

Prostitutes, Prophylactics, and Propaganda:
The Venereal Disease Campaign and the Fight for Control of Female
Sexuality During WWII

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Introduction

On December 7th, 1941, the United States was provoked out of isolation into WWII. The attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese prompted President Franklin D. Roosevelt to call for war the following day—which was granted by Congress less than an hour later.¹ Roused by the surprise attack, the American military and civilians both mobilized for war.

The United States' entrance into World War Two (WWII) reshaped society on the home front. Able-bodied men were drafted into the military, leaving their jobs and their spouses behind. With millions of men fighting the war in Europe, the United States scrambled to fill the void they left at home. World War II marked a dramatic change for women in society: men were needed to fight in the war and as a result women joined the workforce and the military in non-combat roles.

This call to arms marked a historic shift in American culture. The government needed a new labor source, and so they created a marketing campaign aimed at women. Young, middle class women were encouraged to take jobs in offices and munitions factories. Not only were groups of women that historically not worked joining the labor force, but suddenly there were also fewer men around to supervise them.

Along with assisting men by entering the workforce, many women also supported the war effort by servicing the servicemen's sexual needs and "keeping up morale." While the government was not supportive of women's unregulated sexuality, they did tolerate sexuality that they could control, especially when it was in service to military men.

¹ Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Infamy Speech."

Prostitution has always gone together with wartime and WWII was no exception—even Phillip Broughton acknowledged the military and prostitution’s historic relationship. Brothels and red light districts cropped up alongside military bases and they were supported by GI’s military salaries. The government’s tolerance for “the line” varied depending on its location.

The Mann Act and the Eight Point Agreement attacked prostitution by criminalizing the sale of sex, but not the purchase. The official line was that prostitution was bad for the military and caused venereal disease to spread and cripple servicemen. However, popular opinions about male virility and sex drive meant that sometimes officials conceded that “boys will be boys,” and turned a blind eye.

Along with policies aimed at cracking down on sex workers, the government attempted to control civilian female sexuality through a series of official acts and propaganda aimed at preventing “loose women” from weakening servicemen by spreading venereal disease. The United States Public Health Service (USPHS) argued that loose women spread disease just as easily as official prostitutes, but the lack of formality made them even more dangerous because they could be hiding anywhere. Intentionally vague policies with ill-defined language allowed for a great deal of interpretation so that officials could police women’s behavior at will.

While the government tried to criminalize prostitution on the mainland, the military government in Hawaii regulated the trade and allowed it to flourish. This reveals the complicated relationship the government had with the vice trade. Far from home, on an island in the South Pacific, uniformed servicemen waited in lines in broad daylight for their turn with a prostitute in Honolulu’s vice district.

The roles women filled during the war challenged traditional gender roles and notions of women's sexuality and general fitness for work, but as women defied gender stereotypes, the government sought to undermine their new agency and control their sexuality. Wartime propaganda blamed women for the spread of disease and characterized men as victims of aggressive female sexuality's nefarious intentions. The various tactics that the government used in the name of preventing VD in servicemen revealed their fear of female sexuality, and the uneven burden placed on women for the spread of disease. Under these policies anyone could be labeled a "prostitute" or "potentially promiscuous" which gave officials leeway to regulate and control female sexuality both in brothels and in larger society so that women did not gain too much agency during the war years and alter society irreparably once the war ended.

Why Study Sexuality During Wartime

Sexuality has a special place during wartime. During WWII, young men were drafted into service by the government and knew there was a chance that they would never come home again. Emotions ran high as young men and women were forced to say goodbye and hope that the young men survived to return home. The sudden proximity of death encourages people to let go of inhibitions and take action.

Wartime is exceptional time and under these circumstances traditional values can be set to the side in the name of "boosting morale" or "giving a proper sendoff." Young women and men that were likely taught that they should abstain until after marriage were more inclined to throw caution to the wind and engage in sexual activity before the young men shipped out. Young women's sexuality was not viewed as favorably as young men's. While men could

experiment and “fool around,” respectable young women were expected to stay chaste for their husbands. The sensationalism of wartime may have given them the justification they needed to express their sexual desires more freely.

Once men joined their companies, they were surrounded by other young men who were frightened, nervous and away from home for the first time just like they were. In the armed forces, their companions were almost exclusively male which encouraged these young men to behave in ways that they may not have done in mixed company. They were in a new place where no one they knew could witness their transgressions, so they could act out anonymously. This atmosphere led to a culture of toxic masculinity and patriarchal, misogynistic views about sex and women.²

Because these servicemen were viewed as defending heroes, they were allowed quite a bit of leeway in their behavior. Misconduct was explained away as “boys being boys” and “blowing off steam” before being sent into a theater of war. Men encouraged one-another to patronize brothels so that they did not die virgins.³ While their transgressions were acceptable to most, the women with whom they liaised were not afforded the same advantage. During the war, buying sex was tolerated by the government, but selling it was not.

It is also important to study sexuality during wartime because wartime is so often valorized as a time when people behaved nobly in service to the nation. While that is often true, it is only part of the story. To characterize WWII as a sexless, virtuous endeavor is to erase

² Hunter, Mic. *Honor betrayed: sexual abuse in Americas military*. Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2007. 138-139.

³ Ibid.

the many thousands of women across the world who were both voluntarily and forcibly employed as sex workers or characterized as “deviantly” sexual. The comfort women of Japan, the Hotel Street prostitutes in Honolulu and the demonized young women attending USO dances all experienced a reality that is very different than what is often taught about WWII.

Since the 1990s, sexuality and gender history have gained steam and more and more scholars are studying these alternative histories. Often, the experiences of women, racial and LGBTQ minorities are very different than those espoused in the popular, patriarchal narratives. While frequently uncomfortable to read, these histories reveal patterns of inequality and the origins of social problems that survive into the present.

WWII was a time of great upheaval and conscription created a sort of “youth culture” a generation before the counterculture movement of the 1960s. “Acceptable” sexuality was still defined as sex within the confines of marriage, but, as with any generation, the older generation’s ideology did not prevent the younger one from experimenting. Now that scholars have begun to dig into declassified police and military records, statistics, and censuses the link between sex work and the military has become more pronounced.

Studying “deviant” sexuality gives continuity into the present day and contemporary ideas about what acceptable sexuality looks like. It shows that human sexuality is nuanced and perplexing and always has been. Studying past sexual behavior reinforces that normative sexuality has always been an ideology at best, and not something to which entire generations of people rigidly adhered.

Challenges and Methodology

There are comparatively few sources that discuss the use of sex as a contribution to the war effort. Prostitution has a long history of service to military personnel—Napoleon Bonaparte justified making prostitutes available to soldiers by arguing that it prevented soldiers from attacking “respectable” women—however, these sources rarely address prostitution in the United States. They discuss the horrors endured by the “comfort women” of the South Pacific, but they omit the prostitutes in Honolulu who serviced long lines of American GIs at three dollars for three minutes.

The dearth of primary sources discussing wartime prostitution in the United States is likely due to a combination of patriotism and shame. When American soldiers returned home victorious, the nation was overwhelmed by a sense of national pride and celebration. Discussing soldiers’ solicitation of prostitutes could have been viewed as unpatriotic and ungrateful for the sacrifices those men made. For one soldier to discuss his fallen comrade’s sexual trysts after his death would have been a betrayal to his memory and would have served to incriminate the living as well.

In the decades following the war, the Red Scare, Korean War, and Vietnam War prevented many scholars from doing anything that would arouse suspicion. They did not want to do anything that could be accused of being subversive and open them up to inquiry. It was also still very recent and not quite “history” yet and any research into militarized prostitution could produce results about people that the researchers knew personally. Thus, a study of sexual habits during wartime would have to wait. However, wartime propaganda posters,

newspaper articles and legislation from that era reveal attitudes towards female sexuality, male sexuality, and opinions on where responsibility for disease prevention lay.

