

RICHARD GREER

## Dousing Honolulu's Red Lights

PROSTITUTION IN HONOLULU antedates the town itself. This facet of the cultural scene was reflected in the new moral dispensations after 1820 and motivated various forms of discouragement. A law of 1835 forbade "illicit connections," including prostitution, and six years later a longer "Law Respecting Lewdness" (still respected by many) appeared. In 1860, an "Act to Mitigate the Evils and diseases arising from Prostitution" made its debut and for forty-five years remained the basic legislation. It provided for registration and periodic physical examination of "every common prostitute in and around the city of Honolulu." A sort of companion law proscribed the keeping of a "disorderly house . . . for the purpose of public prostitution" and set penalties therefor.<sup>1</sup>

At the turn of the century and until May 1917, a segregated red-light district flourished in Iwilei. Its forced closure brought a glow of fulfillment to moralists and to those devoted to the arduous task of saving people from themselves.

But hope is not alone in springing eternal. Within a short time, "disorderly houses" reappeared in a more easily accessible location to assuage the bestial appetites of the depraved. By the summer of 1930 the situation had "deteriorated" in an unspecified manner; one source cited a wave of sex crimes. This inspired an unofficial system

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of regulated prostitution, with the also unofficial sanction of the military. Army military police and the Navy shore patrol helped monitor it. Later the unrecorded agreement was withdrawn. The Honolulu press knew about all this and apparently agreed with authorities that "silence was a policy in the best public interest."

In January 1932, a special session of the legislature had as its chief objective an overhaul of law enforcement agencies. Its first act created a five-member police commission. An interim chief served briefly, but on August 9 William A. Gabrielson took office (he lasted until May 31, 1946). Gabrielson had been brought from Berkeley, California, as a police instructor. Of the nine divisions eventually formed, only the vice division reported directly to the chief.

During the restructuring of the police force, the houses closed for a few days. About the same time "leading Honolulu women" backed a move to make the closure permanent, but they and subsequent reformers failed to get a grip on the doors. Later, in 1932, General Briant H. Wells, commanding the Hawaiian Department of the United States Army, asked for a plan to regulate prostitution. The one developed was "Based on the premise of an economic control of the vice. . . ." All girls had to live in the houses where they worked; no white girls were allowed on the other side of River Street. The Army, Navy, and civilian police picketed any house violating the rules, and no man could enter it. According to the agreement, the civil police regulated prostitution "with full cooperation by the Army and Navy." Everything was okay excepting instances when the Army or Navy refused to help close a house.

In March 1934, the *Paradise of the Pacific*—a title betraying a dogged determination to deny reality—had to fess up that something was amiss. It attacked certain "quarters" that charged an "unholy alliance" between police and houses of ill fame. The culprits were politicians demanding a grand jury investigation. After all, said the magazine, prostitution "has long since been regarded as a necessary evil!" Besides, Honolulu had a large proportion of "unattached men"—some twenty thousand unmarried military and between sixty thousand and seventy-thousand Filipinos. It was much better to have this substitute for true love regulated "than to endure the chaotic conditions that have been the portion of Honolulu in recent years." So lay off and let the police "go ahead with regulation." The charge of col-

lusion was said to be "utterly ridiculous." This points up the system used to enforce regulations before 1937. It was a cooperative effort of the three police forces. Since that date the police had prescribed no rules of operation, leaving the entire matter to the "landladies," who were responsible for running the houses in a way that would prevent complaints. No liquor was to be used or given away, no girl was allowed to use narcotics, and all girls had to live in the houses in which they worked, though they were free to transfer from one house to another. No pimps were allowed. Sections 5710, 6257, and 6310 of the revised laws of Hawai'i 1935 spelled it out. A further Act of July 1941 provided that "where local officials were unable or unwilling to do the job, the federal government would stamp out any and all prostitution aimed at servicemen."<sup>2</sup>

Sometime before World War II, a mainland prostitute, Jean O'Hara, enhanced the island scene. She described how the girls made it to paradise: Honolulu madams sent mail orders, usually to San Francisco, for the desired goods. Going rates were from \$500 to \$1,000, depending on a girl's age. A detective met the steamer off port and herded the girls to a receiving station—in Jean's case, the Blaisdell Hotel on Fort Street. There the vice squad laid down the rules and regulations. Punishment for infractions was banishment. The girls then went to the police station on nearby Bethel Street for fingerprints and photos, and from thence to the houses to work their shifts—usually 1 P.M. to 5 A.M. They got one day a week off. Medical exams were rare. The girls could stay in Honolulu for six months (a few were known to stay longer). Then they had to return to the mainland for at least a year.

