



# Stop Trafficking!

# Awareness Advocacy Action

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## A Survivor's Reflection

*The following is a survivor's account of how race played a role in his victimization:*

At the time of my victimization, I didn't know what human trafficking was, but I knew that being a person of color didn't make it any easier. Many of my buyers, both male and female, were white. To be 'purchased' is the ultimate feeling of objectification. The buyer was in charge and the victim was inferior — that was pretty clear. During that hour or so, they owned your body, but it often felt like they owned you. These power dynamics, combined with racial differences, heightened the perceived feeling of inferiority. The concept of racism is based on a belief that one's race is superior, so the purchasing of a person of color by a white molester could easily be experienced as a (possibly unintended) act of racism.

America is a melting pot, and we often refer to Americans in reference to their heritage: African-American, Asian-American, Native-American... but we rarely say European-American. Caucasian is considered the norm and everyone else is a subcategory of sorts. The sex industry is no different. Pull up the categories on any pornographic website: Ebony, Latina, Asian, Interracial. White is standard and everything else is a specialty, a fetish and a subcategory. The life of trafficking is also no different. If someone bought you, it was because they wanted to experience an [insert ethnicity here]. Aside from your physical body, your identity boiled down to nothing more than "the [ethnicity]." As a male victim of color, I noted that my peers and I were often bought to play a dominating aggressive sexual role, which played into stereotypes and fantasies about people of color as "savage," "beasts," or "thugs." Your



identified ethnicity was now a selling point used to advertise you. It's important to remember that trafficking is a business, just like any other, and race is a factor in the product.

We were sold for a certain amount of money for 30 minutes or an hour. Allow me to repeat myself: we were SOLD. In my case, being a person of color sold by a white person to other white people was painful on multiple levels. It wasn't until my adult years that I was able to process how closely this aligned with racial oppression. I can't compare one victim's experience to another's, but I will say that race can add an additional layer of oppression. This is especially true when noting that white peers were sometimes sold for more money simply because of their race. My dark-skinned friends and I were sold for less. These aren't just ideas about relative worth in society or perceived racial disparities — these are cold, hard numbers that taught us that white children were literally worth more than children of color. Trafficking exemplifies the continued racism and oppression that exists in modern—day America.

Click [here](#) to view the source of this article.

Focus of this issue:  
The role of racism in human trafficking.

## Sex Trafficking and the Social Construction of Race

*For the Social Science Research Council's "Sexuality & Gender Studies Now" series, Brian Donovan explains how narratives of sex trafficking and coercion have historically been racialized in the United States. Building on his research on the Progressive Era's anti-prostitution efforts, which were fueled by fears of "white slavery," he links this racialized rhetoric of the early twentieth century to contemporary messaging on antitrafficking efforts.*

From the early twentieth century until today, narratives of sex trafficking have proven to be extremely effective vehicles for racist and anti-immigrant discourse. Recently, narratives of sex trafficking were used as a justification to restrict immigration and build a wall on the US-Mexico border. Several years ago, residents of Twin Falls, Idaho, were in the grip of a moral panic about Syrian refugees abducting white women into sexual slavery despite the fact that no Syrians had settled in Twin Falls.

Sex trafficking, framed as "white slavery", also played a major role in advancing racist and anti-immigration policies in the early 20th century. Racial and gender politics were rooted in efforts to fight coercive prostitution, or what was called "white slavery." The efforts to stop "white slavery" share many of the hallmarks of the moral panic of the time. Crusaders of morality often used misleading statistics and shocking narratives of abduction that obscured the economic context of prostitution, sex work, and trafficking. "White slavery" stories tended to distort the reality of coercive sex work by their emphasis on the whiteness of the victims and the physical aspects of coercion.

In the last ten or fifteen years, the racial and gender consequences of antitrafficking efforts have come under scrutiny. The criminal justice system's approach to gender-based violence has been enormously influential in reframing our understanding about human trafficking by focusing on the links among human rights, and social and

economic justice. The racist and xenophobic impulses that propelled the white slavery scare over one hundred years ago have taken on new forms in our current era of globalization and neoliberalism.

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## Missing Black Children Often Go Unreported

*A recent CNN article by Harmeet Kaur on the disparity between the media attention when black and brown children go missing compared to missing white children show that missing white children receive far more media coverage than missing black and brown children, despite higher rates of missing children among communities of color.*

The FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database lists 424,066 children under 18 that went missing in 2018, the most recent year for which data is available. About 37 percent of those children are black, even though black children only make up about 14 percent of all children in the United States. The FBI's report groups white and Hispanic children together. Quoting Robert Lowery, vice president of the missing child division at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) "the high number of black girls reported missing is particularly concerning.

