cleveland established their positions in relation to prostitution. As prostitution spread, citizens of Cleveland took notice of it and began to explore different ways of limiting the increasingly noticeable presence of prostitution. Some of the main groups participating in the discussion on how to handle prostitution during this time were the Cleveland Police Department, City Council, and philanthropies. While each group attempted to prevent the spread of the business of prostitution, no group proposed drastic action; many of the actions of the groups during this time were simply to establish that they did not want prostitution to spread, such as the City Council passing various ordinances and the Cleveland branch of the YWCA opening a facility to aid fallen women.

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<sup>11</sup> Rosen, xi.

<sup>12</sup> Rosen, 10

During the nineteenth century, local and state governments considered public morality to be among their primary responsibilities; this included limiting the presence of prostitution within their respective communities.<sup>13</sup> Police could arrest prostitutes, at their discretion, on a number of charges, varying from vagrancy to lewdness. Because of this, prostitutes were often at the mercy of their local police departments, with their welfare dependent upon their relationship with the police (which was often maintained with bribes).<sup>14</sup> A prostitute or brothel owner on good terms with the police could often avoid arrest and operate relatively undisturbed.

In 1866, the Ohio General Assembly passed the Metropolitan Police Act, which resulted in the formation of the Cleveland Police Department. Prior to this, a system of elected marshals and volunteer watchmen patrolled the city of Cleveland. With the formation of the Police Department came a drastic increase in the number of arrests within the city. In fact, according to the Mayor of Cleveland, H.M. Chapin, the number of arrests in 1866 was twice that as in 1865—increasing from 2,616 to 4,418. However, the large increase in the number of arrests was general and not specific to prostitution. In fact, of these 4,418 arrests, only 272 (approximately six percent) were directly related to prostitution.<sup>15</sup> In addition, only 11 of the 272 arrests were for “common prostitution” (probably for street-walking). The majority of the 272 arrests were for 97 women residing in and 108 men visiting houses of ill fame.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, according to the reports of the Cleveland Police Department, the number of arrests for common prostitution was

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<sup>13</sup> William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996), Chapter 5, Kindle location 2135.

<sup>14</sup> Rosen, 4.

<sup>15</sup> I include the arrests for common prostitution, keeping a house of ill fame, residing in a house of ill fame, and visiting a house of ill fame in my numbers for 1866. As a rule for the thesis, I only count arrests that are without doubt related to prostitution. This means that I do exclude arrests that could potentially be related to prostitution, such as keeping a disorderly house because it is likely not all of the arrests included in such categories were for prostitution.

<sup>16</sup> “First Annual Report of the Board of Metropolitan Police,” *Annual Report for the City of Cleveland, 1867*, WRHS Library Collection.

consistently lower than the total number of arrests for residing in or visiting a house of ill fame from 1866 to 1878 (with 1873 and 1874 being the exceptions).<sup>17</sup> This reveals that the police focused on arresting persons at brothels rather than street-walkers. This was in part because the ordinances in place at this time focused on outlawing houses of prostitution rather than prohibiting street-walking.

In May 1867, the City Council passed “An ordinance to prevent the existence of houses of ill fame, and the visiting thereof.” This ordinance prohibited the use of city property for the purposes of prostitution. In doing so, the City Council announced its stance that prostitution was not welcome in Cleveland. Three key components made up the 1867 ordinance.

The first section of the ordinance stated “it shall be unlawful for an owner or occupant of any premises within said city [Cleveland], to keep, or suffer to be kept on said premises, a house of ill-fame.”<sup>18</sup> This thereby established that it was officially illegal for any property in the city to be used as a brothel. Such a clause both addressed owners of houses of prostitution (such as madams) and landlords (if the madam was renting property from someone). Including the landlords was important as many had learned that brothel owners would pay higher rent because of the associated risks, such as being arrested.<sup>19</sup> The City Council, by including landlords, took a stance against any city property being used for prostitution.

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<sup>17</sup> Reports of the Cleveland Police Department, found in *Annual Report for the City of Cleveland, 1867-1878*, WRHS Library Collection. There are very few instances from 1866 to 1878 where more people were arrested for common prostitution than for residing in a house of ill-fame or visiting a house of ill fame separately, with the exceptions being 1873, 1874. In addition, in 1876 the number arrested for residing in a house of ill-fame was lower than the number arrested for common prostitution, but the number arrested for visiting a house of ill fame was higher than the number arrested for common prostitution. See appendix for exact arrest numbers.

<sup>18</sup> *General Acts Relative to the Organization of Cities and Villages, The School Laws Governing the City Schools, In Force January 1, 1868, and the Revised Ordinances of the City of Cleveland in Force October 25, 1867*, Compiled and Arranged By Order of the City Council, by R.B. Dennis, Esq. (Cleveland: Fairbanks, Benedict & Co., Printers, Herald Office, 1868), 475.

<sup>19</sup> Gilfoyle, 53.

The second section established “that it shall be unlawful for any person to reside in a house of ill-fame, or visit such houses for the purpose of prostitution.” Prostitutes and brothel owners were obvious targets of the first part of this statement. But, in fact, others often lived at the houses, such as servants and children.<sup>20</sup> Just as there were different levels of prostitution, from well-kept mistresses to occasional street-walkers, there were different levels of brothels. Some catered to the wealthy and others to the working class; some prostitutes could charge ten dollars per person and others only fifty cents. More expensive brothels required servants to keep the houses at a higher standard.

The second section of the ordinance was also particularly ardent in its objection to vice in the city as it called for the punishment of not only a person residing in a house of prostitution, but also of those who visited them. In other cities, men were often left unpunished for visiting brothels; in Cleveland, this was not the case.<sup>21</sup> In the nineteenth-century, men were believed to have significant sexual needs, which allowed for a societal double standard that grudgingly conceded that some men were going to visit prostitutes. Thus, prostitutes were a “necessary evil” as they provided an outlet for male sexual needs. However, while they were viewed as necessary, the female prostitutes were also often viewed as evil in that they failed to maintain the moral standards set for women.<sup>22</sup> Hence, female prostitutes were often prosecuted, while their partners-in-crime walked free.

As historian Barbara Meil Hobson explains in her book, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition*, prostitution was viewed as a gender specific

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<sup>20</sup> Karen Abbott, *Sin in the Second City: Madams, Ministers, Playboys, and The Battle for America's Soul*, (New York: Random House, 2007), 24.

<sup>21</sup> Novak, chapter 5, Kindle location 2337.

<sup>22</sup> Rosen, xi.

crime across the United States.<sup>23</sup> Law enforcers tended to go after “the easiest and most visible target, the public prostitute,” while often ignoring the clients.<sup>24</sup> For example, in Boston, an 1872 law called for the prosecution of male nightwalkers, which would allow police to arrest patrons of brothels. However, the police chose not enforce the law.<sup>25</sup> The Cleveland ordinance, in contrast, was enforced and men were arrested for visiting brothels (see figure 1). As already has been seen from the 1866 arrest numbers, men and women were arrested for offenses related to prostitution fairly evenly in Cleveland. As another example of this trend, in 1876, 78 men were arrested for visiting a house of prostitution and 74 women were arrested for residing in a brothel.<sup>26</sup> This tendency to arrest men and women equally continued throughout the 1870s and all the way into the 1880s and 90s.

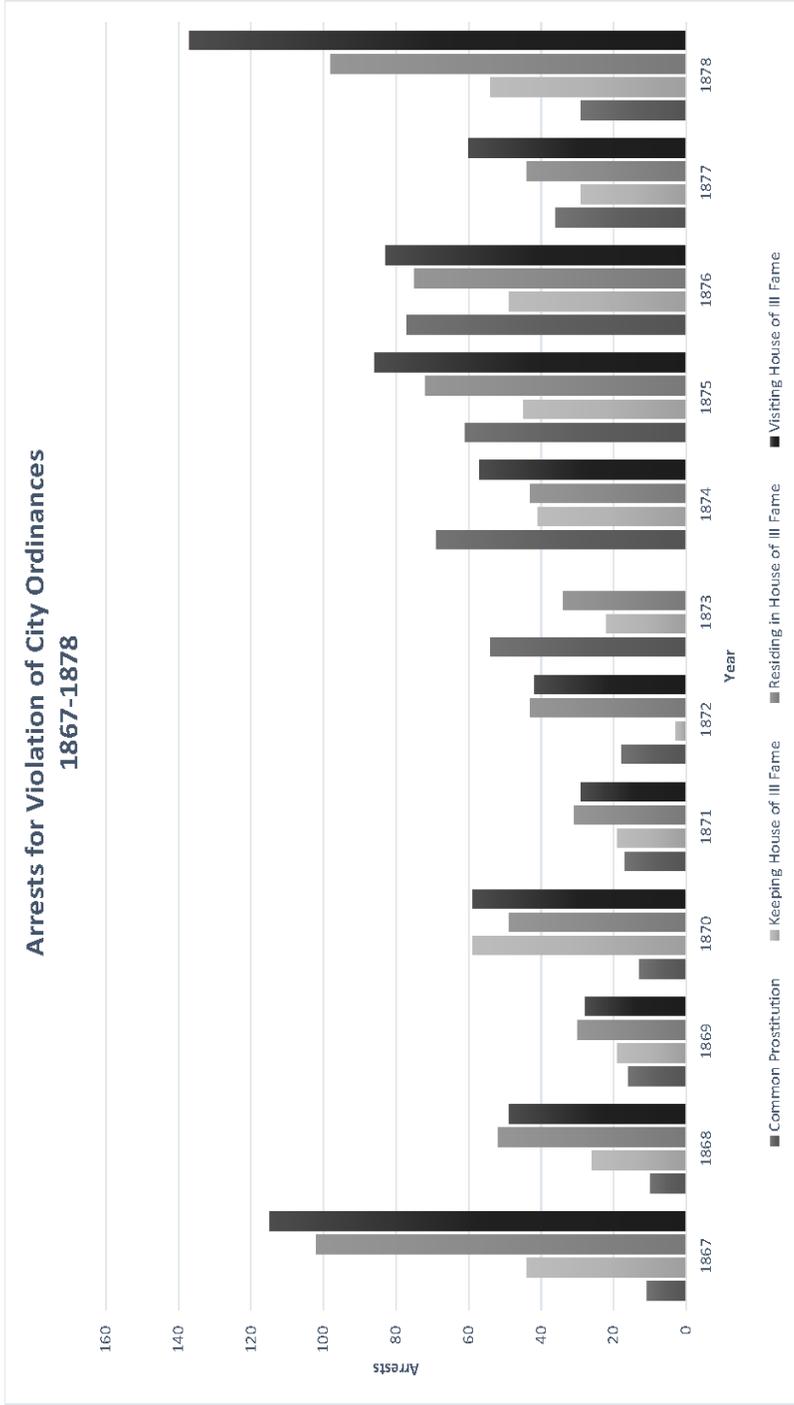
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<sup>23</sup> Hobson, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Hobson, 48.

