



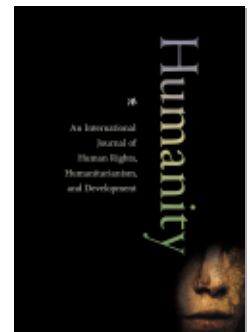
PROJECT MUSE®

---

Equally Vulnerable: Liberal Internationalism, the Traffic in  
Women and Children, and the Non-Politics of Race

Jeanne Morefield

Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights,  
Humanitarianism, and Development, Volume 16, Numbers 1-2,  
Spring/Summer 2025, pp. 1-24 (Article)



Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/985991>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

[81.144.135.218] Project MUSE (2026-03-30 13:54 GMT)

## Equally Vulnerable: Liberal Internationalism, the Traffic in Women and Children, and the Non-Politics of Race

Over the last two decades, a growing number of interdisciplinary scholars interested in the origins of both contemporary global hierarchy and the idea of liberal internationalism have turned their attention to critical examinations of the League of Nations—the world’s first “great experiment” in international organization.<sup>1</sup> In particular, these studies have focused on the tension between the League’s dual commitment to the “equality of nations” (in Woodrow Wilson’s words) and the preservation of the global color line—a commitment formally captured in the Drafting Commission’s refusal to include a racial equality clause in the Covenant.<sup>2</sup> For many scholars, the clearest institutional and rhetorical expression of this circle squaring was the mandate system.<sup>3</sup> Enshrined in Article 22 of the Covenant, the mandate system “internationalized colonialism” by shifting the temporal justification for racial hierarchy to the League. Instead of transferring the colonial territories held by the Axis powers directly to Allied states to govern as colonies, the political settlement of 1919 created a new form of indirect imperialism, where League member states ruled “peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world” as mandates, “on behalf of the League” as “a sacred trust of civilization.”<sup>4</sup> While the mandate system still depended upon the temporal and racial logic of what Partha Chatterjee calls the “rule of colonial difference,” the indirectness of the system made it possible to control the political and economic lives of formerly colonized peoples in the name of internationalism rather than imperialism, a mode of global governance with lingering effects on the international system today.<sup>5</sup>

With critics of the mandate system, I am similarly intrigued by the institutional and rhetorical framework behind the League’s liberal internationalist accommodation of racial hierarchy and the relevance of this evolving framework for our contemporary era. My interests, however, are both conceptually and literally adjacent to theirs. Rather than focus on the temporal and civilizational language associated with Article 22 of the Covenant, I interrogate the explicitly atemporal and deracialized approach to “the traffic in women and children” that appears in Article 23. Thus, despite the preponderance of the term “white slave traffic” in international treaty agreements at the time the Covenant was drafted, the same delegates in Versailles who rejected the Japanese delegate’s proposed racial equality clause chose the phrase “traffic in women and children” to describe the League’s future work in this area.<sup>6</sup> This change was publicly reaffirmed two years later by attendees at the first International Conference on the Traffic in Women and Children, who vowed to “suppress” the phrase “white slave” in League documents.<sup>7</sup> While throughout the interwar period, phrases like “backward races” continued to circulate within the mandate section, a new common sense emerged concerning Article 23: when it came to

the predations of traffickers, *all* women and children were equally vulnerable, “whatever be their nationality and whatever be their color.”<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to contemporary arguments suggesting that an international language associating racial equality with the good of humanity only gained global traction with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, an examination of the League’s early anti-trafficking campaign suggests that a nominal fusion of this type occurred three decades earlier.<sup>9</sup> As an issue, trafficking resonated particularly well with a highly influential form of liberal internationalism, articulated most famously by British liberals during the war, that imagined the League in broadly natural, “nonpolitical” terms as a “common possession of all mankind,” an “element in the international life of the world,” and a means to organize the “vital unifying forces present in humanity.”<sup>10</sup> The originators of this early League vision often described their internationalism not in reference to global political projects and/or the triumph of European civilization, but, rather, through an observational language that stressed extant forms of international organizing devoted to preserving what Alfred Zimmern called the “eternal things which unite, to the rock bottom level of our common humanity.”<sup>11</sup> The global campaign against “white slavery,” they argued, provided a particularly vivid example of such “nonpolitical” internationalism in action. When, in 1919, the drafters of the Covenant took up the issue and substituted “traffic in women and children” for “white slavery,” they embraced the spirit of this “nonpolitical” internationalism while widening its horizons still further, opening up the League’s rhetorical vista to an idea of “common humanity” rooted in the equal vulnerability of “women and children of all races and colors.”<sup>12</sup>

In what follows, I argue that an analysis of the League’s abrupt shift from the language of “white slave” to the language of “women and children” offers scholars unique insight into one of the earliest moments in the development of twentieth-century liberal internationalism when a rhetoric of global racial equality not only coexisted with, but helped facilitate, the maintenance of global racial hierarchy in the name of humanity. This article is the first scholarly attempt to probe the ideological and rhetorical significance of that transition for international thinking.<sup>13</sup> Crucially, my point here is not to suggest that everyone involved in promoting the shift from “white slave” to “women and children” did so with the explicit intention of squaring universal liberalism with racial hierarchy. Instead, as the rest of this essay makes clear, different actors involved with the League—from anti-trafficking feminists to abolitionist activists, from liberal internationalist cheerleaders to imperial administrators—advocated the name change for various, sometimes overlapping, ideological, professional, and political reasons. This article thus suggests that the idea of “racial equality as vulnerability” promoted through the League’s anti-trafficking campaign *had the effect* of allowing “the rule of colonial difference” to circulate in the name of “common humanity” while simultaneously providing supporters of the liberal internationalism preferred by the League’s most powerful founders with an example of that internationalism’s success.

The article begins by interrogating the ideological challenges of League internationalism, then traces the presence of trafficking examples in the international imaginary that most influenced League thinkers. Section two focuses on the importance of the League’s early work on “the traffic in women and children,” paying particular attention to the role of feminist “abolitionists” in the development of the League’s institutional, “technical and nonpolitical” self-fashioning. Section three examines the rhetorical capaciousness of the

idea of humanity, worked out through “the traffic in women and children,” arguing that it replicated the rule of colonial difference by plotting human suffering along a universal scale marked by nonracial signifiers, such as “custom” and “climate.” I conclude with some brief thoughts about the international vision that the League’s campaign against “the traffic in women and children” helped breathe into being.

### **The Ideological Challenges of League Internationalism and the Turn to Trafficking**

In 1919, when President Woodrow Wilson and the other delegates in Paris gathered to thrash out the details of the Covenant of the League, they were all more or less aware of the complicated political task with which they had been charged. On the one hand, the devastating impact of World War I on Europe had convinced millions of people that the only way to prevent future wars was to establish a permanent, international organization dedicated to promoting peace and cooperation. The impact of the war, however, had damaged the reputation of European imperialism as a civilizing/ordering force while anti-imperial struggles in Europe and throughout the colonies amplified support for the idea of “national self-determination,” a cause particularly close to Wilson’s heart.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the rise of Pan-African activism had forced the uniformly liberal group of delegates involved in the drafting of the Covenant—all of whom were nominally supportive of free trade, the rule of law, and collective security—that the internationalism they were in the process of inventing was hardly the only world-organizing vision currently in circulation.<sup>15</sup> In the aftermath of “the war that will end war,” the assembled leaders in Geneva understood all too well that their international imaginary had to differentiate itself from imperialism *and* nonliberal visions of the international while simultaneously supporting the rights of individual states to self-determination.