Kaur reports that because of the distrust between law enforcement and the minority community some families are hesitant to call police when a child is missing. Missing Latino children are underreported because some families with undocumented members might not contact police for fear of being deported.

Experts say media coverage is vital to helping solve cases of missing children and news media organizations have been criticized for not giving missing black children the amount of attention they give missing white kids. Although black children account for about 35 percent of missing children cases in the FBI's database, they amount to only 7 percent of media references.

The Black and Missing Foundation helps families of color file police reports, create missing posters and spread the word about missing children. Facebook groups offer an online community for parents to alert the public about their missing child and ask questions of others who have had similar experiences.

Click [here](#) to view the source of this article.

## The Racial Roots of Human Trafficking

*Cheryl Nelson Butler explores the role of race in the prostitution and sex trafficking of people of color, particularly minority youth, and the evolving legal and social responses in the United States in a recent article in the UCLA Law Review.*



Early antitrafficking legislation duplicated the intrinsic racism within the white slavery movement and victimized rather than protected women of color. The White Slave Act, enacted in 1910 and often called the Mann Act, threatened the prosecution of anyone who transported “any woman or girl for the purpose of prostitution” in interstate commerce. However, the references to “any woman or girl” did not apply to females of color. Moreover, the Mann Act was used to regulate the sexuality of white women by prosecuting black men for engaging in consensual interracial relations. The Mann Act essentially denigrated, rather than protected, sexual relations with people of color. Only white women could be slaves.



Unfortunately, even today the antitrafficking movement continues to marginalize African Americans and other people of color. Advocates who have attempted to bring attention to the horrors of human trafficking have focused on white victims, often ignoring poor minority girls.

Non-white trafficking victims are often further victimized by a criminal justice system that is less likely to see them as victims, and instead is more likely to view them as criminals. In a recent Trafficking in Persons Report, the State Department determined that the failure to properly identify victims of modern-day slavery is a major barrier to addressing the crime.



In the United States, misidentification of victims normally occurs when law enforcement officers stereotype trafficking victims as criminals rather than victims. Our news has been replete with stories of how biases against people of color have undermined the ability of police to respond properly. When law enforcement fail to identify victims, or misjudge them as criminals, the victims lose access to justice. Many of these victims are then subjected to arrest or prosecution. The systemic failure of federal law enforcement personnel and others to accurately identify people of color as trafficking victims also means that fewer people of color are eligible for victim-centered services and resources.

Moreover, when authorities misidentify trafficking victims as illegal immigrants or criminals deserving punishment, those victims can be unfairly subjected to additional harm, trauma, and even punishment such as arrest, detention, deportation, or prosecution. These failures reinforce what traffickers notably threaten their victims with; law enforcement will incarcerate them if they seek help.

This problem of victim identification emphasizes how today’s antitrafficking movement has not been able to fully deal with the role of race in human trafficking in the United States. More attention must be given to the racial disparity of trafficking victims, both in the United States and globally, and ensure that it not remain unknown—or ignored.



Click [here](#) to view the source of this article.