Another likely reason that there are few sources is because prostitution operated behind closed doors—which is how all parties preferred it. The customers were often respected members of their communities, or the servicemen that were fighting in the war. They were role models and did not want to lose status by having their secrets exposed. They may have stood in line for a brothel in broad daylight, but they were half a world away and hidden in plain sight by the sheer number of other men doing the same thing.

The government was equally eager to maintain the good reputation of servicemen on the home front. WWII was a war for ideals. Wartime propaganda characterized the war as a showdown between democracy and fascism, as a war between good American morals and evil, dangerous fascist ideas. If American soldiers were shown to be frequent brothel patrons, it would confuse the message the government was working so hard to send to the country.

It is important to address the intentionally vague labels of “prostitute” and “potentially promiscuous” that officials used to keep women and girls from expressing their sexuality as freely as men. Women had more disposable income and less supervision during the war, and so new government policies were enacted in the name of Public Health that encourage the general population to surveil women and ensure that they were still adherent to middle class values. Under this system, who is a prostitute? Who is potentially promiscuous? What roles do class and race play in labelling young working women as either “respectable” or “potentially promiscuous?” By keeping the language vague, officials gave themselves and the general public great leeway in scrutinizing women’s behavior.

There is also a glaring difference between the white, middle-class image that wartime propaganda held up as an example of patriotism and involvement and the women of color, working-class women and prostitutes that the U.S. military depended on but largely omitted from their wartime narrative. Brothels in Honolulu were heavily trafficked by American GIs, and their existence was justified as a “morale booster” for the soldiers. However, the treatment and opinions of the lower class white women who worked in the brothels was much different than that of the servicemen who patronized them.

In terms of these women, is “sexuality” the right word to use? They serviced servicemen’s sexual needs, but did they possess the agency to consider their work an expression of their own sexuality, or were they used as another product to feed the war machine? When one is given a quota of one hundred men per day, and a time limit of three minutes, does one even have time to consider the interactions as sexual on their part?

The contradictory and hypocritical attitudes towards male and female sexuality and the justifications used to maintain different standards for women and men are rarely stated explicitly. However, these opinions and fear of female sexuality are so pervasive that anti-prostitution wartime propaganda manifested as a caricature so grotesque it borders on absurd. The propaganda paints women as another enemy of whom to be wary. These “loose women” are lying in wait to attack and disease troops in the same way as the Axis powers.

Selected Historiography

Rosie the Riveter has become the mascot for women's involvement in WWII over the last seventy years. When American men left to fight overseas, women contributed to the war effort by taking jobs in factories, forming military auxiliary corps, and volunteer organizations. However, women also contributed through "morale-boosting" activities that ranged from dancing with soldiers at USO clubs to servicing soldiers in militarized brothels in Honolulu and everywhere in between.

Women's involvement in industry during the war has been well documented; it is frequently used as a shining example of patriotism: to secure an Allied victory, every American man, woman and child worked together and contributed everything they could, both at overseas and at home. In American mythology, patriotic Rosies rolled back their sleeves, tied up their hair, and marched off to work in factories alongside the men who remained at home. What many of these sources do not mention, however, is the sexual harassment that these women endured at the hands of their male counterparts and the mistrust men had for these women who were essential to the war effort.

Charles Winick and Paul M. Kinsie worked for the American Social Health Association in the 1970s and examined over fifty years of documents related to prostitution and spent ten years conducting thousands of interviews to write their landmark text, *The Lively Commerce: Prostitution in the United States*. They examined prostitution from the points of view of the prostitutes, the pimps, the Johns, law enforcement officials, and even the cabbies and bellhops that witnessed the trade. Throughout their book, they question why the prostitutes were so harshly punished while the pimps and Johns that facilitated the trade seemed frequently to

escape all prosecution. Written in 1971, this book discusses militarized prostitution and the priorities of the U.S. government concerning prostitution. Legislation during the war was less interested in the morality of sex work and more concerned with the health of soldiers, although the public campaign against prostitution was very much framed as a morality problem. Winick and Kinsie discuss the man hours lost during WWI due to soldiers being incapacitated by venereal disease and the government's eagerness to avoid that same issue during WWII.

By the 1990s, gender and sexuality studies were becoming more mainstream and a rich and dynamic body of work began to be produced by scholars. Many of them chose to study wartime sexuality and the complicated relationship American history has with prostitution. In 1993 Beth Bailey and David R. Farber published *The First Strange Place: The Alchemy of Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii*. They explored the experiences that American GIs had in Honolulu; the first stop on their way to the South Pacific Theater. Hawaii was not yet a state and even though it was a U.S. territory, it was foreign and exotic to the soldiers who had never before left the mainland. As GIs encountered a different culture, they formed complex relationships with native Hawaiians. Bailey and Farber discuss the military brothels that operated in downtown Honolulu, the fetishization of Hawaiian women, complicated race relations between black soldiers, white soldiers, and Hawaiians. They also discuss the experiences GIs had in the Hawaiian Islands during the war and how those experiences shaped mainland culture when they returned home after the war ended.

In 1999 Maureen Honey released *Bitter Fruit: African American Women in World War II*, a compilation of wartime articles from Black publications. She examined how the role that Black women played in the war effort was minimized or erased entirely and discussed how the media

chose to display white women in wartime propaganda. *Bitter Fruit* also addresses the positions that Black women were forced to fill, and the discrimination and harassment they endured in the workplace. Women were surveilled by “concerned citizens” as they moved through public spaces and women of color were even more stigmatized because their skin made them more visible to those who were watching for signs of potential promiscuity. Honey discusses prevailing racist attitudes about Black women’s hypersexuality and their potential to corrupt “nice” white girls if they worked together in factories.

In the 2000s, several high-profile military sex scandals led to intensified scrutiny on the U.S. armed forces. Reports of soldier-on-soldier sexual assault and alarming statistics on the rate of sexual assault in the military increased the attention on these issues. In 2007, Dr. Mic Hunter released *Honor Betrayed: Sexual Abuse in America’s Military*. In *Honor*, Hunter argues that the culture of toxic masculinity and rigid hierarchy of all branches of the American military have cultivated an environment ideal for the proliferation of sexual abuse. Particularly vulnerable are service people that are not straight, white or male. This book examines the link between militarism and aggressive sexuality. Dr. Hunter discusses the use of prostitutes and how the men who solicit them are viewed much differently than the women providing the service.

Marilyn E. Hegarty explores the roles women played in her excellent *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II*. Written in 2010, Hegarty discusses the iconic, desexualized “Rosie the Riveter” and offers up information about the role of women in the war. She examines at length the many ways the U.S. government attempted to control female sexuality and how threatened they were by the prospect of sexually liberated working women. She addresses prostitution, and the unequal

burden shouldered by the prostitutes and the Johns. Hegarty explores the duality between being independent women, and the constant surveillance threat of being labelled as “Potentially Promiscuous” that women endured during wartime. Like Hunter, she explores toxic masculinity and the double standard that champions male sexuality and punishes female.

The current political climate and landmark rulings by the Supreme Court regarding marriage equality, transgender rights, and the debate surrounding women’s reproductive rights mean that the fields of feminist, gender and sexuality studies are receiving more attention. The fields continue to expand as scholars emphasize that the “good old days” did not exist the way people choose to remember them and that human sexuality has always been nuanced. Discussion of sexual behavior has revealed that even when sexuality—especially female sexuality—was expected to be constrained within marriage, it rarely was. Respectable, heteronormative sexuality was the standard, but in practice human sexuality cannot exist inside such narrow constraints. As scholars continue to explore the complicated history of sexuality, the field will doubtless move in new directions and continue to discuss the history of iniquity between men, woman and people of color.

