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Anti-Trafficking Industrial Complex Awareness Month (2nd edition)

The Sex Worker Media Library presents the second edition of a round-up of issues that brought attention to the human rights impact of the anti-trafficking regime.

by  carolleigh 8 months ago 963 Views ▾

In [2007 President Bush declared January 11th National Trafficking Awareness Day*](#). President Obama later expanded this to declare January [National Trafficking Awareness Month](#). The Sex Worker Media Library presents the 2nd edition of "[Anti-Trafficking Industrial Complex Awareness Month \(ATIC\)](#)," as an addendum and an antidote to the U.S. government's month long campaign.

Over the last decade scholars, sex workers, activists and cultural critics have identified various systems and institutions within the anti-trafficking regime including [the Rescue Industry \(Laura Agustín\)](#) and [the White Savior Industrial Complex \(Teju Cole\)](#) and [Militarized Humanism/Carceral Feminism \(Elizabeth Bernstein\)](#). On this occasion we bring awareness to the double-edged sword of anti-trafficking, with it's efforts to assist and empower victims on one side, and the sharp edge of the State's carceral solutions and human rights violations on the other.

This 2nd edition ([1st edition here](#)) focuses primarily on media. Analysis of arrest and incarceration figures can be found at Emi Koyama's blog including [War on Terror & War on Trafficking: A Sex Worker Activist Confronts the Anti-Trafficking Movement](#) and Norma Jean Almodovar's [Police Prostitution and Politics](#). We also request submissions of recent data and analysis to info@sexworkermedialibrary.org.

**Note: January 11 is also Carol Leigh, the author's birthday.*

Becoming aware of Awareness-Raising as anti-trafficking tactic

To launch this 2nd edition, we return to *Dr. Laura Agustín's* January 2015 essay ["Becoming aware of Awareness-Raising as anti-trafficking tactic"](#)

"Awareness is by definition superficial and can only become deeper if followed up by curious investigation: wondering, reading, critique, talking with those more experienced, cogitating over ambiguities. But with awareness-raising as goal, previously uninformed audiences tend to accept whatever messages claim to be the truth, so that when campaigners are unprincipled (as many anti-traffickers are), audiences are misinformed."

The [Sex Worker Media Library](#) revisits this occasion to bring attention to organizations and individuals—activists, artists, and academics— who have carefully researched, responded to and otherwise documented the broad impact of the anti-trafficking regime around the world. We recognize and note ill conceived anti-trafficking policy, the harms of the rescue industry and of increased stigmatization and criminalization of migration, commercial sex, people of color, transgender people and youth. We encourage you to future "... *investigation: wondering, reading, critique, talking with those more experienced, cogitating over ambiguities.*"

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Anti-trafficking movements and journalism: who sets the agenda?

Quoting from Gretchen Soderlund at [Open Democracy's Beyond Trafficking and Slavery \(April 2015\)](#): "In recent coverage of sex trafficking there appears to be a continual feedback loop: the news media have inspired social movements to adopt sex trafficking as a cause at various points in history. Once the issue becomes entrenched, journalists become beholden to anti-trafficking movements as experts for continued coverage of the topic. The press proceeds to adopt a frame from these groups that it had earlier helped to establish as dominant. As I have shown [elsewhere](#), the history of anti-trafficking groups and the history of modern journalism are deeply intertwined. Not only did these social movements and journalism develop symbiotic relationships with one another, but early-twentieth century controversies over the excesses of sex trafficking reportage actually helped change journalistic practices."

"The history of sex trafficking journalism and activism is marred by scandal, sensationalism, and unsubstantiated claims. From Stead to [Somaly Mam](#), sex trafficking is a topic that lends itself to excesses and abuses. Part of the problem is that the narratives have become so universally accepted that they have become ready-made stories that journalists can publish with little reflection or criticism. We need a renewed call for responsible reporting on this issue. Understanding the history of this reportage and its relationship to social movements can help lead us down a path that avoids some of the main pitfalls of the past."

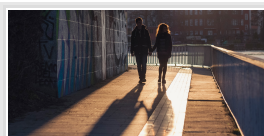
Anti-trafficking movements and journalism: who sets the agenda?

Many have criticised the media for their sensationalist reporting on sex trafficking. But few realise the extent to which social movements are shaping this agenda. Sex trafficking is a framework for understanding commercial sex exchanges that draws on socially potent narratives about immigration, race, gender, and sexuality.



Super Bowl Trafficking and Other Myths: The Evolution of A Discourse

This year's summary highlights glimpses of hope for those harmed by the ATIC: There has been wider support—in the media and in parts of society—for decriminalization of sex work. Mainstream anti-trafficking groups such as Polaris are walking back some of their stigmatizing claims. Their 'understated' versions of "Trafficking Myths" invoke what sex worker and other human rights groups have been voicing for over a decade.



The Average Age of Entry Myth

With January's focus on human trafficking awareness, the topic is sure be discussed in the news more often this month-and this exposure is incredibly important to make sure that people are aware of this crime. But statistics on trafficking can be difficult to find, and the information you hear may not be reliable.

✦ POLARIS

[Anti-Trafficking Campaign Hype](#)

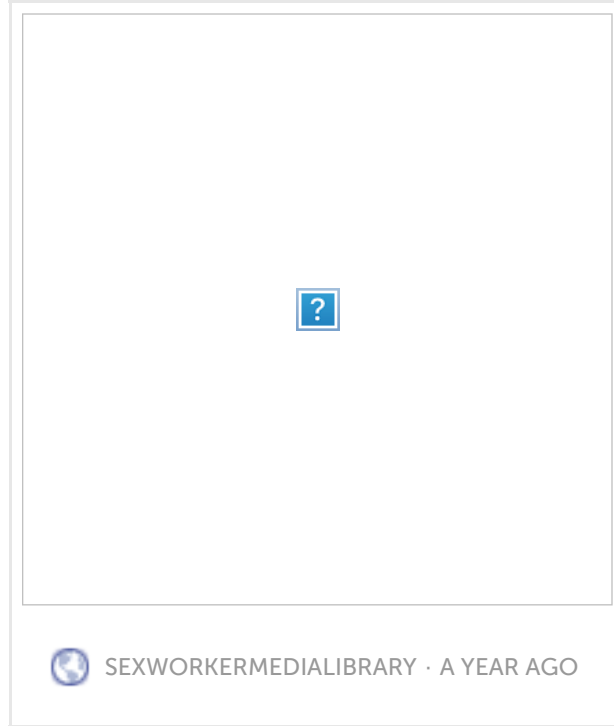
A collection from [Dr. Laura Agustin](#)