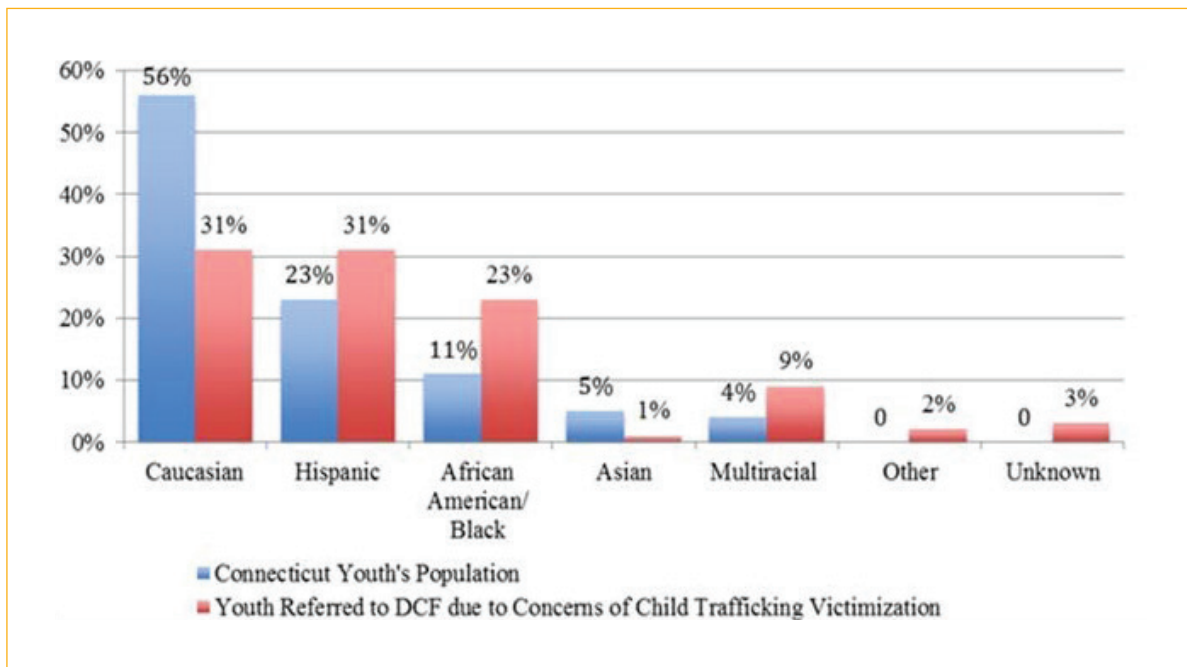
## Racism and Child Trafficking in Connecticut

*Yvette Young, Bree'Ana Johnson, Christopher Bidorini and Erin Williamson discuss data from a study indicating that there is a disproportionate number of children of color being trafficked in the state of Connecticut.*

Racism and oppression are deeply embedded and perpetuated in human trafficking, given the immense racial subordination with respect to people of color. This is especially true when it comes to the sexual exploitation of minors. Human traffickers always prey on the vulnerable which include undocumented migrants, runaways, at-risk youth, oppressed or marginalized groups, and those impacted by poverty.

The Human Anti-Trafficking Response Team (HART) was created in order to focus on and reduce Child Trafficking in Connecticut. Their data indicate that there is a disproportionate number of children of color being trafficked in Connecticut. Of the 210 referrals that the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) received in 2018 for high-risk or confirmed victims of human trafficking, 153 of those referrals were children of color. That number equates to 73 percent of all referrals. The following graph highlights this issue further, comparing the number of trafficking victims referred to DCF and the race of Connecticut's youth population.

Race of Youth Referred to DCF Due to Concerns of Child Trafficking Compared to the Race of Connecticut's Youth Population, 2015-2017



The authors advocate that due to the disproportionate number of children of color who are trafficked each year, human trafficking is a racial justice issue.

“The notion that anyone can be a victim of trafficking is true. However, the fact that the majority of victims are people of color should not be undermined or understated. It is imperative that we address this issue so we can prevent our children from experiencing this form of victimization.”

Click [here](#) to view the source of this article.



## Confronting Racism's Role in Human Trafficking

*Dr. Jade Keller, editor for The Freedom Story, recently wrote about racism's role in human trafficking.*

Throughout the world, victims of trafficking are disproportionately racial and ethnic minorities. In the United States, African Americans make up about 12.7 percent of the total population; however it is estimated that 40 percent of victims of human trafficking are African Americans, while 77 percent of child sex trafficking victims are non-white. In Thailand, the ethnic minorities are the hill tribes and stateless children who have been denied basic rights and protections, making them vulnerable to trafficking. In European countries, the most vulnerable are the Roma ethnic groups. Many of these victims live in poverty and have a history of exploitation, substance or sexual abuse, learning disabilities and inadequate support systems.

Advocates and researchers have suggested several reasons why African Americans are overrepresented as victims of human trafficking. Many live in poverty which increases their vulnerability. Shared Hope International reports that most identified victims in Texas cities are racial minorities and come from households with vulnerable socioeconomic status.

Racial bias is insidious in the way it compounds abuse upon abuse. Not only do sex trafficking victims suffer from the abuse and trauma of being trafficked, when they are children of color, they are often further victimized by a system that is less likely to see them as victims, and instead is more likely to view them as criminals and sexual deviants. Traffickers report that they operate more easily in low-income African American communities. In a recent study that looked at the economics of human trafficking, most of the traffickers interviewed believed that trafficking black women would result in less prison time if caught. Meanwhile, racial or ethnic minorities are more likely to be targets of harassment and arrest, and when arrested, are more likely to encounter harsher punishments.