On the other hand, these delegates were also aware that, while self-determination was a universal principle, it was not to be applied to currently colonized or mandated peoples.<sup>16</sup> Back-channel discussions determined that the League would also exclude the new Bolshevik state from League membership, and similar talks assured the Allied states that they could retain their existing imperial holdings. At the same time, the mandate system was meant to absorb people formerly under Ottoman and German imperial rule.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the proposal brought forward by the Japanese delegate, Baron Makino Nobuaki, to add a racial equality clause to the Covenant was overruled by the triangulated manoeuvring of the United States, Great Britain, and South Africa.<sup>18</sup> In sum, the founders of the League of Nations explicitly eschewed any commitment to the political or material equality between races and/or peoples.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, in 1919, League founders were tasked with envisioning what Wilson called a “new order of the world” that was anti-imperial and “all inclusive” but that also maintained the global racial status quo and facilitated the ongoing, extractive practices of imperial capitalism.<sup>20</sup> They were required to ground the League in the universally conceived principle that all nations had a right to self-determination, while also ensuring that this principle applied only to some peoples. Not for nothing did E. H. Carr later refer to the League’s founders as the “metaphysicians of Geneva.”<sup>21</sup>

Famously, for Carr, League metaphysicians worked out these myriad tensions through a liberal “harmony of interests” doctrine, which claimed that self-interest ultimately resolved itself in the public good.<sup>22</sup> And yet, more often, liberal internationalists addressed the political problems associated with their universal claims and exclusionary policies by

simply removing the idea of organized internationalism from the realm of power politics altogether. Borrowing from a particular approach to internationalism developed by British liberal intellectuals during the war, supporters of a future League of Nations argued that their vision of internationalism was a natural extension of pre-existing legal, social, cultural, and economic connections forged among European states over the course of the nineteenth century. Anyone who dismissed that idea as “utopian” was guilty, Leonard Woolf argued in 1916, of having “shut their eyes to the fact,” that the germ of such a league “already exists.”<sup>23</sup>

Supporters of this international vision, like Woolf and Zimmern (both of whose views had an outsized impact on the final shape of the League), tended to describe it through a vivid language that leaned heavily on naturalizing metaphors.<sup>24</sup> While slightly different in political orientation, both men relied on phrases like “international life” and “international society” to argue, in Zimmern’s words, that “the modern world” is “international to the core” and “its internationalism lies in the nature of things.”<sup>25</sup> Both men also tended to describe what Woolf called the “interconnections of international life” in reference to existing social, cultural, and legal affiliations.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to socialist and anticolonial figures who were also writing about global “interconnections” during the war, Woolf and Zimmern studiously avoided examples forged through the legal, political, and economic entanglements of European imperial competition.<sup>27</sup> Instead, they focused on international agreements and affiliations in areas such as “finance, industry, commerce,” “science and art, philanthropy,” sport, maritime law, and even fashion trends.<sup>28</sup> The necessary challenge of the moment, they argued, was to formalize these interconnections into a “new international order.”<sup>29</sup>

While they tended to draw on different extant examples of international organization, both Zimmern and Woolf zeroed in on the international campaign against “the white slave traffic” as particularly illustrative of the kind of interconnections they found most compelling. With domestic origins in Britain, the international anti-“white slavery” campaign in Europe emerged from a scandal in 1880 over the presence of underage English girls discovered in licensed brothels in Belgium and France.<sup>30</sup> By the time British liberals were developing their international visions thirty years later, that campaign had already inspired several international conferences and the passage of two international conventions: the 1904 International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic and the 1910 International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, for both Zimmern and Woolf, “the white slave traffic” provided proof that internationalism emerged from “the nature of things” because states and activists organized collectively to oppose it and because traffickers were themselves organized internationally.<sup>32</sup> The world, in this vision, was comprised of two internationalisms, one associated with “the common life of mankind in the world” and the other with “the blind and selfish forces of exploitation.” The goal of any future League must be to promote “internationalism in its better” expression while “counteracting it in its worse, manifestations,” and to do so in the name of those “eternal things which unite, to the rock bottom level of our common humanity.”<sup>33</sup>

One can see how the League’s liberal founders would be drawn to an internationalism whose rhetorical framing disassociated international organization from political power and transformed the global landscape into a battle between good and evil. Embracing this new Manichean vision allowed League supporters to make universal claims about

“common humanity” without challenging political inequality, since the things humanity held in common were presumed to lie outside the realm of politics. Thus, by the time these founders were formalizing plans for a postwar peace in the summer of 1918, depoliticized terms like “international life” and “international society” had come to dominate the internationalist discourse of both British and American liberalism.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, throughout 1918 and 1919, these same liberal internationalists began associating the future League with the idea of “humanity” and its “interests” (e.g., the “permanent interests of humanity,” the “interests of humanity as a whole.”)<sup>35</sup> By 1920, the Belgian delegate closed the First Assembly by exhorting the assembled members to remember that the “interests of humanity and the interests of the world are universal interests.”<sup>36</sup> And everyone seemed to agree that such “universal interests” entailed firm, organized opposition to what Wilson described as the “evils currently debasing men”: the traffic in liquor, the traffic in opium, and most urgently, “the white slave traffic.”<sup>37</sup>

Anti-trafficking quickly emerged as one of the League’s signature “social and humanitarian” issues around which the universal “interests of humanity” were presumed to coalesce. The growing consensus on this issue is evident in the many comments made by delegates attending the 1921 Second League Assembly, who were clearly irritated that they even had to debate the passage of the 1921 anti-trafficking convention, given that, as “representatives of humanity,” they were meant to be opposing “certain evils with all the speed possible.”<sup>38</sup> In substance, the 1921 Convention essentially reaffirmed the commitments of the 1904 and 1910 Conventions for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic with one crucial alteration: in 1921, “the traffic in women and children” was officially and permanently substituted for the phrase “the white slave traffic,” reaffirming a change that had already been incorporated into the Covenant by its drafters in 1919. Thus, somewhere along the road between the initial linking of “the white slave traffic” to internationalism and the formation of the League itself, the “permanent interests of humanity” were expanded to include the protection of *all* women and children, everywhere in the world, “whatever be their nationality and whatever be their color.”<sup>39</sup>

### The House That Trafficking Built

The first formal reference to “the traffic in women and children” in a League document appeared in a British amendment to the draft Covenant circulated at the Thirteenth Meeting of the original Drafting Commission in 1919.<sup>40</sup> The following month, the commission received a delegation from the International Council of Women, who urged the League to work for the “abolition” of the traffic.<sup>41</sup> Oversight of international efforts to combat the “traffic in women and children” was included in Article 23, along with “general supervision” of similar efforts to combat the traffic in opium.<sup>42</sup> Both of these mandates were handed over to the League’s newly created Social Section and its head, Dame Rachel Crowdy. A British social reformer, Crowdy relied extensively on the expertise and advice of the most powerful anti-trafficking organization in the world at the time, the British National Vigilance Society (NVA) and its international bureaus.<sup>43</sup> By the fall of 1920, activists from the NVA and other anti-trafficking organizations had helped build up considerable momentum around the issue within the League. That fall, the Assembly passed a motion authorizing the Secretariat to send a questionnaire about trafficking to League member states and recommending that an International Conference be convened before the next Assembly meeting.<sup>44</sup>

Held in Geneva in the summer of 1921, the conference attracted representatives from thirty-four nations and fourteen voluntary organizations. Overall, the gathering led to three significant achievements. First, the delegates agreed upon a set of “Final Acts” intended to serve as the basis for a new international convention. Second, the conference recommended the creation of the Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children (CTWC), which convened annually from 1922 to 1936. Third, on the first day of their meeting, delegates to the conference voted unanimously for a change that would be formalized in the Second Recommendation of the Final Act: “The Conference recommends that the words ‘White Slave Traffic’ should be replaced in the texts of international instruments by the words ‘Traffic in Women and Children.’”<sup>45</sup>

After years of historical neglect, scholarly interest in the League’s anti-trafficking efforts has increased substantially over the last two decades, with particular focus on the CTWC’s work throughout its existence.<sup>46</sup> The CTWC was the first historical example of a committee housed within an international institution that granted legal recognition and status not only to state delegates but also to representatives from voluntary organizations.<sup>47</sup> Initially comprised of delegates from nine countries and six permanent, non-voting “assessors” from voluntary associations, its organizational structure was thus both novel and precedent-setting. From 1921 until its last meeting in 1936, the CTWC concentrated its efforts variously on coordinating replies to yearly questionnaires about trafficking gathered from member states, producing more focused investigations into problems associated with trafficking (e.g., the employment of foreign women in “music halls” and the “rehabilitation of adult prostitutes”), and sponsoring two major global studies of trafficking: the *Report of the Special Body of Experts on the Traffic in Women and Children*, 1927, and the 1932 *Enquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the East*.<sup>48</sup> Activists on the committee also played a significant role in fostering the diplomatic environment for the passage of 1933’s *International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women of Full Age*.<sup>49</sup>

