The Price of Discretion:
Prostitution, Venereal Disease and the
Rise of American Hegemony in France, 1944-1946

Mary Louise Roberts
In September 1944, while he led the 29th Infantry Division across Brittany in the effort to liberate France, the American General Charles Gerhardt decided that his boys needed sex. He instructed his Chief of Staff to start a house of prostitution for the Division.¹ The task went to the St. Renan office of Civil Affairs, the military section assigned to provide the basic needs of the liberated civilian population. Asa Gardiner, the local Civil Affairs officer, called upon his contacts with the French police, who produced a pimp named Morot. The pimp, in turn, recommended four prostitutes currently refugeed nearby. Gardiner and Morot rode an Army jeep to interview them, and on the way back Gardiner asked Morot to manage the business. For the actual brothel, Morot and Gardiner billeted a house outside St. Renan recently vacated by the Germans. The French woman who owned the house was given no payment, nor informed of the exact use to which her property would be put.² A few days later, as Morot moved in with the prostitutes, Gerhardt approved the sign for the establishment reading “Blue and Gray Corral, Riding Lessons 100 Francs” (the cost of a prostitute).³ When the “Corral” opened for business on 10 September, 21 G.I.s, transported by jeep from the bivouac area, waited patiently in line.⁴

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¹ General Charles H. Gerhardt (1895-1976) was educated at West Point, graduating in 1917. He became well-known in the Army during the Second World War for the high casualty rate in his division, as well as for the house of prostitution he established near Brest. Gerhardt assumed command of the 29th in July 1943. On Gerhardt, see Perret, There’s a War to be Won: 311. He was lauded by the French for his liberation of Breton towns. See, for example, Bernard Festoc’s memoir of liberation in Airel, La Vie à Airel et Saint-Fromont pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale (Périers: Impr. X. Garlan, 1994). Gerhardt’s personal papers are in the United States Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. On how quickly the house of prostitution was established, see also Joseph Balkoski, Beyond the Beachhead: The 29th Infantry Division in Normandy (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1989), 48.

² National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), Record Group 331, Records of Allied Operation and Occupation, Headquarters, World War II (SHEAF) (hereafter R.G. 331) Headquarters Twelfth Army Group, Special Staff, Adjutant General Section, Administrative Branch, Decimal File, 1943-1945 (hereafter Entry 198), Box 83: 250.1 to 250.2 Morals and Conduct (hereafter Box 83), Report of Investigation to Determine the Facts surrounding the Establishment of a House of Prostitution for Members of the 29th Division, Conducted by Lt. Col Francis B. Lineman, IGD, 14-17 November 1944 (hereafter Lineman Report), 31.

³ NARA R.G. 331, Entry 198, Box 83, Lineman Report, 28. According to testimony, Gerhardt came up with the “Blue and Gray” name (the nickname of the 29th Division). Gardiner contributed the riding lessons part. The two colors stand for the fact that the division was composed of men from both northern and southern states who had fought each other in the American Civil War. During the war the Union soldiers wore blue uniforms and the Confederate soldiers wore gray uniforms.

⁴ NARA R.G. 331, Entry 198, Box 83, Lineman Report, 20. Word of the new “cat house” had “got around like fire,” according to one officer.
The “Corral” was not the only “G.I. whorehouse” established in France. An estimated dozen divisions started their own brothels there and in Italy during the years 1943-1945. As early as July 6, 1944, one month after D-Day, Chief Medical officer Colonel Gordon found brothels in Cherbourg being run by and for U.S. soldiers, including those designated strictly for “negroes.” Because the two required resources for a brothel—willing women and vacant houses—were in abundant supply, and because the French government was eager to help, the “Blue and Gray Corral” opened its doors within a week. French cooperation on matters of sex resulted from two crucial pieces of common ground shared by the Army and the local Norman government. First, both naturalized male sexual desire as irrepressible and requiring an outlet for physical health, and second, both wanted to prevent venereal disease. For a century prostitution had been legally practiced in France under a system of maisons closes supervised by the police. Grounded in the assumption that male sexual needs could not be suppressed, the system was designed to assure the medical safety of sexual contact. Prostitutes could practice their trade legally as long as they registered with the police, and received regular exams

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5 Geoffrey Perret, *There’s a War to be Won: The United States Army in World War II* (New York: Random House, 1991), 471. According to Perret, 471, the 12th Army Group G-2 Section also started its own whorehouse.
6 Graham A. Cosmas and Albert E. Cowdry, *The Medical Department: Medical Service in the European Theater of Operations* (Washington: Center of Military History, 1992), 540; Leonard D. Heaton, *Preventive Medicine in World War II, V. 5, Communicable Diseases Transmitted Through Contact or By Unknown Means* (Washington: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1960), 243. After Gordon’s visit, the brothels were swiftly placed off-limits. Further evidence of so-called “G.I. Brothels” can be found in the 1944 Preventive Medicine Report, where French Health officials related their frustration at “the operation of brothels in Commercy and elsewhere by the United States Army.” Quoted in Heaton, *Preventive Medicine*, 249. Paratrooper Robert E. Seale remembers how the medical staff of his Infantry regiment set up a brothel in Soissons they called the “Idle Hours Athletic Club” with the full cooperation of the local female mayor, who helped recruit prostitutes from Paris. When the division chaplains discovered the club and blew the whistle, the “Idle Hours Athletic club” was shut down. According to Seale, “of course the brass denied any knowledge of the club’s existence.” See Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (hereafter MHI), Robert E. Seale Papers, “WW II As I Remember it,” 62. Official denial of such whorehouses was common. See, for example, NARA R.G. 331, Entry 65, Special Staff, Medical Division, Decimal File, January 1944-July 1945 (hereafter Entry 65), Box 7, Memo dated 16 May 1945. In this memo to all commanding officers dated April 1945, the U.S. War department claimed that “there has been nothing in official reports to indicate that prostitution is being supported by the Army in theaters of operation.”
for venereal disease. Some of these *maisons*, particularly in Paris (122 rue de Province, Le Sphinx, Le Chabannais to name a few), became world-famous seats of pleasure.\(^7\)

The French reputation for skill in the romance department was not lost on the G.I.s. With fantasies nurtured by their fathers’ (no doubt embroidered) tales concerning sexual escapades in France during World War I, these soldiers expected France to be nothing less than a harem of carnal pleasure. American soldiers landing at Omaha Beach on D-Day had tucked into their packs an Army *Pocket Guide to France* that intoned “France has been represented too often in fiction as a frivolous nation where sly winks and coy pats on the rear are the accepted form of address. You’d better get rid of such notions right now if you are going to keep out of trouble. . . . France is full of decent women and strict women.”\(^8\) The “general opinion all along the line,” wrote *Life* journalist Joe Weston in 1945, was that “France was a tremendous brothel inhabited by 40,000,000 hedonists who spent all their time eating, drinking [and] making love.”\(^9\) These views no doubt informed Gerhardt’s decision to start the Gray and Blue Corral. When it came under official Army investigation, the General’s Chief of Staff defended the brothel by arguing that “the situation in which this division was operating and in the French communities in which we were located that it would be desirable to endeavor to control social relations between our men and the French people rather than to allow promiscuous social relations to obtain.”\(^10\) Purged of Army jargon, that statement meant that the soldiers fully expected to get some “action” in France, and Gerhardt simply wanted to keep it clean and safe. Like the French, then, the Army saw male sexual desires as instinctual, irrepressible, and even healthy for

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\(^9\) Archives municipales Le Havre (hereafter AMH), FC H4 15-5, Joe Weston, “The GIs in Le Havre,” manuscript.

\(^10\) NARA R.G. 331, Entry 198, Box 83, Lineman Report, 5.
battle. As General George Patton famously put it, “if they don’t f—k, they don’t fight.” But what the Army wanted to avoid—at all costs—was a soldier contracting a disease which would take him off the line. Like the French again, they chose to medically supervise rather than stifle the male libido.

Given these shared attitudes, one might assume that the U.S. Army and the French government would find it easy to cooperate on matters concerning sex. In fact, the opposite was most often true. Commercialized sex became a point of contention between the two nations during the U.S. military presence in the years 1944-1946. In particular, authorities clashed over the problem of venereal disease, which became a grave problem among the G.I.s. Effacing the role of the G.I. in spreading venereal disease, Army officers instead blamed French women for soaring rates of sexually-transmitted diseases, including syphilis and gonorrhea. French whores, the U.S. military believed, were infecting soldiers in alarming numbers. Worse still, because of sexual depravity and bureaucratic inefficiency, the French government was incapable of doing anything about it.

These Franco-American conflicts over prostitution and venereal disease are important because they reveal the racism and duplicity at the heart of the U.S. military approach to sex during the Second World War. Because the Army embraced racist stereotypes of African Americans as hyper-sexual, it conceived of white and black male sexuality in opposite ways. While it viewed white G.I.s as the prey of French prostitutes, it scorned African American soldiers as sexually violent sources of contagion. In addition, the Army’s attitude towards sex was riddled with hypocrisy. While officially commanders such as Gerhardt supported the U.S. War Department’s prohibition of prostitution, in private they normalized and even encouraged sexual outlets they saw necessary to maintain troop morale. The

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12 In the First World War, French authorities had blamed women as dangerous carriers of disease and threats to men’s health. See Michelle Rhodes, “‘No Safe women’: Prostitution, Masculinity and Disease in France during the Great War” (University of Iowa, Ph.D. Thesis, 2001), 14, 138.
13 One could argue that such hypocrisy continues with the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy concerning homosexuality in the military today.
result was not only such institutions as the “Blue and Gray Corral,” but also a set of spineless policies about sex which the Army brought to the table in their dealings with the French.

Equally significant, however, these tensions over prostitution anchored larger struggles for authority between the U.S. military and the French government. The military management of sexual relations in France became a vital transfer point for the exercise of—and resistance to—growing American political power in Europe. The relationship between the G.I. and the prostitute worked both practically and symbolically to construct hierarchies between the American “victors” and the liberated French. Not only did such relations articulate and/or replicate inequalities of wealth, but they also had a marked impact on European power relations at the dawn of the Cold War. Because the U.S. military solely blamed French prostitutes for venereal infection, it felt justified in declaring such women objects of American control. As a result, the Army deprived the French government of its prerogative to manage the health and mobility of its own population, and treated the nation as a conquered or colonized nation rather than an Allied power.

