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## **"It is the promiscuous woman who is giving us the most trouble": The Internal War on Prostitution in New Orleans during World War II**

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“It is the promiscuous woman who is giving us the most trouble”:  
The Internal War on Prostitution in New Orleans during World War II

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
History  
Concentration in Public History

By

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## Abstract

When the United States entered World War II, federal officials began planning a war on prostitution and decided to make New Orleans the poster city for reform. New Orleans held a reputation for being a destination for prostitution in the U.S. A federally appointed group aptly named the Social Protection Division began a repression campaign in militarily dense areas throughout the United States. The goal was to protect soldiers by eliminating the threat from venereal disease carrying prostitutes. The Social Protection Division created a campaign with the New Orleans Health Department and the New Orleans Police Department to repression prostitution. Some in New Orleans, however, tried to undermine these efforts and continue the profitable tradition of prostitution. From 1942-1945, New Orleans became part of the internal war waged by the federal government against women deemed sexually dangerous to protect the patriotic male soldier being sent off to war.

Keywords: World War II, New Orleans, Venereal Disease, Prostitution, Women, Social Protection Division

It seems unlikely that New Orleans Mayor Robert Maestri thought anything about Colonel G.M. Halloran from Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg, Mississippi before 1942.<sup>1</sup> But Col. Halloran soon began an internal war on prostitution in a way that the city of New Orleans never saw coming and never before experienced. Camp Shelby began to suffer high numbers of venereal disease outbreaks and military officials tracked the sources of infection to New Orleans. Halloran sent Maestri a memo on January 24, 1942, about the “vice situation” stating that New Orleans ranked second in point of origin for venereal disease infection amongst his troops.<sup>2</sup> It is from Halloran that we see the first mention of an “internal war.” He believed the internal war was “against those who are contributing to the disease and incapacitations of our troops [which] is totally unnecessary and unpatriotic. Each man infected . . . is the equivalent of a soldier lost in action.”<sup>3</sup> According to Halloran, the internal war against venereal disease was a patriotic necessity to keep the soldiers fit for battle. It was another way the home front could contribute to the war effort. Halloran ended the letter with an appeal to Maestri to “suppress” prostitution in New Orleans. In response, Maestri replied, “I am transmitting your communication to Honorable George Reyer, Superintendent of Police, for attention.”<sup>4</sup> Maestri’s one sentence response set into motion a series of events that saw a marked increase in federal scrutiny on the issue of prostitution in New Orleans with the start of World War II.

The city of New Orleans shored up all of its defenses with the onset of World War II: able-bodied men enlisted, women entered the factories, and the police began arresting the city's prostitutes. The Social Protection Division (S.P.D.), a branch of the Office of War Information, used New Orleans as a symbolic location from which to wage an “internal war” against venereal

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<sup>1</sup> Franklyn Hochreiter, “New Orleans, Louisiana - Interim Report,” August 23, 1944, RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 4.

<sup>2</sup> The first ranked location for point of contact for venereal disease infection was the city of Hattiesburg, Mississippi where the Camp was situated.

<sup>3</sup> G.M. Halloran, “Letter of Maestri,” January 24, 1942, RG 215, Community File, Box 120.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Maestri, “Telegraph to Col. Halloran” January 26, 1942, RG 215, Community File, Box 120.

diseases and the women who carried them. The S.P.D. along with the military, the City Health Board, the New Orleans Police Department, and other local groups attempted to prevent the spread of venereal disease through the arrest, testing, and treatment of women suspected of prostitution. These women became targets because officials considered them the most likely source of infection for the soldiers stationed in or near New Orleans. Venereal disease posed a threat to national security because, once infected, soldiers spent two to six weeks in quarantine and the war effort lost man hours. According to historian Jane Leder, “Venereal Disease accounted for the loss of seven million man days in World War I.”<sup>5</sup> No one involved in the war effort wanted to see a repeat of those numbers in World War II. People in the prostitution trade saw an opportunity for money and began to collectively thwart the S.P.D. using bribery, rumors, and subterfuge to continue their booming business. Ultimately, the “internal war” on venereal disease in New Orleans was a fight without a clear victor. In New Orleans, it seems that despite the best efforts of the repression activists, prostitution remained a fundamental part of the city.

New Orleans, World War II, and prostitution are hardly new historical topics; however very few historians have written about the relationships between the three. Established histories of New Orleans like Joan Garvey and Mary Lou Widmer’s *Beautiful Crescent* and Hebert Asbury’s *The French Quarter: An Informal History of New Orleans* discuss general “facts” about the city and tend to portray a more sensational version of its history. One popular topic covered in most New Orleans history books focuses on prostitution and more specifically the notorious red light district, Storyville. Contrary to *Beautiful Crescent* and *The French Quarter*, modern academic scholarship provides deeper analysis into topics such as Storyville. These academic histories delve deeper than the superficial histories like Asbury to investigate the deeper political and social contexts that shaped the events in and around Storyville. For

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<sup>5</sup> Jane Mersky Leder, *Thanks for the Memories: Love, Sex, and World War II* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2006), xi.

example, Alecia Long's *The Great Southern Babylon*, Emily Epstein Landau's *Spectacular Wickedness*, and Judith Schafer's *Brothels, Depravity, and Abandoned Women* all focus on prostitution in New Orleans and how Storyville affected the city. Judith Schafer addresses in her book the history of prostitution in antebellum New Orleans. Schafer explores the reputation of New Orleans as a city of sex during this time through such issues as race, violence, crime, and responses from the local government. Emily Epstein Landau focuses on the formation of Storyville, the role of race in the sexual history of New Orleans and how that influenced Storyville politics. Landau uses artifacts such as directories, photographs, and memoirs from musicians of Storyville to create a picture of life within the district. Using Louisiana Supreme Court cases, Alecia Long investigates how race and sexuality played out in New Orleans society during the years of Storyville. Long uses race as a means to explore issues of sexuality in terms of tourism, class, and respectability in New Orleans. These three histories show how the sexual history of New Orleans shaped public policy and social discourse by dissecting different types of documents.

Storyville influenced the growth of New Orleans as a tourist destination for sexual exploits. Both *New Orleans on Parade* by J. Mark Souther and Anthony J. Stanonis' *Creating the Big Easy* discuss the rise of modern tourism and the influence of its sexualized reputation in building a tourist economy. This type of scholarship addresses more contemporary New Orleans history, but does not focus much on World War II. Both Anthony J. Stanonis and J. Mark Souther use World War II as a bookend in their work. In *Creating the Big Easy*, Stanonis uses World War II as the end result of the events that developed after the closing of Storyville. He discusses the years of transformation of the American landscape following World War I and how politics played into the development of New Orleans as a tourist destination outside the Carnival

season. World War II is mentioned throughout but only as a way to show how a particular issue unfolded into the 1940s. Mark Souther uses World War II as starting point to discuss many of the same ideas as Stanonis in the development of New Orleans as a travel destination. Themes of ethnicity, preservation, vice, the Carnival season, and local politics run throughout the book in a discussion of the latter half of the twentieth century. Both of these books use World War II as a reference point for change in the city but the authors do not focus any considerable time on the war and its influence on New Orleans. The books provide insight into how New Orleans used its reputation throughout the United States, both before and after World War II, as a destination for sexual pleasure into an economic revenue source.

The internal war during World War II targeted women who did not perform the assumed gender roles expected of them during war time. Recent books on women during World War II reveal women on the home front and the complexities of their lives while mostly shying away from the issues of sex and venereal disease. These include D'Ann Campbell's *Women at War with America*, Karen Anderson's *Wartime Women*, and Maureen Honey's *Creating Rosie the Riveter*. These books focus on women in factories, the changing expectations of gender roles, and the effects on their families. These authors examine how the government manipulated the female population both into and out of the work force. One book that discusses sex, venereal disease, and the attempts by the Federal government to eradicate these issues. Marilyn Hegarty's book *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II* discusses the complex issues around the federal government's attempt to decrease instances of venereal disease. Hegarty explores how women became targets throughout the United States, but only mentions New Orleans once. This research attempts to fill a gap in this



literature by extending the history of prostitution in New Orleans past Storyville while addressing venereal disease and sexuality in the city that had a historical reputation.

During World War II, New Orleans boomed as it became an integral part of military operations in the Gulf South. The number of military personnel that travelled through New Orleans dramatically increased when New Orleans became an embarkation station in 1942.<sup>6</sup> The United States Army conducted the Louisiana Maneuvers, its largest training drill beginning in 1941 and ending in 1944 when the soldiers landed in Normandy for the D-Day mission. These training exercises brought names such as Dwight D. Eisenhower and George Patton to central Louisiana.<sup>7</sup> New Orleans became a site for training maneuvers by Army, Navy and Coast Guard in and around Lake Pontchartrain. The United States Navy set up its District Headquarters in New Orleans. The New Orleans area housed several naval stations, as well as Naval Air stations and Merchant Marine units.<sup>8</sup> In New Orleans, the Army established Camp Beauregard, Camp Livingston, Camp Claiborne, Camp Polk, and Camp Harahan. The influx of the military into the New Orleans area helped bring money into the state, which was supplemented by the increase of civilian jobs.

As was the case with most major cities, the entrance of the United States into World War II helped revitalize the stagnant economy of New Orleans. New Orleans began to import and export goods necessary for the war effort. The Port of New Orleans ranked second only to New

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<sup>6</sup> Prior to this time this only embarkation points were New York, Charleston, San Francisco, and Seattle.

<sup>7</sup> Sanson, Jerry P, "World War II." In *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, edited by David Johnson, Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 2010—. Article published August 18, 2011. <http://www.knowla.org/entry/750/>. Sanson also wrote a book published through LSU on Louisiana during World War II.

<sup>8</sup> According to the "History of the Eighth Naval District" website, in New Orleans alone, there was the Naval Repair Base (which included the Personnel and Training Command, Administrative and Military Command, and Industrial Command), Naval Ammunition Depot, a Naval Hospital, Reserve Aviation Base, Naval Station and served as District Headquarters. These locations do not count other bases in Louisiana nor Gulfport, Mississippi. Historical Section, Eighth Naval District, "History of the Eighth Naval District." United States Naval Administration in World War II. Accessed February 11, 2015. <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Admin-Hist/115-8thND/115-8ND-1.html>. 4-7

York in this area.<sup>9</sup> This increase in demand for goods resulted in an increase in jobs and provided a steady income for those who handled materials needed for transport. Additionally, there were people who sought employment in factories like the Higgins Factory. For the first time in a decade, civilians had a steady income and extra money to spend on non-essential items. The city of New Orleans encouraged people to spend their money in the French Quarter enjoying life in a dangerous time.