Images were collected from a range of sources. The central technique is to portray non sequiturs or at least to stretch anti-trafficking metaphors. Visit Dr Laura Agustín's collection on Facebook with images and assorted commentary on Facebook linked below:

Facebook

https://www.facebook.com/lauramariaagustin/media_set?set=a.10153874054944511.1073741829.806779510&type=3

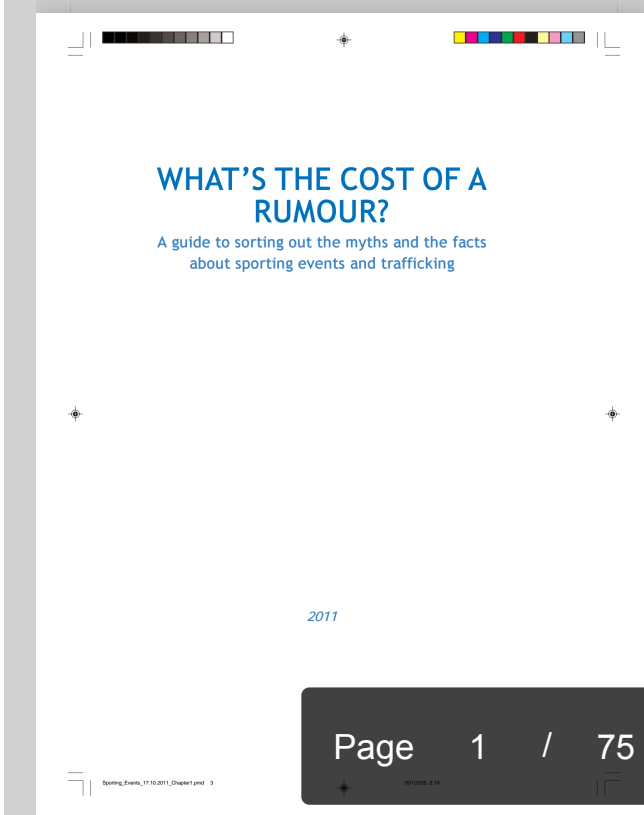
FACEBOOK



Anti-Trafficking, San Francisco Style

The recent anti-trafficking campaign from 'the City that Knows How' is an ideal example of several new trends in anti-trafficking discourse. For example, the 'Super Bowl Sex Trafficking' link has been widely disputed. The *dispute about the link* is now a feature of a large portion of stories about 'Super Bowl Sex Trafficking' in San Francisco, in which the 'mainstream' discourse offers a *minor* retreat:

"While there have been many claims about the effect of a Super Bowl on the amount of prostitution in the host city, [a 2011 study by the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women](#) showed that large sporting events do not cause an increase in trafficking for prostitution."



GAATW

“It would be a misnomer to just say that by having a Super Bowl, it means there’s an automatic increase to trafficking,” said Bay Area Anti-Trafficking Coalition founder Betty Ann Boeving. “It actually is an increase in awareness of the issue.”

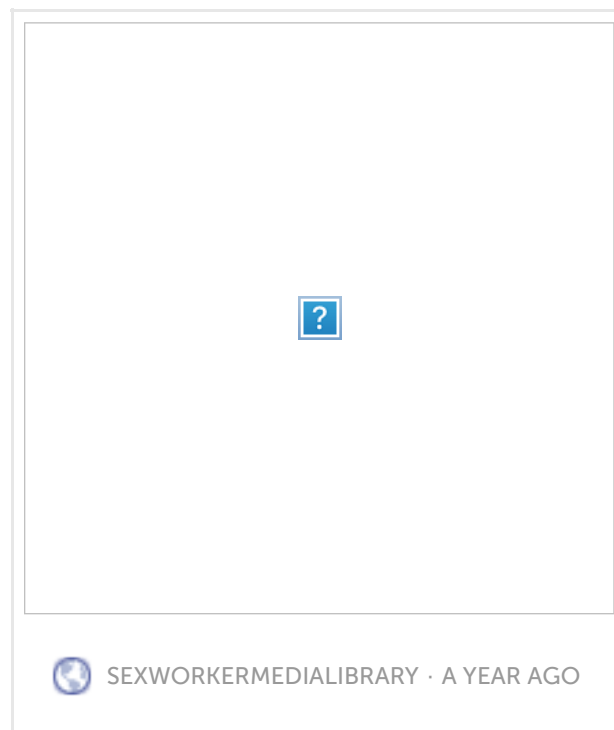


SFO Holds Human Trafficking Awareness Training Ahead Of Super Bowl 50

SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (CBS SF) - The arrival of the Super Bowl to the Bay Area is increasing awareness of human trafficking related to the event. San Francisco International Airport held training sessions for airline and airport personnel Monday to recognize the signs of human trafficking.

 CARLOSCBS5

The new anti-trafficking campaign developed by the Bay Area anti-trafficking groups and city leaders also reflects the new stylistic trends referenced above.