<sup>25</sup> Hobson, 70.

<sup>26</sup> Report of the Cleveland Police Department, found in *Annual Report for the City of Cleveland*, 1876; the 1866 numbers were 97 women for residing and 108 men for visiting a house of ill fame.



*Figure 1: Arrests for Common Prostitution and Residing in a House of Ill Fame were predominantly female. The majority of arrests for Visiting a House of Ill Fame were male. See appendix for exact numbers.*

The third section of the ordinance outlined the consequences of failing to adhere to the law: “Any person violating any provision of this ordinance shall, on conviction thereof, be fined in any sum not exceeding one hundred dollars, or be imprisoned not more than ten days, or both, at the discretion of the court.”<sup>27</sup> The fine was particularly severe. A young women working in industry in Cleveland at this time earned a weekly wage of approximately five dollars.<sup>28</sup> Despite the mythology that women could earn a lot of money quickly and easily through prostitution, it was quite rare for a prostitute to make a substantial amount of money. While a prostitute at a well-established brothel could hope to earn well over fifty dollars a week, most worked in houses that catered to the poor and made very little, often earning only fifty-cents (or even less) per “trick.”<sup>29</sup> Additionally, neither high-end nor low-end prostitutes kept all of the money they earned. They were expected to pay rent, police and/or politician bribes, madams or pimps, and, in addition, those working in fancier houses found it necessary to pay for nicer clothing.<sup>30</sup> In practice, many prostitutes were not charged the full fine of one hundred dollars, and often significantly less.<sup>31</sup> This was likely because many of those arrested could not afford the maximum fine.

Not surprisingly, when the ordinance was revised in 1871, the City Council modified the punishments listed in section III and lowered the maximum fine to fifty dollars. However, public

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<sup>27</sup> *General Acts Relative to the Organization of Cities and Villages*, 475.

<sup>28</sup> Scharf, Lois. *A Woman's View of Cleveland's Labor Force: Two Case Studies. The Birth Of Modern Cleveland*. Edited by Thomas F. Campbell and Edward M. Miggins (Cleveland: Western Reserve Historical Society, 1988), 174.

<sup>29</sup> Rosen, 87, 94; Karen Abbott, *Sin in the Second City: Madams, Ministers, Playboys, and The Battle for America's Soul*, (New York: Random House, 2007), 27.

<sup>30</sup> Rosen, 70

<sup>31</sup> In the municipal court sections of the *Plain Dealer*, fines for prostitutes were often listed. Of the sections I examined between 1866 and 1871, none were charged the full fine and the most charged was for an owner at \$50. Johns' fines, when mentioned, were often a similar amount, but the men's fines were not mentioned consistently enough to make a strong assertion. See the Municipal Court Sections on Jan. 31, 1870, June 17, 1870, and April 28, 1871 for some examples.

service through “hard labor” at the Work House was added as a possible punishment, stipulating imprisonment times which increased with each successive offence, with the maximum term of one year for the fourth and any further offences.<sup>32</sup> The lowering of the maximum fine and the addition of time at the Work House as an option for punishment suggests the difficulty for the women in paying the fine, as well as potential difficulty for the city to collect the fine. It should also be noted that the addition of the Work House as a form of punishment was in part because the Work House location changed in 1871, allowing for more residents. These two ordinances passed by the Cleveland City Council expressed a conscious decision to suppress the spread of vice within the city. However, these ordinances were limited—suggesting a certain level of toleration; for example, they ignored the presence of street-walkers who did not reside in brothels.

Despite the passage of the 1867 and 1871 ordinances, according to the annual police reports, the number of recorded houses of prostitution increased from 1866 to 1878. In 1873, the police reported 42 houses of prostitution in the city. In 1874 they reported 51 houses, in 1875, an increase to 62 houses, and so on, culminating with 81 recorded houses of prostitution in 1878.<sup>33</sup> However, it is important to note that it is unlikely the police would be able to ascertain an accurate count of houses of prostitution in the city. One of the local newspapers even scoffed at the idea that the police knew the true total, saying the figures “are much below the real number, for only those are reckoned which are so public as to be known to the police.”<sup>34</sup> Many

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<sup>32</sup> “City Ordinances,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), June 10, 1871.

<sup>33</sup> There is a decrease in the number of recorded houses of prostitution in 1876, but the number rebounds quickly over the next two years as can be seen by the presence of 81 houses of prostitution in 1878. For specific numbers, see appendix.

<sup>34</sup> “The Gates of Hell,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Jan. 29, 1870.

of the houses of prostitution were small or obscurely located, making it unlikely that the police would know of their existence.

As the City Council ordinances and the actions of the police department clearly did not put a stop to prostitution in Cleveland, the City Council sought the help of city philanthropies in abating prostitution. In 1869, the City Council resolved to give eight hundred dollars “to aid the ladies of the Protestant and Catholic churches in an effort to reclaim those females who are leading a life of prostitution.”<sup>35</sup> In doing so, the City Council attempted to reform prostitution through philanthropic means, while also mandating the behavior of white, Christian philanthropies in the city. Offering aid to prostitutes shows a toleration of prostitution as it did not directly attack the business of prostitution and instead attempted to offer an alternative option for the women involved. Yet, this action also shows a displeasure with the continued existence of prostitution and a potential attempt to reduce the amount of prostitution in the city.

One such white Christian group in the city was the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) of Cleveland. The YWCA was the sister organization of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). The YMCA and the YWCA opened branches in Cleveland in 1859 and 1869, respectively. Both groups were part of the larger, national associations. In the early years of their existence, the national YMCA and the YWCA shared similar goals. For example, both sought to provide urban populations with services, such as leisure activities, to prevent young men and women from seeking out sinful temptation in the city.<sup>36</sup>

Male reform efforts and female reform efforts differed in their approach to prostitution throughout the nineteenth century. Male reform efforts focused on the threat female prostitutes

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<sup>35</sup> “City Council—Resolution,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Sept. 1, 1869.

<sup>36</sup> Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt, Introduction to *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 1-2.

presented to men, often emphasizing the risk of contracting venereal disease.<sup>37</sup> Female reform efforts, on the other hand, expressed sympathy for the prostitutes. They held the belief that women's shared vulnerability to sexual aggression would allow them to create a "Christian sisterhood." This would then provide a pathway for the prostitute to seek redemption and re-entry into society.<sup>38</sup> The Cleveland YMCA and YWCA, when discussing how to handle prostitution, followed these patterns, with the Cleveland YMCA advising men to stay away from "evil companionship" and the YWCA providing some aid for fallen women.<sup>39</sup>

The Cleveland YWCA considered the issue of how to handle the presence of prostitution in the city at its formation in 1869.<sup>40</sup> However, it is important to note, that their activities regarding prostitution in the city were small in comparison to their larger role in the city. The Cleveland YWCA only dealt with prostitutes at the Retreat, which was their home for fallen women (often unwed mothers). Prostitutes would not have been welcome at their other establishments, such as at their home for working girls, as those locations required a background check; girls who were "found undesirable and unfit to be in the society of the other boarders, [are] frankly told so, and [are] asked to make other arrangements."<sup>41</sup>

At its establishment in 1869, the Cleveland Young Women's Christian Association constitution read "The object of this association shall be the spiritual, moral, mental, social and

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<sup>37</sup> John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 143. For more on the reform movements of the 1800s, see pages 140-155.

<sup>38</sup> Hobson, 66.

<sup>39</sup> *A Synopsis of the Annual Reports of the Young Men's Christian Association, 1870-71*, Young Men's Christian Association, WRHS Container 15, folder 1.

<sup>40</sup> "Secretary's Report," *Annual Report of the Young Women's Christian Association 1869*, Young Women's Christian Association, WRHS, Container 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Annual Report of the Young Women's Christian Association 1904*, Young Women's Christian Association, WRHS, Container 12.

physical welfare of Women in our midst.”<sup>42</sup> This statement neither includes nor excludes the idea of helping prostitutes, which was addressed separately. The Cleveland women of the YWCA posed the question to themselves, “What shall be done for those who from want, or sorrow, or deception had lost the glory of their womanhood?” The members made the decision that “If it be God’s will that we assume this new and great responsibility, the way will be opened.”<sup>43</sup> As a result, fallen women were able to seek the help of the YWCA at the Retreat. By 1878, the members of the YWCA expanded the objective to include helping women, “especially the young, who are dependent upon their own exertions for support; the tempted and fallen, who need protection or assistance.”<sup>44</sup> The “fallen” women referred to included prostitutes.

At the Retreat, women were given a place to live, medical aid, vocational education in such skills as sewing and domestic work to make them employable, and religious guidance. The reformers sought to eradicate “life-long evil habits” and implant “virtuous principles and pure habits.”<sup>45</sup> The women of the YWCA believed themselves to be successful in reforming some who entered the Retreat, but they also acknowledged that not all their endeavors were successful. They admitted that “a few have, after temporary sojourn at the Retreat, returned back to the ‘wages of sin.’”<sup>46</sup> The fact that women chose to return to such wages was not surprising. The idea of “sisterhood” adopted by the reformers did not account for class and ethnic divisions.<sup>47</sup>

Additionally, reformers assumed prostitutes lacked agency. Some women chose to be prostitutes

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<sup>42</sup> *Constitution of the Young Women’s Christian Association, 1869*, Young Women’s Christian Association, WRHS, Container 8.

<sup>43</sup> “Secretary’s Report,” *Annual Report of the Young Women’s Christian Association, 1869*, Young Women’s Christian Association, WRHS, Container 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Constitution of the Young Women’s Christian Association, 1878*, Secretary’s Book: 1878-1892, Young Women’s Christian Association, WRHS, Container 1.

<sup>45</sup> “Report of the Retreat” *Young Women’s Christian Association Annual Report, 1873*, Young Women’s Christian Association, WRHS, Container 8.

<sup>46</sup> “Report of the Retreat,” *Young Women’s Christian Association Annual Report, 1869*, Young Women’s Christian Association, WRHS, Container 8.