During World War II, there was a sense of *carpe diem* in New Orleans as military personnel and civilians alike enjoyed life during a tumultuous time. As Mark Souther explains, “Servicemen passing through New Orleans on their way overseas created memories of a raucous, fun-filled city that did not soon fade.”<sup>10</sup> The French Quarter catered to the military men who had money to spend as the threat of death hung over them. From restaurants and hotels to the nightlife, the city targeted these transient tourists. A *Times Picayune* article from April, 1944 confirms this by reporting, “Thousands of service men and war workers are passing our way. Our city is being advertised far and near as....a city of lewd women.”<sup>11</sup> New Orleans was a mecca for fun times involving alcohol and women, which led to an increase in prostitution and venereal disease.

By the start of World War II, New Orleans had become travel destination for Americans who wanted to participate in the legendary debauchery of the city. Many of these visitors wrote about the more unsavory aspects and a mythic image formed that shaped how the rest of America viewed New Orleans. Historian Alecia Long wrote, “People believe two things about New Orleans. First is that it is different from the rest of the United States. . . . The second . . . that its

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<sup>9</sup> In June 1943, the Port exported 659, 135 tons of goods. In May 1945 that figure was up to 1,710,843. The Port also imported 8,462, 533 tons were imports to the area between 1942-1944. Historical Section, Eighth Naval District, “History of the Eighth Naval District,” United States Naval Administration in World War II, 4-7.

<sup>10</sup> J. Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006) 43.

<sup>11</sup> “New Blast Fired To Check Gaming,” *Times Picayune*, April 4, 1944.

cultural distinctiveness is related to its reputation for tolerating, even encouraging, indulgence of all varieties.”<sup>12</sup> This cultural distinctiveness stemmed from the French and Spanish governments that ruled until the U.S. gained control. The “otherness” of New Orleans became exploited by City Boosters after the Civil War when the economy began to fail. Historian Mark Souther explains that the Boosters relied on “the city’s unusual social and cultural customs, imagined sexual permissiveness, and exotic cityscape” to entice tourists to indulge in New Orleans.<sup>13</sup> The perceived construct of the highly sexualized society of New Orleans influenced a document entitled, “A Brief History of the Development of Prostitution in New Orleans with Survey of Recent Developments in Venereal Disease Control” that claimed to provide a history of prostitution in the city. This document provides modern audiences a glimpse into how policy makers viewed the sexualized history of New Orleans. The 1943 “history” showed how the reputation of New Orleans influenced procedure in the city during World War II.

The military sent Lieutenant Commander T.A. Fears to New Orleans in mid-1942 as part of their campaign to eliminate the problem of venereal disease. As the Venereal Disease Control Officer, Fears worked under the District Medical Officer of the Eighth Naval District which encompasses New Orleans.<sup>14</sup> According to the official history of the Eighth Naval District, “One of the most important functions of the District Medical Officer was the fight it waged against venereal disease.”<sup>15</sup> On March 2, 1943, Fears coauthored, “A Brief History of the Development of Prostitution in New Orleans . . .” with Dr. Owen Agee of the City Health Board and the Chief of Police George Reyer. This sensationalized history, while based on selected facts, portrayed New Orleans as a city of sex. For example, “It was under the rule of the United States that New

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<sup>12</sup> Alecia Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race and Respectability in New Orleans 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004) 1.

<sup>13</sup> Souther, *New Orleans on Parade*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> The Eighth Naval District is the second largest Naval District. It contains Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and parts of Florida.

<sup>15</sup> Historical Section, Eighth Naval District, “History of the Eighth Naval District,” 211.

Orleans embarked upon its golden age of glamour and spectacular wickedness and attained its full stature as a city of sin and gaiety unique on the North American continent.”<sup>16</sup> This reveals how the authors viewed the history of New Orleans through an exaggerated and sexualized lens. The document reinforced the sexualized image of New Orleans and argued that the military in conjunction with the city needed to control this potential epidemic.

“A Brief History” covered the history of prostitution from colonization until World War II and described how prostitution remained a constant presence in New Orleans. Ever thorough, the authors “The Brief History” began at the beginning with the colonization by the French. They wrote that the King of France sent twenty-three prostitutes to the colony in 1703.<sup>17</sup> The first anti-vice movement started twelve years later when a priest “suggested” sending the women away to improve the morality of the city. The Governor of Louisiana Lamothe Cadillac responded, “If I send away all the loose females, there will be no women left here at all, this would not suit the . . . inclinations of the people.”<sup>18</sup> According to “A Brief History,” twelve years later, the Provincial government attempted to curb the behavior of these loose women in 1727 as Louisiana was gaining a bad reputation.<sup>19</sup> The government decided to build a House of Detention for abandoned prostitutes run by the Ursuline nuns. According to Fears, this was the first, but not the last time, the city of New Orleans’ unsavory reputation forced them to publicly punish prostitutes. Fears, Agee and Reyer wanted to show that New Orleans needed assistance with prostitution since it became deeply rooted into the culture at its formation.

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<sup>16</sup> T.A Fears, Owen Agee M.D., and George Reyer. “A Brief History of the Development of Prostitution in New Orleans with Survey in Recent Developments in Venereal Disease Control,” Venereal Disease Control, Louisiana Collection/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, Coll. 512, box 6.

<sup>17</sup> The women were in prison and sent to the general area; New Orleans officially did not exist at this point. T.A. Fears “A Brief History of the Development of Prostitution in New Orleans with Survey in Recent Developments in Venereal Disease Control.”

<sup>18</sup> T.A. Fears “A Brief History of the Development of Prostitution in New Orleans with Survey in Recent Developments in Venereal Disease Control,” 1.

<sup>19</sup> Herbert Asbury, *The French Quarter: As Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld*, (New York: Garden City Publishing Co, Inc., 1938) 19.

The coauthors chose their narration of New Orleans history to highlight the sexual depravity and focused on what they thought relevant to their point. For example, the coauthors emphasized the quadroom balls. A quadroom ball was a place where white men could interact with black women to establish a sexual relationship outside of marriage. “The aim of the quadroom was to attract a white man, preferably rich, in order to become his mistress.”<sup>20</sup> The quadroom balls were a popular and embellished story for many who wrote about their travels in New Orleans.<sup>21</sup> This was another example of how these men emphasized the sexualized nature of New Orleans society. Another example of selective writing reveals itself through the lack of attention paid to the efforts made by New Orleans to repress prostitution. There were attempts to regulate prostitution in New Orleans throughout its history. Alecia Long mentions the Lorette Ordinance that was an anti-prostitute City Ordinance in 1857.<sup>22</sup> Long also points out Ordinance 6302 O.S. which set boundaries in the city where prostitutes could work and once against restricted the women’s behavior on the street.<sup>23</sup> Fears, Agee and Reyer, however, skipped over the efforts that New Orleans made to regulate prostitution. Obviously, the men wrote a version of New Orleans history that supported their agenda in convincing policy makers that the city needed help in the repression of prostitution.

A major influence on New Orleans repression policy was the closure of the red light district in the city during World War I. Storyville became one of the most notorious prostitution districts in the United States and its legacy left an impression on federal policy makers. “A Brief

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<sup>20</sup> T.A. Fears “A Brief History of the Development of Prostitution in New Orleans with Survey in Recent Developments in Venereal Disease Control,” 2.

<sup>21</sup> Recent scholarship reveals that instead of being a common place event; they were seldom held. This revelation suggests that the sexual nature of New Orleans’ society became exaggerated with the retelling of a few stories see Kenneth Asklakson, “The ‘Quadroom-Placage’ Myth of Antebellum New Orleans.”

<sup>22</sup> Lorette is French slang for prostitute. It required licensing fees for prostitutes and landlords with punishments in place for those who did not comply. It addressed where prostitutes could work, where they could pick up customers, and regulated their wardrobe. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 3.

History” spent only a paragraph on the topic. They wrote about how in 1897, New Orleans passed an Ordinance to open Storyville and it met its demise in 1917 when the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy banned prostitution within five miles of any military area. One of the more important ramifications of Storyville stems from the fact that its closing was the first act by the U.S. Federal Government to restrict prostitution in New Orleans. The military closed these types of districts across the United States to reduce venereal disease that impacted military strategy during World War I. This case set the precedent for World War II and the government’s involvement in prostitution and venereal disease in American cities. Fears, Agee, and Reyer spent about three sentences describing the number of brothels and women worked in Storyville, once again neglecting to discuss efforts to control prostitution in New Orleans. Storyville influenced New Orleans history by becoming a notorious red light district and how the federal government justified interference in local politics due to war time necessity.

Many of the decisions made during World War II about prostitution stemmed directly from World War I. The fight against venereal disease and prostitution during World War I reflected both a desire to protect military men’s bodies and morals.<sup>24</sup> For these reasons, the military and anti-vice leagues wanted to wipe out the prostitutes and close the red light districts. The military thought if they closed down these prostitution districts then the rate of venereal disease would decrease. A federal official stated, “To drain a red-light district and destroy thereby a breeding place of syphilis and gonorrhea is as logical as it is to drain a swamp and destroy thereby a breeding place of malaria and yellow fever.”<sup>25</sup> The idea that prostitutes carried venereal disease and posed a threat to the safety of military personnel carried from one war to the next.

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<sup>24</sup> Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 52.

<sup>25</sup> Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 72.

Despite the closure of Storyville, prostitution continued to operate in a more elusive form in New Orleans but still retained a dominant presence. After World War I, newspapers published articles about the flourishing business of prostitution in New Orleans and the rate of venereal disease. In an article in 1919, New Orleans, in a ranking of cities with a population of 100,000 - 500,000 people, ranked forty-eight out of fifty-seven for venereal disease rates.<sup>26</sup> The legacy of Storyville came back in 1922 when there was a proposal put forth that New Orleans reinstitute a red light district. The president of the Associated Commerce issued the request because prostitution spread throughout the city and a designated area could contain the women out of sight of daily activity. There was a severe backlash to this statement, though no one disputed the issue of prostitution, just the idea of the red light district.<sup>27</sup> In 1928, a *Times Picayune* article summarized a new policy for the procedure to arrest prostitutes. This article hinted at the issue of how many prostitutes and brothels operated within the city without judicial ramifications, which is why the police revised their procedure to lower the numbers.<sup>28</sup> The situation in New Orleans reflected the predicament in most American cities. The closure of red light districts did not eradicate prostitution, it only changed how prostitution functioned and made it more difficult to find. Once Storyville closed, there was no central location to find prostitutes which made arrests more difficult for police. One way that prostitution still flourished in these densely populated areas was taxi cabs.<sup>29</sup> Prostitution continued in New Orleans through the interwar years and the issues that surrounded it became topic for discussion in New Orleans.