By Jean's time and before, prostitution was a generally acknowledged feature of Honolulu. During the 1930s, a prolific travel writer, Harry A. Franck, commented on the eighteen unlicensed and "officially non-existent hotels and rooming houses," each harboring from six to ten "inmates" (a term that just wouldn't go away) from the mainland. Franck cited the "extreme liquor-forbidden orderliness" and the almost "puritanical decorum" prevailing. Visiting Caucasians enjoyed different entrances and separate receiving parlors in this very strange Hawai'i. Clients couldn't invade the private quarters—"No Man's Land"—where the girls carried on the usual feminine occupations. The "working rooms" were adequately comfortable and

hygienic. Well and good, but the girls couldn't mingle with "virtuous visitors" at Waikiki.

After May 30, 1938, houses operating in Wahiawa were closed with the Army's cooperation, but—as we shall see—they later rose from this near-death experience. Meanwhile, a September 1939 meeting of public health service, Army and Navy representatives, and the territorial health officer agreed to make the local police department responsible for the "repression" of commercialized and "clandestine" prostitution. All the above would cooperate in repressing these evils.

But they weren't repressed or even impressed. Early in May 1941, thirty-six business people of the area protested the spread of brothels up River Street between Beretania and Kukui streets. The police commission passed this hot potato to Chief Gabrielson, instructing him to make a thorough investigation. The matter would then be taken up with the city and county attorney. The chief seized this chance to say that local law enforcement groups had been commended by "high navy authorities for strict supervision and checking." Streetwalking was taboo. Although this prevented open dickering in public, other prickly issues remained. About 1962, David W. Forbes and a companion walked above Beretania Street and on College Walk on the 'Ewa bank of the stream. They came upon an abandoned two-story brick building, standing open and slated for demolition. Old coolers downstairs indicated the former presence of a commercial enterprise. Climbing the stairs, they found a huge room. Along the side walls and down the center, partitions divided off small cubicles, each furnished with an iron bedstead. There were no pictures, no detritus—nothing. Obviously the place had not been used for a long time. But near the stairwell a couple of cabinets lay tipped over, and here dozens of "falsies" littered the floor. It had been a "house"; Maili Yardley remembers seeing it when a line of sailors waited their turn.<sup>3</sup>

Victor S. K. Houston, formerly Hawai'i's delegate to Congress, took a seat on the Honolulu Police Commission in July 1941. Almost immediately he began a vigorous campaign to close the long-tolerated houses; on September 26 he delivered to the commission a twenty-two-page report detailing the situation. His inventory listed sixteen houses in Honolulu and three other brothels in which girls worked but did not reside, plus other establishments in Wahiawa. He gave names and addresses of the pleasure palaces, names of the madams,

names of property owners, the capacity of each brothel, and the number of girls employed—a total of 203. The city and county licensed these places as “rooming houses” and their inmates as “entertainers”—fee, \$1. Houston asserted that Gabrielson had said “in substance” that he couldn’t act because he couldn’t get evidence acceptable to courts. Apparently, a grand jury considered the prostitution question on several occasions without any indictments. Houston’s reaction: “It must be assumed that they are satisfied to let the commission and the police share the responsibility for violating the law.” The police share involved supervision of an industry pulling in four or five million dollars a year, without any reports being required.

At this time military personnel and imported workers totaled an estimated fifty thousand. Houston declaimed: “The utter absurdity of 203 women servicing 50,000-odd men is evidence on its face.” The great influx following the war’s outbreak dramatically raised the absurdity quotient. The prostitutes’ labors—serving upward of one hundred men a day each—put them in the neighborhood of the British Royal Air Force extolled by Winston Churchill: “Never . . . have so many owed so much to so few.” Houston didn’t endorse the obvious expedient of importing more prostitutes, but he did voice what was perhaps the year’s least surprising revelation: “I have reports from individuals that persons who frequent these tolerated houses are not always careful of the proprieties.”

Digging into police files, he came up with a couple of unsigned and undated memos. One defended the status quo, “it being recognized that while [prostitution] cannot be prevented it can be regulated and controlled.” The other outlined required medical procedures: Every new prostitute arriving in the Islands immediately had a culture taken, slide, and Wasserman test by either the Board of Health or the Queen’s Hospital. Anyone with an unsatisfactory slide was taken off the floor and treated until slides were negative on three successive days. Cases of positive slides or cultures were referred to the Board of Health for further procedures. On May 26, 1941, this was part of “a new set of regulations acceptable to the Army and Navy.”