The Roles Women Played

When the United States entered WWII, sixteen million men either enlisted or were drafted into the armed forces.⁴ However, American industry could not come to a standstill while the men fought in Europe. While working-class women have always worked, middle and upper-class women have traditionally not worked outside the home, and they certainly did not take jobs

⁴ "BY THE NUMBERS: THE US MILITARY." The National WWII Museum.
<http://www.nationalww2museum.org/>.

after they were married. During the war, millions of women from many backgrounds entered the workforce for the first time in history, including middle-class women who did not necessarily need the money.⁵

Thirty seven percent of women joined the labor force and by 1945 a full third of the workforce was women.⁶ The government urged everyone to do their part and so for the women that did not need an income, taking jobs was a fashionable, patriotic thing to do, like planting a victory garden or knitting socks for the troops. They took jobs in factories, producing goods for consumption at home as well for use by the Allied forces.⁷

WWII was also the first time that women were allowed into the military as anything but nurses—although they were still banned from combat roles. They took administrative and mechanical jobs that the men had to leave in order to fight. Administration jobs included filing paperwork, classroom training and record keeping. Women also worked to repair and maintain war machines. The armed forces would not have been able to function without the countless women running the administration and maintaining the artillery during the war.⁸

Another way women supported the war effort was by servicing the sexual needs of soldiers. In Hawaii, militarized prostitution was instituted with the US military regulating brothels that catered to the needs of sailors.⁹ The government publicly condemned

⁵ Hartmann, Susan M. *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*. Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne Publishers, 1982.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Estes Blair, Melissa. 2015. "Feminism as Life's Work: Four Modern American Women through Two World Wars." *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1:271-272.

⁹ Hegarty, Marilyn E. *Victory girls, khaki-wackies, and patriotutes: the regulation of female sexuality during World War II*. New York: New York University Press, 2010. 95.

prostitution, especially prostitution that catered to servicemen. However, certain locations were exempted from prostitution bans due to exceptional circumstances. Hawaii avoided the May Act by appealing to the commonly held belief that men had urges that needed to be satisfied. Brothels, the newspaper argued, protected “good” young girls from being seduced, or raped by men overcome with desire.¹⁰

Sex became another consumable good produced to support the war effort. The prostitutes that worked in militarized brothels were treated as commodities. They were subjected to regular, invasive examinations to ensure that they were disease free. Concern about disease was for the soldiers only: “diseased” women would infect and weaken the US military. Thus, the onus of disease prevention was on the women alone. The idea that men had a responsibility to prevent the spread of venereal disease was never considered, or at least it was never suggested. Along with disease prevention, women’s sexuality was not considered except in the context of how it could serve men. The women that worked in the brothels provided three minutes of service to soldiers for three dollars. They worked long hours (especially around pay day) serving long lines of servicemen for three minutes at a time, as another cog in the war machine.¹¹

Women who were not sex workers, but did not conform to the rigid definition of appropriate female sexuality also unintentionally played the role of “demon saboteuse” and “juke joint sniper” in propaganda. This characterization reveals societal insecurities about women’s roles in a rapidly modernizing world.

¹⁰ Hegarty, 98.

¹¹ Hegarty 95-99.

Since the last world war, women had gained the right to vote, property rights, and more personal autonomy than they had ever had in U.S. history. Suddenly, with so many men leaving to fight in the war, they were gaining the ability to work and have an independent income as well. The government worried about what men would come home to if women had the same opportunities as men. If women could vote and work and survive independently from men, what would that look like? What would happen to society?

Officials did not want to find out and so found subtle ways to keep women from having all the same freedoms as men. One of the most successful ways was to demonize female sexuality as a public health concern and call upon concerned citizens to monitor women to ensure that they were not moving too freely through public spaces. Whether going to work, going to dances, or just trying to run errands, women were viewed with suspicion.¹² If they were seen with men who were not relatives, they ran the risk of someone seeing them and reporting their concerns to the American Social Hygiene Administration (ASHA) and having their reputation ruined as agents visited them at home and explained the dangers of promiscuity.

The Syphilis Campaign

Of the 2,000,000 men initially chosen for selective service for WWII, over five percent tested positive for syphilis during their physical examinations.¹³ Government officials were eager to learn from past mistakes to try to minimize days of lost service due to VD treatment. They

¹² Broughton, Philip S. *Prostitution and the War*. New York, NY: Public Affairs Committee, 1944, 20.

¹³ Broughton, Philip S. *Prostitution and the War*. New York, NY: Public Affairs Committee, 1944, 2.

estimated that during WWI, over 7,000,000 days of service to the Army were lost while soldiers were laid up in infirmaries. The total number of American soldiers that received treatment for VD during WWI was 338,746.¹⁴ While soldiers were unable to fight, they were still receiving military salaries. Minimizing VD infection among soldiers made good business sense to the government: they would have less wasted man-hours, less money spent on treating preventable diseases, and healthier soldiers.

Syphilis prevention and control was big business: official estimates place the annual cost for the “syphilitic insane and blind” at over \$41,000,000 in 1941.¹⁵ Even before the United States officially entered WWII in 1941, the government had already been trying to crack down on VD in the military for several years. In 1936, the federal government called on state health agencies to work together with national health agencies to create a plan for disease prevention. In 1938 that plan manifested as the Venereal Disease Control Act. The purpose of the act was to allocate funds to education and public health.¹⁶

In 1939, the War and Navy departments, along with the Federal Security Agency, enacted an Eight Points Agreement that outlined how to prevent and control VD. The program emphasized the need to repress prostitution and those involved in the trade.¹⁷ In 1941, Congress passed the May Act, which gave the federal government the right to take over policing areas surrounding military bases. If local authorities could not control prostitution in their jurisdictions, then the federal government would step in. The May Act specified that

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Broughton, Philip S. *Behind the Syphilis Campaign*. New York, NY: Public Affairs Committee, 1938, 11.

¹⁶ U.S. Congress. *Progress under the Venereal Disease Control Act of 1938*. Cong. N.Y.: American Social Hygiene Association, 1945.

¹⁷ Broughton. *Prostitution* 3-4.

prostitution was a federal offense within a “reasonable distance” of military camps. This intentionally vague language gave law enforcement great leeway to decide what constituted a “reasonable distance” and whether the federal government needed to seize control of the area.¹⁸

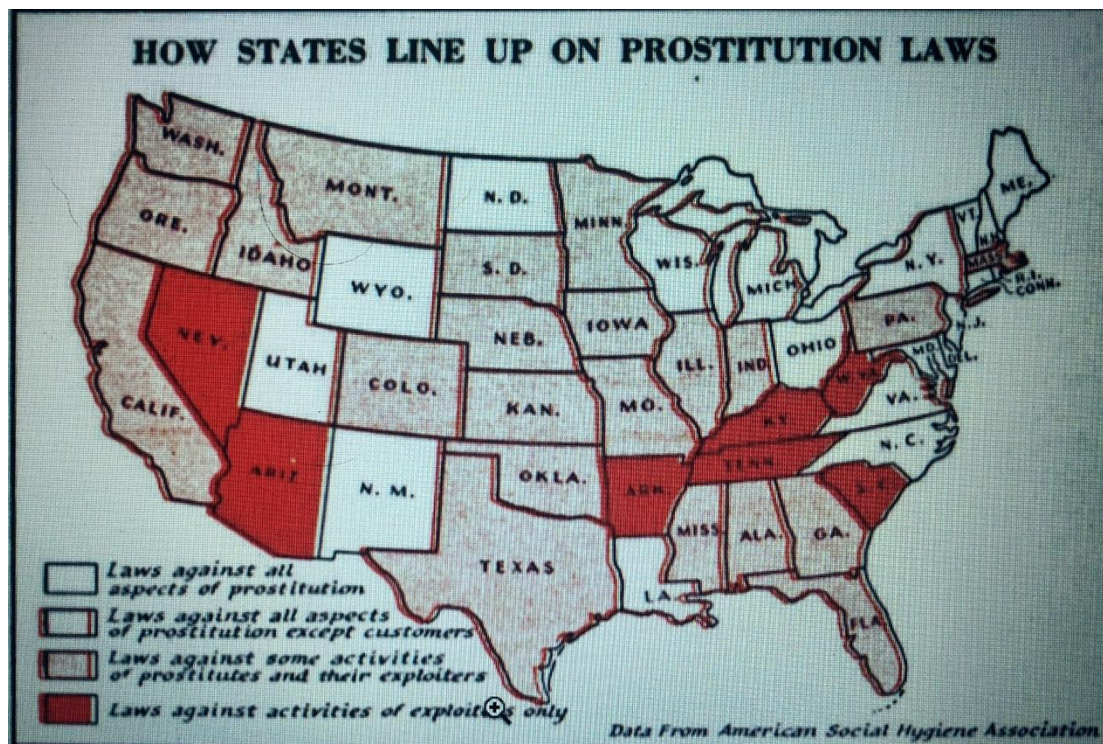
Under these laws, the people selling sex were penalized, but those buying sex were not. The laws stated that the sale was the crime, not the purchase. The rhetoric was that prostitutes spread VD to servicemen and they were thus a danger to the military. However, the source of prostitutes’ VD was not discussed. Propaganda, newspaper articles, and government pamphlets assured their readers that prostitutes spread the diseases, but they stopped short of suggesting that the Johns gave the prostitutes the VD to then spread to their other patrons.