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<sup>26</sup> "State Makes Poor Showing in Army Physical Tests: Louisiana Ranks Forty-Eighth from Venereal Disease Standpoint" *Times Picayune*, June 22, 1919. 13

<sup>27</sup> "Council Solidly Opposes the Return of Old District Leaders in the Community are Outspoken Enemies of Vice." *Times Picayune*. July 22, 1922, 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> "Invoking the Padlock" *Times Picayune*., August 22, 1928, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 166.

During World War II, women became targets and the prostitution campaigns focused on all women as potential threats as carriers of venereal disease. This scrutiny reflected the ideal that women needed to retain a certain role within the household to maintain the stability of American life. The effects of the Great Depression started a fear of women working outside the home and that followed into war time. According to historian Elaine Tyler May, the need for women to earn money during the 1930s “also created nostalgia for a mythic past in which male breadwinners provided a decent living, and homemakers were freed from outside employment.”<sup>30</sup> The desire for American society to return to a life where women stayed in the home followed into the war years when the absence of men forced the United States government to use women their labor source. As Maureen Honey puts it, “The campaign to attract women into war production was part of a drive to weld the home front into an economic army, well disciplined, highly motivated by patriotism, and willing to make sacrifices for the good of American soldiers.”<sup>31</sup> During the war, there was constant attention focused on these female workers and their patriotic duty as women which included working only until their men returned home. Ultimately, the government feared that when the soldiers came home, the women would want to continue to enjoy the freedoms experienced without male supervision. So, there was “a renewed sense of vigilance regarding women’s sexual conduct . . . and regulate women’s behavior characteristics.”<sup>32</sup> The government needed women to remain virtuous so that when the men returned, American society could resume the gender roles of the male breadwinner and the female domestic. The United States Government became particularly involved in the regulation of female behavior to ensure that future.

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<sup>30</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 40.

<sup>31</sup> Maureen Honey, *Created Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984) 6.

<sup>32</sup> Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981) 76.



One of the ways the Federal Government maintained female propriety was through the development of a federal watchdog agency named the Social Protection Division ,S.P.D. In 1939, the United States government began to mobilize for war and the issue of venereal disease became a topic of conversation. Out of this concern came “an agreement by the War and Navy Departments, the Federal Security Agency, and State Health Departments on measures for the control of venereal diseases in areas where armed forces or National Defense employees are concentrated.”<sup>33</sup> This concern brought forth the Eight Point Agreement which outlined strategic points to combat venereal disease in military areas.<sup>34</sup> The Agreement discussed topics including early diagnosis, quarantining infected persons, arrest procedures for the nonmilitary persons, and developing educational campaigns for venereal disease. These points specify that all infected persons, whether military or civilian, must have their names reported to the appropriate agency and they needed to supply the name of the person that infected them. For civilian women, any member of law enforcement in the U.S. could arrest them not only based on being named but also on suspicion of prostitution. The police arrested women for suspicion of prostitution based on other charges such as vagrancy, disturbing the peace, and intoxication; as these were charges associated with prostitution. This implementation of the law saw that any woman suspected of nonconformist behavior was treated as a prostitute even if they were not. All women arrested on suspicion of prostitution had to be tested and quarantined until the results returned.

In 1941 the Office of Community War Services created the S.P.D. to help enforce the Eight Point Agreement. This new division, led by Eliot Ness coordinated with local officials to reduce prostitution and venereal disease using the threat of the May Act as a consequence. The May Act, passed July 1941, made prostitution within five miles of a military base illegal and

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<sup>33</sup> Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki- Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II*, (New York: New York University Press: 2008) 165.

<sup>34</sup> Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki- Wackies, and Patriotutes*, 167.

those involved charged with war crimes. The Eight Point Agreement signified a joining of state and federal agencies to combat the issue of venereal disease and the May Act provided the legal right to conduct investigations into these situations. These points indicate the official start of federal involvement in the suppression of prostitutes and women.

### The Internal War

The relationship between venereal disease and prostitution in New Orleans were recognized by concerned citizens and by federal agencies operating within the city. Agencies such as the United States Public Health Service, U.S.P.H.S, expressed anxiety over these issues in reports such as the one the U.S.P.H.S issued in June, 1941. This report relayed the thoughts of the New Orleans community on the current prostitution situation in the city. The U.S.P.H.S wanted a deeper understanding of the issues of prostitution and venereal disease as part of their pre-war planning to prevent a venereal disease epidemic. A member of the U.S.P.H.S noted “this condition [current state of prostitution] reflects not only the machinations of a strong political machine led by Mayor Maestri but also the opinions of a substantial group of citizens who look upon their city where . . . prostitution is normal.”<sup>35</sup> A member of the Social Hygiene Committee who also served as a newspaper editor, explained that he was “anxious to take any steps to protect the military men but stated frankly that he saw little use in closing down the existing houses which were a major attraction to conventions and the like.”<sup>36</sup> He went on to say that New Orleans acted patriotically when it created the health clinics and prophylactic stations

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<sup>35</sup> In a separate interview a Louisiana State Health official alluded to a “ring” of prostitutes that traveled statewide. The F.B.I denied this allegation. T.E. Bracken, “Memorandum from T.E. Bracken” RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Bracken, “Memorandum from T.E. Bracken,” 2.

to help fight disease. This particular interview shows that the fight against prostitution became a patriotic one.

Even in 1941, there was a sense that the troops needed protection from venereal disease and it was the responsibility of Americans on the home front to protect them from these disease-carrying women. In the U.S.P.H.S. report several interviews discussed the role of law enforcement in prostitution repression. Some people thought the police were ready to take an active role while others were of the opinion that the police would continue with business as usual. There were rumors that the police were bribed to ignore prostitution. Throughout the interviews, there was a consensus that prostitution held a stable place in New Orleans and the health clinics were the extent of the repression. The interviews provide crucial insight to the apathetic nature of the New Orleans community. The interviews show that New Orleans needed outside pressure from the federal government to rid the city of prostitution and venereal disease.

The internal war against venereal disease started before there was action on the battlefield. War was inevitable and the City Health Board began to discuss how to keep New Orleans safe from a venereal disease epidemic. The minutes from their meetings in 1941 described the plan of two doctors to open a venereal disease clinic and employ case finders to help identify those in need.<sup>37</sup> The clinic represented an attempt to treat disease; it was not an interference with how prostitution functioned in the city. Dr. John Whitney, the Director of Health, also stated that he was going to enlist the help of the Federal government to help finance the clinic. In addition to treatment options, the City Health Board discussed the new Army

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<sup>37</sup> These were Dr. John Whitney, the director of health and Dr. Boni DeLaurel. Also involved in the discussion of venereal disease was Dr. F.R. Gomila. City Health Board Minutes. April, 1941. Louisiana Collection/City Archives. New Orleans Public Library.

Prophylactic Station at the Old Court Building. These discussions prove that offensive maneuvers against venereal disease began before the war officially started.<sup>38</sup>

In a later meeting, the Health Board discussed female prostitution as the source of venereal disease which was congruent with the Eight Point Agreement. At the new clinic, Dr. Whitney wanted to institute a monitoring program of prostitutes. Whitney stated “Investigators will check prostitutes by working with landladies; they will check with private physicians and furnish him with laboratory records, and if any prostitute should stop treatment, the investigators will go after her and see that treatment is resumed.”<sup>39</sup> Whitney thought that with the close scrutiny of female prostitutes, all venereal disease cases could be fully treated and an epidemic avoided.<sup>40</sup> The fight against venereal disease during World War II only focused on women and their behavior as carriers of disease. There was no scrutiny or punishment for men who solicited prostitutions or tested positive for venereal disease. The repression program implemented in New Orleans, and throughout the country, blamed women as the carriers of venereal disease and therefore became a threat to national security.

New Orleans’ reputation caused some concern with health officials, but there seemed to be no push from local, federal, or the military groups to address prostitution in the city on the eve of World War II. Everything changed, however, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and America’s official entrance into the war. The United States began the internal war on venereal disease which now included New Orleans courtesy of Col. Halloran. The exchange cited in the opening paragraph between Col. Halloran and Mayor Maestri happened in January, 1942 just weeks after America’s official entrance into World War II. Maestri effectively ignored

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<sup>38</sup> Both the health clinic and the prophylactic station were part of Mayor Maestri’s campaign promises in his bid to become Mayor.

<sup>39</sup> City Health Board Minutes. August 12, 1941. Louisiana Collection/City Archives. New Orleans Public Library.

<sup>40</sup> After August, 1941 the minutes are either lost or do not follow up on venereal disease. The records then jump to February 10, 1942.

Halloran's request to clean up New Orleans by pushing the matter onto Chief of Police Reyer, whom was known to ignore prostitution situation. This prompted Halloran to inform the Commanding General of the Fourth Corps Area that the Federal Security Agency and the Social Protection Division needed to investigate prostitution in New Orleans.<sup>41</sup> Halloran added that one of his officers conducted an investigation in New Orleans and the findings were "that houses of prostitution . . . were being run with the full knowledge of the Police Department and their present location set by the Police."<sup>42</sup> Halloran did not trust the city's officials to rectify the situation and sought federal assistance. This appeal by Halloran for help shows that there was little hope that New Orleans would repress prostitution and venereal disease on its own.