Spurred by Houston’s report, the Board of Supervisors in mid-October asked for a cleanup of notorious hotels and boarding and rooming houses that were nothing more than brothels. It then presented a resolution to the territorial legislature meeting in special ses-

sion. It requested a thorough investigation. In both houses, the resolution was last seen disappearing behind committee doors. The Police Commission itself was equally helpful. When Houston defended his effort, the commission deferred action. Member A. D. Castro urged delay: "I don't think I know enough about prostitution. For ten years I've been studying it but there's certain information I lack." A master of slow learning; perhaps for a modest fee Castro could have deepened his insight quickly. Apparently, a determined Houston continued his campaign but found that getting action was "like nailing jelly to a wall." His crusade ended in January 1942 when he was ordered to active duty in the Navy.

The prewar health inspection requirement complemented a strict code of conduct. The girls could not "visit Waikiki Beach, patronize any bars or better-class cafes, own property or an automobile, have a steady boyfriend, marry service personnel, attend dances, ride in the front seat of a taxi with a man in the back, wire money to the mainland, telephone the mainland without the madam's permission, change from one house to another, be out of the brothel after 10:30 at night," go to theaters or bowling alleys, be on golf courses, or ride bicycles. Their only recreational activity was an occasional supervised outing. They could swim only at Kailua beach.

Many years later, Colonel Frank Steer had this to say: "Practically all were haoles, Mainland people. It was a white slave sort of thing. I don't think anybody came out here against her wishes," but "somebody was organizing it." Local police were involved. A certain lieutenant "always met the boats and assigned the girls to whatever houses they were to go." They were whisked away immediately and usually stayed from a few months to one or two years.

In 1941, Dr. William P. Snow of New York visited Honolulu to study the situation and inspect the houses, which then paid rents ranging from \$200 to \$500 a month. His verdict: He had never before seen such a common-sense setup and was astonished at the low venereal disease rate among Army and Navy personnel.

On December 7, 1941, martial law took over. The commander of the Army's Hawaiian Department, Lieutenant General Walter C. Short, became the military governor. His executive, Colonel (later General) Thomas Green, ran the show from 'Iolani Palace. Civilian courts closed, and military provost courts under Steer's oversight

administered justice. Brian Nicol interviewed Colonel Steer and asked a loaded question: "Was it pretty fair, or strict?" Steer's reply: "It was pretty strict. I'd say it was damn strict," and gave a couple of examples. It was damn strict.

The houses closed on December 7, 1941, and for a few days thereafter. They reopened under Steer's jurisdiction. The bombs of Pearl Harbor converted many of the prostitutes into war workers. A number of the houses offered quarters to evacuees; the girls cooked and did housekeeping chores. Lieutenant General Delos C. Emmons, who had replaced Short, decided to lift all restrictions. The prostitutes "could do anything they wanted as long as they did their business in the brothel." Thus encouraged, girls moved out into the community.

J. Garner Anthony, attorney general from October 1942 to December 1943, was a dedicated opponent of military government. He charged that at war's outbreak a "substantial number" of prostitutes were brought to Honolulu from the mainland under military priorities—a common rumor—and that under military government prostitution "flourished." He also averred that when the Army rescinded the outside residence ban prostitutes scattered throughout the city and in some cases transmogrified their new quarters into brothels. Steer denied this.<sup>4</sup>

In April 1942, Gabrielson and the military clashed over the removal of prostitutes living in Waikiki. Gabrielson's men ordered them to go. A Captain Benson of the military police told them they could stay. Shortly thereafter, Steer, Gabrielson, and three members of the Police Commission met in the chief's office. Steer said that civil police should refer to him all matters relating to prostitution. Gabrielson then issued an order putting the military in control of the vice district. General Emmons refused and tossed the job back to the chief. Even so, military police continued to tell the girls and the madams that they still ran the show and set up rules to govern vice-district activities. To straighten out this mess, Emmons asked in July for a meeting with the Police Commission. A written plan revised somewhat by Emmons resulted. It was much like the police plan in effect before December 7; the main difference was that the girls could live outside the houses with the commission's approval. On or about August 1, 1942, the commission became the regulatory agency though realizing that the civil police couldn't control the vice problem without "the



full cooperation of the Army," which would have to be willing to close a house when requested.

On August 28, the girls turned on the heat with a strike that lasted twenty-two days. They carried signs stating their grievances and picketed the police station and 'Iolani Palace. Their main desire: permission to live away from the regulated house when off duty. Before the war, their working day ran from twelve to fourteen hours, making it impractical to live elsewhere. But in recent months the houses opened at 7 or 8 A.M. and closed at noon when the bars fired up and rowdiness started. Now the prostitutes were trying to gain basic freedoms. They had already abandoned their attempts to raise brothel fees from \$3 to \$5 when faced with Steer's edict: "The price of meat [is] still three bucks." Original commission plans put "off limits" such districts as Nu'uaniu above Judd Street, Mānoa above Wilder Avenue, Makiki, Waikiki, Diamond Head, and Kāhala. In the end, the commission capitulated. The press carried nary a word about the strike.