Our Campaign

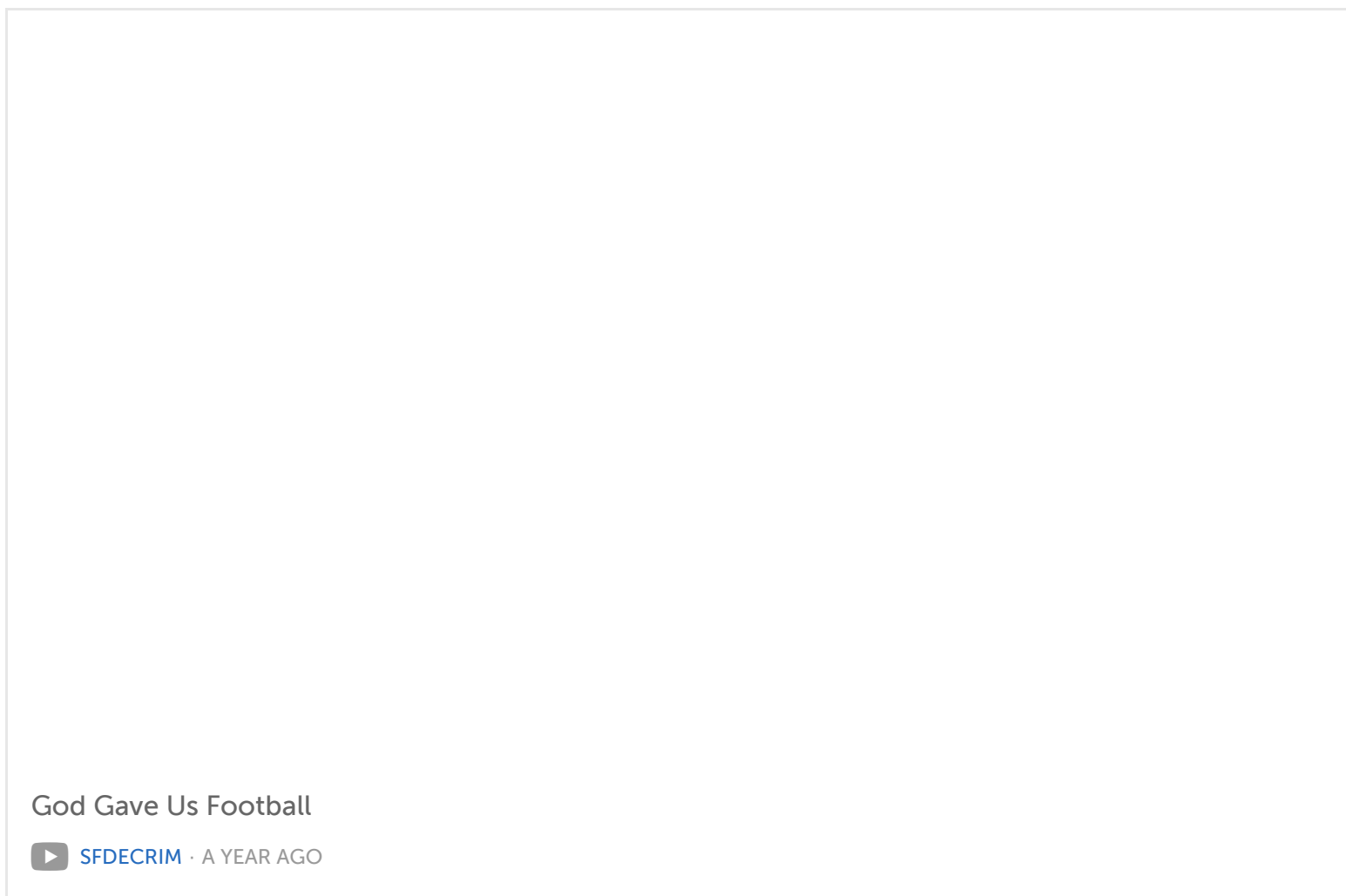
Many people are uninformed or misinformed about the alarming rates of trafficking in the United States, and how it intersects with their own lives. Some individuals are indifferent to the issue of sexual exploitation because they see the victims as criminals, who chose that path, rather than people who have been exploited through manipulation.

 NO TRAFFICK AHEAD

Rights-based European anti-trafficking activist, Bobby Gerasimov, responds: *"The campaign is not that bad for an anti-trafficking campaign. It's relatively general and not focusing only on 'sex trafficking'. Still, one problem is that it creates a sense of urgency, even panic - it's everywhere around us, it takes many forms...I also don't like the clear division between 'sex trafficking' and 'labour trafficking.' Of course sex work should be included as labour (not to mention that it seems now like there are three types of trafficking - human, sex and labour, which is pretty absurd!) I also don't see*

any hint of WHY trafficking occurs - which is because of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, lack of social protection, gender inequality, the deregulation of labour... And that these are all situations for which the state is responsible..."

This humorous short video reflects a common retro and superstitious anti-trafficking sensibility, still common in 'faith based' anti-trafficking circles.



Advances aside, a staple of the 'kinder, gentler' anti-trafficking regime in the U.S. is the firm distinction between 'sex trafficking' and 'labor trafficking.' Further institutionalizing the division between trafficking in sexual labor and all other forms of labor ghettoizes those who work in commercial sex, denying them status as workers, as well as workers rights. Also, by only addressing the most extreme situations (trafficking), the *continuum* of labor struggles within the sex sector and other sectors is ignored.

The new trends also mark the beginning of collaborations between abolitionist based anti-trafficking organizations and rights based groups. What will this mean to the impact of the Anti-Trafficking Industrial Complex on those who are most impacted by the harms of that system?

At the same time, the industrial and financial basis of this complex is widening, employing thousands and funneling charity donations to advertising (ie, 'awareness'). The ATIC is primarily rooted in mainstream feminist networks, 'morality' focused religious based advocacy; primary schools and high schools; criminal justice laws, enforcement and training; and within various departments of local/state/national government. Such locations have become obstacle courses, shifting anti-violence and anti-poverty concerns to anti-prostitution and anti-immigrant campaigns.

An Intersectional Analysis of 'Trafficking' - Industrial/Labor Abuses Rooted in Discrimination and Economic Injustice

As an alternative, to effectively address the abuses in all industries, organized labor, including sex workers, must be central to policy making which impacts their work. Current anti-trafficking trends, that is: speaking up against slavery and only the most extreme forms of labor abuse essentializes the worker's experience in all industries, obscures the struggles of workers and only addresses people as victims. Where is organized labor in the anti-trafficking movement?

An intersectional view of these human rights abuses requires leadership by migrants rights advocates as well as the range of populations who are impacted by social/economic injustice and by the State through an anti-crime agenda.

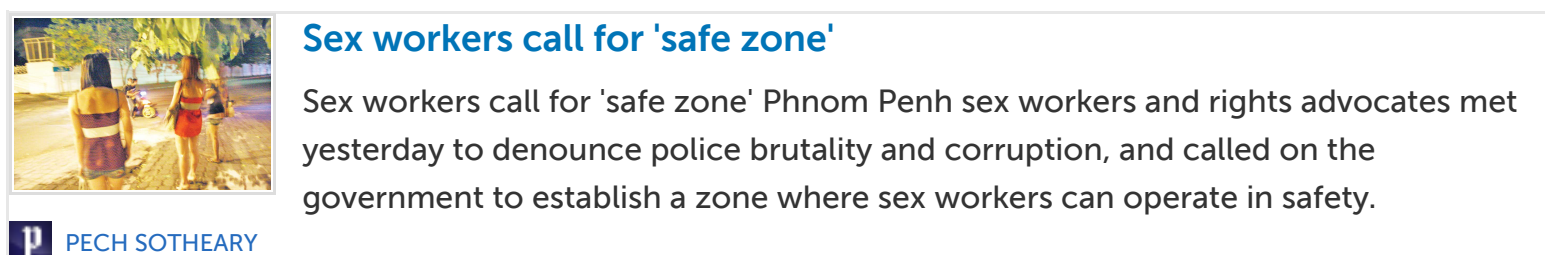
Cambodia: Ground Zero in the War on Trafficking and A Powerful History of Sex Worker Organizing