Scholarly interest in the CTWC also reflects a general renewal of concern with the League’s “technical and nonpolitical” sections—commonly referred to by supporters at the time as its “machinery.”<sup>50</sup> Initially developed to address a variety of international issues, by the 1930s, over half of the League’s annual budget was devoted to this “technical and nonpolitical” work, an expansion driven by the legions of “institutional entrepreneurs” (in Susan Pederson’s terms) who descended on Geneva in the 1920s.<sup>51</sup> A not insignificant number of these activist “entrepreneurs” were women activists who had contributed substantially to the League of Nations movement during the war and now sought to ensure their continued relevance in the postwar order.<sup>52</sup> Hailing primarily from Europe, these activists tended to focus their organizing efforts on the League’s Social Questions and Opium Traffic Section, which was relatively more open to the influence of women.<sup>53</sup> When appointed head of that section in 1920, Crowdy became the first—and only—woman in such a leadership position within the League.<sup>54</sup> Women were also well represented within the CTWC in comparison to other League committees, primarily in their role as permanent “assessors” associated with anti-trafficking voluntary organizations.<sup>55</sup>

And yet, the fact that anti-trafficking rocketed to prominence within the League above almost every other feminist issue brought originally before the drafters of the Covenant cannot be explained solely by the outsized influence of women on the Social Section. One must also examine the outsized influence of “abolitionism” on women’s international organizing in the early twentieth century more generally. Originating in the

British campaign against the Contagious Disease Act (a series of mid-nineteenth-century laws that enabled the state to impose compulsory medical examinations on women accused of being prostitutes), groups like Josephine Butler's Ladies National Association (LNA) referred to themselves as "abolitionists" because they believed that all prostitution (regardless of consent) was coerced and that state-regulated prostitution amounted to legalized slavery.<sup>56</sup> After the repeal of the act in 1886, abolitionists refocused their campaign on the international trafficking of women for sex work, which they now called "white slavery" or "the white slave traffic." This racialized term not only implied coerced labor but also connected that coerced labor to the illicit, often cross-border, forced movement of women. Activists emphasized this rhetorical point by explicitly linking the existence of state-regulated houses to the procurement and smuggling of sex workers, arguing that "the fickle demands of clients" necessitated a constant supply of "new and younger women," which then encouraged trafficking.<sup>57</sup>

During this period, abolitionist activists throughout Europe banded together to form the international branches of the NVA as well as the International Abolitionist Federation (IAF) and the British-led Association for Moral and Social Hygiene (AMSH). Together, these organizations helped push anti-trafficking to the center of the international feminist agenda.<sup>58</sup> While such groups worked collectively across Europe, British anti-trafficking activists exercised substantial influence on these global efforts from the outset which persisted into the League era. Through the NVA and other British abolitionist organizations, abolitionist feminists had a direct hand in constructing the League's official response to trafficking, flooding Crowdy's office with letters and abolitionist publications from 1919 on.<sup>59</sup>

By the summer of 1921, not only was the entire British delegation abolitionist in outlook, but so too were all the representatives from voluntary associations attending the anti-trafficking conference. At the conference, they argued in speech after speech that the goal of the League must be "to abolish the regulation of prostitution wherever it comes within our sphere."<sup>60</sup> At the same time, these same activists and delegates never had enough votes to set the League's anti-trafficking agenda entirely. Powerful delegates from countries with state-regulated prostitution systems (most notably, France) insisted that the League restrict its work on trafficking to *forced* prostitution and the "freedom of women and children."<sup>61</sup> Thus, while the archives reveal that most of the speeches at the 1921 conference were resolutely abolitionist in tone, the attendees were deeply divided about the nature of sex work and the definition of "trafficking" itself.<sup>62</sup>

How then did these divergent groups come to the unanimous decision to change the name of the problem from "white slave" to "women and children"? Surprisingly, despite the rhetorical and ideological significance of this linguistic shift, that question remains under-researched. Instead, most historical scholarship about "white slavery" panics in Europe and North America has tended to think in broader terms about the relationship between anti-trafficking campaigns and the racial and sexual politics of imperialism and immigration that saturated the era.<sup>63</sup> In her wide-ranging analysis of the British, French, and Dutch empires, for instance, Ann Stoler argues that the use of sex and gender regulations as racial bordering instruments of colonial rule was "strongest during the interwar years."<sup>64</sup> And yet, while this critique is enlightening, it is less straightforwardly helpful for unpacking the League's specific and very public decision during those same years to transform "white slavery" into the first international humanitarian problem intended to apply equally to women and children of all races.<sup>65</sup>

The archives themselves are opaque regarding this transformation. Unlike the “racial equality” clause, the minutes of the Covenant’s Drafting Commission include no debate about adding “the traffic in women and children” to Article 23, nor any discussion of its wording. Instead, the phrase “traffic in women and children” (*not* “the white slave traffic”) simply appeared, as is, in the original British proposal. This development undoubtedly reflects the fact that, by the time the Covenant was being drafted, the term had become more widely used in abolitionist circles.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, the race-neutral “women and children” was not embraced by some of the most powerful internationalist abolitionist organizations in the world, and many League activists, delegates, and attendees up through the 1921 conference used the terms “white slave” and “women and children” interchangeably.<sup>67</sup> Thus, in 1919, when the Drafting Commission settled on “traffic in women and children,” they were choosing to amplify a phrase not yet universally accepted in popular discourse or in anti-trafficking circles.

However they reached that decision, by the summer of 1921, the official mood of the League had swung definitively in the direction of “the traffic in women and children.” While the original name of the 1921 conference seems to have vacillated between “white slave” and “women and children” (the archives include preparatory material with both names), the conference was publicly hailed as the “International Conference on the Traffic in Women and Children” during the first meeting.<sup>68</sup> What discussion of the change occurred consisted entirely of positive affirmations. Later, during the proceedings, when delegates reiterated the necessity of removing the word “white,” they were reminded by the president that the word had already “been suppressed in the invitation to the Conference and in the actual work of the Conference,” and would be “omitted from international agreements referring to the traffic” going forward.<sup>69</sup>

Again, however, what accounts for this sudden and unanimous shift? According to Jean-Michel Chaumont, the change in terminology was tactical, reflecting a growing realization among anti-trafficking activists that “traffic in women and children” had a strategic advantage over “white slavery.”<sup>70</sup> The substitution of “women and children,” he argues, added an aura of mainstream, humanitarian respectability to the issue at a moment when various government authorities were beginning to grow suspicious of the melodrama and exaggeration associated with the “white slavery” narratives.<sup>71</sup> Scholars who share this view are thus sceptical of arguments made by some feminist historians, such as Katrina Leppänen, who suggest that the name change reflected a genuinely felt, anti-racist orientation among anti-trafficking groups and a desire “to reframe the issue of traffic in women in a global context.”<sup>72</sup>

While I agree that Leppänen’s reading is a bit pollyannaish, she is correct that numerous abolitionists in the early decades of the twentieth century were moving away from the racist implications of “white slavery.”<sup>73</sup> She is also equally correct to observe that abandoning the phrase “white slave traffic” *did* reframe the issue “in a global context,” expanding the international imaginary of both anti-trafficking work and League internationalism. In other words, while Zimmern and Woolf may have used the example of “white slavery” to draw their readers’ attention to the international dimensions of trafficking and anti-trafficking, they would have been aware that the anti-white slavery conventions of the 1910s were never intended to apply to the entire world, an assumption made explicit in the legal and diplomatic discourse of the time. Trafficking patterns identified by drafters of the 1904 and 1910 conventions, for instance, ran in a single direction:

women were “procured” in Northern Europe and “delivered” to the South.<sup>74</sup> By contrast, the shift to “women and children” enlarged trafficking’s topography at a moment when the idea of international organization was itself becoming at least nominally less racist, as seen in the extension of League membership to China, Japan, and Siam as well as numerous Latin American states (including Haiti) and, eventually, Ethiopia and Liberia.<sup>75</sup> While, in practice, the women in whom League members tended to be most interested were European, the warp and weave of international trafficking now potentially covered the entire world.