The authors of *Social Protection in Hawaii* showed loss of contact with their environment when they asserted there was no evidence of graft. Although no one was ever charged with taking money from the brothels, graft there was. Jean O'Hara wrote that madams paid the vice squad \$50 a month for each girl. A friend who was a member of the force in Gabrielson's time recalls that while the old-timers had little or nothing to say, younger officers openly discussed the various corrupt practices in vogue. And Colonel Steer, offered the chief's job when Gabrielson resigned, said he'd take it if allowed to "kick all the crooks off the police department" and estimated the number as about two hundred. According to Steer, the job "At the time . . . was paying about \$10,000 and all you could steal." In the end, Colonel Steer, a man of sterling honesty and integrity, said in effect, "Include me out."

In August 1943, J. E. Thornton was the special agent in charge of the FBI's Honolulu office. He offered a fresh if not reassuring perspective in his claim that Honolulu prostitution was a "big racket largely in the hands of ex-convicts." After tossing around the required statistics (one of which was that for girls under twenty-one prostitution was up 64 percent), he said that the white slave traffic was a closely related activity. Here he hit pay dirt. In Cleveland, Ohio, seven men were indicted under the Mann Act for operating a white slave syndicate with a branch in Honolulu. Thirteen women who had fled after



the Pearl Harbor attack were held as material witnesses. Girls recruited in Ohio were relayed to houses in Honolulu and other cities.<sup>5</sup>

While all this was going on, civilian courts gradually regained power. On January 27, 1942, they experienced "further reopening." But jury trials, grand juries, and writs of habeas corpus were verboten. On September 2, 1942, civil courts were authorized to resume most normal functions. Still no habeas corpus. On February 8, 1943, General Emmons restored to territorial and U.S. district courts jurisdiction over criminal and civil cases, excepting criminal and civil proceedings against members of the armed forces and criminal prosecutions for violation of military orders. On October 24, 1944, under Lieutenant General Robert C. Richardson, Jr., who had replaced General Emmons on June 1, 1943, martial law in Hawai'i was formally abolished.

According to Anthony, when civil government was "partially restored" on February 8, General Emmons had tried to persuade the governor to take over the "function" of regulating prostitution. But Ingram M. Stainback refused. On the outer islands, George F. Larsen administered stronger medicine. In April 1942, Larsen, in his capacity as police chief, closed the houses on Maui. Later he held the same office on Hawai'i Island and continued his Larsenous conduct by applying his remedy there in March 1944. On O'ahu, it wasn't so simple.

An outfit called the Honolulu Council of Social Agencies, surveying the city's moral landscape, found a cesspool coinciding with the boundaries of the red light district. In 1943, the council set up a "Social Protection Committee" of some forty interested citizens. By interested, I mean devoted to closing the houses. More of this group later.

Throughout the period of regulated prostitution, the amount and spread of venereal diseases, or VD, were vital components of nearly every discussion. One point everybody had to concede: In the Armed Services, infection rates were "phenomenally low." The Board of Health reported that professional prostitutes caused about 75 percent of all new cases. The Social Protection Committee blamed them for about two-thirds of these, and "clandestine" prostitutes for about one-fourth. Governor Stainback linked VD and regulation: "The view held for many years by local authorities and many of your predeces-

sors that . . . regulated prostitution was a preventative of venereal disease was the only excuse for its toleration in this community."

There were those trying to lay the root of the evil at the doors of the regulated houses. But there were some 250 registered prostitutes in town in 1943–1944. Police always faced the nuisance of so-called amateur houses in residential areas (houses usually deracinated when objecting neighbors called for police action). The unedifying behavior of bar girls raveled moral fiber, and the Social Protection Committee noted that "clandestine" prostitutes and pick-up girls were scattered all over the city, even the so-called better districts. A number of the prostitutes had bought homes or apartments. Waikiki and St. Louis Heights were good examples of places where "independent contractors" labored. But it was not necessary to go that far afield. Right downtown opportunity knocked. Many of the young ladies checked into the Alexander Young Hotel on Bishop Street. Although certainly no brothel, the hotel was nicknamed "Love's Bakery," a reference to a long-established local business.

Although Dr. Samuel Allison wrote that the military "obstructed" every effort to repress prostitution, they were "very cooperative" in all matters of venereal disease control, as one might expect. The result is noted above. A subsidiary effect of digging into the venereal disease moraine was to uncover the stratum of lunacy that seems to underlie all such health matters, such as the fear that food handlers were spreading venereal disease. This the doctor rebutted with a great truth that "no one has ever caught gonorrhea from a piece of apple pie," a statement that served the double purpose of reassuring the worrywarts and bolstering an American culinary icon.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, in various locations, citizens were losing their appetite for something besides apple pie—namely, neighbors who were ex-inmates of the brothels. Apparently responding to complaints, police banned residential areas to prostitutes, ordering those who had been allowed for two years to maintain separate residences throughout the city to move back to the regulated houses immediately. Affected were two dozen residences and about one hundred women, or fewer than half of the Board of Health's head count of prostitutes living in town. Newspapers carried this item on August 20, 1944, a few days after the Bar Association of Hawai'i declined to become involved in the "cur-

rent controversy in regard to prostitution." Possibly nobody smelled big money.