Syphilis and Prostitution

The implication of the VD campaign was that women of “poor moral character” were to blame for the spread of disease. Their sexuality was the deviant one and therefore they were the cause of sexual disease. In 1941, only seven states had laws on the books that penalized the “exploiter” (the pimp) but not the prostitute.¹⁹ The “Johns” were very frequently excepted from punishment under the law with some states specifying that all parties are to blame except for the customer.

¹⁸ U.S. Congress. Committee on Education and Labor. *Conciliation Act of 1941: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on S. 683, Seventy-Seventh Congress, First Session, on May 6-8, 13, 21, 22, 27-29, 1941*. Cong. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1941.

¹⁹ American Social Hygiene Association.



American Social Hygiene Association, 1941.

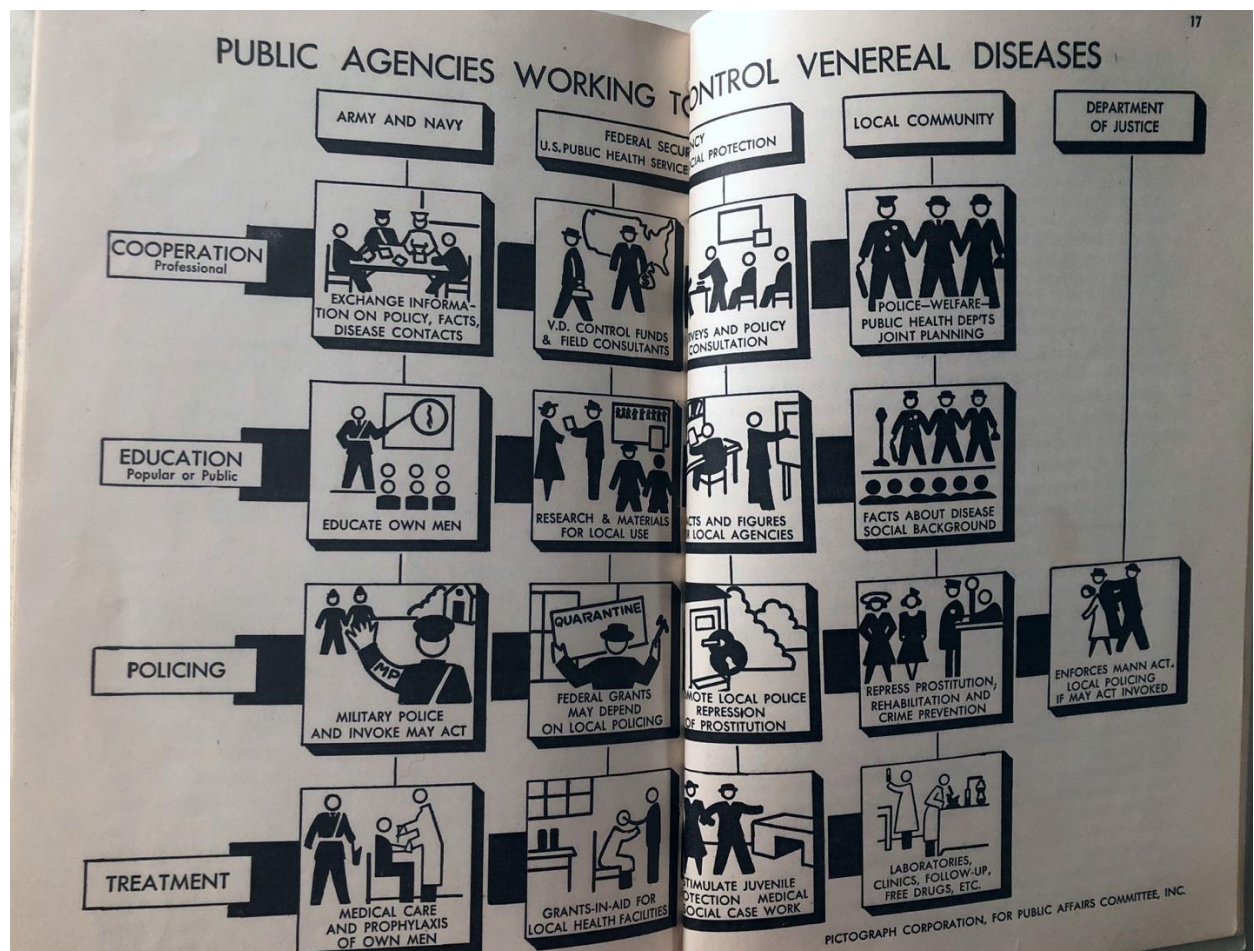
In his 1944 pamphlet “Prostitution and the War,” Federal Security Agent Philip S. Broughton’s suggested solution to the prostitution problem was that the “malarial swamps must be drained. Water supplies must be filtered and purified...communities must get down to fundamentals in tackling the threat of venereal disease.”²⁰ In order to “drain the swamp,” Broughton proposed that military-adjacent communities focused on *morale* problems that lead to *moral* problems. Communities were full of lonely men looking for comfort and young women looking to make money, and often they found it on “the line.”

Broughton also alleged that prostitutes perpetuated the cycle by luring young girls into the trade with promised of easy money and better wages than they could make in legitimate fields. These young, impressionable girls would be taken in by “amoral women” and would become part of the “prostitution racket.” To prevent these outcomes, Broughton asserted that

²⁰ Broughton. *Prostitution*, 5.

legal repression wasn't enough; communities had to work together to ensure that lonely men and young women were not being led into prostitution out of desperation.²¹

Broughton framed his argument as a concern for the welfare of America's young men and women, but the blame was chiefly placed on women for corrupting lonely men and vulnerable girls. When men patronized prostitutes, the prostitutes were penalized. When young girls were deemed "potentially promiscuous," the prostitutes were penalized. They were painted as the villain in America's ongoing battle against immorality.²²



²¹ Ibid, 6-7.

²² Ibid, 17.

The above illustration appears in Broughton's pamphlet. It shows the many ways that various state agencies and citizens could suppress the vice trade. Broughton encouraged the local community to participate in "crime prevention" activities including keeping an eye on young women when they were out in public. In the boxes he suggests many resolutions, including medical testing and educating men about VD, but he does not mention punishing the Johns as a potential solution. Two of the boxes reference the Mann and May Acts, which would punish those that supply the sex, but he does not recommend cracking down on the men demanding the sex. The lack of acknowledgement of the Johns in his pictograph suggests that he does not consider male sexuality to be the problem. He is concerned with deviant female sexuality and its negative impact on men.

Broughton's call to arms served as official permission for neighbors to surveil young women in their communities. If they did not want girls to fall in with the wrong crowd, it was their duty to monitor where they were going, at what times and with whom. Neighbors were urged to report their concerns to health agencies so that girls could be set on the "correct" path. However, these tactics mainly served to shame the girls. Public health officials showed up in labeled vehicles to sit down with young women and their families to try to dissuade the girls from a life of prostitution.²³

Broughton also addresses this public shaming tactic in his pamphlet on prostitution. He states:

Society has known how to wield a policeman's billy on the outside of skulls much longer than it has paid attention to influence the processes that go on *inside*. The

²³ "All-out war on prostitution called best way to curb vice." (1941, Sep 29). *Newsweek*, 18, 58.

most obvious methods of social control include: education of both men and women who are involved or *potentially* involved in the business controlling aimless and vagrant migration...for the young people who may drift into prostitution.²⁴

Rather than resort to corporal punishment, law enforcement would turn to something far more damaging: social stigma and shame.