The United States Army took the threat of a venereal disease outbreak in New Orleans seriously and took immediate action. The Adjutant General of the Fourth Army Corps requested the S.P.D. look into the matter. Eliot Ness requested information about New Orleans from the regional supervisor Whitcomb H. Allen who compiled a brief, initial report. The report stated that New Orleans was not an "urgent problem" due to the low number of soldiers in the city, compared with the rest of Louisiana, in early 1942. There was the additional problem of "the political ramifications of the New Orleans situation justified a delay in any activity on our part in that area."<sup>43</sup> Before Col. Halloran's letter, the S.P.D. felt that there were areas at greater risk for venereal disease outbreak than New Orleans but Halloran's letter and the subsequent involvement of the Army changed that. It showed the S.P.D. that New Orleans was a vital part of repression in the United States. The Army and the S.P.D. "agreed that the city of New Orleans has considerable propaganda value . . . it has always been popularly identified as the

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<sup>41</sup> The Fourth Army Corps based in Atlanta, GA was in charge of operations in Louisiana. In 1943, there was a reorganization of the Army and Louisiana became part of the Eighth Corps Area.

<sup>42</sup> G.M. Halloran, "Letter to Fourth Army Corps," February 3, 1942, RG 215, Community File, Box 120.

<sup>43</sup> Whitcomb Allen, "Letter to Ness on New Orleans, Louisiana," February 9, 1942, RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 1.

mecca for prostitutes.”<sup>44</sup> The reputation of New Orleans as a city of easy virtue persuaded the Federal Government to single out the city for a repression program. The Fourth Army Corps urged an investigation into New Orleans and Allen set up a tentative plan that included a letter from the Director of the Federal Security Agency to Maestri to show the seriousness of the S.P.D. meeting. The end of the report from Allen reveals the greatest threat that federal intervention posed to city officials; Allen told Ness that there was a possibility of an invocation of the May Act in New Orleans.<sup>45</sup> The threat of an F.B.I. investigation into every facet of New Orleans life forced the city to become, however reluctantly, involved in the repression program implemented by the S.P.D. The military used the resources of the S.P.D. to begin the internal war on New Orleans and singled out the city to become a symbol of reform.

The government needed to convince New Orleans that the war effort was more important than the local economy’s dependence on prostitution. The reputation as the City of Sex helped New Orleans become a tourist destination and tourism became one of the sources of income for residents.<sup>46</sup> The U.S. military and the S.P.D. knew that prostitution reform would not be effective in New Orleans without support from the local government. The S.P.D. excluded the New Orleans officials because of the rumored involvement of some officials in the prostitution trade.<sup>47</sup> They decided to persuade Maestri to do his patriotic duty. The Conference agreed “it is common knowledge that although he has reputedly had business relationships with vested

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<sup>44</sup> Fred Kearney, “Conference with Fourth Corps Area Officials,” April 18, 1942, RG 215, Louisiana (Region X), Box 120, 1.

<sup>45</sup> An invocation of the May Act included a full investigation by the F.B.I. This type of investigation would not bode well for New Orleans if the political rumors were true.

<sup>46</sup> “The assumption is quite general that the citizens of New Orleans would not be too receptive to a program of repression since they consider the maintenance of the status quo of prostitution as an asset in attracting not only members of the Armed forces but also other tourist trade.” Fred Kearney, “Conference with Fourth Corps Area Officials,” April 18, 1942. 2

<sup>47</sup> The process for handling May Act investigations usually included city and state officials to organize the repression program. The S.P.D. left out Louisiana officials in part because “the Governor had been somewhat dilatory and ineffective in handling the prostitution problem elsewhere in the state.” Kearney, “Conference with Fourth Corps Area Officials,” 2.

interests closely allied to prostitution in the past . . . [he was] not even remotely reliant upon prostitution for monetary gain.”<sup>48</sup> The Army and the S.P.D. used different tactics to persuade Maestri to adhere to a repression program. One centered on the Mayor’s health clinics that were “one of his major campaign issues during the recent election.”<sup>49</sup> Another focused around Maestri’s desire to run for governor; they believed that the repression program would help garner support. The final point focused on repression as an important, patriotic responsibility. S.P.D. representative Fred Kearney suggested “the fact that New Orleans is a strategic City from the standpoint of the prosecution of the war is an added factor which might incline the Mayor to a favorable consideration of a policy of repression.”<sup>50</sup> If the United States military changed the site of military bases and cancelled military contracts with New Orleans, the city would lose a considerable amount of money. The military and the S.P.D. knew that the success of the repression program relied upon Maestri’s involvement and the conference planned out all the details including their allies.

The internal war against venereal disease affected not only the city of New Orleans but also the state of Louisiana. The State Health Board of Louisiana discussed venereal disease during the April 10, 1942 meeting. The first issue the state of Louisiana addressed to combat venereal disease and prostitution was the legal right to arrest women suspected of prostitution. The State Health Board revised the Rules and Regulations of the Louisiana State Board of Health Act 61 of 1918, known as the Venereal Disease Act. The Venereal Disease Act provided state, city and parish medical examiners with the legal right to pursue and detain those suspected of venereal disease. This Act specifically singled out women as carriers of these diseases resulting in additional scrutiny from main stream society. According to historian Marilyn Hegarty,

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<sup>48</sup> Kearney, “Conference with Fourth Corps Area Officials,” 3.

<sup>49</sup> Kearney, “Conference with Fourth Corps Area Officials,” 3.

<sup>50</sup> Kearney, “Conference with Fourth Corps Area Officials,” 3.

“Those American women perceived as ‘sexually deviant’ became subject to surveillance, arrest, detention, forced venereal disease testing, and other invasive procedures.”<sup>51</sup> By labeling all women as carriers of disease, it exposed women to government scrutiny on their private lives and what society deemed acceptable. It gave government officials the legal right to apprehend, examine, detain, transport, and isolate women suspected of having venereal disease. The Act specified that if a suspected person refused an examination; they could be arrested and tried in court. The Act also gave medical examiners the right to quarantine anyone with a communicable disease until cured.<sup>52</sup> The internal war against women quickly gained footholds in the legal arena, in this instance through the Health Code that allowed those in the repression movement to target women as carriers of disease.

After the decision to use New Orleans as a poster child of repression, unbeknownst to the city itself, there was a certain amount of pressure to get Mayor Maestri to commit to the plan. In March of 1942, Maestri promised the S.P.D. in his correspondence, that he would support a plan to repress prostitution and venereal disease in New Orleans. However, by mid - April, Maestri had not met with either Whitcomb Allen or Fred Kearney as planned. Kearney reported, “As far as I have been able to ascertain, he has been away from the city practically the whole time since we saw him on March 19.”<sup>53</sup> Allen and Kearney attempted both written communication and telephonic communications with the Mayor and were told he was not ‘in the City.’ The need to meet with Maestri and begin repression measures stemmed from pressure from the S.P.D. and the U.S. Army. With Maestri unavailable the repression program stalled. A letter dated on

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<sup>51</sup> Marilyn E. Hegarty, “Patriot or Prostitute?: Sexual Discourse, Print Media, and American Women during World War II,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 10 no. 2 (Summer 1998), 121.

<sup>52</sup> Several months later the Health Board goes back and revises the Act. The revision now read, “The change above gives the Health Officer authority to quarantine any person whom he may suspect of having a venereal disease without that person’s first being arrested and going through trial.” The implications of taking away people’s rights in trying to keep America safe by keeping the military men safe.

<sup>53</sup> Fred Kearney, “Supplemental to Allen’s Memorandum,” April 15, 1942. RG 215, Louisiana (Region X), Box 120



April 15, 1942, from a member of the U.S.P.H.S. cited a dire situation related to him by someone in New Orleans. The letter exclaimed:

New Orleans is as wide open as ever. . . . Far worse than the houses are the out and out sluts who tramp the streets and will operate in any alley for a dollar. . . . Such girls should be drafted and put in ammunition factories along with the hundreds of girls in these bars who lives are as worthless as one more piece of Florida sand.<sup>54</sup>

These types of visceral reactions encouraged the S.P.D. to apply pressure to Maestri. The need for repression in New Orleans became more urgent as reports arrived in Washington, D.C.

There was change in the air in the spring of 1942 and the repression movement began to make changes to situation of prostitution in New Orleans. In a meeting in April, the S.P.D learned that New Orleans banned all members of the military from entering houses of prostitution.<sup>55</sup> This was a sound plan to help reduce the amount of venereal disease amongst the men of the military. However people found a way around it, “Many of the uniformed men, through collusion with go-betweens and the operators of houses, resorted to a number of subterfuges which made it possible for them to continue.”<sup>56</sup> One of these “subterfuges” included clothing rental shops opening next to brothels so military members could rent civilian clothes to enter the establishments out of uniform. Some taxi cab drivers also rented out civilian clothing

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<sup>54</sup> R.A. Vonderlher, “Excerpt from Letter,” April 15, 1942, RG 215, Louisiana (Region X), Box 120, 2.

<sup>55</sup> “This plan, however, did not prove effective and was discriminatory against soldiers and sailors. Whitcomb Allen. “New Orleans, Louisiana -- Joint Report by Fred R. Kearney, Howard M. Slutes, and Whitcomb H. Allen” August 6, 1942, RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 1.

<sup>56</sup> Whitcomb Allen, “New Orleans, Louisiana -- Joint Report by Fred R. Kearney, Howard M. Slutes, and Whitcomb H. Allen,” 1.

for uniformed men.<sup>57</sup> Due to this failure, a meeting held in July with Maestri, the health officials from the military, the Provost Marshal, and the District Director for the U.S.P.H.S decided on drastic measures. On July 14, 1942, the police “closed all known houses of prostitution, and had made the arrest of some taxicab drivers who had acted as go-betweens.”<sup>58</sup> The police closed eighty-three houses of prostitution in accordance with that mandate.<sup>59</sup> The *State Times* in Baton Rouge ran an article on July 10, 1942, “Orleans Police Open Anti-Vice Drive Over City” that reported Reyer had promised to close all houses of prostitution by the end of the week.<sup>60</sup> On July 11, 1942, the *Times Picayune* reported “Reyer Promises Cleanup of Vice Conditions Here.” In the article, Reyer explained that in the previous weeks that police and military officials arrested “a number” of prostitutes and taxicab drivers.<sup>61</sup> The military and the S.P.D. sent undercover agents to investigate and received positive results. There was hope that New Orleans was taking this threat to national security seriously.