Up in Wahiawa, near Schofield Barracks, which had the largest contingency of Army personnel, a storm gathered. Fifty property owners on the Koa Tract petitioned for relief. Two brothels operated within three doors of the community's school. Men waiting their turn roamed all over and often asked school kids for directions. There were cases of indecent exposure. Another problem: When children wanted to know why so many people went into and out of these houses, and what they did in there, they sorely taxed parental inventiveness: "Well ah um—let's go to the store and I'll get you some candy." At least one brothel was closed following the petition.

In Honolulu improper, reported to be the only U.S. city of its size to tolerate open houses in defiance of local and federal law or national military policy, an estimated yearly income of the twenty-odd requested houses totaled between ten and fifteen million dollars, about equal to the prewar tourist trade. The girls averaged around \$25,000 a year, and madams approximately \$150,000. These figures were widely quoted. But Jean O'Hara would have thought them inadequate. Her comment was: "Honolulu has always proved a veritable gold mine for the prostitutes and the 'madams.'" She cited one of the latter who paid \$60,000 for her house (for lease and "good will") but in little more than a year owned \$100,000 in Waikiki property and an equal amount in jewels. Many houses showed a net profit of \$25,000 a month, although during the war none could have more than thirty girls. Very few of these made less than \$100 a day, and some earned more than \$300. A girl could make all she wanted, since a line of men always waited. While living on Pacific Heights, O'Hara checked into the Midway Hotel, "a good spot" with eighteen girls, where she sometimes topped \$300 a day. Of the \$3 charge, the madam took \$1 off the top; the prostitute paid for room, board, and laundry from her \$2 cut. Before the war, nearly all the girls were mainlanders, but after December 1941 increasing numbers of locals entered the trade. Most of the houses were in an area bounded by Kukui, Nu'uanu, Hotel, and River streets. Customers paid \$3 for three minutes, raised to \$5 in houses with no color bar. On any morning, one could see dozens of men in line or standing in the alleys await-

ing their turn. Most houses operated officially from 8 A.M. to noon. Upstairs (always upstairs) rooms might be rented to girls for \$25 to \$75 a day, or the madam might have the girls using two or three rooms in turn and being served by maids. Downstairs the pestering shoeshine boys plied their trade. Most of them congregated in the Army and Navy YMCA area, a few blocks away on Hotel Street, but there were plenty to go around—more than 1,375 roamed the streets. Ages ran from six to sixteen, with most in the ten- to twelve-year-old range. Outside the brothels they joked with the soldiers and sailors in line about their “prospective experiences.”<sup>7</sup>

This was the “vice district” targeted by the Honolulu Council of Social Agencies, its Social Protection Committee, Island clergy, and certain public officials and “community leaders.” There was also a citizens’ group of unknown magnitude whose moving spirit was businessman J. M. Cummings, a sic ’em type. The fate of the houses had been debated for several months when a six-week concerted drive against them began. The clincher was a choke hold on the military administered by the Honolulu Council of Social Agencies, which wrote to Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander in chief, Pacific Ocean Area, Rear Admiral V. R. Furlong, and General Richardson requesting them to state their position regarding enforcement of territorial laws against prostitution. So what could they say—“We love these good ol’ brothels and everything they stand for”?

On September 10, 1944, Governor Stainback sent the following to Ferris F. Laune, the council’s secretary: “I agree with you that the letters from the commanding officers showing a present disposition on their part to cooperate with the police in enforcing laws against prostitution puts a different complexion on the matter. I have, therefore, requested the Police Commission to take steps to close and keep closed the existing houses of prostitution in the City and County of Honolulu.”

The governor wrote to the commission the same day, telling the members to get with it, and took a final swipe at the military:

Immediately after the outbreak of war prostitution increased in Honolulu and was allowed to spread out of the districts in which it formerly was segregated. As this occurred during the period of military control of law enforcement, during which time there was maintained a control

system based neither on suppression nor segregation of prostitution, it was thought that the military authorities were not prepared to cooperate in measures to suppress prostitution. Without that cooperation an enforcement program could not succeed on Oahu, since police forces do not exist in sufficient numbers to handle men of the armed forces resorting to such houses.