The 2014 launched the Somaly Mam debacle rooted in Cambodia. 2015 offered a year of stories about abuse of sex

workers through anti-trafficking policies and projects ([1st edition](#)). Attention was focused on [the history of government oppression and police abuse of sex workers in Cambodia](#) which has been highly influenced by the US anti-trafficking agenda and TIP (Trafficking in Persons) Report. In addition, the long history of powerful sex worker activism in Cambodia is a story that inspires sex workers around the world. This video, "[Sex Workers Cry- Rights Not Rescue](#)" produced by Paula Stromberg with [Women's Network for Unity](#) is an introduction to their work and perspectives. *Soundtrack by the famed Messenger Band.*



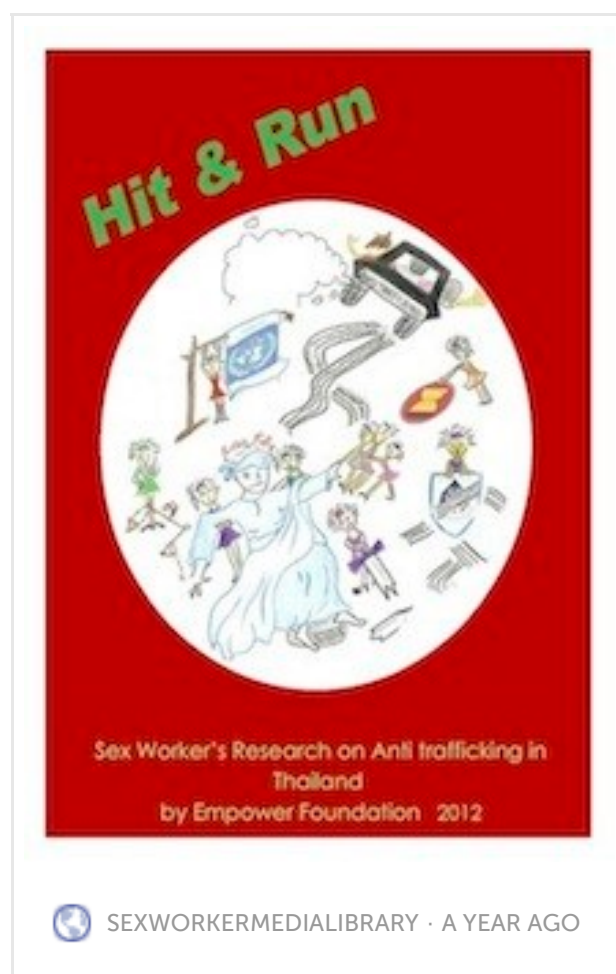
A May 2015 story from Cambodia demonstrates how sex workers in the region have sustain their long term advocacy in the region.



January 19, 2016 reports on the latest development in Cambodian government crimes against sex workers.

Police in Phnom Penh arrested at least 274 sex workers on the streets last year before sending them to the notorious Prey Speu social affairs center, according to a grassroots NGO, which also reported that 80 percent of street workers in its care said they had been "violated" by on-duty officers.

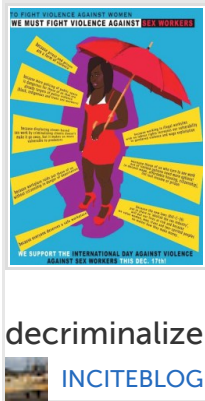
Also [click here](#) for [\(1st edition\) Sex Worker Based Research from Thailand](#) from [EMPOWER](#)



White-Washed 'Anti-Slavery' and the Appropriation of Black Suffering

"Claiming to be a modern-day anti-slavery ambassador is a highly profitable cause, one that is increasingly popular in Hollywood circles.... Indeed it has developed into, quite literally, a [ten-million dollar industry](#); ... In what some are calling the [Age of Ferguson](#), an era where police killings of Black men, women, and children are institutionalized and enshrined in law in the same way that slavery once was, the question must be asked: how legitimate can a 'new' anti-slavery movement be when the legacy of the transatlantic slave-trade is a living, breathing horror for anyone living with

Black skin in the Americas? And what does this say about the value placed on Black lives that fighting 'slavery' is only popular when it is whitewashed of any Black-led struggles for justice?"



#Blacksexworkerslivesmatter: White-Washed 'Anti-Slavery' and the Appropriation of Black Suffering

by Robyn Maynard Originally published at The Feminist Wire, republished here with permission. Claiming to be a modern-day anti-slavery ambassador is a highly profitable cause, one that is increasingly popular in Hollywood circles. Most recently, hundreds of celebrities endorsed an open letter to derail Amnesty International's draft policy to decriminalize consensual adult prostitution.

INCITEBLOG

[Sex Trafficking in Alaska](#)

This website details the ineffectiveness, and detrimental strategies of Alaskan anti-trafficking campaigns. Created by CUSP, a group including sex workers/survivors/supporters, this site provides a rare inside view of the frustration and political actions of this community.

"Alaska spent \$827,200 on a special Sex Trafficking Crimes Investigations Unit in 2012, and it found no sex trafficking to investigate. Meanwhile, there are dozens of young people here in Alaska who've fallen through the gaping holes at the bottom of the system and find prostitution to be their best option – but we don't talk about them. Maybe they aren't exciting or sexy enough. The conversation in Alaska centers, instead, on children snatched off the street or [lured away from the villages by pimps who keep them in chains or cages and force them to have sex for money they never see](#). This is a rare scenario, but it makes for better publicity and funding."

Study-People in Alaska's Sex Trade: Their Lived Experiences And Policy

Recommendations.

Researcher Tara Burns offers the result of her research ["People in Alaska's Sex Trade: Their Lived Experiences And Policy](#)

[Recommendations.](#)" This study is essential background material for activists and those involved with policy making around the issue of sex work and trafficking. Recommendations in this report are detailed.

"Forty-one people who self identified as having worked in Alaska's sex trade or having been profiled as a prostitute took the survey.

"What laws would serve people in the sex industry?"

"Stop pursuing us like hunted animals... If you stop pursuing the criminalization of prostitution, then I can come to you when I'm raped, then I can come to you when I'm robbed, then you can pursue violent crimes."