<sup>47</sup> Hobson, 76.

because they viewed “respectable work,” such as domestic labor which involved low pay and often sexual harassment, with disdain.<sup>48</sup> The women of the YWCA chose not to dwell on the failures, however, and focused on spreading their message of religion and compassion toward all throughout the city. In this respect they were relatively successful as the police occasionally sent young women seeking to work at brothels or rescued from houses of prostitution to the Retreat.<sup>49</sup> The city newspapers similarly expressed sympathy for the prostitutes.

Human interest pieces make up much of the discussion by the local newspapers about prostitution from 1866 to 1878. Many of the stories regarding prostitution were about the prostitutes themselves, whereas later, the articles shifted to focus more heavily on the actions of the city officials.<sup>50</sup> When reporting on prostitution during the 1860s and 1870s, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* often sympathized with the plight of young women forced to sell their own bodies. However, it is important to note that even when the newspapers expressed sympathy for the prostitutes, it was only to white prostitutes described as “young” and “beautiful.” These women received sympathy because society and culture associated the ideals of youth and beauty with innocence.

The prostitutes who received sympathy from the newspapers in the 1860s and 1870s typically possessed at least one of three qualities: youth, beauty, or innocence. By innocence, what was meant was that the women were tricked into their life of prostitution—by seduction, an employment office, or because they were isolated and naïve migrants, often from rural areas. An example that encompasses all three traits can be found in an article entitled “A Respectable

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<sup>48</sup> Rosen, 102.

<sup>49</sup> Two examples of this occurrence are mentioned in the *Plain Dealer* in “In and About the City” on July 8, 1878, and in “Strange Depravity” on Dec. 17, 1879. In addition, YWCA mentions this occurrence themselves in the 1892 Annual Report.

<sup>50</sup> This is not to say there was no discussion of the actions of city officials, but rather the emphasis tended to be on the prostitutes.

Clergyman Finds his Daughter in a Den of Infamy,” in which the *Plain Dealer* told the story of “a young and beautiful girl [who] came to this city about three months ago with a dashing young man who had won her affections” and promised marriage. The wedding however, was postponed and the young man abandoned her, but during their brief time together, the girl “gave to him a woman’s brightest jewel.” Ashamed, the young woman entered a house of prostitution. However, her father found her and took her home. The article concludes that the once happy home of the father and daughter was “blighted forever” and that “if any crime deserves the halter [noose] it is that of seduction.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, the young man was to blame. Because the woman was young, beautiful, tricked into prostitution, and also a daughter of a clergyman, the woman received sympathy, but not without acknowledging that she was permanently ruined.

Another example of sympathy for the young and beautiful can be found in an 1868 *Plain Dealer* article, which reported on the misfortune of a woman who married at 16. According to the woman, her husband failed in his duties and did not adequately provide for her, forcing her to enter a house of prostitution to support herself. The article described her “as possessing remarkable beauty, and every way calculated to make the heart of a true husband happy.” The *Plain Dealer* then went on to express concern for her well-being, stating “she is now on the broad road to destruction, and something should be done to save her.”<sup>52</sup> Because she was young, white, beautiful, and in the unfortunate situation of having an undutiful husband, she warranted sympathy.

A *Plain Dealer* article, printed in 1875, reported on “two girls, aged thirteen and fifteen, [who] were up before the police court...charged with residing in a house of prostitution.” The

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<sup>51</sup> “A Respectable Clergyman Finds his Daughter in a Den of Infamy,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), April 30, 1866.

<sup>52</sup> “A Wife in a House of Prostitution,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), April 4, 1868.

tragedy of these girls was youth: theirs was “a sad, sad story,” with abominable parenting to blame for the girls’ course in life.<sup>53</sup> The article asserted several times that the girls were children, with youth justifying sympathy.

In addition to these three articles, there were numerous others that expressed sympathy for young innocent women living as prostitutes, such as an 1866 article “Life in a Northern City, Shocking Revelations of Depravity.” This article told the story of a 14 year old girl who was found on the streets after escaping from a house of prostitution that she was tricked into entering.<sup>54</sup> Another example is an 1867 article, “Encouragement in the Path of Virtue,” about a young woman who after living as a prostitute, saw the error of her ways and reformed. Unfortunately, the young woman was recently arrested for common prostitution; but, as by all accounts she was now living a respectable life, she was given time to procure proof of her innocence so she could continue on her path of reformation.<sup>55</sup> A further example of sympathy toward prostitutes, is the 1878 article, “Miserable Death of a Once Beautiful Cleveland Girl” which described the death of a prostitute who “was once a beautiful girl” but due to unfortunate circumstances she “sank lower and lower.”<sup>56</sup> As these above examples show, while prostitutes were not a welcome presence in the city, their sad stories often elicited sympathy from the city newspapers.

Yet, this sympathy was clearly only for white, youthful, seduced prostitutes. An article in 1868 told of a fight between two prostitutes, one of whom bore the name “[n\*\*\*\*\*] Nell.” The newspaper described the fight with a tone mixed with tired exasperation and amusement, stating, “The subject of discussion was of course a man. Nell claiming the luckless individual as ‘her man,’ while her antagonist laid equal claims to him. Words did not suffice to settle the matter,

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<sup>53</sup> “In and About the City, *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Dec. 1, 1875.

<sup>54</sup> “Life in a Northern City, Shocking Revelations of Depravity,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), April 25, 1866.

<sup>55</sup> “Encouragement in the path of Virtue,” *Plain Dealer*, (Cleveland OH), Oct. 4, 1867.

<sup>56</sup> “The Miserable Death of a Once Beautiful Cleveland Girl,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland OH), Dec. 26, 1878.

and the fair but frail one resorted to blows.”<sup>57</sup> Neither of these prostitutes received any sympathy; rather, their behavior was looked down upon and reported on as purely a human interest piece in the newspaper. Nell received no sympathy because of her race, and “the fair but frail” prostitute was not able to be seen as innocent or tricked because of her public display of improper behavior. In addition, her description as “frail” distinguished her from the young and beautiful white prostitutes who could be described as looking innocent. However, despite the negative view of the women in the article, Nell and the frail prostitute were given agency, which was often not the case for the women who received sympathy. Through these articles, the *Plain Dealer* expressed its disdain for the business of prostitution, while also implicitly tolerating its existence.

From 1866 to 1878, groups within Cleveland asserted their hostility toward prostitution. For the City Council and Police, prostitution was becoming increasingly problematic, but it did not yet warrant major action, hence its presence was largely tolerated, as is seen by the weaknesses of the ordinances, as well as their lax enforcement. Philanthropies, such as the YWCA, chose to help prostitutes. While prostitutes were still a troublesome presence in the city at this time, aiding the women was more important than calling for their removal and elimination from city. The newspapers, too, chose to see prostitution as a nuisance or as a misfortune in the lives of individual women rather than as a serious problem threatening the city. Yet it is important to note that at no point did city groups find the business of prostitution acceptable. And while the tone of the YWCA and the newspapers can be described as sympathetic, in no way were the prostitutes a welcomed presence in the city; they were tolerated and pitied. As

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<sup>57</sup> “A Free Fight,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), February 20, 1868.

Cleveland moved into the 1880s and 1890s, prostitution would come to be seen as a more serious threat to the city's well-being.

## 1879-1899: “A Crusade Against Vice”

In the 1880s and 1890s, antiprostitution movements gained support across the United States. In the 1880s, there was still some discussion in the country to control rather than eliminate prostitution, but these efforts largely transitioned to calls for total elimination as the nation entered the Progressive era in the 1890s.<sup>58</sup> The Progressive era spawned numerous reform movements which grew out of the middle-class fear of the social changes across the country; the reform efforts were a search for order.<sup>59</sup> Antiprostitution was one such reform movement. However, within the city of Cleveland, confusion ensued as groups disagreed as to how to prevent the spread of prostitution and eliminate it from the community.

By the 1880s, Cleveland was a thriving and nationally prominent industrial city. A recognized vice district formed in downtown Cleveland, dubbed the “tenderloin” district after New York City’s famous sex district of the same name.<sup>60</sup> The area had been home to brothels, saloons, and gambling parlors before the 1880s; however it was during this decade that its presence became undeniable and expanded substantially.<sup>61</sup> During the 1880s and 1890s the Cleveland Police Department largely used the surveillance method in order to control the district, particularly focusing on raiding houses of prostitution. This involved the police keeping tabs on locations of brothels in the city and raiding them approximately once a month. Those arrested in the raids were fined and then permitted to return to their houses—a common practice across the

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<sup>58</sup> Mara L. Keire., *For Business & Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010) 8.

<sup>59</sup> Lears, 195-196.

<sup>60</sup> Gilfoyle, 196.

<sup>61</sup> “Prostitution: Cleveland, 1915-1948,” *Cleveland Press Collection*, CSU; The vice district also generally falls within what was precinct one for the police department in 1873; during this year, precinct one had the highest number of recorded houses of prostitution and also the highest number of female arrests.

nation.<sup>62</sup> This method varied in effectiveness, which resulted in disagreements among the police, mayors, city council, reformers, and philanthropists (see figure 2). City government officials debated whether to regulate or eliminate prostitution. Some philanthropists struggled with their task of helping prostitutes, and the newspapers reacted with either outrage or applause for steps taken by government officials to deal with the prostitution problem. For every group, prostitution was now an issue that warranted sweeping and firm action, but what action to take was heavily debated—especially under Mayor Rensselaer Herrick in 1880.