The governor's close involvement resulted from acts of the 1943 legislature. These ended city and county jurisdiction over the police. Power to appoint the Police Commission passed from the mayor to the governor. The city and county, however, continued to pay police and financially maintain the department. After the changeover, the commission did continue to consult the mayor and the Board of Supervisors.<sup>8</sup>

Now the axe was poised. Word on impending vice squad visits raced through the district. The Police Commission met with Gabrielson at 10 A.M. on September 21 and instructed him to close the houses. An hour later, Captain Ed Hitchcock and his men started to make the rounds of Honolulu's fifteen active houses (one had burned down in August, one was closed in Wahiawa, and one was suspended). The message: Be closed by 2 P.M. Most of the places were practically empty. Thirty men were counted in one, and about twenty in another. Police expected little or no opposition, and such was the case.

Flashes of the girls here and there: One wore a short red apron, a short-short shirt and a pair of cowboy riding boots; one shouted "whoopee" when told she could leave the house; another one said, "I see here that this paper says we can't practice prostitution any more. Heck, I don't practice, I'm an expert." This expert was one of about 165 employed in the bordellos. The girls weren't required to move out; merely residing in a house was not unlawful.

The madams had various reactions in keeping with their circumstances. Some were well fixed, owning real estate or businesses. One, told she could turn her place into a rooming house at \$1.50 per bed per night, said she couldn't make it pay and was glad her lease protected her from "a sudden shutdown." Another, paying about \$1,000 a month on a lease with six years to go, was worried about getting a satisfactory settlement from her Oriental landlord. Several expressed concern for their girls, hoping they would have the chance to become

barmails, dancers, or taxi drivers. Yet another madam said the closing would spread prostitution throughout the city. What would all these hundreds of boys do? "Well, I guess there still are the amateurs and the back alleys," one person responded. A portly, motherly type in a Hawaiian *holokū* said, "Okay, boys, now I can go home and take care of Papa. We'll be closed right up. Thanks for everything." A madam on Smith Street said she would have a lot of furniture to sell, "and all of this swell bedroom stuff." One comment summed it all up: "Well, we really got no kick coming. We have been well treated in Honolulu."

The day after the closing, the *Honolulu Advertiser* bore this headline: "Community, Clergy Rejoices in Move against Prostitution"—a statement that met nearly every desirable criterion except truth. Discussing prostitution itself, Dr. Allison cited "the polyglot population the larger portion of which was comprised of oriental races accustomed to prostitution, a preponderance of males and the presence of service personnel in large numbers. . . ." And the respected *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* editor, Riley Allen, noted that "There is an honest and deep difference of opinion among various elements of the community whether prostitution is or is not a necessary thing, particularly in a seaport such as this."

As for regulation, the basics were quite similar to those in 1901: church leaders, basking in a newfound relevance, decried the moral shame of a vice district, and vocal civic organizations and certain public officials and others pushed for radical surgery on the Chinatown cancer. But where were the street mobs, the giant protest meetings, the five-ton petitions? Instead came such comments as: "Honolulu residents were divided as to the wisdom of the action taken by the governor"; "some citizens expressed the belief that the closing of the controlled places would force the prostitutes to work in clandestine houses scattered around the city"; and average citizens' reactions to the closing "ranged from skeptical to disturbed." Many prominent people had advised "hands off." So what were the boys to do with this now-free time to kill? Dr. G. Guy Schram had a prescription ready: Take dancing lessons. Not "The abominable jive and jib," but "smooth, rhythmic dancing." He asked, "is it far-fetched to expect the teaching of [this] to our fighting forces to result in better timing,

aiming and poise in combat activities?"<sup>9</sup> The answer is yes, doc. Meanwhile the troops remained concupiscent—a condition usually described by a briefer word.

In the short term, former house inmates gave little trouble. Trying to control clandestine prostitution became the major law enforcement problem—that and dealing with the increased number of servicemen peeping toms and those indecently exposing their charms. Businessmen of the defunct vice district were more likely to expose depression. One of them lamented:

These girls have always been big spenders for jewelry and expensive clothes, cosmetics and other luxury items. One girl, and she isn't even a madam, I know spends more from \$200 to \$500 a month in my place. Last Christmas she laid \$3,000 on the line for a ring to give to her boyfriend. Why, I know one dress shop up the way which has practically lived off these girls.

Jewelers went around every week or so with watches and diamonds. The madams paid, then deducted the debts from the girls' weekly earnings.

The government took a hit, too. The tax office estimated that it would lose \$200,000 a year in the gross income take paid by the "entertainers" and their madams.

From taxes to taxis was a trip, but the story was essentially the same—financial wipeout. For years drivers had a lucrative racket. At midnight, they picked up girls from the sporting houses and took them to nearby plantations, camps, and other spots. Then in the wee hours they called back for the ride home. They charged regular fares; the bonanza came from tips of \$5 to \$20. When the houses closed, special police officers stationed at plantation entrances forbade parking of cabs bearing "ladies of the underworld."