Also see: [The Dangers of Sex Work in Alaska: Is the State Helping or Hurting Sex Workers?](#) and [Alaska's Prostitution Law Isn't Working](#)

[Amnesty International's Endorsement of Decriminalization and Sex Worker Rights](#)

"We have chosen to advocate for the [decriminalization of all aspects of consensual adult sex](#) - sex work that does not involve coercion, exploitation or abuse. This is based on evidence and the real-life experience of sex workers themselves that criminalization makes them less safe."

"But when word first got out that Amnesty International had initiated a [consultation to develop a policy to protect the human rights of sex workers](#), it was like lighting a touch paper. Journalists and celebrities climbed on the band wagon.

Ever-more sensational headlines condemned Amnesty International for advocating for "prostitution as a human right".

Amnesty International contextualized their demand for decriminalization with

acknowledgement of concern for trafficking.

In a [Q and A on their website](#), they reiterate their long standing opposition to trafficking, and answer a common accusation: Doesn't decriminalizing sex work just encourage trafficking?

"There is no evidence to suggest that decriminalization results in more trafficking."

"We believe that decriminalization would help tackle trafficking. When sex work is decriminalized, sex workers are better able work together and demand their rights, leading to better working conditions and standards and greater oversight of commercial sex and potential trafficking within it.

"When they are not threatened with criminalization, sex workers are also able to collaborate with law enforcement to identify traffickers and victims of trafficking."

"Organizations such as the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, Anti -Slavery International and the International Labour Organisation agree that decriminalization has a positive role to play. It fosters increased recognition of the rights of people who sell sex and can help end human rights violations against them, including trafficking."

CATW VS. Amnesty International- Celebrity Strategy Backfires: Support for Decriminalization Builds as CATW Tactics and Analysis Comes Under Fire

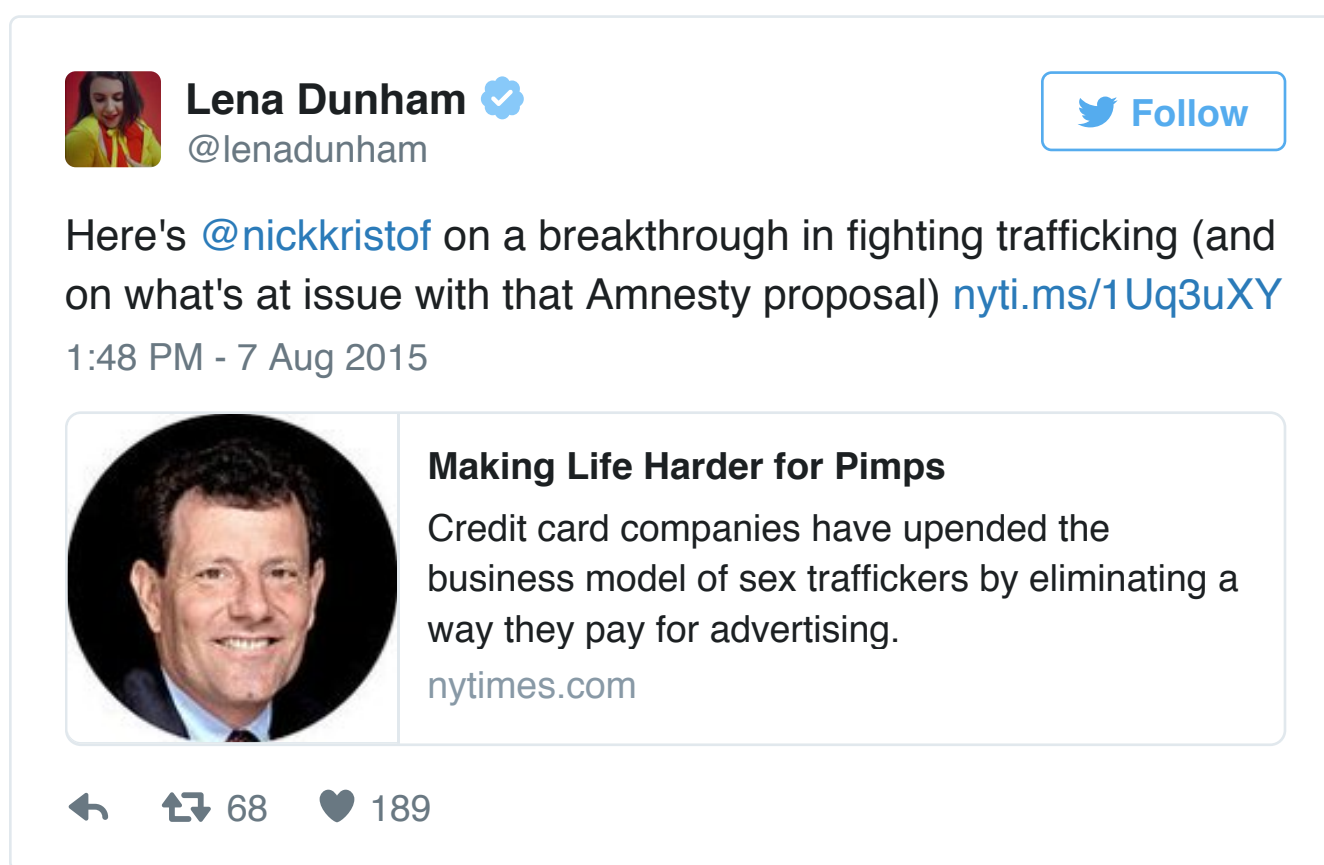
The abolitionist group, the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) had been organizing opposition for over year (since the early discussions and proposal had been leaked).




From CATW (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women):

"Amnesty appears to shape its opinion about the sex industry primarily from the perspective of the HIV/AIDS sector,


including UNAIDS... The primary goals of UNAIDS and other agencies that support limited harm reduction policies in the sex industry seem far more concerned with the health of sex buyers than the lives of prostituted and sex trafficked women."

A dynamic discourse proceeded on social media, fueled by the strident opposition of a few celebrities including Lena Dunham, who is often put forth as the recent generation's feminist. Dunham took to her Twitter account and offered some of the abolitionist talking points. As she cited opinion from Nicholas Kristof, it was clear that her source of information was rooted in the propaganda of abolitionist celebrity fundraising culture, an essential support for the Anti-Trafficking Industrial Complex.