The people in towns close to the military bases had to work doubly hard to prove their “respectability” because they were working class, not middle class. When the government established a military base in an area, towns sprang up around it or existing ones rapidly expanded. These defense housing communities were lower-income and often barely more than shanty towns.²⁵

Popular opinion held that working-class women were more sexually uninhibited than proper middle-class women. They were coarse, lustful and innately sexual. Young women from poor backgrounds had to endure that stigma in addition to the assumption that they could easily be tempted into a life of prostitution if they were not monitored closely. If they valued their reputations, poor young women had to operate carefully in public. They could not come and go as they pleased or be seen with men unescorted. To do so would be to bring the full wrath of the ASHA down upon themselves and their families and announce to the neighborhood that they were the girls that the government was talking about: the “loose women” that were trying to bring down the United States military with unchecked sexuality and VD.

²⁴ Broughton. *Prostitution*, 9.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

American GIs in Hawaii

While the mainland United States maintained a forceful anti-prostitution campaign during WWII, that level of hypervigilance did not extend to the Territory of Hawaii. During the war, Honolulu maintained a sex ratio of five hundred men for every one woman.²⁶ On payday, the houses of prostitution on Hotel Street in Downtown Honolulu's vice district had lines around the block of uniformed servicemen waiting for their three minutes with a girl.

In Hawaii, traditional American social and racial structures simply did not work. There was no racial majority. The demographic of Honolulu was a mix of Japanese, Puerto Rican, Portuguese, Native Hawaiian, and white, with no group having a large enough percentage to claim majority.²⁷ Hawaii did not have a codified segregation system and a racially diverse population meant that race boundaries were more penetrable and not as simple and the "Black and White" segregation of the U.S. However, this does not mean that racism and class distinction did not exist in Hawaii.

What is more, as white soldiers flooded in from the mainland, Hawaii's prewar demographics shifted dramatically and all parties experienced culture shock and tried to establish a clear racial hierarchy. According to Beth Bailey and David Farber, "racial inequality in 1940s Hawaii is indisputable...but to many from the mainland, it looks as if racial barriers did not exist."²⁸ White GIs from the mainland did not see the nuanced race relations among the non-whites that lived in Hawaii prior to the outbreak of the war and instead misinterpreted as a

²⁶ Schmitt, Robert C. *Historical Statistics of Hawaii*. The University of Hawaii Press. Honolulu HI, 1977. 321.

²⁷ Wilder King, Samuel. "Hawaii Has No Race Problem." *Asia Magazine*, March 1939. 152.

²⁸ Bailey, Beth, and David Farber. 1992. Hotel street: Prostitution and the politics of war. *Radical History Review* 1992 (52). 56.

society in which racial boundaries did not exist. Thus, they struggled to navigate a strange new place where everything from the landscape to the culture was foreign.

White and non-white race relations manifested as a mutual distrust and dislike of one another. White men were undisputedly supreme on the mainland, but in Hawaii they were the newcomers and they were viewed as inferiors by the people of color on the island. GIs and locals entered into a complex relationship in which each needed the other but treated one another with scorn and distrust.²⁹

Enterprising locals profited from the influx of servicemen and their military salaries. They catered to them in the bars and brothels in the vice district and often charged these *malihini* (outsiders) more for their services than they did the locals. GIs felt exploited and in response, they pressured proprietors in the vice district to restrict access to their businesses to “Americans” only. As they contributed so significantly to these institutions’ revenue, the owners relented and began to exclude local men.³⁰

Honolulu’s Hotel Street Brothels

While the anti-prostitution campaign raged on in the U.S., in Honolulu—which was under martial law for most of the war—the vice district was allowed to flourish. The government regulated it but did not try to repress the trade. The military did not formally acknowledge its support of the vice district but the police decided who could open a brothel, who could work in one, and how they could behave.³¹

²⁹ Bailey and Farber, 56.

³⁰ Ibid, 56-57.

³¹ Ibid.

The proliferation of the vice district is a testament to prevailing opinions about “good” and “bad” female sexuality. Locals and officials supported the brothels because they kept “respectable” women and girls safe from rampant male sexuality. According to *Hawaii* magazine, the brothels were a necessary evil:

If the sexual desires of men in this predominantly masculine community are *going to be satisfied*, certainly not one of us but would rather see them satisfied in regulated brothels than by our young girls and women—whether by rape, seduction or the encouraging of natural tendencies.³²

The magazine editor accepted male sexuality as a given: men need sex and they were “going to be satisfied” one way or another. The community did not want men to attack or corrupt “nice” girls or “respectable” women and so they needed to have an outlet. Prostitutes were the best way to allow men to express their natural urges while protecting the women in the community.

This article also highlights how men’s sexuality was accepted by society as natural and undeniable but the women with whom they liaised were penalized for either becoming corrupted, or for already being deviant and selling sex for money. They needed women to be available for sex work, but did not want to encourage the “natural tendencies” in any more women than was necessary for the trade.

Rather than employ local women of color in Honolulu’s official vice district, owners brought in women from the mainland. The race and sex relations in Hawaii were further complicated by the influx of lower class white women from San Francisco who

³² “Why Talk About Prostitution.” *Hawaii*, July 31, 1944, 5.

came to Hawaii to work in the brothels.³³ As a result, brothels became even more segregated than they were previously. Brothels had two doors, one for white servicemen and one for Black servicemen. Local men were excluded almost entirely from Hotel Street and instead had to patronize brothels in another part of town that employed local women and had much higher rates of VD.

Brothels complied with mainland segregation customs to avoid racial violence if white men had to witness Black men patronizing the same prostitutes that they did. In many of the brothels, they could not maintain the “color line” because of the high demand and instead stopped serving men of color altogether.³⁴

Female Sexuality and Agency in Honolulu’s Vice District

The roles women played display a great deal of agency on the parts of some women and almost none for others. All of Honolulu’s Hotel Street brothels were owned and operated by women. At three dollars for three minutes, the trade was extremely lucrative and by some estimates the madams made \$150,000-\$450,000 per year and the prostitutes made roughly \$30,000-\$40,000 every year—twenty times what they could expect to make in an office or factory job.³⁵

Lower class white women were lured to Honolulu by the promise of much higher wages than they could ever hope to earn on the mainland in “legitimate” jobs.

Recruiters in San Francisco worked on behalf of the brothel owners to keep young

³³ Bailey and Farber, 58.

³⁴ Ibid, 60.

³⁵ *Prostitution in Hawaii*, Bulletin No. 1. 1 August 1944. 2-3.

women coming to Honolulu. The recruiters described the South Pacific island as a paradise and the work as being a great opportunity to make a lot of money very quickly. Because of the nature of the trade and the extremely high demand for their services, a prostitute could usually only work for a few months before she needed to get out and the brothel owner had to find a replacement. Thus, there was a steady demand for a supply of “fresh” white women from the mainland.³⁶



The Hawai'i Nisei Story

Once they were in the brothels, women had little agency. To keep up with demand, they were expected to service one hundred men a day for three minutes at a time. Even under the intense time constraints, there were frequently lines around the block of men waiting for their turn with a prostitute—especially on payday. The women also had to undergo regular, invasive VD testing and endure lengthy hospitalization if

³⁶ Bailey and Farber, 60.

they were infected and they were isolated until they were cleared to return to work by a physician.³⁷ The VD testing was for the safety of the clients, not for the women who worked in the brothels. The military government allowed the Hotel Street vice district to prosper because of its low rates of VD infection among the men. The women experienced much higher rates of VD, but they were taken out of the brothels to be treated before they could infect the clients. For these women, their sexuality was a commodity to be bought and sold for the pleasure of their male clients and for the profit of the brothel madams.