In this way, sex as a commodity registered growing American dominance of the European continent. Historians have explored how the management of the female body can provide access into struggles for power played out in colonial encounters between Europe and Africa, the Middle East, South- and Southeast Asia. A profusion of literary and historical studies have catalogued the ways in which the eroticized native body served as a metaphor of a feminized colony, which, like the women in it, had to be penetrated, raped and dispossessed in order to secure European colonial power.  

While the link between sexual domination and imperial mastery has been well-established in the colonial example, it has not been explored at all in the case of the Second World War. We tend to

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think of the Normandy campaign as a grand epic rescuing Europe from fascism rather than a colonial endeavor. While the American mission in Europe was no colonizing event, and indeed, demanded noble sacrifices of young men’s lives, it also represented a pivotal phase in the rise of American hegemony in Europe, not only in Germany but also in Italy and France. Although the United States did not become a sovereign power in France, it took advantage of its military presence to control a great deal of French economic, social, and political life during the years 1944-1946. More importantly, it remained a dominant military and economic presence in Europe throughout the Cold War. Examining the politics of prostitution during the Normandy campaign can help us to understand how the U.S. military used the management of the French female body not only to ensure the health of its fighting force, but also to demarcate and consolidate its authority in the days following liberation.

Health is Victory

In order to understand Franco-American tensions concerning prostitution, we need grasp the Army approach to sexual promiscuity during the Second World War. The U.S. Army did not really care if a G.I. had sex with a French woman. What it did care about—a great deal—was that a soldier not contract venereal disease. As a health problem, venereal infection posed a very real threat to the endurance of the armies fighting in the Mediterranean and European theaters of war. “In the face of the impending battle,” wrote ETOUSA Commander Jacob Devers to all units in December 1943, “the loss of manpower from venereal disease cannot be excused. Each soldier who contracts venereal


16 ETOUSA (European Theater of Operations, United States Army) was the specifically American branch of the larger Allied SHAEF military operation (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces), which comprised British, Canadian, French and American Forces, and was commandered by Dwight D. Eisenhower.
disease betrays the United States Army as completely as one who willfully neglects his duty.”17 By likening venereal disease to betrayal, Devers freighted sexual behavior with the weight of treason. Given these high stakes, sexual promiscuity became a topic of paramount military concern during early 1944 as U.S. troops trained in England for the invasion of the continent. Officers at London SHAEF headquarters grappled with the high rate of venereal disease among G.I.s who had fought in Italy.18 Besides high-ranking generals, these officers included senior medical consultants as well as the staff of the Army Preventive Medicine Division, in particular, Venereal Disease Control officers.19

The official policy of the War Department was the repression of commercial prostitution.20 But as the number of men in training grew rapidly after 1941, the sex trade flourished around Army bases. Critics of the War Department began to emphasize the link between venereal disease and military effectiveness, and demand a comprehensive program of education and treatment.21 In 1941, the May Act, passed by the U.S. Congress, outlawed prostitution near Army camps. But the law was slow to be implemented, and as American soldiers began fighting on foreign shores, the inadequacies of the program against venereal disease became painfully obvious.22 Controlling sexual promiscuity among G.I.s in North Africa in 1943 proved to be near impossible: venereal infection became the largest non-combat medical problem in that theater of war.23 In Casablanca and Oran, the Army failed to repress prostitution, managing only in organizing it along the lines of race. While “native” brothels were declared “off limits,” the “better type of European brothels” kept their doors open to U.S.

17 NARA, R.G. 331 General Staff Divisions, G-5 Division, Information Branch, Historical Section, Numeric-Subject Planning File, 1943 - July 1945 (hereafter Entry 56) Box 121, Memo dated 31 December 1943.
18 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7, Memo dated 22 April 1944.
19 Cosmas and Cowdry, The Medical Department, 137-138, 143, 72-73. Venereal Disease Control was a branch of the Preventive Medicine Division.
20 Heaton, Preventive Medicine, 141.
21 Thomas Parran and R.A. Vonderlehr, Plain Words About Venereal Disease (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941), 1.
troops. This latter “European” type of whorehouse was, in turn, segregated by race. When venereal disease rates exploded in Italy in 1943, brothels in Rome, Pisa and Florence were similarly split between those “off-limits” to whites, and those “off-limits” to blacks. In Italy, according to reports of the Fifth Army surgeon, more than half of “available” Italian women had some form of venereal disease in early 1944. Almost all classes of Sicilian and Italian women resorted to prostitution in order to put food on their tables. By April, the VD rate in Italy was estimated to be 168 cases per thousand men, over five times the acceptable standard set by the War Department. American and British medical planners at Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) in London realized that sexual promiscuity could threaten the success of the Allied mission in Europe.

A close look at how medical planners “explained” the high VD rate in Italy in a series of widely circulated SHAEF memos reveals that their understanding of venereal disease was underwritten by complex notions of gender and race. The “availability of brothels” and the “instigation of women” in Italy had been, in these planners’ opinion, enough to arouse the soldier’s “normal instinct” for sex. One Division Surgeon, for example, reported that “prostitutes from Naples descended upon our encampment by the hundreds, outflanking guards and barbed wire. They set up ‘business’ in almost inaccessible caves in the surrounding bluffs. Many of them gained entrance into the camp by posing as laundresses.” Italian women, then, were viewed as aggressors and agents of infection who “descended upon” the camp, “outflanking guards” and attacking men like so many parasites swarming down. The Division Surgeon failed to specify who let the “laundresses” into the camps, or why the prostitutes figured it was worth their while to occupy “inaccessible caves.”

24 Heaton, Preventive Medicine, 208, 215-216.
26 Heaton, Preventive Medicine, 213-216, 220
27 NARA R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7, Memo dated 22 April 1944, Memo dated 13 December. In December 1943, the venereal rate in some divisions soared to 192 cases per thousand soldiers. See Wiltse, Medical Service, 258-259; Cosmas and Cowdry, Medical Service, 172.
28 Quoted in Wiltse, Medical Service, 258.
women were demonized as sirens who created sexual demand in order to cash in on its satisfaction. The G.I.s were exonerated from any responsibility in the spread of venereal infection. The soldiers in these scenarios appear to be the hapless victims of the Italian women, unable to resist insidiously aroused sexual desires. Venereal disease symbolized the fragility of masculinity in a time when it was necessarily equated with strength. As such a symbol of compromised masculinity, it anchored diffuse—but strongly felt—anxieties about Allied resolve and endurance.  

If medical officers considered white men to be the innocent quarry of Italian women, they defined African-American men as sexual aggressors. Racial prejudice inverted the gendered logic of contamination: European women became victims rather than agents of contagion. “European womanhood has been warned concerning the attendant risk to association with the American negro,” wrote Sergeant Walter Bonner in an ETOUSA memo outlining venereal disease control “for colored units” on the eve of the Normandy landings. “We as a race,” urged Bonner, self-described as “colored,” “can no longer afford to be termed ‘immoral,’ ‘oversexed,’ ‘animalistic’ and the like, but we shall always lay ourselves open to the accusation as long as we continue to furnish the smallest reasons for such assertions.” Bonner linked venereal infection to race in the context of overcoming racial prejudice. The Army believed that venereal rates were higher in all-black units. Because of poor medical care and a number of other factors, African-American registrants to the Army did have a higher VD rate. Whether or not a disproportionate percentage of black soldiers became infected during their service is less clear. Inconsistencies in VD reporting made statistics on the subject unreliable. For example, if a division had a high VD rate, a commanding officer, when forced to

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30 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 56, Box 121, Memo dated 2 June 1944. He argued that high rates of disease among black soldiers was caused by “congested housing conditions, lack of medical facilities, poor educational opportunities, social segregation, general poverty and so forth.”
31 Even official army histories do not agree. In Medical Service, 147, Cosmas and Cowdry argue that black troops throughout the war had venereal rates about four and a half times that of white troops. Heaton, Preventive Medicine,
explain himself, would blame the rate on black units.  
Whatever the statistical reality, African American soldiers became symbols of perversion within the U.S. military. Army racial prejudice not only stigmatized black sexuality but also legitimated harsh regulations restricting freedom of movement and contact with civilians for African American G.I.s.

In the American military imagination, then, venereal disease became inseparable from anxieties concerning Allied strength, masculinity and interracial sex. Despite this symbolic load, however, SHAEF planners had few ideas for reducing venereal infection in France. As was the case in the Mediterranean campaigns, medical officers made a three-pronged effort to educate, to prevent, and to coerce. Many officers maintained that ignorance alone explained the high venereal infection rate among soldiers in the Italian campaign. Army statistics on male sexual behavior estimated that 15% of the soldiers would choose continence, while another 15% would insist on having sex no matter what. The remaining 70%, for whom sexual promiscuity was believed to be a question of peer pressure, became the target of the Army’s sexual education efforts. The Army issued an arsenal of pamphlets and posters, as well as such War Department films as “Health is Victory” and “Know for

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188, puts the rate at 8 to 12 times higher. Ulysses Lee, Employment of Negro Troops (Washington, D.C. Center of Military History, 1966), 277: “The presence of venereal diseases bulwarked personal prejudices in the training and use of Negro troops.” In Preventive Medicine in World War II, 189, Heaton gives the following reasons for a higher venereal rate among “Negro” soldiers: low educational level, inadequate repression of prostitution in Black communities, and “lack of recognition of the seriousness of the problem, together with reluctance to face the facts.” He also argues, rather opaquely, on 196: “The failure to control venereal disease among Negroes in the Army was, at least in part, a reflection of the failure of society through individual and governmental efforts to develop a satisfactory race relationship between the white and Negro populations.” On the issue of a higher venereal disease rate among black soldiers, see also Samuel Stoffer, et al, The American Soldier: Adjustment During Army Life (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949), 545-550; Sue Sun Yom, “Sex and the American Soldier: Military Cinema and the War on Venereal Disease, 1918-1969” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 85-86. Sun Yom argues that white doctors may have chosen to stigmatize a black man by officially registering his venereal disease, whereas the same doctor would not have written a report for a white man. White men with v.d. were often not accepted into the military whereas black men were, “based on the conviction that virtually all blacks were malingerers or carried disease.” Sun Yom gives these statistics: among the first 2 million draftees in the late 1930s, 48 out of 1000 white men were found to carry syphilis, whereas 272 out of 1000 black men were registered with the disease.