 **Lena Dunham** 
@lenadunham 

Here's @nickkristof on a breakthrough in fighting trafficking (and on what's at issue with that Amnesty proposal) nyti.ms/1Uq3uXY
1:48 PM - 7 Aug 2015



Making Life Harder for Pimps
Credit card companies have upended the business model of sex traffickers by eliminating a way they pay for advertising.
nytimes.com

  68  189

As Robin D explains, Kristof is well known as a [white savior demagogue](#) and classic exploiter of sex workers through various media. For example, he [live-tweeted brothel raids with Somaly Mam](#), and [named a 9-year-old Congolese rape victim](#).

An avalanche of attention was drawn to the issue including a majority of voices of sex workers, journalists and academics who challenge anti-sex work ideologies. The reactionary, inaccurate claims of the abolitionists did not stand up to mainstream public scrutiny. The celebrity strategy underscored the superficial ideologies behind the abolitionist

claims. Ultimately the celebrity scheme drew attention to the growing support for sex worker rights.

Matthias Lehmann (Research Project Korea) researcher and member of the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe [\(ICRSE\)](#) collected a list of sex worker responses and discussions of Amnesty's proposals.



Posts about Criminalisation of clients on Research Project Korea

This slideshow requires JavaScript. Images* to celebrate Hollywood's "gender studies scholars" who, after conducting "some very scientific studies", have co-signed a letter by anti-prostitution activists to try and pressure Amnesty International into dropping plans to adopt a policy that would recommend decriminalising sex work.

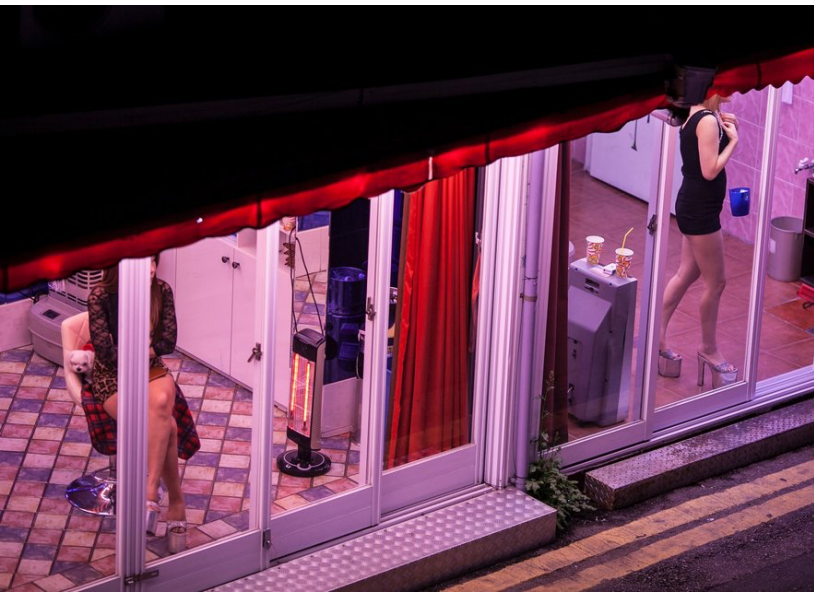
[WORDPRESS](#)

Celebrification of Trafficking

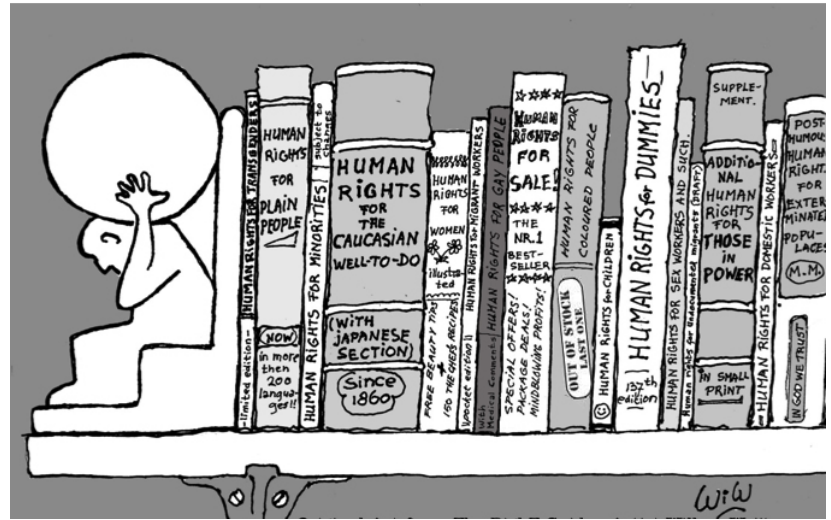
Professor Dina Haynes on "Celebrification of Trafficking" at USC Conference 2013

[CAROL LEIGH](#) · A YEAR AGO

From Dr. Haynes six part text series: "Celebrities can be especially desirable to those who would venture forth even where data is lacking. Whereas experts are inclined to qualify and question discrepant data, celebrities may be more comfortable using unverified statistics and suggesting untested "solutions" so as not to muddle the visceral and emotional appeal of the issue. There are no easy solutions to human trafficking. Experts often recommend large, expensive, and politically challenging approaches. Celebrities, on the other hand, can be more willing to abridge experts' detailed, ambitious, and costly proposals. This is enticing to policy makers and the public, both of whom are interested in "doing something," so long as that "something" is neither too complicated nor expensive. In sum, celebrity voices, conflicting expert opinions, and inconsistent data together induce susceptibility in audiences to a reductionist message about human trafficking. Choosing the path of least resistance, audiences then accept the reductionist narrative to "become aware," and seek additional celebrity input to determine what should be done to combat human trafficking." The full text of her extensive work on 'the Celebrification of Trafficking' is available [here](#).



Collateral Damage: Sex Workers and The Anti-Trafficking Campaigns
by Carol Leigh; narrated by Cosi Fabian sexworkermedialibrary.org/CollateralDamage/