Additionally, this new deracialized framing of the “traffic in women and children” helped grow the League’s “technical and nonpolitical” capacities in an explicitly international direction while linking the work of this “machinery” to the flourishing of common humanity. One senses this in the enthusiasm with which anti-trafficking activists understood their work with the League as part of a larger movement for the “promotion of international cooperation.”<sup>76</sup> As the president of the 1921 conference put it, the League’s anti-trafficking campaign played an essential role in the League’s organizational evolution because, just as “one proves the fact of movement by walking, so the League is proving its existence by working.”<sup>77</sup> From this perspective, the League quite literally animated itself through its work to combat trafficking and, at the same time, served as a “vivifying influence” on the global anti-trafficking movement itself.<sup>78</sup> At the core of these observations lay a sense that, in the words of the British delegate to the 1921 conference, “a new international situation has been created by the establishment of the League of Nations,” which allowed people of good will to establish a “sphere of action” that was “not-confined to Europe, but extends over the whole world.”<sup>79</sup> In other words, through their work on trafficking, League activists helped manifest “a humanity which transcends all differences.”<sup>80</sup>

### **Humanity and the Racial Equality of Vulnerability**

The idea of “humanity” as it evolved throughout the nineteenth century was never intended to apply equally to all races and peoples.<sup>81</sup> Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European anti-slavery arguments, for instance, frequently maintained that the slave trade was contrary to the idea of “humanity.” However, this idea worked primarily, in Lynn Festa’s words, as an “incitement to sympathy” that produced sentimentality rather than “likeness or equality.”<sup>82</sup> Likewise, references to “humanity” as they appeared in international legal documents such as the Geneva and Hague Conventions were usually linked to abstract moral forces associated with “civilization,” and the international legal protocols developed through these conventions were initially intended only for “civilized peoples.”<sup>83</sup> For scholars like Siep Stuurman, this exclusionary reading of humanity dominated international discourse until 1948, when the UDHR established the “inclusive concept of modern equality” as a global value.<sup>84</sup> Such a step, he continues, would have been “virtually unthinkable” during the League era.

If one were to take the discursive environment associated with the Permanent Mandate Commission as a complete expression of the League’s overall attitude toward race, Stuurman’s observations make sense. For Anghie and other critics, the mandates may have laid the groundwork for a future indirect system of control over non-European states in the name of international institutions, but it wasn’t until the postwar period that this indirect form of imperial rule was uncoupled from the temporal language of racial deficit.<sup>85</sup> Despite Japan’s status as a mandatory power, the term “backward races” was very much alive

within the discursive universe of the interwar mandates, with delegates, employees, and activists regularly deploying a language of civilizational development that mirrored—in a literal way—the racist and temporal logic so crucial to the European imperial project.<sup>86</sup>

When it came to the “traffic in women and children,” however, not only was the language of race now absent, so too was the language of “backwardness.” At the 1921 conference, delegates were vocal in their insistence that this international problem impacted women and children “of all races and colors” and that “colored women” and “their white sisters” were equally in need of protection from a crime understood to function in the same way, wherever it took place.<sup>87</sup> Throughout the 1920s, CTWC members reaffirmed their conviction that “trade in women must be extended to mean trade in all women, both Eastern and Western.”<sup>88</sup> Most crucially, League anti-traffickers disputed the idea that the sexuality of Asian and African women was fundamentally different from European women, and contested the notion that sex work does them “no harm whatever.”<sup>89</sup> In other words, neither “backwardness” nor the “rule of colonial difference” circulated within the League’s anti-trafficking sections in the same way it did within the Permanent Mandate Commission. *All* women and children were understood to be equally vulnerable to trafficking *now*, in the present.<sup>90</sup>

It was precisely the urgent and perennial vulnerability of “women and children” that made sex trafficking so different from the other international crime included in Article 23 of the Covenant: the “traffic in opium and other dangerous drugs.” Perhaps, given the short history of the international campaign against drug trafficking, or because the British, French, and Dutch empires dominated the global trade in narcotics at the time, minimal international sympathy existed during the interwar period for the *victims* of drug trafficking. Indeed, users of drugs—whether they be in Shanghai or London—were rarely referred to as victims at all and were even described by newspapers as “evil.”<sup>91</sup> Articles about the League’s work on the “traffic in opium” put out by the Information Section were less sensationalist, but hardly sympathetic to users. Rather than focusing on victims’ vulnerability, most League reports used clipped, officious tones to address international agreements and criminal enforcement.<sup>92</sup> While the various communications associated with “the traffic in women and children” tended to emphasize *shared* characteristics, those dealing with drug trafficking often focused on the racial otherness of both users and traffickers.<sup>93</sup>

From the very beginning, League delegates, activists, and CTWC members were keen to distinguish the victims of sex trafficking from the victims of drug trafficking, and they bristled at any comparison of the two issues.<sup>94</sup> Unlike the deeply unsympathetic, clearly racialized users of drugs, trafficked women and children were almost always portrayed, in both League and popular discourse, as helpless victims, “innocent girls,” tricked into marriage by wily traffickers, living on the corruption of their victims.<sup>95</sup> Within League publications, trafficked women and girls of all races and colonial status were presumed to be victims; from the “innocent young girls” lured “from Kathiawar to Karachi,” to the twelve-year-old African girls discovered in a brothel in Zanzibar, to the “young Cantonese girl” sold for prostitution in Singapore.<sup>96</sup> Within these same publications, sex workers were routinely portrayed as victims of trafficking, *even when* the League’s own researchers reported that the majority of sex workers they interviewed for their reports did not consider themselves victims.<sup>97</sup>

Thus, unlike drug users, *all* women and children in the world were equally vulnerable to the predations of international traffickers. This “racial equality of vulnerability” was,

however, very different from the racial equality being demanded by Pan-African, anticolonial, and non-European liberals at the time. On the one hand, when Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities' League launched its 1922 petition to the League of Nations aimed at transferring the mandate for South-West Africa to their Association, that petition was not only addressed to "Fellow Citizens of All Humanity," but also argued vigorously that had Europeans not enslaved Africans and colonized their land, the "present problem of racial inequality would never have arisen."<sup>98</sup> Likewise, when Du Bois urged the League to acknowledge the "absolute equality of races," he was clear that this referred to the "physical, political, and social" equality of all races.<sup>99</sup> Equality, for both men, thus necessarily entailed political and economic autonomy for black peoples, both individual and collective.

On the other hand, the 1919 Japanese proposal asked the League to ensure that "alien nationals of state members of the League" be given "equal and just treatment" regardless of their "race or nationality."<sup>100</sup> That proposal was thus framed in reference to both national and *individual* claims to equality. The League, Baron Nobuaki argued, was grounded in the "legitimate claims" of all peoples to nationality. Thus, any individual member of a nation-state should expect equal treatment under the law, wherever they found themselves in the world, regardless of their race. At the same time, as the representative of an imperial state, Nobuaki's "racial equality" argument here was also self-serving in a particular way. Japan, along with the United States, was developing a liberal approach to colonial governance that incorporated the language of national self-determination into its imperial self-definition.<sup>101</sup> For the United States in 1919, this meant pushing hard to incorporate the idea of "national self-determination" into the League, while simultaneously arguing successfully for the inclusion of the Monroe Doctrine in the Covenant.<sup>102</sup> For Japan, it meant arguing for a "racial equality" clause that ensured citizens from non-white majority states with League membership had equally "just and fair claims" to equal treatment when traveling abroad (e.g., Japanese citizens in the United States) while, at the same time, insisting that this approach would have "no impact on the internal affairs of any nation" (e.g., on the treatment of racial minorities in settler states or in regions governed by imperial states, including Japan).

While attendees at the 1921 Traffic in Women and Children Conference sometimes used "claim" language to talk about the equality of "women and children," the claims they evoked were markedly different from claims to individual just treatment or claims to economic, political, and national autonomy. Instead, they argued, because all women were equally vulnerable, all women had a claim to protection, and women of color should be able to "claim the same protection as their white sisters."<sup>103</sup> Given this emphasis on protection rather than equal rights, it is hardly surprising that the earliest and most vocal calls to jettison the term "white slave" came not from League delegates from non-white majority states or from women's organizations in Asia or Africa, but rather, from European abolitionist activists associated with imperial states. No women of color were present at the 1921 conference, and only one activist from a colonized region (a Moroccan woman whose "appeal to conscience" one delegate had heard read aloud at a conference eight years earlier) was directly mentioned.<sup>104</sup> As the only non-sovereign colonized state with representation in the League, India could have sent a delegation of Indian anti-trafficking activists, but was instead represented by the head of the delegation, who, until 1928, was always an Englishman.<sup>105</sup> In the course of making the conference's lengthiest and most impactful speech on

the subject, the Dutch delegate captured this fusion of abolitionism and imperialism perfectly by relying almost entirely on information supplied to him by Dutch abolitionists and “a Technical Expert who has worked in the Indies for six years.”<sup>106</sup>