32 For an example of this type of blame, see NARA, R.G.331, Entry 65, Box 7, Memo dated 28 April 1944.
33 On the issue of stigmatizing African American G.I.s as hyper-sexual, see Son Yom, “Sex and the American Soldier,” 91-92.
34 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 56, Box 121, Memo dated 24 May 1944.
35 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7, Memo dated 22 April 1944.
Sure.” These materials reimagined the European temptress as a source of pollution, danger and death. Not surprisingly, in G.I. literature the whore came to serve as a symbol of mortality. Education was aimed entirely at men; no women enlisted in the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) were required to complete sexual education, nor was any WAC ever given an Army-issue condom. While SHAEF viewed European women as shameless and aggressive, they refused to see American women in the same way. Entrenched views concerning American (vs. European) women no doubt informed this refusal, but in addition, the Army was hardly eager to convey the notion that it had let thousands of WACs loose on the world in order to experience sexual adventure.

Besides providing anti-venereal education, SHAEF sought various initiatives to prevent illicit sex and contamination. Outdoor sports such as intramural football and baseball were to be encouraged. Beer was to be shipped from England to France as soon as possible because wine was thought to stimulate sexual interest more than beer. The Army would issue free condoms, six per soldier per month. Raymond Gantter remembers that as he and his fellow infantry men boarded the ship for France, his sergeant stopped at every tent to give his buddies and himself “a generous supply of contraceptives.” SHAEF also planned to establish prophylactic or “pro stations” where soldiers could submit themselves to sanitary treatment after sex.

Finally, SHAEF coerced Army soldiers at risk for venereal disease. On the eve of D-Day, the 21st Army group headquarters encouraged its commanders to use any number of restrictions to control venereal disease. Limitation of passes, imposition of curfews, bans on the sale of alcohol—
all these were to be “imposed if required,” and “resorted to if necessary.” Quite quickly after the G.I.s arrived in France, all brothels were declared off-limits, and guarded by both American M.P.s and French police, who threatened to close down any house found to be servicing Americans. Soldiers received fines for entering brothels (by one report, $65), but no fines for reporting that they had venereal disease. In January 1943, the War Department repealed a law docking a soldier his pay if he contracted venereal disease when it was discovered that Air Force pilots doing missions while treating their VD with sulfa drugs were severely impaired in their ability to fly. What became a punishable offense was concealing that you had contracted venereal disease.

“No parlay Engleesh”

Despite vigilant planning on the part of SHAEF, once the G.I.s landed on French soil, sex became a big problem. In September 1944, after three months of fighting in Normandy, Chief Surgeon A. W. Kenner sent word of warning to SHAEF headquarters that unless something was done quickly, there will be “a dangerously high incidence of venereal disease among our troops, entailing serious loss of fighting efficiency.” In fact, headquarters was receiving news from all over France that infection rates were reaching “unsatisfactory proportions.” By November, Kenner was reporting rates as high as 221 cases per thousand among soldiers in the Loire Base Section, and 163 cases per thousand for soldiers in the Seine Base Section in France. By December, the venereal rate among U.S. troops on the continent had jumped nearly 200 percent since September. The soaring rate of infection signalled the Army’s incapacity at every level to regulate sexual relations between

44 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 56, Box 121, Memo dated 5 June 1944.
45 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7, Letter dated 15 September 1944 from the French Minister of the Interior.
46 Heaton, Preventive Medicine, 143. When the death of one pilot was attributed to anoxemia caused by the drugs, the Air Surgeon exerted pressure to change the laws.
47 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7, Memo dated 9 September 1944. See also NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 100, Box 41, Memo dated 11 March 1945.
48 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7, Memo dated 9 September 1944 and Memo dated 20 September, 1944.
49 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7, Memo dated 8 November, 1944. Both the Loire and Seine Bases were near Paris.
50 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7, Memo dated 13 December 1944.
G.I.s and French women.\textsuperscript{51} This failure stands out as an exception in an Army known for its gaudy successes, its strong leadership and its discipline among the rank and file. It is hard to think of any other issue of command in the European theater where the military had its rules so widely-ignored. The military “problem” of sex stands out as exceptionally intractable, thus begging the question: why was sexual promiscuity so widely allowed, particularly when it was known to lead to disease?

In fact the poor results of medical planning should not have come as a surprise. Although SHAEF officers in London had not wanted to face the music, the overriding lesson of the Mediterranean campaigns was that sex was out of their control. In addition, specific circumstances of the Normandy campaign contributed to the dramatic growth of venereal infection. First, prostitution in France was a legally acknowledged business regulated by the government. Second, the rapid progression of the First and Third Armies across northern France during the summer led to unsupervised contact between soldier and civilian. As these armies moved from village to village, officers and military police had no time to investigate and shut down brothels in any one area. Nor could they set up prophylactic stations or monitor the hygiene of individual French women.\textsuperscript{52} Because supplies could not be organized well behind such a quickly moving Army, condoms and prophylactic kits were often nowhere to be found. Sleeping accommodations were improvised, giving American G.I.s plenty of opportunities to get acquainted with French women in the carnal manner.

Furthermore, SHAEF’s primary preventive measures—condoms and pro-stations—proved difficult to implement. The condoms were the butt of a never-ending stream of complaints. Predictably the G.I.s considered them “too small.” In addition, they were “so damn thick you can’t enjoy yourself” but despite this, “half of them bust” or “came off during relation.” For some


\textsuperscript{52} NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 56, Box 121, Memo dated 13 September 1944.
unexplained reason, the G.I.s also disliked the fact that the closed end had a constriction about three centimeters back, so that the tip drooped at the front.\textsuperscript{53} Many soldiers found condoms more useful to cover their rifle barrels in order to keep mud out.\textsuperscript{54} The pro stations were no more successful. The Americans took over those built by the Germans during the Occupation and constructed others in French cities, Army camps and Red Cross clubs.\textsuperscript{55} After urinating and washing themselves with green soap, a G.I. was to apply two palmfuls of bichloride of mercury to his entire genital area. Then he injected Protargol, a prophylactic, into his urethra, and held it there for five minutes. Finally he covered his entire genital area again with Mercurial Ointment.\textsuperscript{56} Murray Shapiro distinctly remembered his first self-treatment at a station in France. “I followed directions precisely and wound up almost fainting on the floor. If this was the price to be paid for such an encounter, I could forgo it, which I did from this point on.”\textsuperscript{57} Prophylaxis took the joy out of the joy of sex, and soldiers ignored it.

Finally the Army also tried—and failed—to trace sexual contacts. For every venereal case discovered, the unit surgeon was required to fill out a report providing the name, age, occupation and physical description of the woman involved.\textsuperscript{58} The aim was to create a data base of infected prostitutes who could then be medically examined or arrested. The Germans had successfully developed such a data bank during the Occupation, but this was when the legal brothel system operated fairly well. The U.S. Army in France faced a sex market composed of non-professional women. Particularly in Paris, where two out of three cases of venereal disease began, prostitutes were young, single, away from family and often homeless. They lived in cheap hotels and operated

\textsuperscript{53} Heaton, Preventive Medicine, 227. For the same complaint about condoms in Britain, see David Reynolds, Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945 (London: Phoenix Press, 1996), 207.
\textsuperscript{55} Cosmas and Cowdry, Medical Service, 144-145.
\textsuperscript{56} Cosmas and Cowdry, Medical Service, 144-145.
\textsuperscript{57} MHI, World War II Survey, Box 28\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division, “Memoirs of Murray Shapiro” (non-paginated); See also Robert Peters, For You, Lili Marlene (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 60.
\textsuperscript{58} See NARA R.G. 331, Entry 56, Box 121, Etousa Circular dated May 2. For copies of the form, see NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 100 Special Staff, Headquarters Command, Decimal File, 1944-1945 (hereafter Entry 100), Boxes 40 & 41. See also Cosmas and Cowdry, Medical Service, 173, 541.
under a series of false names. Such circumstances rendered hopeless any kind of tracking system.

To make matters worse, soldiers were often drunk when they had sex. “Paris? Hotel?” was often the best they could recall of their “significant sexual contact.” Tracing had worked well in Britain because G.I.s got acquainted with prostitutes and could recall details of their lives. But because few French whores spoke English, G.I.s knew almost nothing of the women who infected them.

The liberation of Paris in August 1944 raised a whole new host of problems. The “silver foxhole,” as it was called, became a magnet for G.I.s on leave. Enterprising women from all over France flocked to the big city to offer themselves for sexual delectation.

The city of light became Sodom sur Seine. One soldier wrote a paean to the city entitled “Parisianisation”: “A naughty little soldier/Who was sweating out rotation/Got a three-day pass to Paris/For some real recreation./But after he was finished/And returned to his old station/He had to go on Sick call/For some rehabilitation.” G.I.s called the VD they contracted their “souvenir of Gai Parée.”

Parisian women arrested as they emerged from hotels with GIs were usually between twenty and twenty-four, and almost never over thirty. See Archives de la Préfecture de la Police, Paris, France (hereafter APP) CB 10.43 and CB 39.98 In these records, there were 146 arrests. The age breakdown was as follows: 13.8% 15-19; 42.1% 20-24; 26.8% 25-29; 13.1% 30-34; 2.1% 35-39; 2.1% 40-44. 82.7% were 29 or under. The prostitutes were overwhelmingly single and childless. Police arrest records reveal that of 146 prostitutes arrested by the police during 1945, only 15.8% were married. 8 had children or 5.5%, and only a handful were divorced or separated. The remainder were single. See APP CB 39.98 39ième Commissariat de Police du Quartier de la Porte Saint-Martin, 31 October 1944 – 22 October 1945 and APP CB 10.43. 10ième Commissariat de Police des Enfants Rouges, CB 10.43 June 1945-October 1945. The Registres d’Ecrout at La Petite Roquette, a common prison for prostitutes, also suggest that single women predominated among prostitutes in Paris. Of 51 entries given for prostitutes jailed in La Roquette only one was married. See Archives de Paris (hereafter AP), 1443 W 45, no. 1-603, 1945 (30 Janvier – 18 avril); 1433 W 46, no. 1-903, 1945 (18 avril – 31 juillet); 1443W 47, no. 1-603, 1945 (31 juillet – 15 septembre); 1443 W 48, no. 10600, 1945 (15 septembre – 3 novembre). Of course, women could have been married and not reported that fact to the police. At the same time, the figures roughly match Alfred Scheiber’s profile of prostitutes before the war. Scheiber also argues that it was mostly single women who practiced prostitution. See Alfred Scheiber, Un Fléau social: Le Problème Médico-Policier de la prostitution (Paris: Librairie de Médicis, 1946), 27.