When the Hotel Street prostitutes were off duty, there were strict rules that regulated their behavior outside of the brothels as well. Although they were white, they were not “respectable” white women. They were lower class and deviantly sexual and so the community wanted to keep them segregated. The community tolerated their presence and acknowledged that these women performed a necessary service, but they did not want them mixing with decent women or corrupting “good” girls.

Prostitutes could not have boyfriends or be seen in public with men. They could not visit beaches, cafes or bars that were considered “upper class.” They could not go to dances or marry servicemen. These women had curfews and rules for how they could travel around town and what they could do with their wages. They could not even use the telephone without permission from the madam.³⁸ These were the conditions set by the military police that ran Honolulu during WWII. The rules reinforced the prostitute’s

³⁷ “Suppressed Prostitution.” *The Honolulu Advertiser*. October 6th, 1944.

³⁸ O’Hara, Jean. *My life*. Excerpted from Bailey and Farber. Hotel street: Prostitution and the politics of war. 58-59.

position in the social hierarchy: they were in Hawaii to fulfill a need. Outside of that, they were not to be seen or heard from. Respectable members of society did not want to be reminded of the prostitutes' existence and so they were expected to be invisible.

The lower class white prostitutes endured much more stigma in Honolulu than the lower class white men in the military. Those men were forgiven for their low birth because they were "our boys" fighting in the war. Soldiers were afforded great leeway in their behavior that was explained away as "boys being boys." They were about to ship out to fight for their country and so the community tolerated their rowdiness. These men had coarse manners, drank too much, and frequently picked fights, but they were protected by their status as white men and as soldiers.

Prostitutes had no such status. They arrived in Honolulu poor and isolated from their families on the mainland. If they stepped out of line they could be brutally beaten by vice squads or forced to leave Hawaii.³⁹ The military acknowledged their essentiality to keeping up morale and keeping "decent" women safe from unbridled male sexuality. These women made very good money that could afford them a comfortable lifestyle, but when they were off duty they were excluded from "respectable spaces." The nature of their work—accepted though it may have been—made them unacceptable, even though it did not do the same to the men who purchased their services.

³⁹ Bailey and Farber, 59.

The Propaganda Campaign:

The campaign to regulate female sexuality capitalized on the insecurities people already held about women gaining more social agency. Traditional ideas about gender roles had to be modified to make allowances for women in the public sphere because industry and the wartime economy needed them to be there. However, the government did not want these adaptations to become permanent—after the war when the men returned home they wanted to resume business as usual.

To keep women from becoming too uninhibited, the ASHA released a series of propaganda espousing the dangers of “loose women.” They framed their concerns as a matter of public health and hygiene. These propaganda also frequently reminded men that they could not fight for their country if they were in a hospital being treated for VD. This campaign blamed women alone for the spread of venereal disease.

Women’s sexuality was another enemy to the military; it preyed on men’s weaknesses and waited to ambush when they let their guard down. Men needed sex, but any woman willing to “give it up” was not a nice girl and was therefore worthy of mistrust and shaming. This propaganda campaign did not eliminate casual sex, but it did prevent women from gaining the same social freedoms as men. The government turned female sexuality into a public health crisis. VD was framed as a disease that women transmitted to men—with no discussion of how women contracted the VD in the first place. Any woman that chose to act on sexual desire could be labelled as a traitor: she was potentially crippling her own country’s military because she could not control herself.

These posters hung in public places to remind people of what was at stake. Women needed to be surveilled for their own good and for the good of others. If a woman looked like she was “potentially promiscuous” it was a citizen’s civic duty to ensure that she did not follow through on the act, either by intervening themselves, or by reporting her to ASHA. The propaganda campaign reminded people that it was not only acceptable to monitor women, but necessary. The following images reveal the government’s fears about women’s promiscuity and unrestrained sexual appetites.



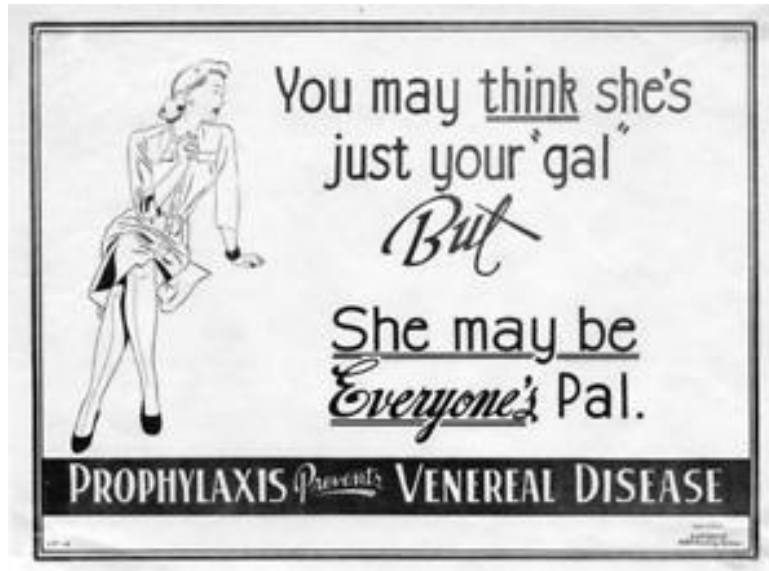
Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota

In this image, a sailor, a GI, and a civilian man are standing to the left of an image of a young woman. Her white dress symbolizes purity and her makeup is tasteful and understated. She has round cheeks and glowing skin—suggesting youth, innocence and good health. Her appearance suggests that she is a “good girl.” The text in the poster reminds men that while she

may look “pure,” she still could have VD. The poster separates women into categories—the “clean” girl and the “dirty” girl— to reinforce that professional prostitutes are not the only carriers of VD. It then admonishes men that, “You can’t beat the Axis if you get VD.”

This poster was meant to discourage casual sexual encounters with anyone—not just professional sex workers. The poster places the blame for VD on women—it asserts that women spread disease to men and thereby cripple them and render them incapable of fighting the Axis powers. The poster’s message is that women willing to have casual sex are not “nice” girls. No matter how they look they could be diseased and waiting to spread their VD to men.





Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota

These two advertisements promote prophylactics to fight venereal disease. The top image urges military men not to “take chances” on prostitutes without first taking a “pro.” An Air Force pilot is pictured standing next to a prostitute on a street corner below images of planes dropping bombs on Japan. Once again, women are portrayed as VD carriers and if men succumb to them they will be infected and unable to engage in combat. This image acknowledges men’s sexual urges and their need to have sex, but it demonizes the women that meet that need. Liaisons with diseased women would result in an Axis victory: American soldiers could not “slap the Japs” if they were laid up in the infirmary with venereal disease. Thus, if the Allies lost the war, it was because loose women willfully infected American servicemen. This position ignored men’s involvement in the sex act and their culpability in the perpetuation of VD.

The bottom image promotes prophylactics to men in relationships, encouraging them to take the medication as a precaution. It warns servicemen that their girlfriends may be unfaithful and could expose countless men to VD from one of their many other sexual partners.

The government's fear was that if left unregulated, women would have promiscuous sex with multiple partners and spread disease to all the poor, unsuspecting men who thought that they were in relationships with these "loose women." This image reinforces the idea that even girls that look "nice" can spread VD. If a woman is immoral enough to have premarital sex with one man, she is probably immoral enough to have sex with many of them. It does not matter what she looks like because her actions reveal that she is untrustworthy. This poster does not tell men not to engage with such loose women, but to take their "pro" when they do. It acknowledges the inevitability of men having sex, but demonizes the female partner and urges men to protect themselves from dangerous female promiscuity while they are acting promiscuously themselves.