That so many delegates attending the 1921 conference would end up articulating their concerns about race and trafficking in terms of colonial administration is, again, also a testament to the outsized influence of Britain on the international abolitionist movement. Following the repeal of the Contagious Disease Act in 1886, British abolitionists not only shifted their focus toward international anti-trafficking campaigns but also toward campaigns to repeal regulationist laws in the colonies, a shift that reflected a broader expansion of British women’s social welfare activism throughout the Empire during this period that Pedersen refers to as “maternalism.”<sup>107</sup> Maternalist activism more generally played a crucial role in supporting and consolidating imperial culture while legitimizing the feminist movement domestically.<sup>108</sup> Many of these activists embraced a broadly developmentalist attitude toward racial difference, often arguing that women in Britain had a unique moral insight into “the problem of the relation between races at different stages of civilization” because their struggle for rights had taught them wisdom that men “have not learned or have forgotten.”<sup>109</sup> When it came to abolitionism, however, many activists employed a rhetoric that concentrated less on racial difference and more on the particular characteristic they believed European women and women of color shared: a gender specific vulnerability to suffering.<sup>110</sup> In this framing, because women were more prone to suffering and pain than men, “the wrongs of every woman,” no matter her race or colonial status, were “the wrongs of all women.”<sup>111</sup> This meant that for many abolitionists, both the subjects and objects of abolitionist social work (white and black/brown women, respectively) were sisters in suffering, equally vulnerable to “the unequal moral standard by which man so often brings disease home to the innocent wife.”<sup>112</sup>

This emphasis on shared suffering allowed abolitionists to claim that regulated prostitution was the same abomination everywhere in the world, a strategically vital point to make given that England had only recently abolished the Contagious Disease Act and numerous European states still sanctioned systems of licensed houses. In other words, abolitionist activists in Britain and Europe who expanded their interests to the colonies could not argue that legalized prostitution was a phenomenon embraced by only the most backward of races. Instead, they maintained that state regulation *always* and inevitably disadvantaged all women everywhere. As the editors of *The Shield* put it in 1908, in every part of the world—in regions representing “different races, different religions, different forms of governments” and “different climates”—one finds “the inevitable union of the systems of slavery and regulation.”<sup>113</sup>

Again, however, while the assumption that women of all races were more vulnerable to suffering than men enabled abolitionists to universalize both the problem (regulated prostitution) and its solution (the abolition of regulated prostitution), most activists and organizers still believed in the clear, civilizational superiority of European women. Abolitionist discourse sustained this contradiction by plotting the differences between white and black/brown women along a scale of suffering rather than civilization, arguing that Indian and African women suffered *more* than their European sisters. During the height of her crusade to repeal the Contagious Disease Act in India, for instance, Josephine Butler spoke about Indian women as “the first and greatest sufferers,” arguing that regulation weighed “more heavily on the poor Indian woman” who “bends under it more hopelessly, more helplessly,

a broken reed, trodden down by unholy feet.”<sup>114</sup> This image of Indian women as downtrodden, mute victims was common in abolitionist literature. It was usually linked to economic and cultural circumstances—“ignorance of hygienic facilities, insufficiency of medical and maternity aid, poverty, early motherhood”—and to “the difficulties of the tropical climate.”<sup>115</sup> Returning to an older tradition of “climate determinism” that had gone out of fashion in the late nineteenth century with the expansion of settler colonialism in Africa, abolitionists stressed that “tropical climates” had deleterious effects on Indian and African women’s health and made both European and non-European men more susceptible to sexual vice.<sup>116</sup> When combined with religious custom, the result was a “heart-rending percentage of suffering” experienced by women in the colonies.<sup>117</sup>

Thus, abolitionists tended to think about suffering in terms of gradations, a logic that both equalized and differentiated at the same time. Butler, for instance, referred to Indians as “our fellow subjects” rather than “uncivilized races,” and to “Indian gentlemen” as those “whose hearts are full of deep sorrow and concern for the women of their own land”; women who suffer more from the degrading effects of regulation than English women because of poverty, custom, and climate.<sup>118</sup> The abject situation of Indian women (and their perennial portrayal as silent, broken subjects) served as the primary invitation for the interventions of English women social workers. However, the rhetoric of this invitation functioned slightly differently from the “white men rescuing brown women from brown men” logic that Gayatri Spivak and others associate with imperial power.<sup>119</sup> While maternalist anti-trafficking activists still spoke *for* women in the colonies, and while their international social work continued rationalizing the ongoing intervention of the British, they did not presume that the sexual behavior of non-white men in the colonies (and their treatment of women) was either uniquely barbaric or the product of an ineradicable “Oriental sensuality,” because regulated prostitution *always* negatively affected men’s sexual conduct, wherever it occurred.<sup>120</sup> In this scenario, all women were vulnerable, and “no race can claim to be guiltless” when it came to the sexual exploitation of women.<sup>121</sup>

This maternalist abolitionism reigned supreme within the voluntary organizations that most shaped Crowdy’s view on “the traffic in women and children.” As early as 1920, these organizations began lobbying Crowdy, the Secretary General, and the Council, imploring them to agree that “all mandatory territories shall adhere to the International Agreements for the suppression of traffic in women,” a plan enthusiastically supported by other imperial social work organizations.<sup>122</sup> During the 1921 conference, abolitionist representatives and delegates alike rose to speak on the issue, insisting, as did the Dutch delegate, that once one admits “no woman should be handed over to prostitution,” one also has to acknowledge that “the colonies are suffering from the same evils that the Mother-country has suffered from.” In “whatever country it is practised,” the traffic in women “has a definitely parasitic character, which made it necessary to bring to the colonies the same policies adopted by the Mother-country at a degree of development from which the colonies are still far removed.”<sup>123</sup>

Thus, despite some disagreement among conference attendees, the Second Recommendation of the Final Act of the Conference was passed unanimously. It began by observing that attendees were “anxious to provide for the protection of women and children, whatever their race or color.” It went on to instruct the council to invite state signatories of the 1904 and 1910 International Conventions to “notify their adherence also on behalf of their colonies and dependencies.”<sup>124</sup> And yet, in the draft of the 1921 International Convention

put before the Second Assembly for a vote later that autumn, this recommendation was replaced with Article 14: “Any Member or State signing the present Convention may declare that the signature *does not* include any or all of its colonies, overseas possessions, protectorates or territories under its sovereignty or authority.”<sup>125</sup>

It remains unclear when the decision to jettison the Second Recommendation was made, although it must have occurred between the conclusion of the conference in July 1921 and the presentation of the draft proposal to the assembly that fall. What is clear is that the state whose delegation took the Final Acts of the conference and transformed them into the formal language of the 1921 convention decided to drop the Second Recommendation and replace it with the Article 14 exception.<sup>126</sup> That this state was Britain may appear surprising, given that the most powerful and outspokenly abolitionist delegation at the conference was British, and Britain presented itself as an abolitionist state. British associations and activists had played the biggest role in pushing the League away from the language of “white slavery,” and they lobbied hardest for the extension of the anti-trafficking protocols to the colonies. Britain had, by all appearances, worked to help coordinate relationships between the League’s Social Section and British abolitionist organizations from the very beginning, organizations that Crowdy and the Home Office invited to help structure the League’s response to Article 23 as early as 1919.<sup>127</sup>

What is also clear is that the removal of the recommendation appears to have troubled none of the British delegates nor the very abolitionist activists who fought so hard to get it on the agenda in the first place. Indeed, the only person who publicly remarked on its absence was the French delegate, Gabriel Hanotaux, and his persistent comments on this omission lend the minutes of the 1921 Second Assembly debate an almost comical aura of procedural gaslighting. Two abolitionist activists—the Norwegian Kristinne Bonnevie and Danish Henni Forchammer—began the discussion about the proposed convention by throwing their full support behind it, referring to the draft as “nothing but the same Final Act clothed in conventional terms.”<sup>128</sup> When Hanotaux pointed out that the Second Recommendation “has been cut out” and that therefore “the reference to women of color and the reference to Colonies was entirely deleted,” he was either ignored or other delegates referred to the changes as “slight modifications.”<sup>129</sup> Later on in the debate, when the French delegate returned to the absence of the recommendation, Arthur Balfour responded with derision. “M. Hanotaux has,” he opined, “by the application of a very acute and very critical intellect, discovered some differences between the Final Act and the Convention.” “My own powers of discrimination,” he continued, “are not sufficient to find any substantial differences.”<sup>130</sup>

Why abolitionist activists failed to protest the omission of the Second Recommendation is unclear, but it might have something to do with assurances they’d been given about access to the League’s Social Section. Individual British, European, and American abolitionists, for instance, were actively promoted by Crowdy within the League and the CTWC, and their perspective would go on to dominate the voluntary associations associated with that committee going forward.<sup>131</sup> For the official British state representatives on the League, by contrast, the answer seems slightly more straightforward. From as early as the 1921 conference, it was abundantly clear that the race-neutral term “traffic in women and children” could accommodate the “rule of colonial difference” quite cozily. In other words, representatives from the British empire didn’t need to explicitly extend the provisions of the 1921 convention to the colonies because the “racial equality of vulnerability”—grounded in gradations of

suffering—provided them with another vocabulary to rationalize that exclusion without reference to racial distinctions or civilizational inferiority.