La Prostitution en Touraine à l’époque des maisons closes (1920-1946) (Paris: Chambray-lès-Tours, 1999), Croubois examines a sample of 580 dossiers of prostitutes working in Tours during the years 1940-1944, and finds that single women outnumber married ones by roughly two to one. Finally, prostitutes in Paris were rarely from the city. Police records suggest that only about 19% of them were born in Paris. This figure is based on 146 police records of arrests in APP, CB, 39.98 and 10.43. Out of the 146 dossiers, 28 or 19.2% of the prostitutes were born in Paris and its immediate suburbs; 103 or 70.5% were born in the provinces; 2 or 1.4% were born in the colonies, and 6 or 4.1% were born outside of France. For another 7 or 4.8%, no information was given.

NARA R.G. 331, Entry 100, Boxes 40 and 41. For the success of the tracing program in Britain, see Reynolds, Rich Relations, 206.

Heaton, Preventive Medicine, 245

“Puptent Poets,” Stars and Stripes, 6 March 1945.
military again sought to segregate the brothels. On 2 September, the Provost Marshall of the Seine Base Section (covering Paris and its suburbs) arrived in the city with the French police. Making the rounds, the men selected certain *maisons* for the officers, certain *maisons* for white enlisted men, and certain *maisons* for “negroes.” Although the Chief Surgeon arrived three days later to declare brothels off limits, the “unofficial” policy prevailed, with brothels organized by race and rank.  

Even in towns like Cherbourg where the Americans could organize prohibitions against prostitution, the Army was unsuccessful in keeping G.I.s out of brothels. The soldiers considered fines received for entering brothels (by one report, $65) as nothing more than an amenity fee for sex. In order to slip by the MPs stationed in front of brothels, G.I.s dressed in borrowed or stolen civilian clothes. Some pretended to speak only French. Such efforts had the makings of a French farce, a fact not lost on

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64 Heaton, *Preventive Medicine*, 246; Costello, *Virtue under Fire*, 247. Brothels were also segregated in Cherbourg and other minor French cities. See Archives Départmentales de la Manche, St. Lô, France (hereafter ADM), Rapports Américains, 13 num 2521.

65 Costello, *Virtue under Fire*, 95.

the American cartoonist Bill Maudlin, who authored a sketch for Stars and Stripes in which a G.I. tried to get around the rules by declaring “No parlay English.”[67] [Fig. 2] While large brothels were heavily policed, smaller ones, disguised as residential houses, flew under the MP radar. Others camouflaged themselves as bars, restaurants or “athletic clubs.” The Cherbourg Provost Marshall reported that as soon as the MPs declared a building off-limits, the prostitutes moved to another of the many vacant houses. One captain stated that he “would need an MP for each G.I. who is after what he wants.”[68] Obviously, the G.I.s were a determined bunch. It was not easy to scare an Infantryman who faced death everyday with the threat of a curable infection.

But the problem of sexual promiscuity went deeper than G.I. obstinancy. In its efforts to prevent venereal disease, the Army showed a basic lack of will in carrying out the War Department’s repression of prostitution. Nowhere was the spineless nature of Army policy more evident than in a key ETOUSA circular dated May 2, 1944—a document used in subsequent months as a classic statement of War Department policies. This circular began by forbidding commanders from abetting prostitution in any way. In the next breath, however, it ordered them to distribute condoms “to military personnel desiring them whenever such personnel leave the unit area on duties or on leave whenever they may be exposed to venereal infection.”[69] By insisting that soldiers be supplied with condoms “whenever they may be exposed to venereal infection,” the circular really meant “whenever they may be having sex.” But if officers were not supposed to encourage prostitution, why were they authorized to hand out condoms?

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[67] It is not clear from Maudlin’s cartoon if this is a French bar or a brothel, both of which could have been off-limits to Americans. (Many bars also served as brothels.) Besides the American MP, Maudlin pictures several members of the French FFI dressed in American uniforms.


[69] NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 56, Box 121. ETOUSA Circular dated 2 May 1944. For the importance of the circular, see Heaton, Preventive Medicine, 241.
Issuing free condoms, providing pro stations, not penalizing diseased soldiers—such policies had the effect of normalizing the sexual practices the military was supposed to be suppressing.\(^\text{70}\) As such, they sent a mixed message to unit commanders already comfortably non-compliant on the issue of sex. In the absence of any real structural controls, SHAEF was forced to leave the matter of sex in the hands of the acting commanders.\(^\text{71}\) And that was a big mistake.\(^\text{72}\) G.I. John Dunn remembers that the General Commander of the 82\(^{\text{nd}}\) and 101\(^{\text{st}}\) airborne units “who was a very religious man by the way, not a bad person. . . really believed that one way to keep the animals quiet was to have a house of prostitution.” For this reason, recalls Dunn, he made both prostitutes and a pro station available to them.\(^\text{73}\) In recalling his commander’s approach to sex, Dunn failed to distinguish between what was legal (pro station) and illegal (prostitution). The contradictions at the heart of SHAEF instructions to commanders—that they should not condone sex but make forms of prophylaxis possible—gave them just the loophole they needed in order to give free reign to the male libido. According to one insider, the vast majority of officers believed that War Department policy on prostitution was “neither logical nor effective.” While “individually and privately” they favored prostitution, “collectively and officially” they had to call for rigorous repression.\(^\text{74}\) This double maneuvering doomed SHAEF’s efforts to curb venereal disease.

General Gerhardt’s efforts to start a brothel outside St. Renan in Brittany provide an opportunity to understand up-close how such double maneuvering worked. His Corral came under

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\(^\text{70}\) Rose also noted the mixed message given soldiers in the ETO, although her focus is on American soldiers in the UK. See “The ‘Sex Question’,” 899-900.

\(^\text{71}\) As Devers had put it some months before: “Contraction of venereal disease is considered evidence of improper indoctrination of the individual which is an indication of poor leadership on the part of the unit commander.” NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 56, Box 121, Memo dated 31 December 1943.

\(^\text{72}\) At least in the North African theater, there was an “almost universal lack of understanding of the problem” among line officers. Because such officers were often denied promotion if their units had a high VD rate, they concealed cases and distorted their reports. Much of the initial educational program in North Africa was directed toward command, where progress was considered slow. See Heaton, Preventive Medicine, 224.

\(^\text{73}\) Transcript of an oral history interview with John W. Dunn, OH29, Veterans Memorial Library, Madison, Wisconsin.

official Army investigation when after only five hours of business, it was reported by the chaplain and shut down by the Assistant Provost Marshall.  Neither Gerhardt nor his staff were forthcoming about the brothel when forced to face the investigator. Gerhardt denied that the Corral was his whorehouse: “it was not officially a house of prostitution of the 29th Division, I don’t believe—we will have to check on that,” then eventually admitting only “we will say it was an extracurricular activity and not official.”

When the investigator insisted he explain himself, Gerhardt described the Corral in this way: “An attempt was made...to insure contacts that would protect the health of the troops.” Once again, the argument was dishonest, as the investigation went on to show that neither Gerhardt nor his staff gave the prostitutes adequate medical attention before the opening of the Corral. In the official record, then, Gerhardt tried to squirm out of the charges by denying them or by catering to military anxieties concerning venereal disease.

More private communications told another story. After the investigation, Gerhardt wrote a letter to his commanding officer, General Omar Bradley. In this missive, which Gerhardt probably did not think would become part of the official record, he argued that his men were “preoccupied” with sex, because the war had “removed [them] from feminine contact.” Furthermore, Gerhardt wrote Bradley, he was afraid his men would turn to homosexuality or bestiality in order to satisfy their desires. Raising the specter of “perversion,” as he called it, was a strong argument in a rabidly

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75 During those five hours, seventy-six men managed to avail themselves of the Corral’s services, for an average of nineteen men per woman.
76 NARA R.G. 331, Entry 198, Box 83, Lineman Report, 1, 5, 76.
77 NARA R.G. 331, Entry 198, Box 83, Lineman Report, 1-3, 90.
78 Gerhardt did order the acting Division Surgeon, Major Gerald A. Logrippo, to examine the prostitutes the morning the brothel opened. When Logrippo and his assistant, gynecologist Herman Tannenbaum, examined the four women that morning, they discovered several problems. Two had bad tonsils, one had a bad ovarian tube, and one had rales in the left chest (a sign of lung problems.) In general, Logrippo concluded, the women were already physically stressed and in poor health. Moreover, as Logrippo later testified, “in no way could I rule out gonorrhea and syphilis,” as testing for these diseases could not be conclusive in such a short span of time. Logrippo testified that when Gerhardt came to inspect the house that day, he seemed to be in a hurry and did not even ask him about the prostitutes’ medical condition. The physician did not get a chance to give him the bad medical news about the four women until later that afternoon. See NARA R.G. 331, Entry 198, Box 83, Lineman Report, 55.
homophobic Army, but it never surfaced in the official report. Gerhardt also had made these views known to a group of assembled chaplains sometime during the late summer. Again on this occasion, he could not have known that his talk would eventually become public testimony. To this group, he again emphasized men’s sexual needs, claiming “it is my business to not quarrel with life.” On both occasions, then, Gerhardt naturalized the male libido as unstoppable. Such rhetoric justified his denial of accountability for his actions.