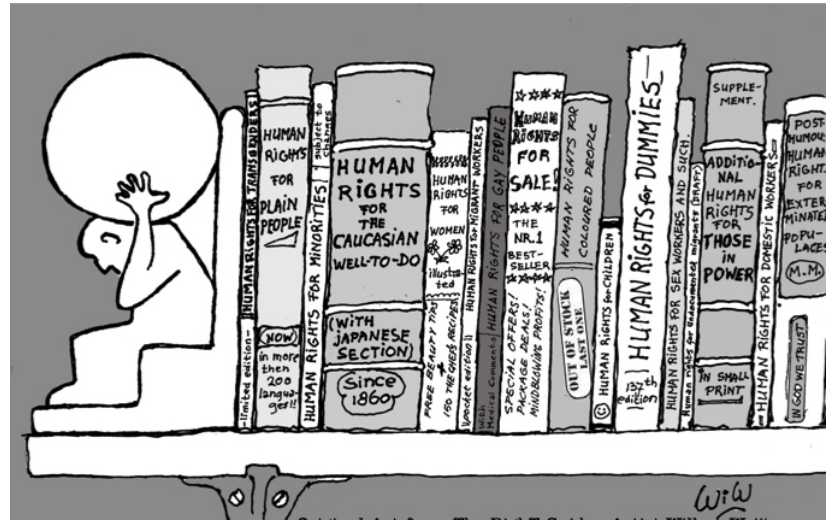


PROMOTING PROSTITUTION

Anti-Trafficking Industrial Complex Awareness Day-1st edition 2015



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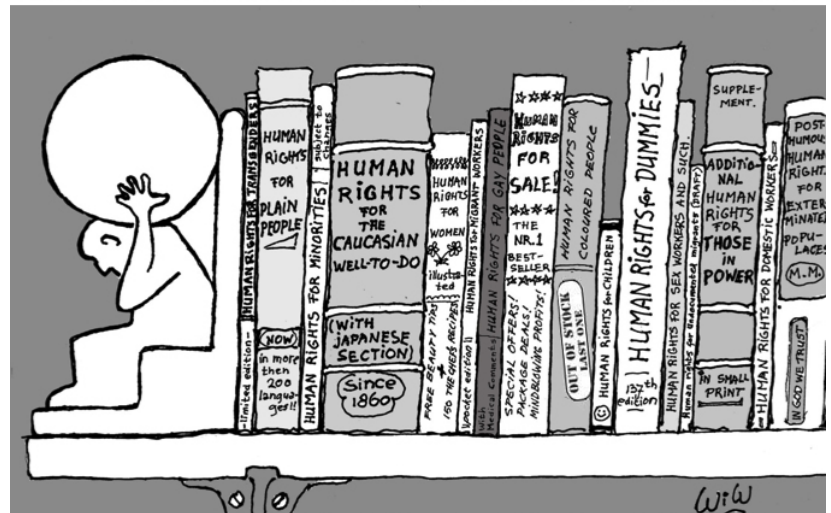
The Sentencing of Amber Batts

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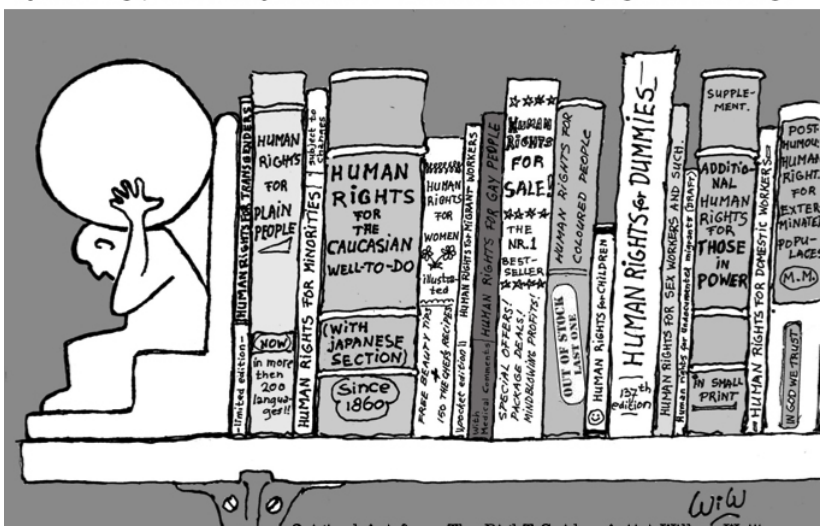
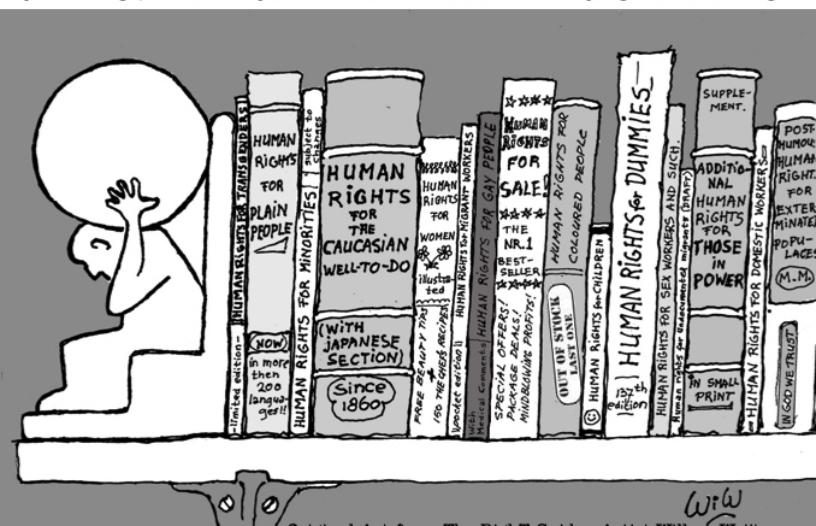