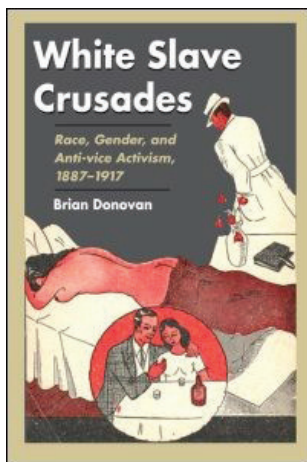
Even while being trafficked, racial bias can determine how badly women and children are treated. According to a U.N. World Conference report, at a Bangkok conference, the country's delegation emphasized that: "some women of certain racial or ethnic groups were subjected to abuses in larger measure than other women, while particular forms of violations, such as trafficking in women and girls frequently involved racist attitudes and perceptions, and were often directed at certain racial and ethnic groups, indigenous women and migrants." Sometimes, even in intentions to do good and spread justice, racism can rear its ugly head. It comes in the form of the white savior who wants to rush in and play the role of hero; meanwhile ignoring or even promoting policies and larger socio-political structures that contribute to racism.

Click [here](#) to view the source of this article.

## Cultural Oppression and Human Trafficking: Exploring the Role of Racism and Ethnic Bias by Thema Bryant-Davis & Pratyusha Tummala-Narra in Women and Therapy.

Human trafficking is maintained within a context of intersecting forms of oppression. Cultural oppression, including racism and ethnic bias, creates additional risk for human trafficking and generates unique challenges for prevention and intervention. There are, however, cultural strengths that survivors of human trafficking have that may be utilized to aid their recovery process as well as psychotherapeutic interventions. In addition to traditionally recognized legal and economic strategies, ending human trafficking requires engagement in interrupting the factors that increase vulnerability to human trafficking, including racism and ethnic bias. By combating oppression, abolitionists can work to create a society that is committed to ending slavery.

Click [here](#) to view the source of this article.



### White Slave Crusades

*Race, Gender, and Anti-vice Activism, 1887-1917*

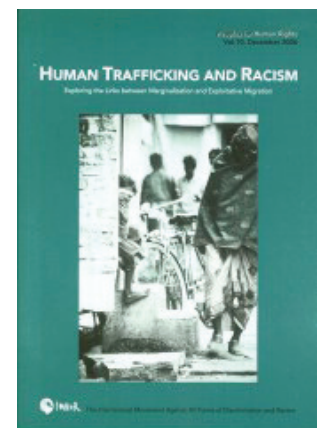
*Forced prostitution, moralism, and the narratives of prejudice*

During the early twentieth century, individuals and organizations from across the political spectrum launched a sustained effort to eradicate forced prostitution, commonly known as “white slavery.” White Slave Crusades is the first comparative study to focus on how these anti-vice campaigns also resulted in the creation of a racial hierarchy in the United States.

Focusing on the intersection of race, gender, and sex in the anti-prostitution campaigns, Brian Donovan analyzes the reactions of native-born whites to new immigrant groups in Chicago, to African Americans in New York City, and to Chinese immigrants in San Francisco. Donovan shows how reformers employed white slavery narratives of sexual danger to clarify the boundaries of racial categories, allowing native-born whites to speak of a collective “us” as opposed to a “them.” These stories about forced prostitution provided an emotionally powerful justification for segregation, as well as other forms of racial and sexual boundary maintenance in urban America.

### Human Trafficking And Racism

Exploitative migration takes place in connection with marginalization. Those subject to marginalization usually belong to minority communities. This book explores this old yet on-going issue from different perspectives.



# End the Criminalization of Child Sex Trafficking Survivors

Twenty-one states in the nation can still arrest and charge youth survivors of sex trafficking with the crime of prostitution, the very crime committed against them. Shared Hope International invites us to sign a petition to support legislation to help end the criminalization of child sex trafficking survivors and ensure that all survivors have access to comprehensive, trauma-informed services, instead of jail time. Please click [here](#) to sign petition.

Click on the links below to view additional web sites about Human Trafficking

Bureau of Justice Statistics  
([Click here](#))

Belle Moore, Sex Trafficking and the Social Construction of Race  
([Click here](#))

The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity  
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Race and Human Trafficking in the United States  
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National Center for Missing and Exploited Children  
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[The Link Between Race & Human Trafficking](#)



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