The contrast between Gerhardt’s public testimony and his letter to Bradley can be explained by how male sexuality was handled in the military: privately affirmed, officially denied. Gerhardt expressed the same arguments for the official record only obliquely. At one point he explained to the investigator that “the troops had been in combat for a hell of a while, had been under a restraint since 15 May.” “This division,” he noted “has been overseas for two years, and that is quite a long time. . .” “To go without sex” was Gerhardt’s unstated conclusion. It was common knowledge that G.I. promiscuity rates rose in proportion to length of time in combat. At every turn, military policy on sex vacillated between official regulation and unofficial disregard. Brothels were “off-limits” but segregated by race; sex was condemned but condoms made available; prostitution was banned but covertly organized; brothels were publicly denied but privately explained. Whatever he said to the investigator, Gerhardt’s fundamental motivation was that his men wanted sex, and were not going to

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79 Concern that forced continence would lead to so-called perverse sexual behaviors was never far from the military mind. Medical literature related “striking cases” of men who turned to other men out of desperate need, then grew “to like it,” becoming “fixed” homosexuals who never “revert” back to “normal.” See Benjamin, “Morals Versus Morale,” in Robinson, Morals in Wartime, 199. See also Brandt, No Magic Bullet, 166.

80 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 198, Box 83, Comments made by the Commanding General to Assembled Chaplains, 29th Infantry Division, October 1944. In his views, Gerhardt was joined by Colonel Edward H. McDaniel, who called the brothel “a happy solution to a very delicate problem which has continuously existed since the formation of armor and will continue to exist”; and Lt. Col. Louis M. Gosom who felt “we should recognize the facts of life.” See Lineman Report, 7, 50.

81 NARA R.G. 331, Entry 198, Box 83, Lineman Report, 2. The US Army conducted a survey in the Mediterranean theater that showed this relationship between promiscuity and length of time in combat. The survey revealed a level of promiscuity which was much higher than expected. Less than 1% said they refrained from sex because of religious reasons. The survey found that 3 out of 4 men were having sex with Italian women, on average once or twice a month. They paid for sex in cash or rationed food or supplies. A third of the men who had had sex were married. See Costello, Virtue under Fire, 97.
wait to get it, even if it meant having sex with each other. Furthermore, as he and his officers agreed, the division was “operating in a place like France.” Trying to control a soldier’s sexual behavior in “a place like France” was tantamount to making him eat raw carrots in a steakhouse.

The Lurking Dangers of Infection

Rather than perceive France as a nation struggling to recover from defeat, occupation and war, the U.S. military often chose to view it instead as a “tremendous brothel.” From the very beginning of their campaign in northwest Europe, officers blamed high rates of venereal infection on the fact that they were “in a place like France,” already fixed in their minds as a sexually debauched country. It did not help that legal system of prostitution was in shambles at the time. During the war, the Germans had set up their own brothels, forcing many French women who were already prostitutes to work in them, and keeping them under strict, often brutal medical supervision to assure their venereal health. In the chaotic post-liberation months, the legal system floundered as the French scrambled to recruit the necessary medical and police authorities. Compliance was less than perfect. While legal prostitutes were to undergo regular medical exams once a week, they avoided them, if infected, by disappearing when medical personnel showed up at the maisons or by tinting their hair and becoming itinerant to avoid the police.

These women were not unwise to evade government medical care even if their health was at stake. The treatment awaiting them was at best ineffective, at worst physical torture. Exams were given under poor lighting and unsanitary conditions. Often no effort was made to wash the speculum

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82 NARA R.G. 331, Entry 198, Box 83, Lineman Report, 5.
83 NARA, R.G. 331, General Staff Divisions, G-5 Division, Secretariat, Numeric File, August 1943 - July 1945 Entry 47 (hereafter Entry 47), Box 31, Report sent by Lieutenant Colonel F.C. Corin to Colonel R.M.J. Martin, G-5 Division, 25 January 1945
84 Menin, *Wehrmacht et prostitution*, 112, 142-48, 151. In cooperation with the French Bureau of Hygiene and Police, the German Sanitary Service largely succeeded in keeping a personnel file on every prostitute in France. Once a woman was declared infected, it was impossible for her to continue work. We don’t know how many women were actually prosecuted because of lack of archival evidence. Cyril Olivier argues that such regulations were put in place after an explosion of clandestine prostitution at the beginning of the war. See Cyril Olivier, *Le Vice ou la Vertu: Vichy et les politiques de la sexualité* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2005), 232.
in between examinations, or for that matter, to change the napkin and the pot of vaseline. The sickest of the women ended up in locked hospital wards, most infamously Saint-Lazare in Paris. Nuns did their best to administer such hospitals, waging a battle against booze, bad language and lesbian sex. St. Lazare doctors were easily bribed to write favorable health reports. Even if women were healthy when released, they soon became ill again, either because they were re-contaminated or because they could not afford medications to treat their illnesses. If a woman was arrested several times, or was proven to be corrupting minors, she would go to a prison where she would eat and sleep aside thieves and murderers.

SHAEF medical planners were made aware of the failings of this system, reinforcing for them already entrenched prejudices about French sexual decadence. Many U.S. military medical personnel scorned French regulation as depraved and corrupt. In a well-known 1941 polemic against brothels near U.S. Army bases, two military doctors argued that “unless vigorous Federal action is initiated, we may sink to the level of France in our tolerance of prostitution.” As was the case of Italy, SHAEF medical planners took for granted that civilian women were the sexual aggressors and would act as agents of venereal infection. At a Civil Affairs planning meeting in May 1944, for example, the officers suggested that a committee examine what was required to prevent G.I. venereal disease “as the result of infection from the civilian population,” from whom the G.I.s would have to be “protected.” The officers predicted that the brothel situation in France would be even worse than in

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89 Parran and Vonderlehr, *Plain Words,* 90.

90 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 47, Box 47, Extract from the minutes of the Sixth Meeting of the Combined Civil Affairs Committee, 16 May 1944. For the language of “protection,” see NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 47, Box 28 Civil Affairs Summary No. 6, 21 July 1944 under the rubric “Pubic Health and Sanitation.”
Italy, due to the fact that French women’s “moral fibre has been weakened by privation.” These officers recommended that such women “be rounded up and deported from the occupied area” because, they believed, nothing would deter them. 91 Before they even set foot in France, SHAEF medical officers were assuming their right to dispose of French women’s bodies in whatever way they saw fit. At this point SHAEF did not even consider what might be the role of the French government since it planned to rule the French directly under military government.

“Operating in a place like France” meant both presuming control over the prostitute’s body while reproaching local authorities for venereal infection. Once in Normandy, commanders and soldiers continued to harbor the same negative prejudices about the French. The Pocket Guide to France which warned the GIs against winking at or slapping the backsides of French women, also cautioned them not to trust the French regulatory system. “Before the war the French Government made an attempt to examine and license prostitutes. But don’t be fooled. No system of examination has ever made a prostitute safe. Her health card means absolutely nothing.” 92 Particularly frustrating for the Americans was the fact that French law forbade the jailing of prostitutes if they were not infected. If found to be healthy, an arrested prostitute would be released. 93 At a public health meeting between French doctors and Allied medical officers held in Rouen in September 1944, Americans complained that a prostitute in Bayeux, known to have infected one soldier, had been arrested by the police, given a “cursory” medical inspection, and let go. According to these medical officers, she then went on to infect five other men. 94 While the Americans completely blamed the French doctors for the

91 NARA R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7, Memo dated 22 April 1944.
92 Army Information, Pocket Guide to France, 16
93 See the Report filed by Chef Defrene in Service historique de la Gendarmerie nationale, Fort de Charenton, Maisons-Alfort, France (hereafter SHGN), C76E6, 200 Brigade Territorial de Cany-Barville, Registres de correspondance courante au départ, 5 septembre 1945. Cany-Barville is a village 60 kilometers north and east of LeHavre, about an hour away.
94 NARA R.G. 331, Entry 54, General Staff, G-5 Division, Information Branch, Historical Section, Numeric-Subject Operations File (hereafter Entry 54), Box 193, Minutes of Second Meeting on Public Health and Welfare
high level of infected prostitutes, they refused to give them any control over tracing such women. In short, the French were given all the responsibility and little power. As the problem got worse, SHAEF’s war against French prostitution widened to include all women who came in contact with G.I.s. In November, headquarters advised officers that troops in French cities should be “briefed as to the dangers of infection lurking in the ‘pick-up’ type of girl in those towns.” One medical officer described the spread of venereal disease in this way: “Any prostitute may become infectious immediately after contact with a diseased patron and may transmit infection to an indeterminate number of subsequent visitors before the disease can be detected in her.” This officer failed to acknowledge that a woman who has sexual contact with a diseased patron has to be infected before she becomes infectious. Once again, the male role in the transmission of disease had been effaced.

From blaming the prostitute as the infectious agent, it was only one step to condemning the French as a whole. The fact that GIs likely came into contact with prostitutes more than any other single type of French person made the political impact of such relations greater. After the front moved to Belgium, contact between G.I.s and French civilians centered in urban areas, particularly Paris, where soldiers took leaves. These cities developed elaborate red light districts, where long lines of G.I.s, waiting for sexual services, snaked around the block. “It isn’t fair to judge a nation on the business principals and communicability of the world’s oldest profession,” commented G.I. David Ichelson, “but we saw more French whores than we did French statesmen.” In popular American culture and in high diplomatic and military circles, the whore came to articulate “Frenchness” itself. According to historian Frank Costigliola, Americans consistently imagined the French during this

95 NARA R.G. 331, Entry 54, Box 193, Minutes of Second Meeting.  
96 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7. Memo dated 17 November 1944.  
97 NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7, Memo dated 22 January 1945. Emphasis mine  
98 MHI, WWII Survey, Box 71st Infantry Division, David Ichelson, “I was There,” 62.
period as “wayward” women such as whores. Lieutenant Colonel Chester Hansen conjured this image of the French in his journal after a visit to Paris in September 1944. Hansen, who was chief military aide to General Omar Bradley, wrote about the insistent prostitutes he had met in the city of light, and how, when he danced with one woman, she stunned him by asking “You will sleep with me tonight, no?” From this encounter, he more generally concluded that “French people have sold themselves to no one and no one is impressed by them.” In Hansen’s mind, the prostitute’s solicitation symbolized a larger French “bid” for recognition and acceptance. He conflated his refusal of the prostitute with his rejection of the French generally. The two had fused in his mind.