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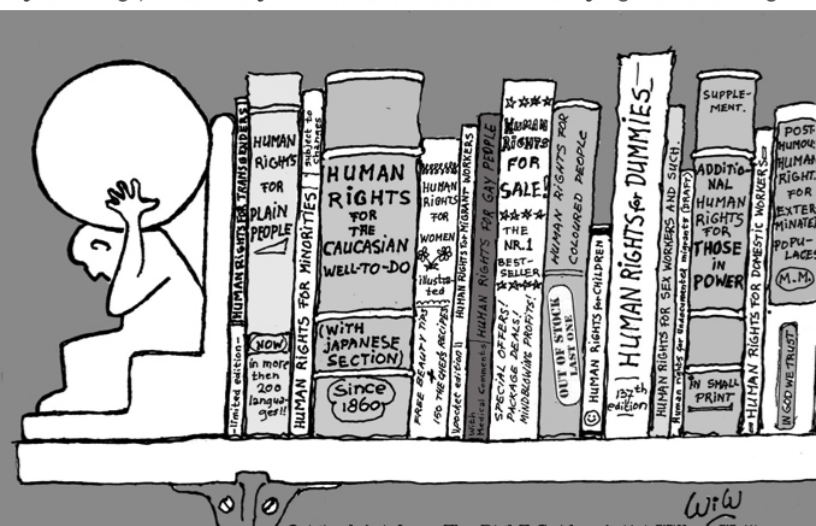
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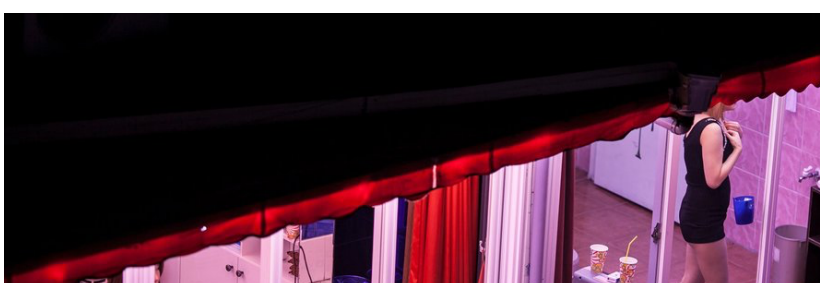
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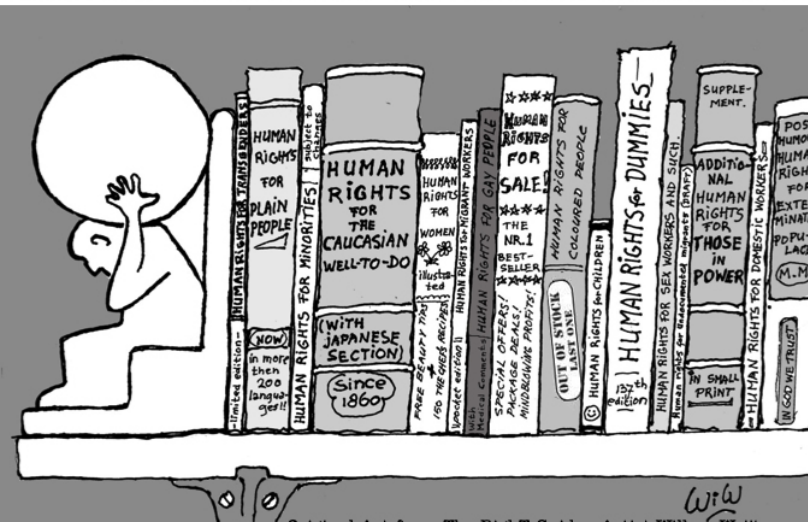
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PROMOTING PROSTITUTION



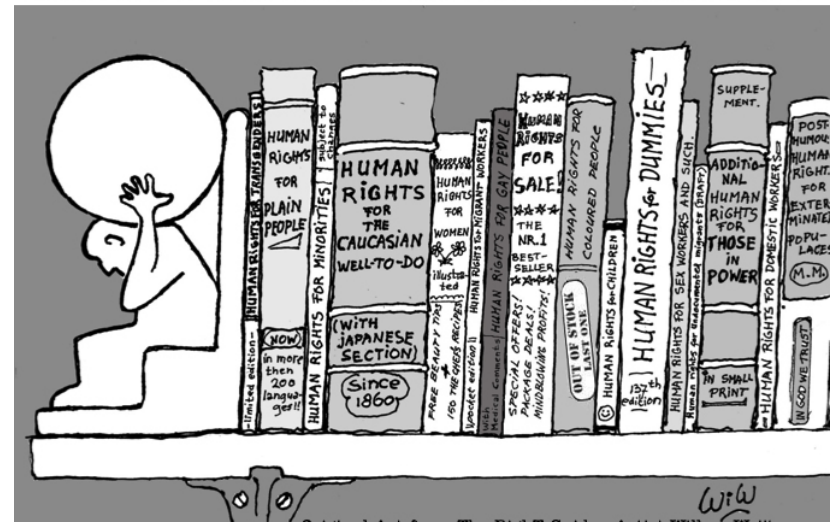
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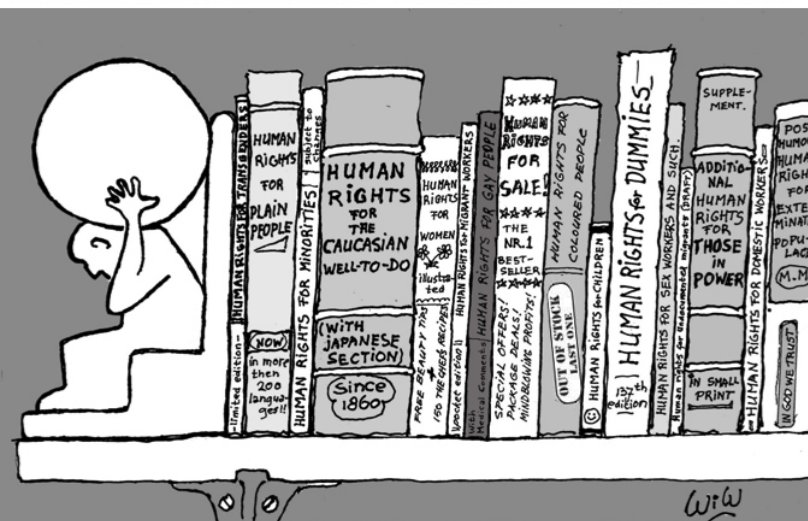
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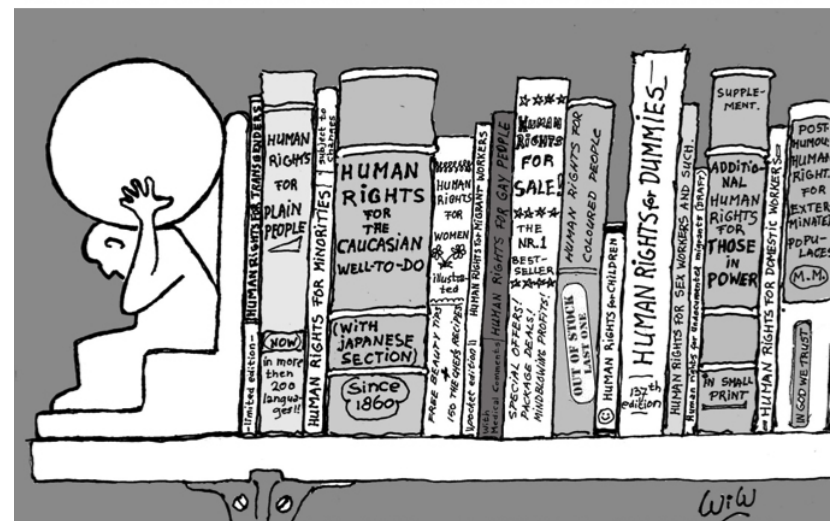
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The Sentencing of Amber Batts



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