The S.P.D. was skeptical of how the closure of the prostitution houses would affect prostitution in New Orleans. Whitcomb Allen reassured Ness on July 26, 1942 that there was progress in New Orleans.<sup>62</sup> The police reported that fifty women were arrested after the given date and “50-75 percent of women [left] town.”<sup>63</sup> There was evidence many of the prostitutes crossed the Mississippi River to Gretna, Louisiana because the residents of Gretna complained about these suspected prostitutes.<sup>64</sup> There was also a severe crackdown on the taxi cab drivers

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<sup>57</sup> T.A. Fears, “A Brief History of the Development of Prostitution in New Orleans with Survey in Recent Developments in Venereal Disease Control.” 6

<sup>58</sup> Whitcomb Allen, “New Orleans, Louisiana -- Joint Report by Fred R. Kearney, Howard M. Slutes, and Whitcomb H. Allen,” 2.

<sup>59</sup> In the Social Protection Division documents the prostitutes are referred to as “girls” or “inmates.”

<sup>60</sup> “Orleans Police Open Anti-Vice Drive Over City,” *State Times*. July 10, 1942.

<sup>61</sup> “Reyer Promises Cleanup of Vice Conditions Here,” *Times Picayune*, July 11, 1942. 1

<sup>62</sup> Maestri, Reyers, Eighth Naval, Provost Marshal, State Health Board, U.S.P.H.S., State Health Board officials, and other City officials attended the meeting

<sup>63</sup> Whitcomb H. Allen, “New Orleans, Louisiana” July 27, 1942. RG 215, Community File, Box 120.

<sup>64</sup> Gretna, Louisiana is directly across the Mississippi River from New Orleans, only several miles away.

that acted as go between; “the penalty inflicted has been quick and severe, which has resulted in their taking the orders seriously.”<sup>65</sup> This enforcement was the first real step in the repression of prostitution and probably one of the strictest periods in New Orleans prostitution history.

While the initial reports suggested that repression was finally in New Orleans, there was still skepticism in the community. A S.P.D. representative, Howard M. Slutes, summarized the mixed emotions of the community. Slutes reported that the military and police hoped progress would continue. According to military statistics in the S.P.D. reports, the venereal disease rates dropped which supported there was hope for success in repression. More good news came from Dr. Owen Agee of the City Health Board. He seemed to think the new military law prohibiting military men from entering drinking establishments after midnight helped with the decrease in incidents.<sup>66</sup> Some citizens were more skeptical. Slutes found some “believe the current efforts may be labelled ‘just another drive’ which will soon taper off.”<sup>67</sup> This included some health officials “who question the honest and sincerity of public officials.”<sup>68</sup> During a meeting Slutes attended with the Committee of Social Protection one topic discussed focused on the high arrest statistics. One woman questioned the high arrest rate of the black women and “wondered if the police were trying to make arrests to satisfy the persons who have pressed the issue or if they were really trying to suppress prostitution.”<sup>69</sup> One woman suggested checking the police reports to see “whether or not the police were giving protection to houses.”<sup>70</sup> Slutes pondered on whether the prostitutes that left town had returned to the city. Police Captain James Cripps supported Slutes’ theory by reporting that the police arrested twenty women between the ages of

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<sup>65</sup> Whitcomb H. Allen, “New Orleans, Louisiana” July 27, 1942.

<sup>66</sup> “Committee of Social Protection.” August 21, 1942. 2

<sup>67</sup> Howard M. Slutes, “New Orleans, Louisiana; Supplemental Field Report” August 5, 1942, Community File, Box 120, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Howard M. Slutes, “New Orleans, Louisiana; Supplemental Field Report” August 5, 1942. 3

<sup>69</sup> “Committee of Social Protection.” August 21, 1942. RG 215, Community File, Box 120. 2

<sup>70</sup> “Committee of Social Protection.” August 21, 1942, 2.

17-49 in a week's time. Cripps added that five "girls" were arrested daily on prostitution charges "because some houses reopened."<sup>71</sup> It is understandable that the community believed the repression program was superficial. There seemed to be an inability to completely close the houses of prostitution and keep the women off the streets. The eradication of prostitution in New Orleans was difficult and the community was still unsure of its ability to succeed.

The arrests of the women during the July clean up brought up an important issue about the next step for the repression program. Those in the repression movement felt the arrest procedures for prostitution charges needed change. The two main pressing problems were where to keep the women in treatment and where to keep the women awaiting test results. The City Health Board wanted the women to be quarantined in a secure facility outside the prison system. For a detention facility, there was talk at about placing all the prostitutes in a building in Algiers where they could "take those women there and cure them. . . . [before] turning them loose upon the community."<sup>72</sup> The isolation of women away from the prison population became popular, especially from local social agencies, as a way to rehabilitate the prostitutes. Social workers wanted to interview the women and provide occupational or vocational training to provide an alternate revenue source. There was hope that some of these women, with aid from the government, could become part of the war effort. Repression in New Orleans brought reform to the judiciary process in order to prevent women from returning to prostitution.

The issues over women's arrest on prostitution charges made the repression movement consider all aspects of the policies over detention, quarantine procedures, and treatment options. Along with detention, there needed to be a separate facility to test and provide the treatment. Once again, most reformers wanted to move the women out of the prison system as to better help

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<sup>71</sup> Howard M. Slutes, "New Orleans, Louisiana; Supplemental Field Report" August 5, 1942, RG 325, Box 120, 4.

<sup>72</sup> City Health Board Minutes. November 10, 1942. Louisiana Collection/City Archives. New Orleans Public Library.

redirect their habits. The Health Board had discussed this type of health clinic since 1941 and eventually found the Delgado Building at Charity Hospital. The City Health Board planned, “The building will be guarded twenty-four (24) hours per days by three (3) members of the State Police and the activities would be directed by the Venereal Disease Division of this Board.”<sup>73</sup> The Delgado Hospital operated through the City Board and two social workers would “determine eligibility of venereal patients” for rehabilitation.<sup>74</sup> For some local officials, the need to change the fundamental life styles of women arrested for prostitution pushed forth the agenda to change procedures that did not work.

While the city of New Orleans continued to arrest women on prostitution charges, the S.P.D. continued to seek to reform the city. The S.P.D. began 1943 with a venereal disease educational campaign in New Orleans. This educational campaign was the first nationwide effort to impress upon the American public how dangerous venereal disease was to the community. The campaign included information about the diseases, testing, treatment, and attempt to gain public support for repression programs.<sup>75</sup> The educational campaign consisted of newspapers articles, radio spots, posters, and public speaking events. This strategy hoped direct involvement in activities and educational information would decrease the venereal disease rates.

One sector that continued to thwart all efforts at repression was the local taxicab industry. Apparently in New Orleans, the taxicab drivers not only set up meetings with prostitutes, but also allowed the use of their cars for the trysts. “The cab driver not only gets a split with the girl, but he also charges a high price for the use of his cab.”<sup>76</sup> By the end of March 1943, Eliot Ness had enough with the issue of the taxicabs. He wrote a letter to the Chief of Taxicab Section in

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<sup>73</sup> City Health Board Minutes. November 10, 1942.

<sup>74</sup> City Health Board Minutes. November 10, 1942.

<sup>75</sup> Lester H. Herman, “Letter of Whitcomb Allen on January 27, 1943, Educational Meeting.” January 28, 1943, RG 215, Community File, Box 120.

<sup>76</sup> Eliot Ness, “Letter to Clewell Sykes.” March 30, 1943. RG 215, Community File, Box 120

Washington, D.C. to inform him of the situation in New Orleans. Ness asserted that New Orleans needed to write City Ordinances allowing the prosecution of those who did not follow the regulations of the Office of Defense Transportation. “Ness even arranged through the National Cab Association to have taxi drivers’ licenses revoked if they were found to be acting as go-betweens for prostitutes.”<sup>77</sup> An article from the *Times Picayune* in April 1943 discussed how “taxicab solicitation has grown to alarming proportions in recent months.”<sup>78</sup> The issue of taxicab drivers was a problem that continued to plague the repression program in New Orleans and highlighted the difficulties in implementing change.

The state of Louisiana showed its concern for the issue of venereal disease by holding a state conference on April 2, 1943. The conference sought to demonstrate its patriotism by repressing the “diseased prostitutes”. Governor Jones opened with “the control of venereal disease in Louisiana is essential to the public health and necessary if we are to make our maximum contribution to the war effort.”<sup>79</sup> Dr. David Brown, of the State Health Board believed a large number of prostitutes came from “all over” who were “disseminating disease to these young men who must go far to win our battles.”<sup>80</sup> Dr. Ira Schamberg of the State Health Board reiterated much of Brown’s patriotic sentiment. Dr. Schamberg pointed out that Louisiana had the fifth highest rate of venereal disease rate in the country and “as a result of venereal disease acquired in this state, over 75,000 man days were lost . . . in 1942.”<sup>81</sup> He encouraged harsher penalties for prostitution charges because “those in the prostitution racket have plenty of

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<sup>77</sup> Brandt, No Magic Bullet, 166.

<sup>78</sup> “Social Hygiene Forum Held,” *Times Picayune*, February 2, 1944

<sup>79</sup> “Conference on Wartime Venereal Disease Control” April 2, 1943. RG 215, Louisiana (Region X), Box 120, 1

<sup>80</sup> Conference on Wartime Venereal Disease Control” April 2, 1943. 4

<sup>81</sup> Conference on Wartime Venereal Disease Control” April 2, 1943. 6

money for fines.”<sup>82</sup> This conference used speakers from government agencies like the health board and the military to push the agenda of repression as a patriotic duty of every American.