SHAEP’s frustration with French regulation and their inability to see French women as infected as well as infectious, had a significant impact on Franco-American relations. Besides reinforcing American prejudices about France as a decadent nation, the “problem” of venereal infection inspired further condescension, invited American intervention into French affairs, and naturalized the Army’s “right” to manage the freedom and mobility of the civilian population. The supposedly “infectious” body of the prostitute became the site of a power struggle, but it operated at a more symbolic level as well. To the extent that the prostitute came to represent Frenchness, her sexual commerce signalled a broader French subservience to the whims of American money and power.

**Scandalous and Intolerable Public Spectacles**

In 1945, conflict over prostitution reached its most climactic battle in the Norman port city of Le Havre, where discretion about commercial sex became paramount to both the local mayor and the military commander. For the French, the spectacle of prostitution at the town center was intolerable not only because indecent and linked to violence, but also because the prostitute signified national humiliation, and served as a painful reminder of the Occupation. The Americans were

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99 Frank Costigliola, “The Nuclear Family: Tropes of Gender and Pathology in the Western Alliance,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 170.
100 MHI, Chester B. Hansen Collection, Official Papers, Diary.
equally focused on the issue of visibility, in this case, on shielding sexual labor from the eye of the American public. At the roots of the struggle were once again the Army’s duplicity concerning sexual promiscuity, and its inclination to both blame the French authorities and render them powerless.

By January of 1945, Le Havre was home to hundreds of prostitutes. Liberated by the allies in September 1944, the 16th Port, as the Americans called it, became the gateway to the European Theater for the Allies. Between October 1944 and 1945, four million soldiers embarked or disembarked there.101 Large “cigarette camps” with names like Phillip Morris and Lucky Strike were constructed just north of the town in order to house the G.I.s. The prostitutes followed. Le Havre’s maisons closes were already in crisis when the Allies arrived in the fall of 1944. 85% of the city was destroyed from bombardments during the summer of 1944, and the maisons closes were not spared.102 Without this key infrastructure, local officials found it difficult to regulate commercial sex.103 The prostitutes gained the cooperation of less principled members of the community by sharing their profits either in cash or American goods. Bar, restaurant and hotel owners quietly gave them a place to do business.104 The situation echoed that in Paris: with the legal system broken, prostitutes worked independently. But unlike Paris, the town had no elaborate matrix of hotels so that the prostitutes frequently had to settle for more makeshift places to do business, including the great outdoors, most frequently the Montgeon forest north of town, as well as damaged buildings in the city center.105

102 Jean Legoy et al, Le Havre, 1517-1986; Du Havre d’autrefois à la métropole de la mer (Rouen: Editions du P’tit Normand, 1987), 43,44-53 ; Roger Gobled, Voici Le Havre de 1944 à 1963: Recueil de documents écrits et photographiques (Le Havre, Imprimerie M. Etaix, 1963), 12-17; During the night of the 14-15 June, Allied bombs completely destroyed the six maisons on the rue des Galions or Red Light district. On 5 September, another bombardment destroyed fourteen houses which were authorized to receive registered prostitutes. Le Havre was left with only two such houses on the rue Haudry. AMH, FC I 49-2 : Prostitution, Letter dated 7 november 1944.
103 AMH, FC I 49-2 : Prostitution, Letter dated 7 november 1944.
104 SHGN, 76E6, 200 Brigade Territorial de Cany-Barville, Report of 5 October 1945
105 AMH, FC H 15-6, Agressions, Déprédictions, Méfaits, Letter dated 17 November 1945
January, local officials obtained a legal “arrêt” to end the flow of women into town.\textsuperscript{106} It did little good. Prostitutes arrived by train and spread out into public spaces, only to be arrested, taken to the hospital, and treated—all at the expense of the municipality. Many women insisted on being inscribed in police rolls in order to make their trade legal. But this again strained local resources, augmenting the number of women who needed regular medical exams. In an effort to reduce the population, police forced them onto trains going out of town. But with pockets flush with G.I. money, the women got off at the first station and took cabs back into town.

The prostitute was a difficult presence in LeHavre. The trade in sex was noisy, obtrusive and linked to violence, and before long, the Havrais began to complain. Particularly outraged were those who lived near the camps and had to endure the daily sight of G.I.s having sex with French women.\textsuperscript{107} “These things are happening in full daylight under the eyes of children or other people who happen to be near,” complained a civilian about the prostitutes plying their trade in a park.\textsuperscript{108} “In certain periods the American soldiers form a line down the staircase and into the corridor of the house,” one civilian told the police. “They urinate along the walls and in the hallways, and they attack any women who happens to live there.”\textsuperscript{109} Still others protested the noise. Because brothels operated covertly, the G.I.s had to knock on the door and shout up at the windows in order to gain entrance. But because the brothels were not marked, a G.I. often knocked on several doors before finding the right house. Night after night, one man complained, soldiers came banging on his door shouting words which “left nothing to doubt” on the nature of their mission. The neighborhood, he lamented, “is becoming impossible for women and young girls.”\textsuperscript{110} Havrais women were in danger of being mistaken for prostitutes. A local Tanning Company petitioned the mayor for greater security, claiming that the

\textsuperscript{106} AMH, FC 1\textsuperscript{4} 49-2 : Prostitution, Letters dated 30 January and 2 February 1945.
\textsuperscript{107} AMH FC H\textsuperscript{6} 15-6, Agressions, Dépréhations, Méfaits, Letter dated 4 September 45.
\textsuperscript{108} AMH FC H\textsuperscript{6} 15-6, Agressions, Dépréhations, Méfaits, Letter dated 13 June 1945
\textsuperscript{109} AMH FC H\textsuperscript{6} 15-6, Agressions, Dépréhations, Méfaits, Letter dated 9 October 1945
\textsuperscript{110} AMH FC H\textsuperscript{6} 15-6, Agressions, Dépréhations, Méfaits, Letter dated 6 December 1944.
workers’ “wives and children are terrorized by the nearly daily crimes taking place near their homes.”\textsuperscript{111} Another petition by 110 Havrais living near the camps demanded better lighting because of incidents of violence.\textsuperscript{112} Still other townsfolk complained about the cemetary. The G.I.s had made two holes in the cemetary wall, one as an entrance, the other as an exit. As a supervisor noted, “both operated continually, day and night, compromising the moral bearing of the Cemetary.”\textsuperscript{113}

The Normans were also painfully aware of the impression prostitutes were making on the G.I.s. It had begun to dawn on them that the G.I. notion of Frenchness was not solidifying in the museum. What a pity, wrote Jean Vanier of Havre Éclair, that the Americans are lacking other images of the French people, for example, “the mother of the family, tending to her children with great attentiveness, exhausting her health and strength to make ends meet,” and “the laughing, pretty young girl, always eager to help her mother.”\textsuperscript{114} Ouest-France was on the defensive when it pleaded with its readers: “Let’s give them the impression of a disciplined people, disciplined on its own accord, like they are themselves. And also of a people dignified and proud, conscious of their splendid past and the promise of the future.”\textsuperscript{115} For the French as well as the Americans, then, female sexual behavior was pivotal in shaping France’s “reputation” beyond its borders.

These fears about prostitution and national reputation had their roots in the Occupation. In 1946, the social reformer Alfred Scheiber recalled wartime prostitutes in Lyon rounding up German soldiers and steering them towards the maisons. “What shame we felt,” he remembered, watching these women make their offer of service.\textsuperscript{116} Wartime resisters dismissed prostitutes as collaboratrices who had relinquished the right to be French. As the historian K.H. Adler has put it, prostitution “became a

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\textsuperscript{111} AMH FC H\textsuperscript{4} 15-6, Letter dated 10 September 1945
\textsuperscript{112} AMH FC H\textsuperscript{4} 15-6, Reclamation pour l’éclairage des rues Pressenseé, Ambroise, Thomas
\textsuperscript{113} AMH FC H\textsuperscript{4} 15-6, Agressions, Déprédations, Méfaits, Letter dated 2 July 1945.
\textsuperscript{114} Jean Vanier, “Aide Toi Toi-Même,” Havre Éclair, 6 June 1945. See also “L’Attitude populaire,” Journal de la Marne, 21 September 1944.
\textsuperscript{115} “Les Américains et nous,” Ouest-France, 9 August 1944.
\textsuperscript{116} Alfred Scheiber, Un Fléau social: Le Problème Médico-Policier de la prostitution (Paris: Librairie de Médecis, 1946), 130-131.
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metaphor for the uncertain status of national identity.”117 Particularly for French men who stood by as women sold themselves to the Germans, the prostitute came to symbolize their loss of pride as a nation. In addition, a large proportion of wartime prostitutes, it was rumored, were married to French men suffering as prisoners in German stalags.118 The myth of the prostitute-wife transformed sexually available women into objects of anger and shame. These feelings surfaced at the liberation when the FFI or French Resistance humiliated thousands of women, many of them prostitutes, by shaving their heads in public.119 Because of her alleged wartime past, the prostitute signalled emasculation and a deficit of French honor. No image could have been more sensitive to the Normans after the liberation, when the nation was forced to confront the moral shadow of its own collaboration with the Nazis.