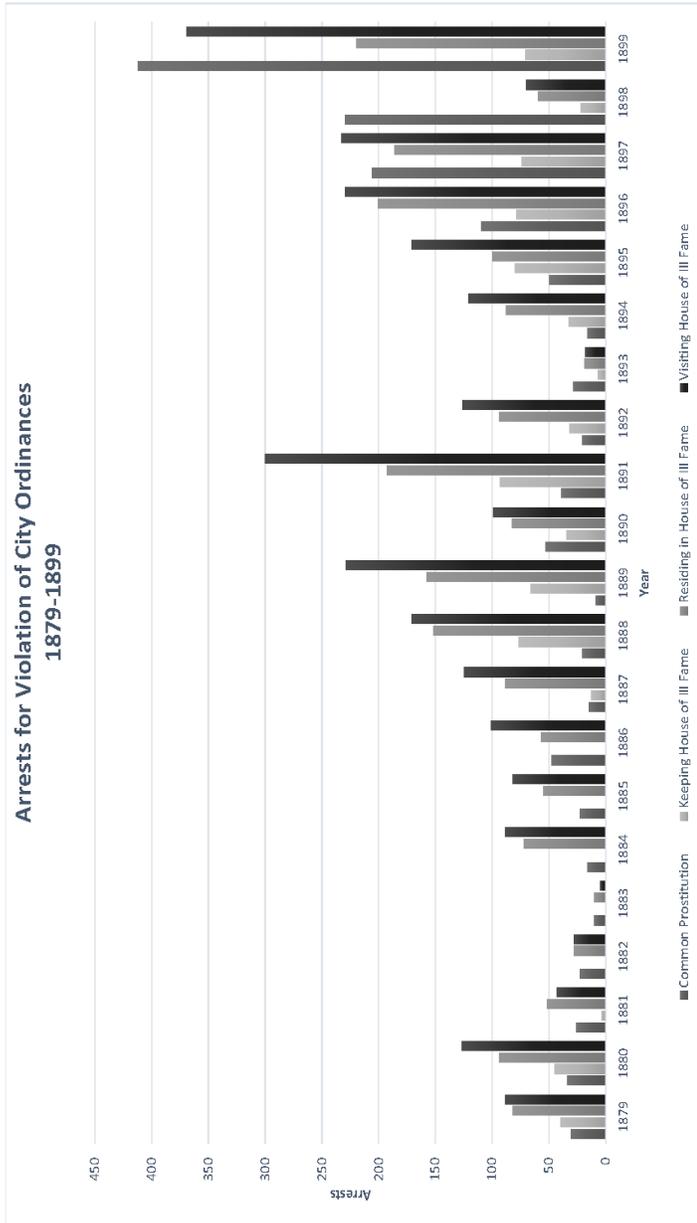
Elected mayor of Cleveland in 1879, Republican Herrick faced significant scrutiny from city residents and the City Council during his three years in office. This was largely because of a failure of the police department to control prostitution in the city of Cleveland from 1879 to 1882. From 1873 to 1878, the number of houses of prostitution in the city increased.<sup>63</sup> Then, oddly, in 1879, the police reported the existence of only 54 houses of prostitution, a staggering 27 house decrease within a year. The number of recorded houses of prostitution continued decreasing over the next three years, with only 48 reported houses in 1880, 29 in 1881, and just 25 in 1882, revealing the decrease was more than just a minor fluctuation. In addition to the decline in the number of recorded houses of prostitution in the city, the arrests related to prostitution also significantly dropped. For example, in 1878 there were 318 arrests directly relating to prostitution; by 1882 only 79 persons were arrested for offenses relating to prostitution. This may initially seem to suggest that under Mayor Herrick the police gained

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<sup>62</sup> “Prostitution: Cleveland, 1915-1948,” *Cleveland Press Collection*, CSU; Rosen, 4-6.

<sup>63</sup> As previously mentioned, there was a decrease in 1876, but as the number rebounds the next year, from 1873 to 1878 it is a general increase. No other numbers from the police reports seem drastically different, whereas under Herrick all the arrest numbers change. 1876 is most likely just an oddity and an example of the fact the police reports were not 100% accurate.

control over prostitution in the city, but looking at the events that occurred while Mayor Herrick was in office reveals the opposite.



*Figure 2: As can be seen, the amount of arrests fluctuated frequently during these years. In addition, the use of the surveillance method is apparent from the high number of arrests for Residing in and Visiting a House of Ill Fame. See appendix for exact numbers.*

In 1880, the City Council initiated an investigation into the failure of the police to act. From the outset of the investigation, Mayor Herrick questioned its intentions, claiming the goal was not reform but to “stir and vent spite on the police department.”<sup>64</sup> Certainly, the investigation showed distrust of Herrick’s authority. A member of the Police Board, Prosecutor Lewis, was placed in charge of the investigation, which took several months. Among the primary concerns of the investigation was the relationship between the police and prostitutes in the city. Early in the investigation, Prosecutor Lewis suggested that the police department failed to control prostitution in the city because of unstated orders: “I know that there are certain houses of ill fame in this city the keepers and inmates of which the police dare not, or at least do not, arrest, although their locality and character are well known to them; and all they say in excuse is that they have orders not to—not definite and outspoken orders, but tacitly understood.”<sup>65</sup> As the investigation progressed, Lewis’s fears of prostitution going unchecked in the city were confirmed as numerous police officers recalled instances in which they chose not to arrest prostitutes and brothel owners. Some officers maintained that there was no explicit order against arresting prostitutes. Captain Henry Hoehn, for example, explained that while “he had never received any order restraining him from making arrests from houses of prostitution,” he also acknowledged that there existed “an understanding that the officers of the department should be informed before patrolmen made arrests of this kind.”<sup>66</sup> Other officers, however, asserted that an outright order prevented them from arresting prostitutes. One ex-patrolman frankly stated “there was an order against raiding houses of prostitution” and failure to comply would result in

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<sup>64</sup> “Lewis Crusade,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Sept. 1, 1880.

<sup>65</sup> “Stirring Up the Animals: Prosecutor Lewis Before the Investigating Committee,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Sept. 23, 1880. See also, “The Bobbing,” *Cleveland Leader*, (Cleveland, OH), Sept. 23, 1880. The Lewis quote from *The Leader* is not word-for-word identical, but the same message is conveyed. For reader comparison, it states: “Every officer knows perfectly well that there are houses of illfame [sic] in the city, but dare not ‘pull’ them. When asked why they do not make these arrests they invariably reply that they dare not do so.”

<sup>66</sup> “The Police Investigation: Continuation of Testimony,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Oct. 25, 1880.

reprimand.<sup>67</sup> These statements suggest that members of the police department and city government maintained relationships with some of the city brothels. These types of relationships were not uncommon in large cities in the United States as they allowed police to maintain some form of knowledge and control of vice in the city. Yet, it was because of these relationships that the police and government were subject to significant criticism from citizens.<sup>68</sup>

As part of the investigation, Mr. T.H. Graham, a citizen of Cleveland, testified that the city police ignored his complaints about a house of prostitution near his property. Graham sought the help of the police department to rid his neighborhood of a brothel in order to prevent his property from losing value. When Graham made his initial complaint, “nothing was done.”<sup>69</sup> Instead, the prostitutes attempted to bribe Graham. It was not until after Graham refused the bribe and placed another complaint that the police prosecuted the women. Based on the testimonies of various police officers and citizens, the City Council investigation concluded “that as a rule, the Police department does not interfere with houses of prostitution or gambling houses, except on complaints of citizens in cases of disturbances.”<sup>70</sup> The investigation confirmed that, under Mayor Herrick, the police made an active decision to avoid arresting prostitutes. As mayor, Herrick was largely in charge of the police. The years of decline in the recorded houses of prostitution align with Mayor Herrick’s term in office, suggesting the decrease was largely because of his influence. By 1883, with Herrick out of the office, the number of recorded houses of prostitution in the city more than doubled, totaling 58.<sup>71</sup> The number of arrests directly related to prostitution continued to decline in 1883, but rebounded

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<sup>67</sup> “The Police Investigation,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Oct. 22, 1880.

<sup>68</sup> Gilfoyle, 185.

<sup>69</sup> “The Police Investigation: Continuation of the Testimony Before the Council Committee,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Oct. 16, 1880.

<sup>70</sup> “The City Council,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Nov. 23, 1880.

<sup>71</sup> Reports of the Police Department, found in *Annual Report of the City of Cleveland*, 1878-1883, WRHS Library Collection.

back to their pre-Herrick numbers by 1884. This is likely because Mayor Herrick's influence had not completely died out within the police force and orders to avoid arresting prostitutes likely lingered, even if the brothel locations were again being recorded for the official city count.

During Herrick's time as mayor, Cleveland also grew as a city. Cleveland was industrializing and increasing in population in the 1880s, making it unlikely that prostitution would have actually decreased at this time. In addition, the 1880s was the time in which the Cleveland vice district began to truly take root in the city. The lack of control of prostitution under Mayor Herrick and the growth in the vice district occurred with the complicity of the police and city government; Mayor Herrick allowed prostitution to go basically unchecked during his years in office. The collaboration between the police department and prostitutes was obvious and problematic but Herrick turned a blind-eye to the situation.

At the end of Mayor Herrick's term, even the city Republican newspaper, the *Cleveland Leader*, condemned his performance as mayor, stating that Herrick allowed prostitution to "taint" and "poison" the city. Herrick's mayoralty endangered the city in the eyes of the public as "it attract[ed] the procuress and gilded harlot" to the city.<sup>72</sup> Thus citizens were fearful that Cleveland's reputation might invite the wrong type of people to the city. Clearly, many citizens of Cleveland deplored the lack of control over prostitution.

The investigation revealed a number of problems with handling prostitution in the city: not only could the police not always be trusted to enforce the ordinances, but city officials did not see eye-to-eye with citizens on how to deal with prostitution. In addition to these problems, there was discord among the city officials. This dissonance continued even after Mayor Herrick left office. Just two years later, in October 1885, Mayor George Gardner and Police

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<sup>72</sup> "The City's Shame: The Last Day of Infamy Under Mayor Herrick's Reign as Confessed by the 'Leader,'" *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), April 7, 1883.

Commissioner Bradner found themselves in a public battle over how to eliminate prostitution in the city. Mayor Gardner declared his intent to eradicate prostitution by instructing the Chief of Police to close all of Cleveland's brothels.<sup>73</sup> Commissioner Bradner, upon hearing of the order, complained to a local newspaper that the mandate was outside the Mayor's power and that the Mayor "ought to know that the social evil [prostitution] could not be suppressed."<sup>74</sup> This disagreement led to a confrontation at a Police Board meeting where Mayor Gardner emphatically asserted his authority, stating, "so long as I am mayor of the city of Cleveland, I shall issue orders to the chief of police whenever I consider it necessary to preserve the public peace."<sup>75</sup> The argument between Mayor Gardner and Commissioner Bradner was part of the larger problem facing the city: there was not one idea of how to handle prostitution.

Because of the lack of consensus on how to handle prostitution, the City Council sought ways other than ordinances to control prostitution in the city. One such effort involved the Board of Health, a group of appointed public officials and physicians.<sup>76</sup> Prostitution was a concern of the city Board of Health as it was linked in the public eye with venereal disease, specifically syphilis and gonorrhea. Beginning in the nineteenth century, many Americans associated venereal disease with moral corruption.<sup>77</sup> Prostitution's connection with venereal disease thus made commercialized sex both a moral (public officials) and a health concern (doctors). As the police department could not always be relied upon to enforce city ordinances to prevent prostitution in the city, it was logical for the City Council to consult the Board of Health to aid in preventing the spread of venereal disease through prostitutes.