All branches of the military sent members to speak at the Conference. Lieutenant Commander T.A. Fears spoke on behalf of the U.S. Navy. Fears pointed out that one of the problems with repression was that, “A large percent of the voting public endorses prostitution.”<sup>83</sup> He addressed the issue that many families would rather see infected military men with prostitutes instead of their daughters. Though this line of his speech seemed to support prostitution not repression. Fears presented the statistic that out of 820 persons arrested for prostitution, 80% were infected. Fears then discussed how these diseases spread so rapidly. “It is not uncommon for a prostitute to have 40 to 50 contacts in one night.”<sup>84</sup> Fears ended his speech with an appeal for law enforcement to uphold the statutes in place for the prosecution of these women and to protect the members of the military. Major William Summer, a member of the Army’s medical corps, stressed the importance of days lost due to treatment of venereal diseases. Major Summer stated that venereal disease was a condition of the civilian population and that, “All venereal disease in the military forces are acquired from civilians.”<sup>85</sup> He noted that the Eighth Service Command, which encompassed New Orleans, had the highest rate of venereal disease in January 1943. Captain Cranville Larimore from the Air Corps began with the statistic that their command lost 27,000 days and \$75,000 due to treatment of venereal disease.<sup>86</sup> All individuals found infected were grounded due to the chemical makeup of the treatment. The ramifications of a grounded pilot signaled not only a loss of man power but also a loss of time and money.<sup>87</sup> The

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<sup>82</sup> Conference on Wartime Venereal Disease Control” April 2, 1943. 6

<sup>83</sup> Conference on Wartime Venereal Disease Control” April 2, 1943. 10

<sup>84</sup> Fears mentioned he counted 115 men outside a house of prostitution on night. This would make the number of contacts right based on the number of women inside. Conference on Wartime Venereal Disease Control,” 11

<sup>85</sup> Conference on Wartime Venereal Disease Control” April 2, 1943. 7

<sup>86</sup> Conference on Wartime Venereal Disease Control” April 2, 1943. 12

<sup>87</sup> Conference on Wartime Venereal Disease Control” April 2, 1943. 12

Conference stressed the importance of educating everyone on the dangers of venereal disease and the continued efforts to arrest prostitutes. Each speaker spoke earnestly about protecting the military from venereal disease so that they could go fight the war. The internal war on prostitution was the patriotic duty of every American and the conference in Baton Rouge reminded every one of the importance of repression.

By June of 1943, however, there were several instances of the New Orleans prostitution trade operating with limited interference from repression personnel. S.P.D. representative Lester Herman wrote about several new problems. Herman discussed that the Provost Marshal would not declare any establishment “out of bounds” for servicemen. Herman informed the Provost Marshal that this policy of restricted access worked in other places, but Morgan insisted that the men would find the prostitutes in another area. The second problem Herman addressed was a rise in venereal disease numbers in black servicemen and black prostitutes. In February 1943, twenty-six white and seventy-three black prostitutes were named as contacts by the military. By March 1943, servicemen named thirty-one white and 202 black contacts. The S.P.D. singled out Rampart Street as an area where most of the black prostitutes worked. The women rented rooms instead of using fixed locations like the houses Cripps closed in 1942.<sup>88</sup> This seems to be the only contrast made between black and white prostitutes in the S.P.D. reports.<sup>89</sup> Herman found that the police arrested “several” of the landlords but there were no convictions.<sup>90</sup>

In addition to the landlords, another source of subterfuge emerged within the legal system. A new law stated that bail bonds for women arrested on prostitution charges needed to use real estate as collateral. A lawyer named Augustus Williams began to defend prostitutes and

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<sup>88</sup> It seems many of these women worked in and around Rampart St. which is three streets away from Bourbon St. in the French Quarter.

<sup>89</sup> There is not much concrete information on how the black prostitutes operated their trade in comparison with white prostitutes.

<sup>90</sup> Lester H. Herman, “Supplementary Report -- New Orleans, Louisiana” June 14, 1943. RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 2.



post their bail based on the income of one Alfred Rickerfor.<sup>91</sup> Rickerfor had about a half of a million dollars in real estate that he used to bail out the women arrested on prostitution charges.<sup>92</sup> Rickerfor was an unsavory businessman who built his empire on illegal gains in full view of a compliant police force on both sides of the Mississippi River. It seemed that prostitution in New Orleans remained secure with the aid of people like Rickerfor despite the diligence of the repression program.

Several months later, the judicial issues over bonds remained a source of irritation for repression in New Orleans as the prostitutes continued to evade justice. It seemed the activities of Augustus Williams and Alfred Rickerfor came to the attention of Fears and his Army counterpart. The men wrote a letter to Maestri that stated “the police arrest 159 women, however, 57 were released on bond and 40 were discharged. Bonds were furnished in 47 of these cases by Gus Williams.”<sup>93</sup> Twelve women were released without examination and twenty-seven tested positive but were released before treatment. In response, the Mayor called a meeting with the military, City Health officials, and the S.P.D. and decided to uphold Ordinance 5112 from May 22, 1918. The *Times Picayune* reported “Old Law Invoked to Halt Disease” on June 30, 1943. The article explained the Mayor wanted law enforcement to this ordinance because it “calls for the immediate incarceration which lasts until the disease is pronounced cured.”<sup>94</sup> This stated that anyone suspected of being infected with venereal disease could be held until the

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<sup>91</sup> Alfred “Freddie” Rickerfor was mentioned in the newspapers during the 1930s. One article from the *Times Picayune* in October 1933 relayed the details of a murder charge. The article stated that Rickerfor was, “known to practically every member of the police force”. Another article showed Rickerfor, in March 1935 when he ran a lottery drawing, taking 8% of the nights draw for himself. “Rickerfor Calls Police Officers To Be Witnesses” *Times Picayune*. October 24, 1933. 7. “Lottery Vendors Throng ‘Drawing Night’ At Resort” *Times Picayune*. March 29, 1935. 1-2.

<sup>92</sup> Lester H. Herman, “Supplementary Report -- New Orleans, Louisiana” June 14, 1943, 3.

<sup>93</sup> Lester H. Herman, “Supplemental Report --New Orleans, Louisiana” July 12, 1943. RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 1.

<sup>94</sup> “Old Law Invoked to Halt Disease” *Times Picayune*, June 30, 1943, 15.

results came back. New Orleans tried through measures such as Ordinance 5112 to repress prostitution when it seemed that women were evading justice.

The repression movement tried to suppress prostitution while attempting to thwart the efforts of interested citizens involved in the trade and the rest of New Orleans complained it was not enough. A social worker in New Orleans on July 16, 1943 wrote to the Office of War Information revealing a dissatisfaction with the situation. She stated “the failure of the City to cooperate by action rather than words . . . is sabotaging the war effort just as effectively as any Japanese espionage.”<sup>95</sup> The social worker expressed concern over the failure of the government to repress the prostitutes and “promiscuous” girls. “These individuals, furthermore, are thoroughly disgusted with the army for permitting this situation to exist and in effect condoning the laxity of the city.”<sup>96</sup> She argued that the educational campaign was ineffective and that the city needed action. On August 4, 1943, Ness responded to the letter and said, “I can appreciate the concern . . . . But I cannot agree with her implications.”<sup>97</sup> Ness continued that the education campaign was effective and important to the repression program in New Orleans. Ness argued that “polite society” needed the information about venereal diseases because the infected are no longer just people with “low moral standards.”<sup>98</sup> The reports into and out of New Orleans often paint a contradictory picture. Some believed the repression program made a difference while others believed that not enough was done. While the S.P.D. and others thought that New Orleans tried to repress prostitution; some community members felt that the progress was not enough.

By 1944 there was a slip in the repression program and health officials voiced their concerns about the lack of progress made in New Orleans. A report from November 1943-May

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<sup>95</sup> “Memo from Medical Social Worker in New Orleans.” July 16, 1943. RG 215, Community File, Box 120

<sup>96</sup> “Memo from Medical Social Worker in New Orleans.” July 16, 1943.

<sup>97</sup> Eliot Ness, “Venereal Disease Control In New Orleans.” August 4, 1943. RG 215, Community File, Box 120

<sup>98</sup> Eliot Ness, “Venereal Disease Control In New Orleans.” August 4, 1943.

1944 provides a summary of the situation stating, “During this period there was an observable slackening in the repression program in New Orleans.”<sup>99</sup> For instance, those in charge of the examination and treatment of women arrested for prostitution found that 25% of white women and 55% of black women tested positive for venereal disease. The medical professionals “held that wholesale arrests of non-infected women did not constitute an efficient prostitution repression and control program.”<sup>100</sup> There seemed to be an improvement in the venereal disease statistics in certain cases, but the health officials wanted better venereal disease numbers.

While there were a myriad of issues with the repression program in New Orleans, the Federal Government continued to congratulate and encourage Mayor Maestri. On January 26, 1944, Ness wrote a letter to the Mayor’s office on the progress in New Orleans. The letter congratulated the Mayor on the “the high caliber of venereal disease control developed . . . the extent to which your personal leadership was instrumental in the development of such a program . . . Your efforts in this regard merit our highest commendation.”<sup>101</sup> Ness ends the letter with this statement “We go forward with the confidence that we may expect the same caliber of cooperation until the day of victory.”<sup>102</sup> This letter shows the contradictory nature of the repression program in New Orleans. Maestri received praise from the head of S.P.D. while the representatives wrote to Ness about the worsening situation. It is unclear if Ness wrote the letter to bolster the Mayor’s spirits and keep him involved in the repression program. It is clear, however, that the S.P.D. still needed the support from the Mayor’s office to continue with the repression program in New Orleans.

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<sup>99</sup> Whitcomb. Allen, “New Orleans, Louisiana, New Orleans Port of Embarkation, Naval Air Station, and Naval Base,” June 12, 1944. RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 2.

<sup>100</sup> Whitcomb Allen, “New Orleans, Louisiana, New Orleans Port of Embarkation, Naval Air Station, and Naval Base” June 12, 1944, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Eliot Ness, “Letter to Mayor Maestri” January 26, 1944. Coll 512, Box 6. Venereal Disease Control. Louisiana Collection/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.

<sup>102</sup> Eliot Ness, Letter to Mayor Maestri January 26, 1944.

While the S.P.D. sent congratulatory notes to Mayor Maestri, New Orleans officials dealt with more condemnation from the public. On February 2, 1944, the F.B.I. New Orleans branch and George Reyer received an irate letter from “Mrs. John Q. Citizen.” This letter was a critique of the repression program. In contrast to the commendation letters received by New Orleans officials, the citizens did not feel the same. “Mrs. Citizen” wrote that after hearing about a Social Hygiene Conference in New Orleans, she waited to see the outcome but saw no results. She stated that there were “houses of prostitution which are wide open in New Orleans in defiance of the law.”<sup>103</sup> She wrote:

While the press and radio are screaming for the crying need for man and woman power by both the government and private industry, numerous houses of prostitution, employing ten to twenty able bodied women as well as men as bouncers, are operating at large profits and are too busy to even know there are such thing as War Bonds.<sup>104</sup>

She continued that she would not provide addresses because “private citizens have to lay themselves wide open to the wrath of the underworld in order to have the law enforced, why should they have to pay taxes for the support of law enforcement agencies?”<sup>105</sup> She ended the letter with one address and phone number. She stated that while it is difficult to get a telephone during wartime, these houses of prostitution had no trouble getting one. There was a sense that the citizens saw no real change in the prostitution situation and expected more from the

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<sup>103</sup> John Q Citizen, “New Orleans Citywide Venereal Disease Committee.” February 13, 1944, RG 215, Louisiana (Region X), Box 120.