For French men in particular, the prostitute had become a symbol of national uncertainty, shame and defeat. But it was not just prostitutes who were the focus of their concern. Even “respectable” women who flirted with Americans and enjoyed their luxuries came to be seen as symbols of subservience. In a diatribe against prostitution, Alfred Scheiber announced that women of all classes, seemingly undeterred by old prejudices, prostitute themselves—and not strictly out of economic need.120 A new type of amateur prostitute, to whom the arrival of the Americans had given “the illusion of an easier life,” had emerged. Called “boniches,” these women were daughters of good families who chose to frequent the GIs rather than seek serious work. “The arrival of the Americans with their ‘Camels,’ their ‘chewing gum,’ and their chocolate, was a particular cause of this outbreak of

117 K. H. Adler, “Reading National Identity” 50, 52. See also K. H. Adler, Jews and Gender in Liberation France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42-44. In We will Wait: Wives of French Prisoners of War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 47-50, Sarah Fishman argued that the high figures of married prostitutes named by French officials could have been a ploy to get better allocations for wives of French prisoners of war when they faced resistance from the Minister of Finances.
118 Scheiber, Fléau, 125.
119 The classic work on these incidents is Fabrice Virgili, La France “virile”: Des femmes tondues à la Libération, (Paris: Editions Payot et Rivages, 2000).
120 Scheiber, Fléau, 195.
uncontrolled prostitution,” noted a police newspaper. 121 The lure of American commodities was leading a new class of women into prostitution, making the common whore “much more difficult to define.” 122 As anxiety about sexual promiscuity became more diffuse and generalizable, the prostitute came to stand for “Americanization” generally. 123

The mayor of Le Havre, Pierre Voisin, responded vigorously to the complaints of his constituents. 124 Although Le Havre’s politics customarily veered toward socialism, Voisin was a right-leaning businessman with a reputation as an effective administrator. He answered his constituents’ complaints personally, dispatched the police to patrol key streets and parks, and kept an eye on suspect houses. As for the holes in the cemetery wall, Voisin had them sealed “as rapidly and solidly as possible.” 125 Despite Voisin’s heroic efforts, however, there were insurmountable problems. The prostitutes were homeless, mobile, and flush with cash. There were too many of them and not enough police or medical personnel to assure the safety and health of the community. By the summer of 1945, the situation had become critical. The end of the war in May 1945 had brought to town thousands of bored G.I.s waiting to go home. To make matters worse, the warm weather facilitated outdoor sex. The entire town had become a red light district. Voisin began to step up his complaints to the American commander of Le Havre operations, Colonel Weed, with whom he had

122 APP DB409 “Le Visage Caché III. Dans l’ombre.”
123 In postwar occupied Japan, prostitutes called *panpans* became notorious for walking arm-in-arm with their GI companions, or riding happily in their jeeps. While the panpan openly prostituted, others, even “good” middle-class Japanese women consorted with the Americans. As a result, the pan pan became “unsettling” to the Japanese as “striking symbols of the whole convoluted phenomenon of ‘Americanization.’” See John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 135-136.
125 AMH FC H4 15-6, Agressions, Dépréda tions, Méfaits, Letter dated 4 July 1945
a cordial, mutually respectful relationship. At the end of August, Voisin called a meeting with Weed in order to discuss what measures could be taken to repress prostitution.”

Much of what happened at this meeting we know through Voisin’s hand, as the mayor wrote Weed a letter the next day summarizing their discussion. Voisin began the letter by reviewing the problem. The citizens of his town were witnessing scandalous scenes. In addition, the prostitutes were taking no known hygiene precautions, and risked contaminating large numbers of soldiers and civilians. Out of the 75 prostitutes arrested in August, he noted, 33 were contaminated. The complete repression of prostitution was not feasible because if the G.I.s did not find women to satisfy their desires, they would rape “honest” women. (French authorities, like their American counterparts, widely considered prostitution to be a deterrent to sexual violence.) Second, the repression of prostitution was unrealistic as well as dangerous because prostitutes could not be incarcerated unless they were infected. Finally, attempts to put prostitutes on trains going out of town had not worked.

To solve the problem, Voisin proposed that the Americans create a restricted zone in the city, forbidden to the public and “convenient” to the cigarette camps. Here, tents would be set up where soldiers could visit prostitutes under the eyes of police and medical personnel. Hygiene could be maintained, the women would receive regular medical exams, and the G.I.s would have what they needed. Voisin’s proposition was hardly revolutionary. He was suggesting that the Americans set up a system of regulated prostitution similar to France’s own (and not unlike the Blue and Gray Corral). By tradition, the French Army had attached brothels to their regiments, even when the troops were

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126 This relationship lasted ten months. Voisin became Mayor of Le Havre in May 1945; Colonel Weed left Le Havre in February 1946. For the warm relationship between the two men, see AMH, FC- H^4-15-5, Armée et autorités américains, Letter dated 20 September 1945. Weed was born in Texas in 1892, and had served in the army 29 years at the time of his stewardship of the Le Havre port.

127 AMH FC H^4 15-6, Prostitution, Document announcing a meeting 29 August.

128 AMH FC H^4 15-6, Prostitution, Letter dated 30 August 1945.

not stationary. \textsuperscript{130} Normans had been astonished the summer before when the U.S. military failed to set up a brothel “to take care of the needs of the soldiers.” \textsuperscript{131} Nor was Voisin’s proposal the first made to the Americans. In October 1944, after charges of rape were made against the G.I.s in Cherbourg, the police in that city wrote the U.S. military urging them to establish a brothel for their soldiers. \textsuperscript{132}

Above all, the mayor was interested in discretion: he wanted to remove G.I. sex from the public eye. Discretion was a largely unspoken rule in French sexual relations. Traditionally, a variety of sexual choices and practices were tolerated as long as they were carried out privately. Concealment laid the foundation of the French brothel system: the \textit{maisons closes} were called that because the madames were told to keep the shutters closed. Similarly, Voisin intended for the prostitutes to set up business in tents adjacent to the cigarette camps north of town. This location may have been “convenient” for the soldiers, but its real aim was to keep the G.I.s away from residential neighborhoods and the town center. In short, its goal was to keep sex out of sight. In Voisin’s words, “scenes contrary to decency take place day and night, not only in private homes, disturbing peace and quiet in various neighborhoods, but also in the squares, gardens, walkways and ruins of damaged buildings. The fact that youthful eyes are exposed to such public spectacles is not only scandalous but intolerable.” To Weed, Voisin made it clear that it was “absolutely imperative to make sure that acts contrary to decency do not happen just anytime anywhere in the view of just anyone.” \textsuperscript{133}

Voisin’s meticulously-presented proposal fell on deaf American ears. Weed’s response to Voisin’s letter, written the next day, did not even engage the question of a sex zone. Weed presented the prostitution problem as Voisin’s alone. “This serious situation,” he wrote, will effect “the morality


\textsuperscript{131} ADM, Rapports Américains, 13 num 3046

\textsuperscript{132} NARA R.G. 498 Records of Headquarters, ETO, U.S. Army, 1942-1946, Adjutant General’s Section Administration Branch, General Correspondence (1944-1945), Box 27, 250.1 (Morale & Conduct) Translation of Letter from Central Commissaire de Police to Lt. Simms, Chief of C.I.D.

\textsuperscript{133} AMH FC H\textsuperscript{4} 15-6, Prostitution, Letter dated 30 August 1945.
and security of your young people and the health of the entire community.” American soldiers appeared nowhere in Weed’s scenario of the problem; they were not to be held in any way responsible. Instead of taking blame, Weed flattered the mayor in a patronizing way: “The decision to curtail the prostitution which at present prevails in the port region will demand all the vision and delicate judgment which I know you have.” Finally, he declared that the “formidable” task of ushering thousands of soldiers in and out of Le Havre demanded all his time and energy. In other words, not only was he not accountable for the problem, but he could not be bothered to fix it.\textsuperscript{134} Weed’s letter suggests that he did not care about the American impact on the community of Le Havre. A few days later, a high-ranking French police official, in touch with the American Provost Marshall, confirmed for Voisin what he already knew: “the American authorities are hostile to the creation of what could be called ‘regulated Army brothels.’”\textsuperscript{135} The American military pledged to send in 40 American doctors to treat contaminated women, and later in January, to create a floating hospital on a ship anchored in the port.\textsuperscript{136} Both these promises addressed the same catastrophic problem: local venereal wards were overwhelmed with infected women. In Voisin’s careful record of correspondance, however, no evidence exists that the Americans made good on either promise.

Since American authorities never engaged Voisin on the issue of the Army brothels, we are left to speculate why they were so “hostile” to his proposal. Of course, the issue came down to following orders, in this case, the War Department’s repression of prostitution. But as Gerhardt’s case suggests, obedience to commands was not always paramount when it came to prostitution. Furthermore, regulated prostitution was already a reality in the Pacific, namely in Hawaii, where it

\textsuperscript{134} AMH FC H\textsuperscript{4} 15-6, Prostitution, Letter dated 1 September 1945.
\textsuperscript{135} AMH FC H\textsuperscript{4} 15-6, Prostitution, Letter dated 10 September 1945
\textsuperscript{136} AMH FC H\textsuperscript{4} 15-6, Prostitution, Letter dated 17 September 1945; AMH FC H\textsuperscript{4} 15-6, Prostitution, Letter dated 4 January 1945.
was overseen by the military, local police and government. According to one Army survey, one in five soldiers favored “G.I. whorehouses.”

Why, then, were they not established in France?

The example of regulated brothels in Honolulu is instructive. “Hotel Street,” as the district was called, existed for many years prior to the war due to cooperation between the military, police and government. Near a large military base, Hotel Street attracted 30,000 visitors a day at its peak of operation during the war. With Taylorist efficiency, soldiers were ushered in and out of small rooms where they had sex in hygienic conditions. The prostitutes received regular check-ups and good medical care. For a while, everyone was happy with Hotel Street: the military, because it kept venereal disease rates low; the white elite, because it kept the seedy sorts out of their neighborhoods; and the police, because it was thought to prevent sexual violence. Hotel Street also worked because representatives from each of these three groups—the military, the elites, and the police—knew and trusted each other to keep the arrangement working effectively. Nevertheless, Hotel Street was a delicate sexual ecosystem. Despite the fantastic wealth some of the prostitutes acquired, they were not allowed to enter certain elite neighborhoods of Honolulu. For this reason, they were allowed to remain in the city only about six months. When the prostitutes began to rebel against these restrictions and buy property in rich areas of the city, the brothels were promptly closed down.