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<sup>73</sup> "A Crusade Upon Vice" *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Oct. 17, 1885.

<sup>74</sup> "Red Hot," *Cleveland Leader* (Cleveland, OH), Oct. 28, 1885.

<sup>75</sup> "A Lively Fight," *Plain Dealer*, (Cleveland, OH), Oct. 28, 1885.

<sup>76</sup> "Cleveland Board of Health" *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, last modified 1997, <http://ech.case.edu/cgi/article.pl?id=CBOH>

<sup>77</sup> Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 5.

Within the city of Cleveland in the 1880s and 1890s, the generally accepted practice for limiting vice was surveillance; the police knew many of the locations of houses of ill repute and raided them periodically. Yet, with the looming threat of venereal disease, the Cleveland Board of Health was concerned that the raids were not enough. During the 1880s, the Board of Health repeatedly recommended to the City Council that the city implement a system of regulation for prostitution, despite the ordinances explicitly outlawing prostitution's presence in the city. In 1881 the Board of Health argued, "As long as syphilitics are permitted to go unrestrained, the innocent woman and child share the danger of contamination with the libertine and prostitute." This argument led the Board of Health to conclude that Cleveland should "require a complete registration, inspection and examination of all houses of prostitution."<sup>78</sup> The general idea behind a licensing system was that prostitution would be regulated, assuring the health of customers and their families. Prostitutes would be required to register with the police or board of health and be subjected to regular health examinations. Those who passed the examination would be given a certificate, thereby allowing them to continue soliciting. Those who failed would be quarantined. The idea of regulation was discussed across the United States in the 1870s and 1880s. Proponents of regulation argued that prostitution was ineradicable and that the best option was to control it.<sup>79</sup> Attempts were made in New York City, Chicago, and St. Louis to introduce official regulation in the 1870s, with advocates succeeding only in St. Louis—and even there only briefly. The idea of regulation continued to be discussed throughout the 1880s in other American cities, such as Detroit and Cleveland, with much controversy surrounding the discussions.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> "The Board of Health," *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Aug. 19, 1881.

<sup>79</sup> Rosen, 9

<sup>80</sup> Rosen, 10-11.

Upon hearing the Board of Health's suggestions, women in Cleveland held a meeting and petitioned the City Council. They condemned the idea on the grounds "that immorality being a sin, we have no right to provide safe indulgence in it." In addition, the women argued that the passage of an ordinance to only regulate the women would be "unjust because it legislates for one sex only," thereby emphasizing their disapproval of the sexual double standard.<sup>81</sup> Because of these protests, the closest the Board of Health came to achieving their regulation system was the City Council's instruction for them to take a census of the prostitutes of the city in 1884.

When another attempt was made at regulation by Police Director Pollner in the 1890s, the idea was met with a similar public backlash. The Cleveland branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and Sorosis (a philanthropic and intellectual society for Cleveland women) called a meeting in city hall to publicly protest Pollner's idea. At the meeting, the women denounced regulations of vice, calling them "an insult to every good man and woman and a disgrace to our city." In addition, they protested "against treating women alone as the guilty party, while the keeper of vile houses and the men who frequent them go free." At the time of this debate, women were fighting nationwide for the right to vote and to voice their opinions outside the home. For feminists, the mandatory health inspections and the regulation of prostitutes was an obvious example of the second-class status of women in society.<sup>82</sup> This relates back to women reformers seeing the prostitutes as "sisters" with a shared experience of womanhood. The women also noted that the Cleveland system was bringing "remonstrances from the good people of New York, Boston, Chicago, Toledo and San Francisco."<sup>83</sup> In the 1890s, Cleveland continued to gain prominence in the nation because of its growth, industry, and

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<sup>81</sup> "Petitions," *City Council Annual Records*, Dec. 26, 1882, City Council Archives.

<sup>82</sup> Hobson, 151.

<sup>83</sup> "Social Purity," *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Nov. 21, 1893.

prominent wealthy citizens. According to the women of the city, instituting a system to regulate prostitution rather than outlaw it threatened to negatively impact outside opinions of Cleveland. As Rosen explains in *The Lost Sisterhood*, regulation was ultimately rejected across the nation, because while such a system might technically control prostitution, it also explicitly permitted its existence and directly implicated the city with vice.<sup>84</sup> The protests of the women were again successful and there is no later mention of a regulation system in the city of Cleveland. As can be seen from the objections against regulating prostitution in the 1880s and 1890s, prostitution not only threatened society's moral health but also generated serious policy disagreements.

Although the Young Women's Christian Association was a philanthropic group, it was not immune to the growing dissension regarding prostitution. In the 1890s, the Retreat of the Cleveland YWCA shifted away from being a place of welcoming to all. The tone of their annual reports became defensive and less accepting of the women seeking help. Reports throughout the 1890s suggest public controversy over the work of YWCA related to prostitution and apprehension about continuing to help some of the women who walked through their doors.

Reflecting on the past year, the matrons of the Retreat reported that 1891 had been a year of great difficulty. The Retreat suffered from "a lack of sympathy from the general public." Critics of the work done by the YWCA questioned the ability of the services offered to actually dissuade women from a life of prostitution. Opponents asked "Do you not feel you are encouraging vice while harboring, sheltering and protecting these girls?" The women of the YWCA staunchly defended their program to the public, stating that the Retreat does not harbor

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<sup>84</sup> Rosen, 17.

vice, but simply offered “a chance to do better.”<sup>85</sup> The women of the YWCA asserted that the complaints against them were the result of ignorance.

However, while the philanthropists at the YWCA insisted to the public that their work helped women, the YWCA’s reports began to question their acceptance of all in need as well as the success and usefulness of some of the YWCA’s programs. Although the matrons of the Retreat still claimed to welcome all women, they began to restrict admissions. One significant restriction was the decision to not accept those over the age of 27.<sup>86</sup> The matrons also tightened their rules for admittance, requiring that all women formally apply, by mail or in person, to live at there. The applications would then be deferred until Thursday every week. If accepted, the women then had to agree to stay at the facility for a minimum of six months. The belief was that six months was “the shortest time in which the real advantages of the Retreat [could] be made effective.”<sup>87</sup> While the YWCA may have had good intentions in trying to instill “virtue” in the residents, asking a woman to submit herself to the group’s custody for half a year proved to be unrealistic in many cases. The decision of needy women to reject the Retreat’s help once hearing the terms of admission or to leave before completing the six months reflects this.<sup>88</sup> Further, requiring a stay of six months forced the women to sacrifice their income, which was unaffordable and thus unrealistic. In fact, some prostitutes preferred fines over probation and reform houses, as they prevented income.<sup>89</sup> The matrons of the Retreat expected the young women to work while staying at there. While the administrators of the YWCA may have

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<sup>85</sup> *Annual Report of the Young Women’s Christian Association, 1891*, Young Women’s Christian Association, WRHS Container 8.

<sup>86</sup> “After 30 years,” 1899 report, Young Women’s Christian Association, WRHS, Container 10

<sup>87</sup> *1894 Constitution of the Young Women’s Christian Association*, Young Women’s Christian Association, WRHS, Container 8.

<sup>88</sup> “Report of the Superintendent of the Retreat” *Young Women’s Christian Association Annual Report, 1891*, Young Women’s Christian Association, WRHS, Container 8.

<sup>89</sup> Rosen, 20.

believed that it was in the fallen women's interest to work so that they would be employable, the prostitutes were often not interested in the types of work offered. Many prostitutes preferred their own way of life to that of "respectable" workers who endured harsh conditions and low pay. This was an issue of assuming the prostitutes lacked agency because of their profession.<sup>90</sup>

In addition to restricting the age and requiring six months' time commitment, women were also not allowed to return to the Retreat "for a second offence."<sup>91</sup> Although Progressive era philanthropic efforts sought to help the poor, there was a limit to their charity; "respectable" society differentiated between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. Those who failed to uphold the rules and ideals set by the YWCA were classified as "undeserving" and not given a second chance.<sup>92</sup> This rule fit with the changing attitude of the women of the YWCA as they began to blame the difficulties of instilling virtue on the fallen women. They explicitly described the Retreat's struggle to reform the women in 1892 as a problem with the "class of girls" admitted there. They blamed their failures upon the fact that "a greater number" of girls had been sent to them after being "rescued from houses of prostitution," or committed by the police court.<sup>93</sup> The attitudes of the members of the YWCA toward prostitutes were increasingly negative and there was dissatisfaction with the current solutions for handling prostitution. This held true for the newspapers as well.

While in the 1860s and 1870s, sympathy was often expressed for prostitutes in Cleveland newspapers, articles of the 1880s and 1890s began focusing on the threat prostitution posed to the city. For example, extreme acts showcasing opposition to prostitution were highlighted in

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<sup>90</sup> Rosen, 102.

<sup>91</sup> *1894 Constitution of the Young Women's Christian Association*, Young Women's Christian Association, WRHS, Container 8.

<sup>92</sup> Lears, 173.

<sup>93</sup> "At the Retreat" *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Jan. 16, 1893.

the newspapers, demonstrating public support for its elimination and little concern for the prostitutes. In an article praising the “wise-forethought” of the police in 1886, the *Plain Dealer* reported that the police had recently conducted “a raid for revenue.” The raid resulted in 38 arrests and earned the city approximately \$1,000.<sup>94</sup> Within the report there was no sympathy expressed for any of the women arrested and the men involved were mocked for giving fake names upon their arrest. The article applauded the police for taking action to suppress prostitution.

In another article, the *Plain Dealer* lauded a citizen raid at the nearby city of Coldwater. In November 1891, a masked group of females raided a house of prostitution. The women attacking the house threw two of the prostitutes into the frigid waters of a nearby stream. In addition, furniture and various household items were destroyed during the raid and the house itself was significantly damaged. The goal of the raid was to send a message that all houses of prostitution must leave their “virtuous community.” Despite the cruel treatment of the prostitutes, destruction of property, and violence of the affair, the *Plain Dealer* described the band of women raiding the house as “members of the best society.”<sup>95</sup> In the eyes of the public, these women protected their homes from evil and helped to eliminate vice. The ideals of a “Christian sisterhood” only went so far, and a house of prostitution that refused to close threatened society. Hence, these women were the “best of society” and their actions seen as protective. Violent acts against houses of prostitution were not uncommon across the United States.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> “A Raid for Revenue,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Sept. 26, 1886.