One of the clearest examples of this accommodation in action can be found in a speech given by the delegate from India, Stephen Meredyth Edwardes, at the 1921 conference. Again, India was the only non-self-governing state that had representation in the League, and the British continued to control both its domestic and international policy throughout the interwar era.<sup>132</sup> Edwardes, therefore, attended the 1921 conference to nominally represent “Indian” interests, but the British imperial state still determined those interests. And the British, for all their explicit affiliation with the abolitionist movement, had no intention of extending the provisions of either the 1910 or the 1921 anti-trafficking conventions to India. This decision reflected a regulationist common sense about prostitution in India developed during the latter half of the nineteenth century that played a crucial role in promoting the empire’s interests in overseeing racialized zones of sexual hygiene for its soldiers.<sup>133</sup> In the context of British imperial governance, control of sexual vice functioned as a mechanism for reinforcing racial difference through the symbolic and legal separation of native sexuality from British values, and this remained the case, even after the repeal of the Contagious Disease Act in India in 1888.<sup>134</sup> During the interwar era, as anticolonial tensions increased, the imperial state—working in concert with voluntary organizations like the AMSH—continued to focus on sexual vice as a crucial site of biopolitical control and differentiation within India.<sup>135</sup>

Edwardes, the retired police commissioner of Bombay with a long-term interest in the city’s sex trade, began his speech at the conference by arguing that “India” was “anxious to associate herself with other countries” and become a signatory of the 1910 convention. Unfortunately, that had not been possible because of the “various ways” the problems associated with prostitution in India were “different from those which confront the countries of the Western World.”<sup>136</sup> This argument is notable for the hidden-in-plain-sight nature of the imperial unseeing woven into its rhetorical structure. Obviously, the “India” that Edwardes is representing at the conference, as though “she” was independently “anxious” to sign the 1910 convention, could not have been an independent signatory before 1919 because India had no independent international status. Moreover, in 1921, most of India’s domestic and foreign policy was still controlled by the British, despite having independent representation in the League.

Edwardes avoided this obvious fact, focusing instead on India’s putative “difference” from Europe to explain why “she” could not sign on to the provisions of the 1921 convention. And, since the “difference” Edwardes described could now no longer be explained through a language of race—since all women and children “whatever their race or color” were, within the League, now equally vulnerable to trafficking and all men were equally capable of sexual vice—Edwardes’s vocabulary fixed on an issue that had long been a key feature of the abolitionist agenda: the establishment by international convention of a universal age limit below which it was illegal for a person to engage in sex work abroad.<sup>137</sup> The current age limit of twenty years, Edwardes opined authoritatively and at length, presented “certain difficulties arising out of the conditions which are peculiar” to India. These “difficulties” included, he argued, “established physical facts” associated with the “climatic conditions of India,” which result “in maturity being reached at an earlier age than in Europe.” Simultaneously, he argued, the age limit would also conflict with India’s “religious and social customs.”<sup>138</sup>

Edwardes's clear purpose in his speech was to establish Indian sexuality as exceptional to the universal standards articulated by abolitionist activists, in part, by mirroring the language of abolitionism itself while also adhering to the new restrictions of a discursive environment that no longer tolerated explicit references to racial difference.<sup>139</sup> He achieved this by mirroring the race-neutral language of climate and culture that British abolitionists had developed decades earlier. And he was hardly alone. Over the course of the CTWC's existence, various delegates and assessors would evoke differences in climate and custom to make racial distinctions when it suited them (e.g., in reference to colonial governance or immigration policy), while still insisting that all women and children, regardless of race, were equally vulnerable to trafficking.<sup>140</sup>

In effect, it was precisely the rhetorical flexibility baked into the idea of racial equality as vulnerability that allowed imperial and mandatory states, working through the League's "machinery," to strategically reinforce zones of racial exception within the emerging, post-racial common sense about "the traffic in women and children." Crowdy inadvertently put it best in a 1921 letter in which she described the benefits of the International Convention. In her opinion, she observed, "it is a question of some importance, that the term 'white Slave Traffic' is abolished, and 'Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children' substituted, as this will, undoubtedly, enable the advisory committee to consider, when necessary, the question of traffic in colored women."<sup>141</sup> The ability to address the traffic in non-white women "when necessary"—and in ways deemed appropriate to climate and culture—enabled the imperial and mandatory states on the committee (including Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Spain, and the ever-present, nonvoting but hugely influential representative from the United States) to enforce the provisions of the 1921 convention selectively.<sup>142</sup>

This selective enforcement proved useful for imperial and mandatory states throughout the interwar period. On the one hand, this was a period of exploding global migration that also saw a rapid increase in the number of women migrating for sex work.<sup>143</sup> Much of this movement took place either within Europe or between Europe, the Middle East, and North and South America. According to the League's own research, most women involved were over the age of twenty-one and already sex workers in their home countries.<sup>144</sup> The flexibility built into the language of "traffic in women and children" allowed European states (including liberal democratic states that were also empires) to exercise immigration control and racial exclusion by other means. They could, for instance, selectively enforce the 1921 convention to deport women of color they accused of being prostitutes (even if they were not) while simultaneously evoking differences in climate and custom to justify differential treatment of foreign and indigenous sex workers in various parts of Europe's still sprawling imperial geography and the mandated territories.<sup>145</sup>

On a more macro level, the League's anti-trafficking work supported racial hierarchy in a way similar to its anti-slavery provisions. As with "the traffic in women and children," the League's "nonpolitical" commitment to combating slavery globally was codified by convention in 1926.<sup>146</sup> Imperial member states weaponized this convention when they challenged the membership credentials of free African states like Ethiopia and Liberia on the grounds that they weren't doing enough to combat domestic slavery.<sup>147</sup> Likewise, the apparent failure of some Latin American countries to combat "the traffic in women and children" cast doubt on the legal capacities of these states to regulate immigration, while the supposed inability of locals in cities like Cairo to control illegal sex work contributed

to an imperial common sense that mandatory states like Britain should retain their “special powers” in nominally independent states like Egypt.<sup>148</sup>

In addition, the shift to a global, deracialized language of “traffic in women and children” allowed liberal League boosters to claim that its “machinery” was of universal benefit to the world even as the institution itself remained racially exclusive and its political and diplomatic ineffectiveness became more obvious. The president of the Second Assembly meeting, for instance, closed the session by first acknowledging that the League had accomplished very little before directing his audience to the few things it *had* accomplished, putting efforts to combat “the abominable traffic in women and children” for “the benefit of humanity” at the top of that list. He then insisted that the League of Nations—“the political and moral expression of the interests which unite all peoples”—was “not a mirage, but reality.”<sup>149</sup> That same year, in a speech before the Imperial Conference, Balfour identified the League’s “common international effort” to combat “the traffic in women and children” as one of the new organization’s few successes.<sup>150</sup> For the next decade, League champions in Europe and America used the League’s work on trafficking to exemplify “the organized international life of our time” and demonstrate “how the nature of international relations is slowly being altered as the League idea and system settle deeper and deeper into the life of the world.”<sup>151</sup> To combat trafficking was to promote the interests of women and children “of all races and colors,” to restructure international life, and to concretize the League for the universal good of humanity. All at the same time. Without decolonizing. And without mentioning race.