Circumstances in Honolulu differed sharply from those in France, and these contrasts are illuminating. One important difference concerns the matter of race. Was American military command more tolerant of prostitution in a U.S. territory with a non-white population? While race undoubtedly played a part in military decisions concerning sex in Honolulu, the majority of

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137 Costello, Virtue under Fire, 99. This survey was kept a classified secret for forty years. According to Costello, Virtue under Fire, 95, Eisenhower’s staff gave “very serious consideration that licensed houses should be provided under Army supervision” in Germany because the nonfraternization policy posed a “problem” to order and discipline.

prostitutes working on Hotel Street were white women from San Francisco.\textsuperscript{139} By buying property in certain neighborhoods, the women violated class rather than racial boundaries, as these regions were inhabited by an indigenous haole elite. Nevertheless, other circumstances worked in favor of tolerance in the Hawaii case, namely that it was a permanent arrangement with a history of friendship between military, police, pimps and prostitutes. For example, the Provost Marshall knew all of the madames by first name.\textsuperscript{140} By contrast, in France, police and military officials did not even speak the same language. Nor, as we have already seen, did U.S. military officials respect local medical and police authorities. Bonds of trust might have been established over time, but the conditions of war rendered that process impossible. Honolulu was a U.S. military base, but at least in the summer and fall of 1944, the U.S. Army in France was a rapidly moving military front. As for Le Havre, Weed had no incentive to do long-range planning. The war in Europe was over; the boys were going home, and particularly after the victory in Japan, the military had lost its motive for preventing venereal infection.

Furthermore, unlike Hotel Street, where prostitutes were well-cared for by a medical organization, the French system tottered on the brink of ruin. During the post-liberation years, the French government was struggling to its feet, and was chronically short of both funds and personnel. Understandably, then, SHAEF dismissed French regulation as an ineffective deterrent of venereal disease. Even before the Normandy invasion, military thinking had been dubious on the issue of reducing venereal disease through legal regulation. By the summer of 1945, medical planners had gotten a close look at the French system and wanted no further part of it.\textsuperscript{141} In the meanwhile, by late 1944, penicillin began to be used widely in the European theater. The “magic bullet,” as it was called, reduced the number of days necessary to treat gonorrhea from twenty to five; 99.9% of

\textsuperscript{139} Bailey and Farber, “Hotel Street,” 58-59, 102. Not all girls were white. Some were Hawaiian, Puerto Rican, and Japanese. Also, brothels were segregated.
\textsuperscript{140} Bailey and Farber, “Hotel Street,” 63. The Provost Marshall position was created when martial law was imposed on Hawaii after the Japanese attack.
infected soldiers now returned to duty after short treatment.\textsuperscript{142} Army doctors could thus begin to cope with venereal infection without having to bother with the French at all.

Finally, American military commanders had one overriding incentive \textit{not} to regulate. Like the French, they were supremely attentive to the issue of discretion. The military insisted on keeping French sexual labor invisible, not only from War Department officials, but even more importantly, the American public back home. In a May 1945 memo to all commanding officers, Adjutant General R.B. Lovett argued that if the Army was found guilty of condoning prostitution in overseas theaters, the War Department would “be open to the charge that it is supporting conditions inimical to the health and welfare of troops. The eventual result might be public scandal with families of military personnel charging the War Department with an unforgivable violation of trust in neglecting to care for the physical and moral well-being of its personnel.”\textsuperscript{143} This fear of scandal lay at the heart of all the military double-talk about sex. Towing the official line, even if it led to glaring hypocrisy, had to be respected in order to “protect” the American public. Photographs of the pro stations which populated French cities and military camps were censored throughout the war in order to keep them from the eye of the American public.\textsuperscript{144} Robert Seale remembers another G.I. brothel, the “Idle Hours Athletic Club,” which was closed because it “would not be appreciated by the soldiers’ wives and loved ones in the states.”\textsuperscript{145} Murray Shapiro once observed how the MPs inspected the \textit{maisons} at precisely scheduled times, allowing all parties to evacuate and avoid arrest. When Shapiro asked an officer why this “farce” went on, he was given this response: “American mothers and sweethearts are not wanting to hear of such activities being officially condoned.”\textsuperscript{146} The U.S. military remained caught

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\textsuperscript{142} Cosmas and Cowdry, \textit{The Medical Department}, 542; see also Brandt, \textit{The Magic Bullet}. SHAEF headquarters did not consider the use of penicillin to be a decidedly good development, because it created a “false” sense of safety. See, for example, NARA R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7, Memo dated 17 November 1944.
\textsuperscript{143} NARA, R.G. 331, Entry 65, Box 7, Memo dated 16 May 1945.
\textsuperscript{145} MHI, Robert E. Seale Papers, “WW II As I Remember it,” 62.
\textsuperscript{146} MHI, World War II Survey, Box 28\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division, Shapiro, “Memoirs of Murray Shapiro,” 87.
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in the same double bind that had defined their attitude towards prostitution from the beginning: they were forced to condemn what they could not condone at the same time that they were forced to condone what they could not control.

Given this dilemma, the issue of prostitution was reduced to a matter of visibility. Because any institutionalized form of prostitution made sexual labor observable to the American public, sexual promiscuity could only take place in a covert, unofficial manner. But the sex that had to remain hidden from Americans remained a rude reality for the French. One fact seems to have eluded the concern of American officers eager to maintain an unsullied image of American manhood: its cost to French civilians. In large cities such as Paris and Marseille, and even in small towns, French families could not take a stroll in the park or visit their mother’s grave without witnessing what Voisin tactfully called “scenes contrary to decency.” According to a French policeman in the small Norman town of Cany-Barville, “the healthy segment of the population is disgusted by such debauchery, which takes place even under the eyes of children.” 147

Le Havre’s troubles did not disappear as Americans had shipped out for home. In January 1946 Voisin was reporting to the Sous-Préfet that there were still one thousand prostitutes in Le Havre “servicing” Americans, and using up available hotels in the process.148 The women offering sex—farm girls from the surrounding area—were even more inexperienced than during the war. They had come to Le Havre in hopes of finding an American husband, and ended up prostituting themselves after their “lover” shipped out. Because such women were naïve about health matters, they did not take precautions, and as a result, a greater percentage of them were sick. 149 An anti-venereal ward meant for forty was forced to accommodate nearly 200 women. “Permanent disorder

147 SHGN, 76E6, 200 Brigade Territorial de Cany-Barville, Report of 5 October 1945
reigns” in such wards according to one French official. The women fought for the beds and the mattresses on the floor; they tried to escape by the windows using bedsheets and shirts; and they amused themselves by having sex with each other and molesting the staff. To make matters worse, although the clinics were unsafe and ineffective, they were nevertheless expensive. “The American authorities insist that the greatest possible number of these women be frequently hospitalized,” Voisin wrote, at a cost of about 8.5 million francs a month. At this rate, he argued, his entire medical budget for the year would be gone before March.150 Voisin was writing his superior, hoping to get extra funds, so he probably exaggerated the gravity of the situation. At the same time, one cannot help but be struck by the unfairness of the situation. At one of the American military’s two most important French ports (Marseille was the other), Voisin was trying to keep a pace of American demands for medical hygiene on a limited municipal budget.151

The injustice of Voisin’s position—and the uniqueness of the French case—can be put into perspective if we compare it to the support which the U.S. military gave the British during the war on matters of venereal infection. American troops were present in Britain throughout the war years, and as a result, venereal disease reached alarming levels there as well, particularly in London and its suburbs. The crisis produced a meeting in April 1943 between American, Canadian and British military and health authorities. As it began, the chief American representative, Surgeon General Paul Hawley, advised all involved that the British could not be blamed for the situation: “There was no more moral laxity in this country than in the United States,” he argued, “The problem was one for the public health authorities.”152 Following Hawley’s leadership, a Joint Committee on Venereal Disease

151 Voisin’s last effort to relieve crowding at his hospital was to find a home for infected prostitutes at the Fort de Tourneville to the north of the town. Ironically, the Fort had served as American headquarters during the war and so became available as the soldiers left town. But despite several letters to his superiors, his request was refused. See AMH FC H2 15-6, L’armée américaine au Havre, Letter dated 1 April 1946; AMH FC I1 49-2, L’armée américaine au Havre, Letter dated 3 April 1946; Letter dated 16 April 1946
152 Quoted in Reynolds, Rich Relations, 206.
was established shortly thereafter, convening American, British and Canadian health authorities to cooperate in solutions to the rising rates of venereal infection.

One cannot imagine Hawley making such a statement about France, nor such a committee being established to address venereal disease there. Deeply-entrenched stereotypes led U.S. military authorities to arrogate to themselves the management of the French female body when it served them, and to abandon such management when it no longer proved necessary to do so. By defining the French nation in prostituted, debauched, and thus feminine terms, the United States military naturalized its dominance of power relations in continental Europe. The American G.I. did not have to worry about his venereal infection going untreated, nor his loved ones witnessing “scenes contrary to decency.” The military approach to venereal disease in Le Havre registered a growing confidence on the part of the United States government to construct—whether consciously or through inaction—asymmetries of power in the transatlantic alliance: whose health was important and whose was not, whose family would be protected and whose would not. If the Americans did not worry about public prostitution in Le Havre, was it because they believed that the display of sex could not be morally disruptive in a society without morals? Or was it because the Havrais—as members of a community, as citizens of a sovereign nation—were invisible to the Army, a mere backdrop to its conquest of Europe?

In either case, the cost of American diffidence was paid by French citizens, and most dearly, by prostitutes themselves. Our last two images of the prostitutes in LeHavre are ones of defiance and subjection. To his superior Mayor Voisin wrote in 1946 that the prostitutes infected by American G.I.s “preferred to tear up their cash or throw it in the sewer rather than be forced to pay their bills.” By refusing to pay medical costs, the prostitutes were preserving their business, preventing a situation where profits would be eaten up by medical expenses. But their refusal to pay also signalled

153 AMH FC 149-2 : Prostitution, Report from the Commissaire Central.
their belief that their illnesses were not their responsibility alone to bear. At the same time, however, they did forfeit their health and freedom. As the Americans bid “adieu” to France government officials everywhere in Normandy faced the same problem: what to do with the sick prostitutes? The venereal wards were overwhelmed. French medical services in Cany-Barville transported them in vans to Rouen, only to be turned back because there was no room at the hospital. The women were then taken to Le Havre, only to be re-directed back to Rouen by the Le Havre authorities for the same reason. Some women were then accepted at Rouen, but the majority sent to Dieppe. Here, they were once again re-directed to Le Havre. But when the women arrived in Le Havre, they were pointed once again in the direction of Dieppe, then sent back from Dieppe to Le Havre once again. An unwanted population of diseased women being shuttled from town to town—these prostitutes comprised the wreckage of American hypocrisy, and compromise the legacy of the American military presence in Normandy.