<sup>95</sup> “An Unheeded Warning,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Nov. 25, 1891.

<sup>96</sup> Gilfoyle, 77-89. In addition, prostitutes, generally faced much violence in their lives. For numerous examples of this, see Mackell, Jan, *Red Light Women of the Rocky Mountains*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 2009.

An opinion piece published in 1887 in the *Cleveland Leader* expressed some sympathy for women forced into prostitution, noting that “the life of a prostitute is short and always dreadful.” Yet, at the same time, this also showed that there was a limit to sympathy—only those forced into prostitution deserved compassion. While the author established his sympathies with those few women forced into prostitution, the author also called prostitutes “bad [women],” “scourges of society,” and temptresses that organized “all the forces of the kingdom of darkness to make victims.”<sup>97</sup> Again, sympathy only went so far.

Yet despite these harsh statements regarding prostitutes, the focus of the article was not the prostitute herself, but how society should handle prostitution. In order to determine the best possible solution, the author discusses the four most common methods used to deal with prostitution: annihilation, toleration, regulation, and surveillance. The author does not approve of toleration, regulation, and surveillance because they allow prostitution to exist and do not deal with all the aspects and dangers of prostitution. The author then argues that annihilation of prostitution is unrealistic. Therefore, the best method is to educate children on the dangers of prostitution. The author’s discussion of each of the different solutions and then suggestion of his own method demonstrates the lack of consensus on how to handle prostitution within the city as well as concern for the future of the city.

From 1879 to 1899, groups within Cleveland struggled to find a solution to the prostitution problem. While the groups were united in opposition to prostitution, there was no consensus on how to act. The disagreements between the City Council, police, and mayors under Mayors Herrick and Gardner show the obvious differences in opinion as to how to deal

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<sup>97</sup> Citizen, “The Social Evil,” 1887 Pamphlet, reprinted from earlier *Cleveland Leader* article, WRHS.

with prostitution. The concern of the women of the YWCA that the Retreat was not able to help many fallen women also demonstrated a shift away from assuming prostitutes could be helped and toward the view that prostitutes should be the concern of the police. Lastly, the newspaper articles reveal that citizens wanted something to be done about prostitution, but what exactly was unknown. Hence, with all the different opinions, the only consensus was that prostitution was a problem.

## 1900-1915: “The Segregated District Must Go”

In the early 1900s, the ideas of the Progressive reform movements began to impact national policy, with Congress passing several laws that directly related to prostitution. For example, the 1903 immigration law stipulated that prostitutes could not immigrate to the United States and an immigrant accused of prostitution could be deported. In addition, the 1910 Mann Act, also known as the “white slavery act,” prevented the transport of white females across state lines for sexual purposes.

During the early twentieth century, the new “science” of eugenics also began influencing reformers. The goal of the eugenics movement was to create a more perfect society through increased reproduction and education of the “fit” and decreased reproduction of the “unfit.” Legislation within the United States primarily called for the latter, which emphasized the passage of marriage laws, sterilization laws, as well as restricted immigration to prevent “unfit” persons from entering the country. Prostitutes were among the first targeted by eugenic social reformers to be tested for venereal disease and feeble-mindedness so as to establish them as “unfit” members of society; and also, as seen by the 1903 immigration law, to be prevented from entering the United States.<sup>98</sup>

Cleveland continued to grow as a city in the early 1900s. In 1910, the city was the sixth largest city in the nation, boasting over half a million residents.<sup>99</sup> The Progressive movement heavily affected the city of Cleveland, particularly under Tom Johnson, who served as mayor from 1901-1909. Prostitution decreased in the city as the surveillance methods of the police finally proved successful under Police Chief Kohler in 1903. Kohler’s success in limiting

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<sup>98</sup> Rosen, 21.

<sup>99</sup> “The History of Cleveland Timeline,” *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, <http://ech.cwru.edu/timeline.html>.

prostitution, led to Mayor Newton Baker calling for the closure of the vice district in 1915. Elimination finally appeared attainable.

Elected to the office of mayor in 1901, Tom Johnson ran Cleveland as a progressive city. This meant that Johnson was a proponent of using the government to combat various urban problems, such as abuses by big business and struggles of the poor. This led to Johnson instituting numerous changes in the city, such as tent meetings to encourage democratic participation and the lowering of the streetcar fare to three cents.<sup>100</sup> In 1903, Johnson appointed Fred Kohler to the position of Chief of Police. Johnson's support for Kohler was essential; police efficiency relied heavily on the police relationship with the mayor. Through the teamwork of Mayor Johnson and Police Chief Kohler, vice decreased significantly in the city of Cleveland. This was achieved by Kohler replacing the sporadic raids on brothels with a stricter system of surveillance.

Tom Johnson and Fred Kohler shared a belief in the importance of prevention. At the end of a meeting with President Theodore Roosevelt, Johnson stated, "The difference between you and me Mr. President, is this, you are after law-breakers, I am after the law-makers. You would put a man in jail for stealing, I would prevent the theft."<sup>101</sup> Agreeing with this ideology, Kohler instituted what he termed the "golden rule." The idea behind the "golden rule" was for the police department to focus on preventing crime rather than arresting people.<sup>102</sup> However, this ideology at first proved to be difficult to implement with regard to prostitution.

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<sup>100</sup> Robin Meiksins, "Tom L. Johnson," *Cleveland Historical*, <http://clevelandhistorical.org/items/show/329>

<sup>101</sup> As found in the introduction by Elizabeth J. Hauser to Tom Johnson, *My Story*, ed. Elizabeth J. Hauser, (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1913), xvii.

<sup>102</sup> "Report of the Police Department," *Annual Report of the City of Cleveland*, 1910, WRHS.

In 1903, Kohler waged an “open war” against street walkers and solicitors, with 239 women arrested for common prostitution.<sup>103</sup> He was able to do this, in part, because of an ordinance passed by the City Council in 1894: “an ordinance to prohibit lewd and lascivious behavior in the streets and other public places in the city of Cleveland.” The 1894 ordinance prohibited “any person to solicit another... in any street, avenue, lane, alley, public ground, or public place in the city of Cleveland to accompany him or her to any room or place in said city for purposes of lewdness or prostitution.” This then specifically addressed the issue of street walking. By passing this ordinance, the city Council shifted the focus of enforcement from the residents of brothels to street walkers.

In 1904, Kohler boasted that “street soliciting for the purpose of prostitution has almost entirely ceased”; yet the police still arrested 316 women for prostitution, showing the battle was far from over.<sup>104</sup> The number of arrests for common prostitution remained high for several years while Kohler continued to insist the police were successfully eliminating the presence of prostitution in the city. By 1909, the effects of Kohler’s methods were clear as the police arrested only 53 women for prostitution.<sup>105</sup> This drop in the number of arrests was a result of police efficiency.<sup>106</sup>

As these numbers suggest, Kohler’s method of prevention was successful; Kohler bragged in 1909 that “the city, on a whole, is orderly and well conducted. I am positive there is not a citizen who can recall the time when this city was in a more orderly condition, with less crime, vice or the social evil.”<sup>107</sup> This had not been achieved without significant changes in the

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<sup>103</sup> “Report of the Police Department,” *Annual Report of the City of Cleveland*, 1903, WRHS.

<sup>104</sup> “Report of the Police Department,” *Annual Report of the City of Cleveland*, 1904, WRHS.

<sup>105</sup> “Report of the Police Department,” *Annual Report of the City of Cleveland*, 1909, WRHS.

<sup>106</sup> Ernest H. Tippett, *Suppressing Prostitution in Cleveland* (Cleveland: Federated Churches of Cleveland, Ohio, 1915), 2.

<sup>107</sup> “Report of the Police Department,” *Annual Report of the City of Cleveland*, 1909, WRHS.

methods of the police department. For example, Kohler placed uniformed patrolmen in front of houses of prostitution that refused to close. The patrolmen “[secured] the names of visitors” and “their business.” This was very effective and many of the places were “compelled to discontinue business.”<sup>108</sup> The success of this prevention method is not surprising because men did not want to be known to visit brothels; it was also technically illegal for men to visit houses of prostitution in the city of Cleveland.<sup>109</sup>

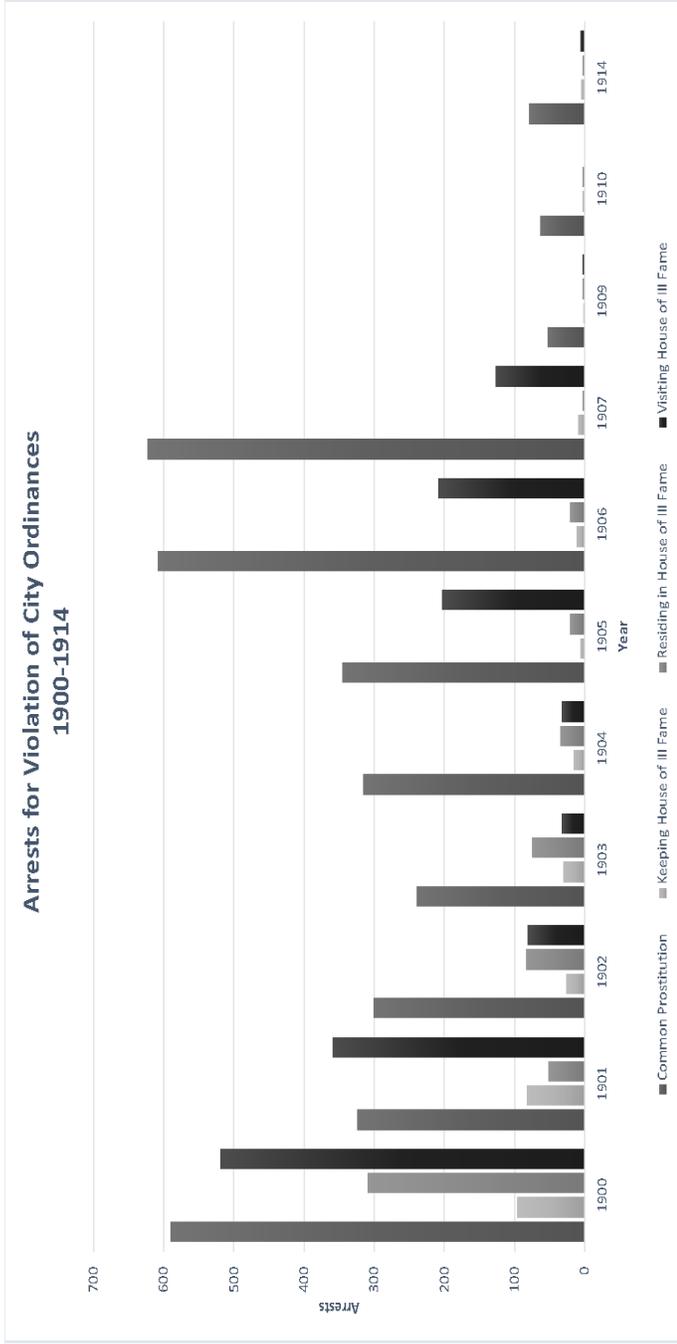
Unlike the earlier decades, during the 1900s, men and women were no longer arrested evenly for prostitution in the city. For example, in 1903, there were 239 arrests for common prostitution and 75 for residing in a house of ill fame, arrests which were more likely to be women. Only 33 persons were arrested for visiting a house of ill fame.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, only around 10% of the arrests related to prostitution were male, when in previous years, it was typically around 50/50 for male and female arrests. This was a result of the changes Kohler instituted into the police department. Focusing on street walkers significantly increased the number of women being arrested for prostitution, while the amount of arrests for visiting brothels stayed in about the same range until 1909 when all arrests for prostitution substantially decreased (see figure 3).

