

On Monday November 16, 2009 I was invited to be on a panel at Harvard University to debate "**Civil Rights and Civil liberties of the Legalization of Prostitution**". It was my hopes that this debate would be videotaped however, it was not so I have written a summary for your review on this important issue.

The panel consisted of myself and Dr. Melissa Farley the Founder and Executive Director of Prostitution Research & Education (PRE) www.prostitutionresearch.com, located in San Francisco Calif. She and I spoke on why the legalization of prostitution is not the answer. Our opponents were Dr. Elizabeth Wood and Dr. Samantha Majic who represented the *pro prostitution* side. Melissa and I formulated questions for the people who attended that were anti-legalization activist.

I must say that the debate was very interesting. Dr. Melissa Farley, Carmen Maianu (Breaking Free Board Member), and I met together the night before the debate to strategize on what we (Melissa and I) would focus on. I focused on prostitution as an extension of slavery and that the majority of women involved in the life of prostitution are African-American women and other women of color both in the United States and around the world. Melissa Farley focused on the overall harm of prostitution and had statistics both nationally and internationally to prove her point.

Each of the panelists had seven minutes to present their case. After the debate, we entertained a variety of questions from the audience. Questions ranged from individuals who did not agree that prostitution and slavery should be connected to other questions that minimized the harm of prostitution and questioned some of Dr. Farley's statistics. Although we received questions such as the above, the majority of questions were confirming both my own and Dr. Farley's statements on why prostitution should not be legalized. In the end, the anti-legalization argument seemed to win the debate.

As I stated above, I wish they would have taped the debate but they did not. I have a brief copy of my seven minute statement for you to review below. It is my understanding that debates such as these will be taking place throughout the nation in the upcoming future.

As I stated in a meeting with Hunt Foundation the day after the debate, *"It's a sad and pitiful thing that in the 21st century we are still debating on whether or not it is ok to buy and sell human beings. In 1860 slavery was abolished, ending forever the buying and selling of human beings in this country. It should be clear to all women, whether you have been prostituted/trafficked or not, that we are not disposable human beings and prostitution makes a statement about all women. If we don't take some immediate action quickly to end this form of sexual slavery, other than just talk about it, it pains me to think about what the women and girls of tomorrow have to look forward to should legalization take place."*

Sincerely,

Vednita Carter

Executive Director and Founder

Breaking Free

OPENING STATEMENT: Civil Right and Civil Liberties of implications of legalization of sex work.

My name is Vednita Carter I am the founder and Executive Director of BF a program that assists women and girls to leave the life of prostitution. I have experienced prostitution and its effects personally and through the lives of women and girls that I work with on a daily basis for the last 20 years. There are vast numbers of African-American women and other women of color who make up the majority of women used in prostitution throughout the USA and the world.

Everyone is familiar with the history of slavery in America. Africans were bought and sold into slavery for decades. Prior to the slaves being freed, I'm sure there were many discussions right here at Harvard such as we are having today regarding whether or not slaves should be free. The slaves that worked in the big house with the slave master (representative of "so called" upper-class prostitution or escort services), may have felt that slavery for them at least, was not so bad. After all, they were able to eat the scraps that the master left behind, they received fairly decent shelter and were given worn out clothes, blankets etc. Many were protected from brutal beatings and rapes because they worked in the big house and were made to believe by the master that they were better than the field slaves. The field slaves (who would be representative of street prostitution or lower-end prostitution) had to work long hours in the fields with no protection from the hot sun. They were always susceptible to brutal beatings and rape of women and girls. Their shelter, food, and clothing were always inadequate. They also had a quota of cotton they had to pick daily or pay a deadly price. The field slaves wanted freedom. Their lot in life was not good and they wanted better. Eventually, all the slaves were freed. It was determined that if slavery hurt one it hurt all regardless of whether or not the house slaves felt differently.

Today, a vast amount of prostitution occurs in the streets and in the clubs of US cities and in poor urban communities populated by African-Americans and other poverty stricken people and people of color. Middle-class men, predominantly of European descent, drive through these neighborhoods for the sole purpose of finding a young black girl or woman to buy and use for sexual gratification. ⁱ Like slave women on the auction block, African-American women are displayed on the streets or in strip clubs, on Craig's list and porn magazines. They are surveyed like cattle, and selected to perform at the orders of a stranger. They are routinely berated and shouted at while being sexually assaulted, and are often slapped, brutally beaten, pushed from cars, and some are killed. It is not difficult to see the connections between slavery and prostitution.

Prostitution proponents argue that prostituted women are simply performing a service like any other and that they can learn to be used by another person. The average American prostituted woman is recruited or coerced into prostitution at the age of 12-14. Would you consider this the age when girls can make an objective decision about the career path they want to pursue? When girls start this young, many are unable to escape. While they are still considered youth once they reach the age of 18 years, prostitution for them is considered by some a free "choice". This free "choice" or women who seemingly "choose" to be prostituted is in reality, a

result of the lack of choices that lead women and girls to believe this is their only option to survive.

If prostitution should be considered legal work, it should be able to provide basic work benefits. Instead, here's a story closer to the reality of what many prostituted women face. A young woman who came to Breaking Free for services stated that she worked in the legal brothels of Nevada. While working, she became very ill and informed the Brothel Manager that she was unable to continue to be prostituted. The Brothel Manager informed her that he would have to call her pimp who referred her and get his permission before allowing her to stop working. This was because she had a daily earning quota to meet. The pimp told the Brothel Manager that her mouth was not sick and that she should continue to work.

Based on my 20 years experience in working with women in prostitution and as a survivor of prostitution myself, I know that most prostituted women may get some amount of money though often much of it passes through her to someone else: a pimp, a sauna/escort owner, drug dealer or a Brothel Owner. Even if she retains some funds with which to support herself, the bottom line is that prostitution is not a career and the few who do prosper achieve their wealth by exploiting other women - the one skill that is taught in prostitution.

Here we are at Harvard University today going backwards instead of forward trying to determine if we should or should not buy and sell women, human being. Have we not learned anything from our history? We must remember if prostitution hurts one it hurts all and legalization is not the answer. We must end prostitution. Let's not blindly repeat our nation's history of slavery. Let us free women from the bondage of prostitution.

Sources

¹ In every Southern US city in the 1920s and 30s, the red-light district was on the "other side of the tracks" in the black ghetto, where young white boys routinely "discovered their manhood" with the help of the "two dollar whore." Carmen & Moody.