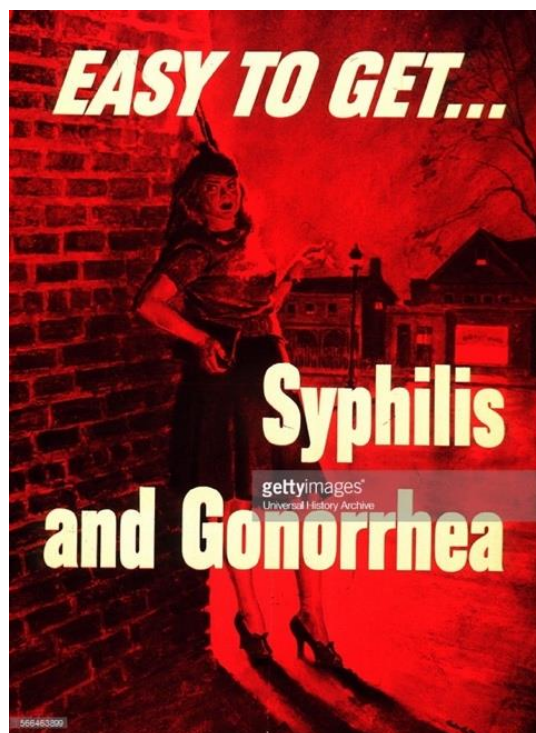
Library of Congress

This poster mirrors the last in its concern about hypersexualized women. The woman is heavily made up, smoking a cigarette and wearing all red. Her eyes are narrowed in a lustful gaze. She conveys a powerful and confident sexuality. Cigarette smoking was a masculine habit, “nice girls” did not smoke. If they did have a cigarette, they did not let it hang out of their mouth in such a masculine way. Combined with her sultry expression, the smoking suggests that she possesses a masculine sex drive. She is brazen and unsubtle in her pursuit of men.

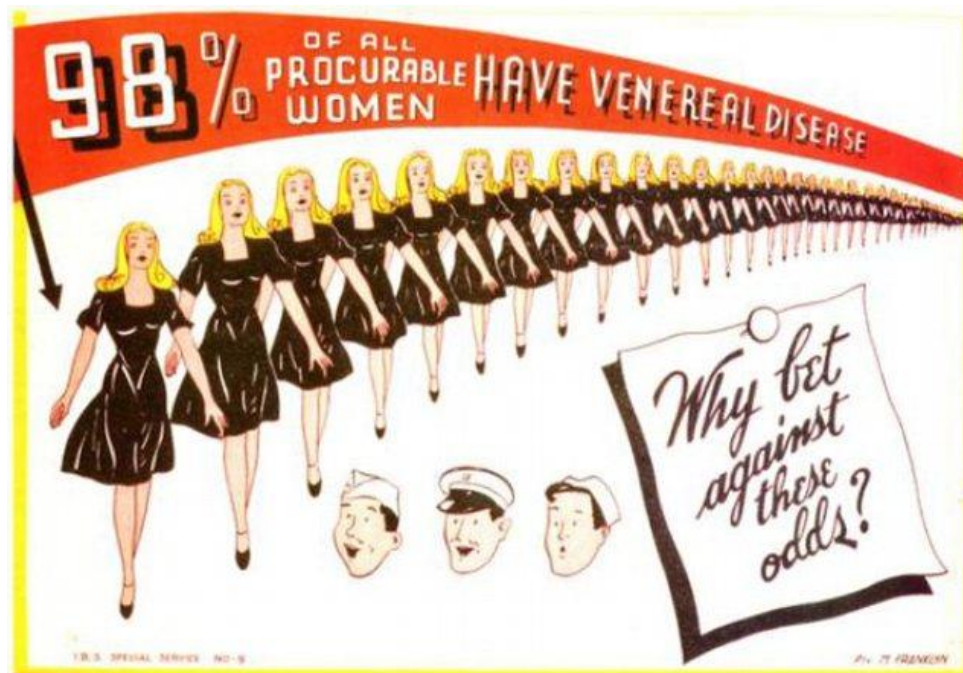
The use of red also helps to proclaim her power. Red is the color of fire and blood—this choice could also relate to menstruation—further reinforcing her fertility and sexuality. It is the color of passionate, volatile emotion. The artist has not only made her clothing red, but her lips

and even her skin are deeply flushed—once again evocative of blood. The message is that she is passionate and uninhibited and dangerous. The artist also chose not to show her eyes. Her lowered eyelids and long, drooping eyelashes hide her actual eyes from the viewer. If the eyes are the windows to the soul, then hers are vacant and emotionless. This choice shows that while on the surface she looks attractive and fun, underneath she is devoid of feeling for her potential partners.

The poster's point is that bold, sexually liberated women are unhealthy. This kind of woman looks like fun but she is a man-eater; she will have her way with men and leave them diseased and disabled. She is a bag of trouble and a cesspool of disease. This image reveals what the state feared women would become if they were not regulated: the woman on the poster owns her sexuality, it is not merely defined by male desire but by her own. She does not exist merely to serve men and thus she is dangerous.



Getty Images

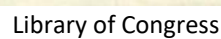


Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota

These next two images are meant to reinforce how easily prostitutes spread VD. In the top image, a prostitute stands on a street corner waiting for a John. The poster proclaims, “Easy to Get” to acknowledge her attainability but also the ease with which she transmits disease. She is leaning languidly against the corner of a building, smirking and smoking a cigarette. Her makeup, expression and cigarette tell the viewer that she is not a nice girl and her motives are impure. Men can buy her, but they may get more than they bargained for.

The poster below confidently espouses that “98% of procurable women have venereal disease.” They do not give a source for that figure. Underneath that statistic is a line of women spanning into the distance, showing the endless supply of diseased women that have made themselves sexually available to servicemen. Below the women there are three men from the three branches of the military ogling them with glee. The message is that “procurable women” are nearly all diseased and that the odds are that a sexual encounter with them will leave the

In both images, the women are portrayed as the only ones who can spread disease—the men that have sex with them are the infected, never the infector. All prostitutes are lumped together as disease carriers that will infect the whole military if given the opportunity. These images try to discourage men from having sex with diseased prostitutes, but they do not acknowledge how the prostitutes get the diseases. The onus is on women for having sex with men, not the other way around.



These next three images have the common theme of sneak attack. The first is a “saboteuse” the second is a “booby trap” and the third is a “sniper.” All three rely on an element of surprise to outmaneuver the enemy and they do so deliberately and carefully. This theme reinforces the idea that women who sleep around do so deliberately to infect their male partners. Men may sleep with women out of passion or an inherent need for sex, but women do so maliciously. Deviant female sexuality is destructive: it is not driven by passion but by selfishness.

The first woman is a “saboteuse” waiting around a corner as a sailor approaches. She is smoking a cigarette and wearing a label that brands her “venereal carrier.” The woman hides behind the wall like a feline getting ready to pounce on her prey. She is waiting for her chance to sabotage the U.S. Navy with VD. Her posture, dress and cigarette smoking tell the reader that she is bad news as surely as her “venereal carrier” sash does. Her very form-fitting dress and her cigarette smoking tell the viewer that she is vulgar and lewd. She does not ascribe to ideas about appropriate femininity. She is divergent and therefore she is a threat.

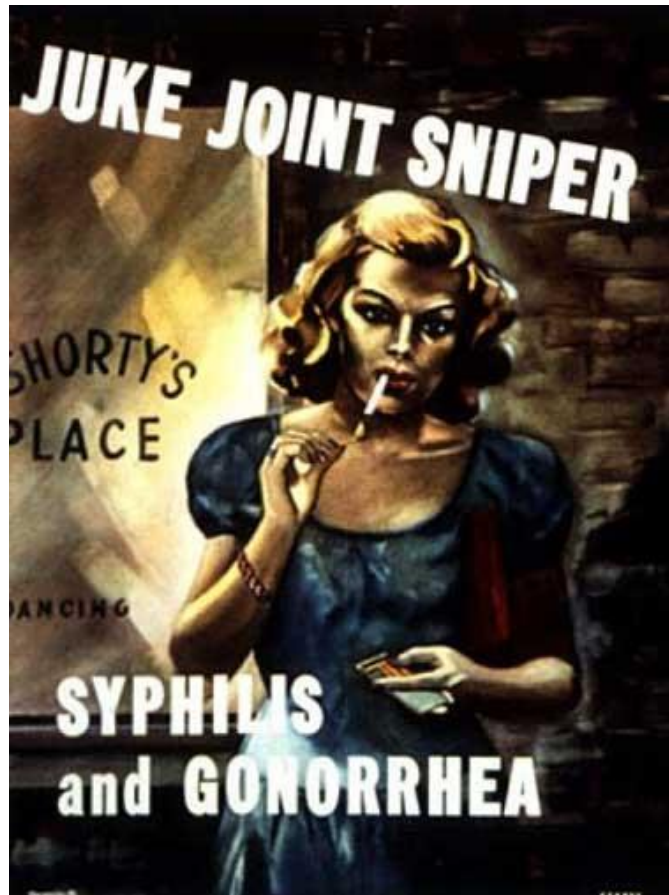
Below, the second woman is leaning into a table full of soldiers as they also lean towards her and gaze up adoringly. Her dress is blue, suggesting trust and faithfulness. However, the message on the poster reveals that this is a trap: she is lulling unsuspecting servicemen into a false sense of security before she ensnares them with disease and disability.