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<sup>108</sup> “Report of the Police Department,” *Annual Report of the City of Cleveland*, 1906, WRHS.

<sup>109</sup> “City Ordinances” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH) June 10, 1871.

<sup>110</sup> “Report of the Police Department,” *Annual Report of the City of Cleveland*, 1903, WRHS.



*Figure 3: Arrests for Common Prostitution spiked as the police targeted street walkers. The effects of Kohler's "golden rule" policy are also apparent with the sharp drop in arrests in 1909. See appendix for exact numbers.*

For some cities, including Cleveland before Kohler, the surveillance method of controlling prostitution was used to the city's monetary advantage. Kohler, however, came out against the method of raiding and fining, declaring, "The farce of a city sharing in the wages of a woman's shame by exacting tribute from unfortunate women by a regular systematic fining or license system, is not permitted."<sup>111</sup> Kohler thereby argued against the city exploiting prostitutes, essentially calling the money "unclean" and improper for a respectable city to use. The combination of Johnson and Kohler led to a city with the presence of vice both minimal and under control.

Kohler focused primarily on the regulation of prostitution. While he did actively work to close houses of prostitution, he also acknowledged that their existence would not be completely eradicated. For example, in 1905, Kohler ordered that music will not be allowed in "Houses of Ill-fame after 12 [o'clock midnight] unless there are a great number of visitors."<sup>112</sup> Kohler's method of regulation was not controversial for the city as it maintained a high level of control and prosecuted both men and women (although significantly less men). It also focused more heavily on maintaining surveillance than registration with city officials. The success in decreasing street walking and the overall number of houses of prostitution in the city gave Cleveland both the appearance, and actuality, of being a relatively vice-free city.

In addition to the systematic efforts of Police Chief Kohler, the influence of the "scientific" methods of eugenics were noticeable among both philanthropists and citizens of Cleveland. In the early 1900s, the Retreat of the Young Women's Christian Association continued to operate, but its purpose was modified. The Retreat transitioned from a home that

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<sup>111</sup> "Report of the Police Department," *Annual Report of the City of Cleveland*, 1910, WRHS.

<sup>112</sup> Fred Kohler, *Order Book of the Police Chief*, 1905-1906, WRHS.

helped “all” fallen women in need to primarily a maternity home. Since the Retreat had always helped expectant mothers, the transition was gradual.

In addition to converting the Retreat into a maternity home, admittance requirements became more restrictive. In order to explain the reasoning behind the new restrictions, the YWCA turned to eugenic ideas. In 1916, the Board of Trustees stated that “mentality and morality are closely connected,” and because of this, applicants should “expect to have a mental test in the future as well as physical.”<sup>113</sup> These tests would be implemented to assess whether the women were “feeble-minded.” With the assumed connection between morality and mentality, and as prostitutes were a “moral” problem, they were among the first to be targeted by eugenicists as “feeble-minded” citizens. The brand “feeble-minded” implied a failure to conform to middle-class standards more so than as proof of mental deficiencies.<sup>114</sup> Thus, the implementation of a mental test was presumably designed to keep prostitutes out of the Retreat.

In addition to the eugenic ideas expressed at the Retreat, Cleveland citizens also began advocating for eugenic control over the population—specifically preventing prostitutes from contaminating the “fit” population. Speaking at a conference of the Surgical and Gynecological Association in Detroit, Dr. James Craven Wood called for the segregation of prostitutes from society in order to protect respectable citizens. Wood proposed keeping female prostitutes away from not only the upper-classes, but all men in order to prevent reproduction. Wood also called for prostitutes who had venereal disease to be quarantined. There was no expectation that prostitutes might later return to respectable society. However, the men who contracted venereal disease were expected to return to society because they did not sell their bodies “as does the

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<sup>113</sup> *Minutes and Records of the Board of Trustees*, October 17, 1916, YWCA manuscript collection, Container 2

<sup>114</sup> Rosen, 23.

prostitute.”<sup>115</sup> This continued the trend of male reformers’ concern for men’s well-being and not the prostitutes’. Calls for total segregation (which were more extreme than the calls of earlier reformers) were also a sign of the eugenic ideas taking hold.

Mayor Newton D. Baker, elected in 1912, announced his intention to close the vice district in 1914. Mayor Baker’s draconian plan was part of a larger movement across the nation to eliminate all prostitution. While vice districts were common in the early 1900s, as the United States approached entrance into World War I, such zones became unacceptable.<sup>116</sup>

At the time that Mayor Baker announced his plan to close the vice district, it had already been significantly reduced because of the actions of Mayor Johnson and Police Chief Kohler. The reduction, however, was not enough for Mayor Baker and he had every intention of completely eliminating vice from the city. Working with Police Chief William Rowe, Mayor Baker was able to follow through on his goals. Within a year, Rowe and Baker reduced the number of houses of prostitution from approximately 48 houses in 1913 to just 27 houses in 1914; each of these 27 houses were placed under strict police watch.<sup>117</sup> Even the newspapers acknowledged the success of the campaign, with the *Cleveland Press* stating, “The policy of gradual elimination of the segregated district has proved satisfactorily in the past year and the district has been made so small its utter abolishment may be accomplished soon without any accompanying evils.”<sup>118</sup> With this apparent success, Mayor Baker resolved to completely eliminate the segregated vice district and issued an official edict to shut down the entirety of the vice district by March 31, 1915. Yet, not everyone rejoiced at this decision.

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<sup>115</sup> James Craven Wood, *The Social Evil—The Duty of the Physician*, 1912, WRHS Library Collection.

<sup>116</sup> Mark Thomas Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 9.

<sup>117</sup> 48 houses: Ernest H. Tippet, *Suppressing Prostitution in Cleveland* (Cleveland: Federated Churches of Cleveland, Ohio, 1915), 2.

<sup>118</sup> “Prostitution: Cleveland, 1915-1948,” *Cleveland Press Collection*, CSU.

Two women of the vice district, May Erwin and Blache Moulton, went to Mayor Baker to request he keep the vice zone open because its closure would leave them homeless. Their pleas, however, fell on deaf ears. Mayor Baker simply responded with, "I'm sorry. My sympathies are with you women. But we're going to make Cleveland a clean city. Chief Rowe's order will be enforced. The segregated district must go." Despite his offering sympathy to the women, Mayor Baker focused on making Cleveland vice free. This then blinded him to potential consequences of closing the vice district, such as increasing vice in the rest of the city. The police officially closed the vice district at midnight on March 31, 1915. Unfortunately for Mayor Baker and Police Chief Rowe, the closure of the vice district failed to make the city clean of vice. Instead, as Mayor Baker had been warned would happen, the closure of the segregated vice district led to an increase in prostitution as the displaced women spread throughout the city of Cleveland.<sup>119</sup>

The closure of the vice district in Cleveland permanently changed how prostitution operated in the city. Prostitution was no longer able to operate openly in the city. Prior to the closure of the vice district, there were only 27 houses operating with approximately 300 residents.<sup>120</sup> Each of the houses were under strict surveillance. With the closure, the houses were no longer under surveillance and therefore no longer under control. An article entitled "More Places of Vice Run Now than for Years" estimated that vice had increased "fivefold" in the city since the closure of the vice district.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Evidence of this can be found in "Tenderloin Women Spread over the City," "Prostitution: Cleveland, 1915-1948," *Cleveland Press Collection*, CSU.

<sup>120</sup> Ernest H. Tippet, *Suppressing Prostitution in Cleveland* (Cleveland: Federated Churches of Cleveland, Ohio, 1915), 2.

<sup>121</sup> "More Places of Vice Run Now than for Years," found in "Prostitution: Cleveland, 1915-1948," *Cleveland Press Collection*, CSU, article was most likely printed in late 1915 or early 1916.

With the closure of the vice district, a number of brothels relocated to predominantly black communities. Daniel Kerr, in his thesis on prostitution in Cleveland from 1915 to 1933, argues that this move resulted in prostitution transitioning into a predominantly African-American business with an elaborate underground economy.<sup>122</sup> Prostitution became increasingly criminalized, resulting in the “development of a complex network of political protection.”<sup>123</sup> In addition, the closure of the vice district took the control of the brothels away from the women and men began running the business; a typical transition across the United States.<sup>124</sup>

From 1900 to 1915, prostitution was systematically eliminated throughout the city. Under Mayor Johnson and Police Chief Kohler, prostitution was brought under control due to a shared belief in the importance of preventing crime. The influence of eugenics was also felt in Cleveland as citizens and philanthropies concerned themselves with separating prostitutes from respectable society as they were increasingly seen as feeble-minded. Finally, under Mayor Baker, the vice district was closed, changing prostitution in Cleveland permanently as prostitutes could no longer operate openly. Each of these efforts were highly organized. While they did not successfully eliminate prostitution, they were sweeping, systematized actions.

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<sup>122</sup> Kerr.

<sup>123</sup> Kerr, 3.

<sup>124</sup> Kerr, 60; Rosen, 70.