<sup>104</sup> John Q Citizen, “New Orleans Citywide Venereal Disease Committee.” February 13, 1944.

<sup>105</sup> John Q Citizen, “New Orleans Citywide Venereal Disease Committee.” February 13, 1944.

government. There was also sense of frustration towards law enforcement. This contradicts the congratulatory words of Ness from one month earlier and supports reports of a lax repression program.

The conditions of the repression program in New Orleans seemed to reflect the sentiment of the letter from Mrs. John Q. Citizen. Whitcomb Allen summarized an undercover S.P.D. investigation in a letter to Mayor Maestri stating “this report indicates that conditions in the City are less favorable than they have been at any time since you initiated the repression program.”<sup>106</sup> The report uncovered six houses of prostitution with about twenty-one “inmates.”<sup>107</sup> Allen disclosed that five cab companies and twenty actual drivers were identified as the people who knew where the locations and drove customers there.<sup>108</sup> Allen wrote, “I am confident that it is your intention to take whatever steps may be necessary to correct this situation . . . and have every confidence that the present unfavorable situation will be corrected.”<sup>109</sup> It is quite the juxtaposition of sentiment to read the letter from Ness three months earlier to the report from Allen. While the director praised the Mayor; the representatives call out for more reform. Maestri continued to insist he remained concerned about prostitution and agreed to a vice meeting. The *Times Picayune* covered this new surge in an article entitled, “Meeting on Vice Here is Called.”<sup>110</sup> The article interviewed Franklyn Hochreiter who remarked on the growing numbers of prostitutes and how this meeting with Maestri would produce results. The New Orleans government played a vital role in the repression program and without its support prostitution seemed to flourish which brought the S.P.D. further into local politics.

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<sup>106</sup> Whitcomb H Allen, “Letter to Mayor Maestri” March 7, 1944, Venereal Disease Control. Louisiana Collection/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, Coll. 512, Box 6.

<sup>107</sup> Magazine, Orleans, Barrone, Julius, Conti and Burgundy streets Allen, Whitcomb H, Letter to Mayor Maestri on March 7, 1944. It is assumed that the word “inmate” refers to a prostitute and perhaps implies that these women had been previously arrested.

<sup>108</sup> Whitcomb H Allen, Letter to Mayor Maestri on March 7, 1944. 2

<sup>109</sup> Whitcomb H Allen, Letter to Mayor Maestri on March 7, 1944. 2

<sup>110</sup> “Meeting on Vice Here is Called,” *Times Picayune*, March 22, 1944, 3

These negative reviews of repression in New Orleans along with high venereal disease rates prompted another round of raids by police. In the early weeks of March 1944, the police raided all the reopened houses of prostitution and their “intensified” their search for “call houses and pickups.”<sup>111</sup> A *Time Picayune* article confirmed this proactive approach by reporting, “Anti-Vice Raids Net 61 Arrests.”<sup>112</sup> The police renewed their campaign to keep the houses closed. New Orleans passed a new city ordinance for taxicabs and began to revoke cab drivers’ licenses. Also in March 1944, the S.P.D., Mayor Maestri and representatives from New Orleans judiciary system met to begin reform focused on the punitive measures and laws involved with prostitution. It is also at this time that S.P.D. encouraged Maestri to form the Venereal Disease Council which had become a popular repression strategy in other cities. The Mayor led the group with members of the community already involved in the repression program to create a more coordinated effort to reduce the numbers of venereal diseases. The Council would meet twice a month to “service as a continuing administrative body which would currently evaluate the repression and control program, recommending changes as circumstances warranted.”<sup>113</sup> New Orleans tried to take an offensive stance against prostitution and hoped that the new reforms made the difference.

While the repression program seemed to be a positive force, there was some strong critique of measures taken by the repression program. The *Times Picayune* published an article on April 5, 1944, that focused on Police Superintendent George Reyer.<sup>114</sup> This article questioned the authority of Ordinance 5112 after a complaint from the Louisiana League for the Preservation of Constitutional Rights. The League, a New Orleans based group, focused most of

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<sup>111</sup> Whitcomb Allen, “New Orleans, Louisiana, New Orleans Port of Embarkation, Naval Air Station, and Naval Base,” June 12, 1944, RG 215, Louisiana (Region X), Box 120, 3.

<sup>112</sup> “Anti-Vice Raids Net 61 Arrests,” *Times Picayune*, March 26, 1944, 17

<sup>113</sup> Whitcomb Allen, “New Orleans, Louisiana, New Orleans Port of Embarkation, Naval Air Station, and Naval Base,” 5

<sup>114</sup> “Caution Urged in Cleanup Raids,” *Times Picayune*, April 5, 1944, 9

their attention on racially motivated and violent encounters committed by employees of the New Orleans government that violated civil liberties of local citizens. The complaint stated that the New Orleans police arrested innocent women under the Ordinance. The League argued that innocent women were detained with criminals while awaiting their test results. The League stated that it put an “unmerited black mark on their reputations.”<sup>115</sup> Reyer clarified in a *Times Picayune* article that the arrests of many of the women were the result of tips by the United States military. Maestri stated in the same article “it was not the intent of the city government to victimize any innocent women. . . . [he] admitted that in the round-up some mistakes may have been made. . . . [and] The crusade was ordered at the request of the military.”<sup>116</sup> The police reported from November 1943-March 1944 that 1,393 women were arrested on “prostitution related charges.”<sup>117</sup> There was a backlash to the amount of arrests in the community. “Immediate reverberations were felt as a result of this drive when several women stated to the press that they were not guilty.”<sup>118</sup> Several organizations in the city wrote Reyer an open letter that, “Raised questions of abuse in law enforcement.”<sup>119</sup> This continued the series of allegations towards Reyer and his police policies. While progress was made in the arrest of over a thousand women in a six month span, there was a push back from the prostitution community that created bad publicity for the repression movement.

The high number of prostitutes arrested by the police showed at least one gap in the repression program which led new measures in the judicial process. By August 1944, New Orleans created a new court review for women charged on prostitution charges with help from

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<sup>115</sup> “Caution Urged in Cleanup Raids,” *Times Picayune*, April 5, 1944, 9.

<sup>116</sup> “Caution Urged in Cleanup Raids,” *Times Picayune*, April 5, 1944, 9.

<sup>117</sup> The largest age group was 17-20. Whitcomb Allen, “New Orleans, Louisiana, New Orleans Port of Embarkation, Naval Air Station, and Naval Base,” 6.

<sup>118</sup> Whitcomb Allen, “New Orleans, Louisiana, New Orleans Port of Embarkation, Naval Air Station, and Naval Base,” June 12, 1944, 6.

<sup>119</sup> Whitcomb Allen, “New Orleans, Louisiana, New Orleans Port of Embarkation, Naval Air Station, and Naval Base,” June 12, 1944, 7.

the Venereal Disease Council. The Venereal Disease Council helped expedite new policies and procedures such as the missteps in the judicial procedures. Repression activists felt that if all prostitution cases were heard in one court under one judge, there would be less room for the women to escape justice. Therefore the matter of a designated women's court under senior Court Recorder Gaston Rose made its way to Maestri's attention. On September 8, 1944, Maestri officially gave Judge Gaston Rose the power to preside over the women's court. The *Times Picayune* described the women's court as "another link has been forged in the overall [repression] program."<sup>120</sup> The separate court would allow greater control over the prostitution cases as only one judge would oversee all prostitution charges and this allowed officials tighter control over women who eluded the justice system.

The opening of the Women's Court showed that the New Orleans Venereal Disease Council actively searched for gaps in repression and implemented solutions. The agenda from the October 1944 meeting shows how these members attempted to gain control of the prostitution situation. The first topic dealt with the type of repeat offenders seen in the Diagnostic Center. The Council wanted to decrease the amount of repeat offenders which meant addressing issues such as alcoholism and mental health issues. A year later in May 1945, Whitcomb Allen described the conditions at the Center that showed there was separation by color, but no separation by experience. Allen noted, "The hardened prostitutes, many of whom had become habitual alcoholic or drug addicts, mingled free with the teen-age girls."<sup>121</sup> In an interview, one physician mentioned there were about twenty women who the police frequently brought in and the physicians found to be reinfected.<sup>122</sup> The physician stated that these women were addicts and other than institutionalizing them, there was no place for the women to go. The

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<sup>120</sup> "Women's Court to Open Sept. 18," *Times Picayune*, September 8, 1944. 1

<sup>121</sup> Whitcomb Allen, "Report on Visit to New Orleans," May 10, 1945. RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 4.

<sup>122</sup> Whitcomb Allen, "Report on Visit to New Orleans," May 10, 1945, 4.



second topic centered on the drop-off in numbers at the Diagnostic Center. There were several reasons discussed such as the police were not current on the new procedures for the Center, low census data, and low infected population. The decrease in numbers put federal funding at risk as there needed to be a certain bed occupancy number to receive financial support. Another issue dealt with the parole of arrested prostitutes. The Council wanted a better system for parole in the belief that there would be hope for rehabilitation. There were no immediate solutions agreed upon for these topic and they occupied the Venereal Disease Council for several sessions. For every solution the Council and others in the repression program found, it seemed the prostitutes were already moving around them.

The end of 1944 saw an increase in venereal disease rates as unresolved issues plagued the New Orleans repression program. Franklyn Hochreiter from the S.P.D. wrote with an update on several recurring issues in the last few months of 1944. The situation on South Rampart Street, that the S.P.D. tried to address in February 1943, continued to present problems. An undercover report by the American Social Hygiene Association in October of 1944 showed a grave situation. The report, quoted by Hochreiter, mentioned "Law enforcement in respect to commercialized prostitution among Negroes has slipped badly."<sup>123</sup> It seemed that the prostitutes that frequented establishments on Rampart Street were quite bold in their come-ons to civilians and servicemen. According to the report "they indulge in immoral bargaining in sufficiently audible tones."<sup>124</sup> The Venereal Disease Council brought the matter to Maestri and Reyer who promised a "cleaning out" of Rampart Street. Hochreiter also reported the climbing venereal disease rates within the Navy thought to be due to the increase of servicemen in New Orleans

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<sup>123</sup> Franklyn Hochreiter., "New Orleans, Louisiana -- Interim Report." January 2, 1945. RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 2.