Library of Congress

The virginal blue color of her dress is contradicted by the low neckline, wasp waist and tight skirt. She is also wearing very heavy eye, lip and cheek makeup. The “booby trap” is trying to look innocent, but she cannot quite get there because she is betrayed by her bad intentions.

Her danger is also in how she shamelessly chases men. She is leaning against a table of soldiers so she obviously approached them, not the other way around. Nice girls did not pursue men, they allowed themselves to be pursued. This woman has inverted the status quo and so she is unpredictable and viperous. She refuses to fall in line and instead seeks out men for her own selfish ends.



Library of Congress

The third woman is also wearing a blue dress, but is also dramatically made up and waiting in the shadows smoking a cigarette. She is a sniper lying in wait outside of a dancehall to eliminate her prey. The shadows throw her face into high relief and make her look menacing. Her eyebrows are furrowed, suggesting that she is angry and whatever she does next is not going to be good.

These posters suggest that women's transmission of VD is not unintentional, but something much more sinister. They are dangerous predators that have marked their prey for elimination. Loose women are dangerous and deliberate in their affections: they are experts in spreading disease and they will take out any man who is gullible enough to fall for them.



U.S. National Library of Medicine

This image once again uses the “Woman in Red” to symbolize disease. She is the personification of the red-light district and dangerous female sexuality. The Woman in Red is a temptress waiting to seduce and infect unsuspecting men who fall for her tricks. As with the other femme fatales, she is heavily made-up with bedroom eyes and red lipstick. The poster urges men to “learn to protect [themselves] NOW” to avoid becoming another one of her victims.



Library and Archives Canada / Bibliothèque et Archives Canada
www.collectionscanada.gc.ca

Library and Archives Canada

In this image, the “Woman in Red” strikes a suggestive pinup pose in a doorway while two uniformed servicemen crane their necks to look at her. She has a fashionable haircut and outfit, but instead of a face she has a leering skull. Of course, the men cannot see this, all they see from behind is a pretty girl standing in a doorway. The print on her dress looks like polka dots from afar, but upon closer inspection it is printed with the initials, “V.D.”

The message is that from far away she looks great, but once you get closer, her true nature is revealed. She is a “VD mine” just waiting to annihilate her prey. The theme of surprise attack surfaces again to suggest that she is intentionally disabling the military with communicable disease.

The bottom of the poster reminds men that if they get VD from a prostitute, they could potentially infect their wives and children too. This final point shows the difference between “good” and “bad” women’s sexuality. Good women are only sexual within the context of marriage and in service to producing children and training them to be productive citizens. Their sexuality is not lustful and self-serving. If their spouses visit prostitutes, they could bring infection home to these innocent bystanders.

Bad women are selfish and aggressive. They pick up men to feed their sexual appetite and at the end of their encounter, they leave them crippled and filled with regret. These loose women not only attack the military, but the American family and middle class values. If they give men VD, those men bring it home to the very people that they went to war to protect.

This collection of images reveals popular opinions of male and female sexuality. The woman in the posters are portrayed as man-eaters lying in wait to devour their prey. Their sexuality is characterized as deviant and dangerous to the armed forces. The major themes of the posters are ambush, promiscuity and widespread venereal disease among hypersexual women.

In many of the posters, the women are shown to be sirens waiting to “sabotage,” “snipe,” “booby trap,” or “mine” men who let their guards down. The implication is that

women who are sexually available are intentionally infecting men: they know they have VD and they want to spread it to whomever they can.

VD propaganda also sought to emphasize that servicemen needed to take prophylactics because even if they thought they were in a monogamous relationship, their partners may not be loyal to them. The posters placed the blame for the spread of VD on loose women who engaged in risky sexual behavior rather than staying faithful to their men.

VD posters also sought to discourage men from soliciting prostitutes. The posters asserted that “procurable women” were nearly all diseased and that it was all but certain that an encounter with a prostitute would leave the man diseased and regretful.

The various tactics that the government used to prevent VD in servicemen reveal their fear of female sexuality and the uneven burden placed on women for the spread of disease. Wartime propaganda blamed women for the spread of disease and characterized men as victims of aggressive female sexuality.

Because the government blamed women for the spread of VD, they had to move carefully in public. Propaganda turned preventing VD into a patriotic act. People kept their eyes on young women to ensure that they were not “potentially promiscuous” and would not infect servicemen. Unescorted women were under constant surveillance from people out in public so even if their male relatives were away serving in the war, they still could not move freely through public spaces. Women had to maintain a careful, wholesome image to avoid suspicion.

Conclusion

WWII was a time of enormous upheaval and social restructuring. The attack on Pearl Harbor proved that the U.S. was not unassailable and shook people's confidence. Young men joined the war, both voluntarily and through conscription, and prepared to ship out for Europe and the South Pacific. Even though the world was changing rapidly, the government promised a return to normalcy after the war. However, in the twenty years leading up to WWII women had gained more agency than they had ever had before in U.S. history. With the call for women to take jobs and participate in the public sphere, they were gaining even more ground.

If the U.S. was going to return to traditional values once the war ended, they needed to ensure that women did not gain too much freedom during the war years. To keep women under control, the ASHA released a propaganda campaign that encouraged citizens to keep women from being tempted into a life of prostitution. They were encouraged to monitor women and what they did in public. If women were perceived to be "potentially promiscuous," they needed intervention before they tipped into full moral decay.

Opinions about women's sexuality were further complicated by the general acknowledgement that men's sexual needs were natural and must be acted upon. This belief split women into two groups: "good" girls that needed to be shielded from male sexuality and "bad" girls on whom it could be dispensed.

Men needed an outlet, but the women involved still need to be regulated. They were treated as a consumable good in service to the war effort. They were licensed, examined and heavily regulated even as the government acknowledged the purpose they served. When these women appeared in public, they were penalized for the work they did and they were barred

from many “respectable” institutions so they did not mingle with and possible corrupt decent women.

Examining sexuality during WWII reveals that the virtuous, desexualized wartime narrative is more of a national mythology than an accurate historical representation. Servicemen waited in long lines to enter brothels and have their turn with prostitutes, young women danced with men at USO balls and often did more, but they had to be discreet lest they be labeled as troublesome. The government calculated the cost of VD to the armed forces in the last war and attempted to lower VD rates by releasing a propaganda campaign that condemned female sexuality as the root of the VD problem.

Beneath the patriotic imagery of sexless Rosies and clean cut GIs lies a complex relationship between male and female sexuality and the clash of traditional gender roles with wartime exceptionalism. A complicated double standard regulated women’s sexuality while championing men’s. Servicemen were given great leeway by the government and by the public because of the status they held as soldiers. Things that were acceptable for men to do were not acceptable for women, and yet men could not do them alone. The women involved in the acts were stigmatized and punished for their participation, even though it was often government sanctioned. Women on the mainland could not move too freely in public for fear that they would be publicly shamed and labeled as a threat to the armed forces. The intentionally vague labels of “prostitute” and “potentially promiscuous” kept women from owning their sexuality as fully as men and from moving too freely in public, as the government was eager to return to traditional values and gender roles after the war ended.

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