## Conclusion

In an 1883 article titled “The City’s Shame,” the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reprinted an article from the *Cleveland Leader* detailing how the spread of prostitution was ruining, and would continue to ruin, Cleveland unless city officials took “decisive action.”<sup>125</sup> Prostitution threatened the city as it showcased immorality and endangered respectable society. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, cities across the nation struggled with the prostitution problem and Cleveland was no exception.

In Cleveland, from 1866 to 1915, prostitution operated relatively openly within the city. The “tenderloin” vice district thrived for over two decades while city groups debated over what to do about it and the presence of prostitution. Each group had a different perspective on how to handle prostitution in the city. Because of this, no consensus was reached. While the City Council passed ordinances, it was dependent on the mayor and the police chief as to whether the ordinances would actually be enforced. Philanthropists provided an alternative home for prostitutes and an opportunity for them to reform, but some citizens were concerned that providing a home did more harm than good for the community. Journalists often felt the actions of city officials were either too weak in their attempts to curb the prostitution problem or too fervent and likely to fail, which would potentially result in backlash. The groups within Cleveland failed to reach a middle-ground approach, resulting in prostitution’s continued existence in the city, even after the closure of the vice district.

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<sup>125</sup> “The City’s Shame: The Last Day of Infamy Under Mayor Herrick’s Reign as Confessed by the ‘Leader,’” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), April 7, 1883.

In Cleveland, as across the United States, the attitudes toward prostitution evolved from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. In Cleveland, the shifts in attitude can be divided into three distinct periods: 1866 to 1878, 1879 to 1899, and 1900 to 1915. From 1866 to 1878, the issue Cleveland faced was how to handle the growth of prostitution in the city. Cleveland was just beginning to grow and gain prominence as industrial city, hence the increase of prostitution, while not a new problem, was just becoming noticeable and potentially problematic. Groups thus established their distinctive roles in relation to prostitution during this time rather than take drastic or firm actions. For each group, this meant something different. From 1879 to 1899, Cleveland continued to grow and the vice district grew with it. The 1880s and 1890s were the height of prostitution in Cleveland with the vice district thriving and reaching approximately 150 houses by 1900.<sup>126</sup> During this time there were many calls for actions by various groups. Despite all the groups agreeing that action was needed, there was no unanimity between the groups as to what action to take. Finally, from 1900 to 1915, prostitution was eliminated in the vice district. This was not because of an agreement between the groups as much as it was the mayors and police chiefs taking charge and asserting that they were going to eliminate prostitution and then doing it.

As has been seen throughout the thesis, Cleveland's transitions and groups reactions in regards to prostitution were fairly typical of other cities in the United States. Perhaps the most unique aspect of the city's relationship with prostitution was the decision of the city police to actively arrest men for visiting houses of prostitution up until the 1900s. The female prostitutes largely took the blame for the prevalence of prostitution throughout the United States. However,

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<sup>126</sup> Ernest H. Tippet, *Suppressing Prostitution in Cleveland* (Cleveland: Federated Churches of Cleveland, Ohio, 1915), 2.

their continued existence was not possible without male clients. Cleveland's recognition of that in the late nineteenth-century is noteworthy.

Throughout all these transitions in the city, the prostitutes' voices are not heard. While the city groups were vocal in their aversion to the presence of prostitution, Cleveland prostitutes, in the historical record, do not respond. Instead, what is heard is a contempt for the business of prostitution and the dangers these women presented to society. However, the fact remains that prostitutes were women working—some just trying to earn enough money to be able to eat, others trying to gain access to a more luxurious lifestyle. Unfortunately, the reasons of these women did not really matter to those opposed to their existence. Instead, prostitutes were simply fallen women and a threat to society.

## Appendix

Below are the arrests made by the Cleveland Police Department directly related to prostitution. These numbers were collected from the City Annual Reports, 1866-1914. In some years (when the Annual Reports listed them), I also include the number of recorded houses of prostitution in the city.

I use the language found within the City Annual Reports.

### 1867

Violations of City Ordinances:

Offenses	Male	Female	Total
Common Prostitutes		11	11
Keeping House of Ill Fame	9	35	44
Residing in House of Ill fame	5	97	102
Visiting House of Ill Fame	108	7	115

### 1868

Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Male	Female	Total
Common prostitutes		10	10
Keeping House of Ill Fame	5	21	26
Visiting Houses of Ill fame	43	9	52
Residing in house of ill fame		49	49

**1869**

## Violation of City Ordinances:

Offenses	Male	Female	Total
Common prostitutes		16	16
Keeping House of Ill Fame	3	16	19
Visiting Houses of Ill fame	22	8	30
Residing in house of ill fame	4	24	28
Renting Building for Brothel	1		1

**1870**

## Violation of City Ordinances:

Offenses	Male	Female	Total
Common prostitutes		13	13
Keeping House of Ill Fame	27	32	59
Visiting Houses of Ill fame	46	3	49
Residing in house of ill fame	7	52	59
Renting Building for Brothel	23	2	25

**1871**

## Violation of City Ordinances:

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitutes	17
Keeping House of Ill Fame	19
Renting a house to be used as a brothel	1
Residing in House of Ill Fame	31
Suffering to be kept as House of Ill Fame	7
Visiting House of Ill Fame	29

**1872**

Violation of City Ordinances:

Offenses	Male	Female	Total
Common Prostitute		18	18
Keeping house of ill-fame	3	0	3
Residing in house of ill fame	13	30	43
Visiting house of ill fame	42	0	42

**1873**

Violation of City Ordinances:

Offenses	Male	Female	Total
Common prostitute		54	54
Keeping house of ill fame	8	14	22
Residing in house of ill fame	2	32	34

*Houses of Ill Fame in City: 42***1874**

Violation of City Ordinances:

Offenses	Male	Female	Total
Common prostitute		69	69
Keeping house of ill fame	17	14	41
Residing in house of ill fame	2	41	43
Visiting house of ill fame	50	7	57

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 51*

**1875**

## Violation of City Ordinances:

Offenses	Total:
Common Prostitute	61
Keeping house of ill fame	45
Residing in house of ill fame	72
Visiting house of ill fame	86

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 62*

**1876**

Offenses	Male	Female	Total
Common prostitute		77	77
Keeping house of ill fame	13	36	49
Residing in house of ill fame	1	74	75
Visiting House of ill fame	78	5	83

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 47*

**1877**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Males	Females	Total
Common Prostitute		36	36
Keeping house of ill fame	12	17	29
Residing in house of ill fame		44	44
Visiting house of ill fame	50	10	60

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 56*

**1878**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Males	Females	Total
Common Prostitute		29	29
Keeping house of ill fame	10	44	54
Residing in house of ill fame	7	91	98
Visiting house of ill fame	124	13	137

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 81*

**1879**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Males	Females	Total
Common Prostitute		31	31
Keeping house of ill fame	9	31	40
Residing in house of ill fame	7	75	82
Visiting house of ill fame	75	14	89

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 54*

**1880**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Males	Females	Total
Common Prostitute		34	34
Keeping house of ill fame	13	32	45
Residing in house of ill fame	2	92	94
Visiting house of ill fame	118	9	127

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 48*

**1881**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	26
Keeping house of ill fame	4
Residing in house of ill fame	52
Visiting house of ill fame	43

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 29*

**1882**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	23
Residing in house of ill fame	28
Visiting house of ill fame	28

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 25*

**1883**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	10
Residing in house of ill fame	10
Visiting house of ill fame	5

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 58*

**1884**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	16
Residing in house of ill fame	72
Visiting house of ill fame	89

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 67*

**1885**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	23
Residing in house of ill fame	55
Visiting house of ill fame	82

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 48*

**1886**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	48
Residing in house of ill fame	57
Visiting house of ill fame	101

*Houses of Ill Fame in the City: 55*

**1887**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	15
Keeping house of ill fame	13
Residing in house of ill fame	89
Visiting house of ill fame	125

**1888**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	21
Keeping house of ill fame	77
Residing in house of ill fame	152
Visiting house of ill fame	171

**1889**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	9
Keeping house of ill fame	66
Residing in house of ill fame	158
Visiting house of ill fame	229

**1890**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	53
Keeping house of ill fame	35
Residing in house of ill fame	83
Visiting house of ill fame	99

**1891**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	39
Keeping house of ill fame	93
Residing in house of ill fame	193
Visiting house of ill fame	300

**1892**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	21
Keeping house of ill fame	32
Residing in house of ill fame	94
Visiting house of ill fame	126

**1893**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	29
Keeping house of ill fame	7
Residing in house of ill fame	19
Visiting house of ill fame	18

**1894**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	16
Keeping house of ill fame	33
Residing in house of ill fame	88
Visiting house of ill fame	121

**1895**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	50
Keeping house of ill fame	80
Residing in house of ill fame	100
Visiting house of ill fame	171

**1896**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	110
Keeping house of ill fame	79
Residing in house of ill fame	201
Visiting house of ill fame	230

**1897**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	206
Keeping house of ill fame	74
Residing in house of ill fame	186
Visiting house of ill fame	233

**1898**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	230
Keeping house of ill fame	22
Residing in house of ill fame	60
Visiting house of ill fame	70

**1899**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	412
Keeping house of ill fame	71
Residing in house of ill fame	220
Visiting house of ill fame	369

**1900**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	590
Keeping house of ill fame	96
Residing in house of ill fame	309
Visiting house of ill fame	519

**1901**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	324
Keeping house of ill fame	82
Residing in house of ill fame	52
Visiting house of ill fame	359

**1902**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	301
Keeping house of ill fame	26
Residing in house of ill fame	84
Visiting house of ill fame	81

**1903**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	239
Keeping house of ill fame	31
Residing in house of ill fame	75
Visiting house of ill fame	33

**1904**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	316
Keeping house of ill fame	16
Residing in house of ill fame	35
Visiting house of ill fame	33

**1905**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	345
Keeping house of ill fame	6
Residing in house of ill fame	21
Visiting house of ill fame	203

**1906**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	608
Keeping house of ill fame	12
Residing in house of ill fame	21
Visiting house of ill fame	209

**1907**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	623
Keeping house of ill fame	9
Residing in house of ill fame	3
Visiting house of ill fame	127

**1909**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	53
Keeping house of ill fame	2
Residing in house of ill fame	3
Directing female to house of ill fame	3

**1910**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	63
Keeping house of ill fame	3
Residing in house of ill fame	3

**1914**

## Violation of City Ordinances

Offenses	Total
Common Prostitute	79
Keeping house of ill fame	5
Residing in house of ill fame	3
Visiting house of ill fame	6

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