<sup>124</sup> Franklyn Hochreiter., "New Orleans, Louisiana -- Interim Report." January 2, 1945, RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 2.

returning from overseas.<sup>125</sup> Though there as hope that with the new Provost Marshal appointed to New Orleans that policies would change. In fact, the new Marshal set several locations “out of bounds,” a preventive measure many in the city had wanted for several years. There was great hope that this new restriction would decrease the venereal disease numbers despite the new arrivals.

In 1945, the war seemed to be almost over and everyone in New Orleans wondered what peacetime would bring to the city’s prostitution trade. The daily battles continued on the streets but there was a new concern about what would happen after the war ended. Maestri and the S.P.D. spoke with Dr. John Whitney of the City Health Board, a month after V-E Day, about continuing the repression program after the war. Whitney explained “that there was a powerful demand that houses be reopened” and there needed to be a concerted effort amongst the social agencies to continue the repression program.<sup>126</sup> Fears agreed that the population of New Orleans would favor the reopening of a “district.” He stated, “Former operators of houses of prostitution and night life places in New Orleans were watching eagerly for the termination of the war, when they expected to go back to policies of the ‘good old days.’”<sup>127</sup> The war seemed almost over and Americans desired a return to the life they knew before the war, in New Orleans that meant unregulated prostitution.

One of the “successes” of the repression program was the Delgado Clinic which provided New Orleans’ only public facility to treat venereal disease in the early 1940s. This facility became threatened with closure when the Federal Security Agency refused to pay the extremely high overhead for the maintenance considering the low numbers reported. The U.S.P.H.S

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<sup>125</sup> In this report was the update that several staff members of the Delgado Clinic were removed due to a “mismanagement” of funds.

<sup>126</sup> Allen, Whitcomb Allen, “Report on Visit to New Orleans.” May 10, 1945, RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 2.

<sup>127</sup> Allen, “Report on Visit to New Orleans.” May 10, 1945, 8.

intervened with the money so Delgado remained open. In fact, the U.S.P.H.S. began an educational campaign in March 1945 that focused on a new treatment for venereal disease: penicillin.<sup>128</sup> The *Times Picayune* reported that New Orleans was the first city to host such an event.<sup>129</sup> The use of penicillin rapidly reduced the treatment time, leading men to stop using prophylactics.<sup>130</sup> The result of this campaign saw the U.S.P.H.S. give New Orleans five billion units of penicillin, a dose was about two million units. The Delgado Hospital distributed the penicillin as part of their outpatient program.<sup>131</sup> In the first month 1,848 people received treatment.<sup>132</sup> If the Delgado Clinic closed, the public would lose their access to venereal disease treatment which could have led to an epidemic.<sup>133</sup> There was a legitimate fear that the federal influence and its money would disappear from New Orleans; leaving a booming, disease ridden, prostitution trade in its wake.

The S.P.D. became very concerned about the high numbers of venereal disease rates among the military personnel in May 1945 which indicated a rise in prostitution. These high statistics, based on military intelligence, placed the blame on the increase number of men passing through the Embarkation Station. Fears also noticed that there was a slackening in repression from the city as well as the Navy. Fears felt that the increase in the number of people combined with a lack of preventive measures, due to access to penicillin, resulted in an increase of infected men. Military officials felt “the soldier is experiencing a sense of false security concerning his

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<sup>128</sup> The specific target of this campaign was gonorrhea. Franklyn Hochreiter, “New Orleans, Louisiana -- Interim Report.” May 8. 1945, RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 6.

<sup>129</sup> “Penicillin Ready to Curb Disease,” *Times Picayune*, March 14, 1945. 15

<sup>130</sup> According to Allan Brandt, the treatment of men with venereal disease was per 1000 men=1279 days lost. As treatments developed in sophistication it became 1000 men =368 days lost.

<sup>131</sup> Hochreiter, “New Orleans, Louisiana -- Interim Report.” May 8. 1945. 6

<sup>132</sup> The demographic break down was split almost evenly between black and white, with double the amount of men to women. Hochreiter, “New Orleans, Louisiana -- Interim Report” May 8, 1945, 6.

<sup>133</sup> “The medical department concluded that without penicillin a major epidemic might have been possible; particularly as discipline broke down during demobilization.” Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 170.

promiscuous relations with women who state they have just received penicillin treatment.”<sup>134</sup>

The men and their superior felt that the risk of infection was worth unprotected sex because of the shortened quarantine time for treatment on penicillin. One of the medical officers on staff thought “they were not worried about their personnel getting venereal disease as treatment was so rapid that practically no time was lost from service.”<sup>135</sup> This concerned Fears who reinforced that after the war, there would need to be an aggressive campaign to keep prostitution rates down. In response to the increase of venereal disease rates amongst the military personnel, officials formed a Joint Army-Navy Disciplinary Control Board, as well as committees to focus on postwar New Orleans. There was great concern that the increase in venereal disease rates would continue to climb if there was no post war plan in place.

While the military dealt with their personnel, the Venereal Disease Council remained focused on the judiciary gaps in the prosecution of prostitutes. At the June meeting, the Council focused on issues such as the prosecution of madams in criminal court contrary to prostitutes who were charged in the Women’s Court.<sup>136</sup> The Council wanted quicker trial dates to circumvent the dismissal of cases or women “playing one court off of another.”<sup>137</sup> A *Times Picayune* article from 1944 stressed the quicker trial that led to jail time and not fines. The article explained, “When they [the women] merely pay a fine and are released, they return immediately to their nefarious practices and continue to be a menace to the community.”<sup>138</sup> As reiterated throughout this paper, the prostitutes and those who worked with them always seemed to find a way around the action plan from the repression program. The women used loopholes within the judicial system to avoid a trial and jail time. The constant need to reorganize the

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<sup>134</sup> Hochreiter, New Orleans, Louisiana -- Interim Report.” May 8, 1945, 3.

<sup>135</sup> Whitcomb Allen, “Report on Visit to New Orleans.” May 10, 1945. RG 215, Community File, Box 120, 8.

<sup>136</sup> Agenda Venereal Disease Council. June 25, 1945. June 25, 1945, Venereal Disease Control. Louisiana Collection/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, Coll. 512, Box 6.

<sup>137</sup> Agenda Venereal Disease Council. June 25, 1945.

<sup>138</sup> “Speedier Trials for Prostitutes” *Times Picayune*. February 2, 1944. 4

judicial process for handling prostitution cases shows that the repression program was not effective in preventing the practice of prostitution.

Just as many feared, the fall of 1945 showed the repression program losing its grip on New Orleans. Fears was reassigned to San Francisco in May 1945. As Fears was one of the staunchest supporters and an active member of the repression program, there was a huge hole in the repression movement. Allen wrote a report on October 12, 1945 summarizing an undercover investigation from August. According to the report, six brothels reopened and there was “a very formidable movement on foot by former operators and real estate owners” to reopen the houses.<sup>139</sup> The prostitutes were back to reclaim their prewar status. It also seemed that the Superintendent of Police Reyer was “losing interest in the enforcement of the program and had stated that now that the war was over the policy of the United States Government was no longer pertinent.”<sup>140</sup> The lack of support from the police combined with the diminishing support of the Federal Government led to a relaxation in repression. Despite these changes, Maestri assured S.P.D. representative Hochreiter that he wanted to continue the repression program. There seemed to be a split between what the city of New Orleans did and what they said. A *Times Picayune* article quoted Dr. John Whitney saying, “There are 37 brothels operating openly in the city, and there’s not a thing I can do about it. . . . The houses are under police control.”<sup>141</sup> The article continued that the fear of prostitution regaining previously lost ground was becoming a reality. Finally, the S.P.D. New Orleans office closed its doors on December 1, 1945. Allen wrote to Maestri that the S.P.D. suffered financial cut backs and would no longer be a viable presence in the city.

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<sup>139</sup> Whitcomb Allen, “New Orleans Under-Cover Study.” October 12, 1945, RG 215 Community File Box 120.

<sup>140</sup> Allen, “New Orleans Under-Cover Study.” October 12, 1945.

<sup>141</sup> “Says 37 Houses Operate Openly” *Times Picayune*. December 25, 1945.

After World War II ended, the threat of venereal disease waned. It is unclear whether this is a result of the rapid treatment with penicillin. It could also be explained by a lack of movement of young people who settled down and began families after the war. Either way, venereal disease rates remained low until the 1960s. For New Orleans, in 1945 Maestri lost the mayoral election to deLesseps S. Morrison. This brought a new era of reform and preservation that lasted until Morrison's departure in 1961. An important part of Morrison's plan for New Orleans involved his brother Jacob Morrison and sister-in-law Mary Morrison both staunch and loyal Vieux Carre preservationists. Jacob Morrison wrote the first book on legal preservation and with his wife were active advocates in architectural preservation of the French Quarter. Post-war Americans felt a strong desire to preserve their country's past and New Orleans was not different. There was a drive throughout the city to bring more sanitary conditions and preserve the history and character of the area. While New Orleans still needed its reputation as decadent for the tourists, there was a pressing desire by citizens to clean up. The city wanted to appeal to more than just the male dominated convention traffic. By modernizing sanitary conditions and masking the uglier side of pleasure, New Orleans reinvented itself as a safe place to indulge and relax for men, women, and children.

This paper attempts to provide valuable insight into a piece of New Orleans' history that bridges one of the gaps in modern scholarship. While the history of prostitution in New Orleans is adequately covered until Storyville, the story stops in 1917. New Orleans' does not lose its reputation for decadence until the 1950s. This scholarship begins to answer at least one part of the question of what happened to prostitution after Storyville. It also addressed how many women were treated as criminals during World War II. Women were targeted as carriers of disease and they became the focus of intense scrutiny. Finally, it fills a gap of knowledge about

venereal disease during World War II. While New Orleans did not have the highest venereal disease rate in the country, it was used as an example of reform. Many repression programs were piloted in New Orleans such as the educational campaign and the penicillin treatments for civilians. The mythic image in the minds of Americans about New Orleans helped single it out as a place where repression policy could prove its worth. I am not sure if the repression program worked in New Orleans based on the constant communication between the key players about the lack of results and the constant subterfuge they encountered.

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### Vita

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