Most of the girls planned to return to the mainland as soon as possible, leaving Honolulu's picking to others. Even then suspicious moralists were at work; they maintained that police activity against prostitutes in the neighborhoods was not too energetic. This might be a "deliberate attempt" to let the situation get so bad that residents of the "better" sections of town would demand reestablishment of a segregated district.



These people were certainly right in their basic belief that love will find a way, especially if there's a cash payoff. Less than five months after the houses closed, a prostitution ring did its thing in a parking lot not far from the police station. Male procurers solicited servicemen and referred them to girls or taxi drivers, one of whom had five years of college. Many of the "acts" took place in taxis driven slowly on the winding Tantalus Road, high above the city, which certainly offered a lot better scenery than the average brothel. For this trip the client paid \$15 to \$25 for the girl and \$5 each to the procurer and the driver. Customers willing to shell out \$100 could stay in a room from 10 P.M. to 6 A.M. The girl got \$60, the driver \$20, and the procurer \$20. Four local girls, two of them sisters, were the *pièces de résistance*. Police busted one found naked in a Waikiki hotel room with several servicemen. Fourteen people were involved. Each man got ninety days in jail. The four drivers forfeited their operators' licenses for two years. The women were freed on bail. This was the first in an endless series of raids, "wars," investigations, surveys, stakeouts, arrests, and so forth. If all the prostitutes who have served Honolulu since 1944 were laid end to end they might not reach the moon, but they would provide an impressive length for sure.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, what were the results of closing the houses? Did it end prostitution? No. Did it trigger unrest and a big morale crisis in the military? No. Did it fill the streets with bug-eyed rapists and assorted sex fiends? No. Did it abolish venereal disease? No. Did it compromise the imaginary virgin purity of the city? No. Well, then, what did it do? It closed the houses and presumably protected society from itself by excising the foul tumor of the red-light district. It also raised Honolulu to the moral eminence already occupied by other large American cities.

#### POSTSCRIPT

Venereal-disease statistics suggest that whether the houses of prostitution were open or closed did not have much to do with the number of cases, but antibiotics did. In 1943, penicillin began to be manufactured in Hawai'i for restricted use by the military. After 1945, the medicine was also available to civilians.

Table 1. Venereal Disease Rates in Hawai'i, 1937-1949 (number and rate per 100,000 population)

Gonorrhea      Syphilis			Gonorrhea      Syphilis		
1937	326 81.3	563 140.5	1944	1,788 208.2	999 116.3
1938	1,130 275.6	907 221.2	1945	1,890 232.0	936 114.9
1939	867 208.6	980 235.7	1946	1,347 246.2	946 173.4
1940	771 180.2	771 180.2	1947	1,434 272.5	1,002 190.4
1941	1,102 239.9	811 176.6	1948	1,351 261.3	727 140.6
1942	1,276 219.2	890 159.9	1949	983 192.4	544 106.4
1943	1,401 215.7	1,132 174.2			

Source: Compiled by retired state statistician Robert C. Schmitt from Hawai'i State Department of Health, Office of Research and Statistics, *Communicable Diseases in Hawai'i*, Report No. 11, June 1976.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *The Penal Code of the Hawaiian Kingdom, Completed from the Penal Code of 1850, and the Various Penal Enactments Since Made, Pursuant to Act of the Legislative Assembly* (Honolulu: Government Press, 1869) XLII 103, LVII 146-47; William F. Snow, Ferris F. Laune, and Samuel D. Allison, *Social Protection in Hawaii: How the City of Honolulu Closed Its Red-Light District* (New York: American Social Hygiene Association, 1946) 15; Richard A. Greer, "Collarbone and the Social Evil," *HJH* 7 (1976): 3-17.
- <sup>2</sup> *PP* March 1934, 3; Victor S. K. Houston, "Abatement of Houses of Prostitution in the City and County of Honolulu," 1, 4-5, typescript, submitted to Honolulu Police Commission Sept. 26, 1941; Lawrence M. Judd papers, AH; Leon Straus, *The Honolulu Police Department: A Brief History* (Honolulu: The 200 Club, 1978) 28, 31, 35; Snow, Laune, and Allison, *Social Protection* 16-17; Beth Bailey and David Farber, *The First Strange Place: The Alchemy of Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1994) 98; [History of Prostitution Control] 1. Typescript, no title, no author, no date, Prostitution File (Honolulu Council of Social Agencies), AH; *HA* Oct. 18, 1941: 2; *HA* Sept. 21, 1944:

- 6; *HSB* May 3, 1941: 3; *HSB* Sept. 9, 1944: 6; *HSB* Sept. 21, 1944: 6; *HSB* Sept. 22, 1944: ed. p.
- <sup>3</sup> Social Protection Committee of the Honolulu Council of Social Agencies, "Prostitution in Honolulu," 3, mimeograph, Aug. 1, 1944, HHS; Harry A. Franck, *Roaming in Hawaii: A Narrative of Months of Wandering Among the Glamorous Islands That May Become Our 49th State* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1937) 95–96; interview with David W. Forbes, Mar. 1999; telephone conversation with Maili Yardley, Apr. 1999; Houston, "Abatement" 3, 8; Jean O'Hara, *Honolulu Harlot* (Honolulu: privately printed, Nov. 1944) 19; *HSB* May 3, 1941: 3.
- <sup>4</sup> Bailey and Farber, *First Strange Place* 109, 234; J. Garner Anthony, *Hawaii Under Army Rule* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford U P, 1955) 27, 40; Houston, "Abatement" 4–10, 12; Snow, Laune, and Allison, *Social Protection* 5, 17; O'Hara, *Honolulu Harlot* 17–19; Brian Nichol, "Col. Frank Steer," *Honolulu Magazine*, Nov. 1981: 72–73; [History of Prostitution Control] 1; *HA* Oct. 15, 1941: 2, 4; *HA* Oct. 16, 1941: 3; *HSB* Sept. 26, 1941: 2.
- <sup>5</sup> Bailey and Farber, *First Strange Place* 112, 240; Anthony, *Hawaii Under Army Rule* 40; Snow, Laune, and Allison, *Social Protection* 5; [History of Prostitution Control] 2, 3; Nichol, "Col. Frank Steer" 84; *HA* Aug. 4, 1943:1; *HA* Oct. 21, 1943:1; *HSB* Sept. 21, 1944: 6.
- <sup>6</sup> Social Protection Committee, "Prostitution" 1–3, 5; interview with Scott Green, Jan. 1999; Anthony, *Hawaii Under Army Rule* 19; Gwenfreed Allen, *Hawaii's War Years* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1950) 394, 397, 401; Snow, Laune, and Allison, *Social Protection* 17–18; *HA* April 15, 1944: 3; *HA* Sept. 21, 1944: 6; *HSB* May 3, 1944: 2; *HSB* Aug. 9, 1944: 1; *HSB* Aug. 31, 1944: 3; letter, Gov. Ingram M. Stainback to Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, Sept. 20, 1944. Prostitution File (Honolulu Council of Social Agencies).
- <sup>7</sup> Snow, Laune, and Allison, *Social Protection* 5, 8; O'Hara, *Honolulu Harlot* 44; *HA* Aug. 20, 1944: 1; *HA* Aug. 20, 1944: 1; *HA* Sept. 12, 1944: 1; *HA* Sept. 16, 1944: 1; *HA* Sept. 21, 1944: 6; *HSB* July 2, 1943: 14; *HSB* Sept. 12, 1944: 2.
- <sup>8</sup> Snow, Laune, and Allison, *Social Protection* 6, 18; O'Hara, *Honolulu Harlot* 24, 25, 42, 44; letters, Gov. Ingram M. Stainback to Ferris F. Laune, Sept. 19, 1944; Stainback to chairman and members of the Police Commission, Sept. 19, 1944; Laune to Stainback, Sept. 15, 1944; Stainback to Lt. Gen. Robert C. Richardson, Jr., Sept. 20, 1944; Richardson to Stainback, Sept. 22, 1944; Nimitz to Stainback, Sept. 22, 1944; Rear Adm. W. R. Furlong to Honolulu Council of Social Agencies, Sept. 24, 1944; Richardson to Laune, Sept. 4, 1944; copies of all letters in Prostitution File, AH; *HSB* Sept. 14, 1944: 2; *HSB* Sept. 21, 1944: 6; *HA* Sept. 21, 1944: 1; *HA* Sept. 27, 1944: 7.
- <sup>9</sup> Snow, Laune, and Allison, *Social Protection* 18; *HSB* Sept. 21, 1944: 1, 6; *HSB* Sept. 26, 1944: 7; *HSB* Feb. 8, 1945; *HA* Sept. 21, 1944: 6; *HA* Sept. 22, 1944: 1, 5, 8; *HA* Oct. 11, 1944: 4.
- <sup>10</sup> O'Hara, *Honolulu Harlot* 24; *HSB* Nov. 30, 1944: 1; *HSB* Feb. 24, 1945: 1, 4; *HA* Sept. 21, 1944: 6; *HA* Sept. 22, 1944: 5, 8; *HA* Sept. 29, 1944: 2; *HA* Oct. 28, 1944; *HA* Dec. 1, 1944: 2.