## Conclusion

I have argued above that the League of Nations’ shift from “white slave traffic” to “the traffic in women and children” offers an early example of liberal internationalist circle squaring by nonpolitical means. Thus, for supporters of the League, its campaign against “the traffic in women and children” not only demonstrated this new institution’s color-blind commitment to “common humanity” but also helped grow its bureaucratic “machinery” while seemingly proving its organizational effectiveness. At the same time, locating racial equality in the vulnerability of women and children rather than in the political and economic autonomy of individuals and/or peoples, allowed member states to selectively enforce anti-trafficking provisions and rationalize the League’s ongoing support for imperialism despite its commitment to the self-determination of nations. Furthermore, the attachment of League anti-trafficking activists to words like climate and custom, rather than race and civilization, can be read as a harbinger of the deracialized language that sustains global racial hierarchy to this day. If, as Anghie puts it in relation to the postwar period, a “vocabulary of race is no longer required in its explicit form” to exercise political and economic control over formerly colonized peoples, a close reading of the League’s early linguistic reworking of trafficking—and its refiguring of racial equality as vulnerability—provides us with crucial insight into the process by which this happened.<sup>152</sup>

## NOTES

1. Robert Cecil, *A Great Experiment: An Autobiography* (London: Jonathan Cap, 1941); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019); and Jeanne Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

2. Woodrow Wilson, "Address on the Essentials of Permanent Peace, Delivered to the Senate of the United States," January 22, 1917, President *Wilson's Foreign Policy: Messages, Addresses, Papers* (New York: Oxford University Press, American Branch, 1918), 250. W. E. B. Du Bois's international and Pan-Africanist writings clearly suggest that he understood his most prescient line from 1903's *The Souls of Black Folk* ("The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line") in global terms (*The Souls of Black Folk* [New York, New American Library, 1969], 78). For more on the League and global racial hierarchy, see Mousab Younis, *On the Scale of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022); Megan Donaldson, "Ventriloquism in Geneva: The League of Nations as International Organisation," in *History, Politics, Law: Thinking Through the International*, ed. Anabelle Brett, Megan Donaldson, and Marti Koskeniemi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). See discussion at drafting meeting of proposal from Japanese Delegate, Makino Nobuaki, *Draft Texts of Covenant and Minutes of Drafting Commission*, 1919 [League File S585/15/1], 180–82, 230–34.
3. Antony Anghie, "Time Present and Time Past: Globalization, International Financial Institutions, and the Third World," *NYU Journal of International Law and Politics* 32 (1999): 243.
4. Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 5; *The Covenant of the League of Nations*, Article 22, accessed October 20, 2025, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp#art22](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp#art22).
5. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 16–18; and Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 207–8. For more on indirect control and the economic sections, see Jamie Martin, *The Meddlers: Sovereignty, Empire, and the Birth of Global Economic Governance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).
6. Although the original Treaty of Versailles disappeared during World War II, we know that the term "traffic in women and children" appeared in the first version of the Covenant because the League Archive houses a certified true copy in its museum. With thanks to Jacques Oberson at the United Nations Archives at Geneva.
7. *International Conference on Traffic in Women and Children*, 1921 [League File R655-12-13895-18324.], 204.
8. Maria de Graaf (Netherlands), *International Conference*, 1921, 116.
9. See Siep Stuurman on the "global acceptance" of racial equality and "common humanity," in *The Invention of Humanity: Equality and Cultural Difference in World History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 484.
10. Newton Rowell, "The League of Nations and the Assembly at Geneva," *International Review of Mission* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1921), 402; Alfred Zimmern, "The Development of the International Mind," *Lectures Delivered at the Geneva Institute of International Relations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 4; and Hans Wehberg, "Hat Japan durch die Besetzung der Mandschurei das Völkerrecht verletzt?," *Die Friedenswarte* (1932), 12.
11. Alfred Zimmern, *Nationality and Government* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1918), 62.
12. *International Conference*, 1921, 118.
13. Many histories of trafficking and race skip over the significance of the name change. See Nicole Bromfield, "Sex Slavery and Sex Trafficking of Women in the United States: Historical and Contemporary Parallels, Policies, and Perspectives in Social Work," *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 31, no. 1 (2016): 32; and Joe Doezema, "Loose Women or Lost Women? The Re-emergence of the Myth of White Slavery in Contemporary Discourses of Trafficking in Women," *Gender Issues* 18, no. 1 (1999): 30–31. Notable exceptions include Esther Pomares Cintas and Stephen Legg, although neither probes the linguistic shift in great detail. See Cintas, "Metamorphosis of the White Slave Trade Concept Within the League of Nations: Paradigm of Contemporary Migratory Flows," *Journal of Law and Criminal Justice* 9, no. 2 (2021): 49–62; and Stephen Legg, "The Life of Individuals as Well as of Nations': International Law and the League of Nations' Anti-Trafficking Governmentalities," *Leiden Journal of International Law* 25 (2012): 647–64.
14. Glenda Sluga, "What is National Self-Determination? Nationality and Psychology During the Apogee of Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 11, no. 1 (2005): 1–20. See Neil Smith for more on Wilson's imperial/non-imperial reading of "national self-determination," in *The Endgame of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
15. On multiple forms of internationalism in the interwar era, see Patricia Clavin and Glenda Sluga, eds., *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
16. Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
17. Antony Anghie, "Colonialism and the Birth of International Institutions," *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
18. *Draft Texts of Covenant*, 1919, 180–82, 230–34. See also, Paul Lauren, "Human Rights in History: Diplomacy and Racial Equality at the Paris Peace Conference," in *Race and US Foreign Policy from 1900 Through World War II*, ed. Michael Krenn (New York: Routledge, 2020), 99–120.
19. Donaldson calls the League a "quasi-universal" organization. "Ventriloquism in Geneva," 253.
20. Woodrow Wilson, Address at the University of Minnesota Armory in Minneapolis, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed October 20, 2025, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the>

- university-minnesota-armory-minneapolis; and Alfred Zimmern, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1936), 3.
21. E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919–1939* (London: MacMillan, 1941), 41.
  22. Carr, *Twenty Years Crisis*, 56.
  23. Leonard Woolf, *International Government* (New York: Brentano's, 1916), 149.
  24. On Woolf's influence, see Peter Wilson, *The International Theory of Leonard Woolf: A Study in Twentieth-Century Idealism* (London: Palgrave, 2003). On Zimmern, see Peter Yearwood, "'On the Safe and Right Lines': The Lloyd George Government and the Origins of the League of Nations, 1916–1918," *The Historical Journal* 32, no. 1 (1989): 131–55.
  25. Zimmern, *Nationality and Government*, 36.
  26. Woolf, *International Government*, 83.
  27. W. E. B DuBois, "The African Roots of the War" (1915), *W.E.B. Du Bois: International Thoughts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); and Rosa Luxemburg, *The Crisis in German Social-Democracy (the "Junius" Pamphlet)* (New York: Socialist Publication Society, 1919).
  28. Zimmern, *Nationality and Government*, 35.
  29. Woolf, *International Government*, 129.
  30. Jean-Michel Chaumont, "The White Slave Trade Affair (1880–1881); A Scandal Specific to Brussels?" *Brussels Studies* 46 (2011), <https://journals.openedition.org/brussels/4494>.
  31. Jean Allain, "White Slave Traffic in International Law," *Journal of Trafficking and Human Exploitation* 1, no. 1 (2017), [https://glc.yale.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/allain\\_the\\_white\\_slave\\_traffic\\_in\\_international\\_law.pdf](https://glc.yale.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/allain_the_white_slave_traffic_in_international_law.pdf).
  32. Woolf, *International Governance*, 167.
  33. Zimmern, *Nationality and Government*, 163, 37, 62.
  34. On "common life of states," see "Final Report of the Committee on the League of Nations," in *Draft Texts of Covenant*, 14; and Jan Smuts on "common international life" found in *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 8.
  35. James Bryce, *Essays and Addresses in War Time* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 204; and Robert Cecil in *London Observer*, quoted in "International Notes," *Advocate for Peace* 81, no. 1 (January 1919): 23.
  36. The Records of the First Assembly, 1920 [League File A-PLenary-MINUTES-1920\_BI], 761.
  37. Woodrow Wilson, "Address at Columbus Ohio, September 4, 1919," *Addresses of President Wilson* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), 13.
  38. Henriette Forchammer (Denmark), Provisional Record of Second Assembly, 1921 (League File R1367-26-15465-15465), 173; and Henri La Fontaine (Belgium), Provisional Record of Second Assembly, 1921, 173.
  39. de Graaf, *International Conference*, 1921, 116.
  40. *Draft Texts of Covenant*, 1919, 202.
  41. *Draft Texts of Covenant*, 1919, 208.
  42. Covenant of League of Nations, Article 23, accessed October 20, 2025, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp).
  43. See comments of Sir Malcolm suggesting closer connections with NVA, Home Office Memo 1919 [League File R636/12/647/647], 14.
  44. Motion to Assembly from Council Committee 11, 15 Dec. 1920 [League File R636-12-647-9547].
  45. *International Conference* 1921, Final Acts.
  46. See, for example, Barbara Metzger, "Toward an International Human Rights Regime During the Inter-War Years: The League of Nations' Combat of Traffic in Women and Children," in *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire, and Transnationalism, 1880-1950*, eds. Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann (New York: Palgrave, 2007); and Liat Kozma, "Regulated Brothels in Mandatory Syria and Lebanon: Between the Traffic in Women and the Permanent Mandate Commissions," *The League of Nations and Social Issues*, eds. Magaly Rodríguez García, David Rodogno, and Liat Kozma (New York: The United Nations, 2016).
  47. Metzger, "Toward an International Human," 73.
  48. *International Conference 1921*, 26. See *Report on Music Halls*, 1929 [League File R3022-11B-288-11590]. Traffic in Women and Children Committee, Text of the minutes of the 15th session, April 1936 [League File R4669/11B/23724/729]. *Report of the Special Body of Experts on the Traffic in Women and Children* 1927 [League File C. 52. M. 52. 1927. IV]. For more in the 1927 report, see Paul Knepper, "The Investigation into the Traffic in Women by the League of Nations: Sociological Jurisprudence as an International Social Project," *Law and History Review* 34, no. 1 (2016); and Jeanne Morefield, "Worldmaking as Underworldmaking: Trafficking, Fascism, and the Imaginative Geography of Liberalism," *Theory and Event* (forthcoming, winter 2026). *Report of the Special Body* 1927 [League File C. 52. M. 52. 1927. IV]; and *Enquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the East. Report to the Council*, 1932 [League File C-849-M-393-1932-IV\_EN]. For more on the committee, the reports, and data gathering, see Emma Post, "'Fighting a Ghost': Collecting Data and Creating Knowledge on Sex Trafficking in the League of Nations Between 1921 and 1939," *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 24, no. 3/4 (2021): 296–314.
  49. Diplomatic Conference concerning the Suppression of Traffic in Women of Full Age (Geneva, October 9th–11th, 1933); *International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women of Full Age* (Geneva, October 11th, 1933) [League File C-590(t)-M-276(t)-1933-IV\_BI].

50. Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007): 1091–1117; Gilbert Murray, "A Survey of Recent World Affairs," *Problems of Peace: Lectures Delivered at the Geneva Institute of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 2; and Konni Zilliacus, *Mirror of the Past: A History of Secret Diplomacy* (London: Current Books, 1946).
51. Paul Knepper, "International Criminals," *Media History* 20, no. 4 (2014): 405; and Pedersen "Back to the League of Nations," 1092.
52. Susan Pedersen, "Metaphors of the Schoolroom: Women Working the Mandates System of the League of Nations," *History Workshop Journal* 66 (2008): 190.
53. A smaller number of women from the America's (including the United States) were also involved with the League's social and humanitarian work—most notably, the Uruguayan delegate to the committee, Dr. Paulina Luisi. For more on the complicated career of Luisi, see biographical introduction on Luisi in Sara Castro-Kenen, Sylvia Molloy, and Beatriz Sarlo, *Women's Writing in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2019). The social reformer Grace Abbott also served as the unofficial representative of the United States on the committee from 1922 to 1934. See Knepper, "Investigation into the Traffic in Women," 54–55.
54. Daniel Gorman, "Servants of the World: Rachel Crowdy at the League of Nations," *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 61.
55. Magaly Rodríguez García, "The League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women," *International Review of Social History* 57(S20): 97–128, doi:10.1017/S0020859012000442. Luisi represented one of the rare women delegates on the CTWC.
56. Jessica R. Philey, "Claims to Protection: The Rise and Fall of Feminist Abolitionism in the League of Nations' Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, 1919–1936," *Journal of Women's History* 22, no. 4 (2010): 90–113.
57. Meliscent Shephard, "Aspects of Moral and Social Hygiene in India," in *Traffic in Women and Children - Correspondence with Association for Moral and Social Hygiene (India)* [League File R4672/11B/10230/1522], 154.
58. Julia Ann Laite, "The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene: Abolitionism and Prostitution Law in Britain (1915–1959)," *Women's History Review* 17, no. 2 (2008): 207–23.
59. See copies of *The Shield* (put out by the AMSH) sent to League "to encourage a scientific study of the sources and conditions of the traffic with a view to stopping it completely." *Traffic in Women and Children* [League File R636/12/4616/647].
60. Forchammer, *International Conference* 1921, 142.
61. M. Regnault, *International Conference* 1921, 134.
62. Sonja Dolinsek, "Tensions of Abolitionism During the Negotiation of the 1949 'Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others,'" *European Review of History* 29, no. 2 (2022): 223–48.
63. Gayle Rubin, "The Trouble with Trafficking," *The Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); and Petra de Vries, "'White Slaves' in a Colonial Nation: the Dutch Campaign Against the Traffic in Women in the Early Twentieth Century," *Social and Legal Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663905049525>.
64. Ann Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable," *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 652.
65. Metzger, "Toward an International Human Rights Regime."
66. Report of the ICW to the First meeting of the Traffic in Women and Children, Minutes of the First Session, 1922 [League File 0000766725\_Do001], 112.
67. The NVA used "white slave traffic" until after the establishment of the League. Laura Lammasniemi, "International Legislation on White Slavery and Anti-trafficking in the Early 20th Century," in *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking, Volume 1*, eds. Jackie Jones and John Winterdyk (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2019), 69.
68. See multiple archival entries for the *International Conference on White Slave Traffic – Resolutions and Recommendations of the Conference*, and Acte Final [League File R655/12/13895/13895]. Also, *International Conference*, 1921, 11.
69. *International Conference* 1921, 209.
70. Knepper, "International Criminals," 405. See also, Jo Doezema, "Who Gets to Choose? Coercion, Consent, and the UN Trafficking Protocol," *Gender & Development* 10, no. 1 (2002): 28.
71. Jean-Michel Chaumont, "How to Establish the Reality of Trafficking in Women? The Selective Disqualification of Sources by the Special Body of Experts of the League of Nations (1924–1927)," in *Trafficking and Sex Work: Gender, Race and Public Order*, ed. Mathilde Darley (London: Routledge, 2022), 18.
72. Katrina Leppänen, "International Reorganisation and Traffic in Women: Venues of Vulnerability and Resistance," *Lychnos: Årsbok för idé-och lärdomshistoria* (2006), 116, 115.
73. Stephanie Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 63–65.
74. The Rapporteur for the Legislative Commission created by the 1902 International Conference reminded members that their remit only concerned victims "procured in a northern country, conveyed across

a central country” and “delivered up in a southern country.” Commission Législative, Rapport présenté par Mr. Ferdinand-Dreyfus, Annexe au Procès-Verbal de la Quatrième Séance, *supra* n. 11, 123; as translated into English in: *supra* n.12, 9, quoted in Allain, “White Slave Traffic in International Law,” 8.

75. Despite the presence of these states in the League assembly, it remained an imperial, deeply racist institution. See Musab Younis, “Race, the World and Time: Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia (1914-1945),” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 46, no. 3 (2018): 352–70; Robert Knox, “Haiti at the League of Nations: Racialisation, Accumulation and Representation,” *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 21, no. 2 (2020); and *Beyond Geopolitics: New Histories of Latin America at the League of Nations*, ed. Alan McPherson and Yannick Wehrli (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015).

76. Meeting of Special Body of Experts - Minutes of the Second session, 1924 [League File S169/24/4].

77. *International Conference*, 1921, 10.

78. *International Conference*, 1921, 12, 27.

79. *International Conference*, 1921, 28.

80. Closing speech, “Report of the Seventh International Congress for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children,” London, Tuesday, June 28 to Friday, July 1, 1927, Caxton Hall (London: National Vigilance Association, 1928), National Vigilance Association Collection, International Bureau for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children, Box 108 S88P. 112 [LSE Women’s Library], 112–13.

81. Jennifer Pitts, “Boundaries of Victorian International Law,” in *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Duncan Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 67–88.

82. Lynn Festa, “Humanity without Feathers,” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights* 1, no. 1 (2010): 4.

83. Art 63, the Geneva Convention – 1864 – For the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field, accessed October 20, 2025, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/hague993.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/hague993.asp). Participants at the Hague Peace Conference of 1899 excluded “uncivilized” peoples from the convention that prohibited the use of expanding bullets and poison gas. Faien Klose, *In the Cause of Humanity: A History of Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 26.

84. Stuurman, *Invention of Humanity*, 487.

85. For more on the non-racial and yet racial significance of contemporary terms like “undeveloped” and “developing,” see Edward Said’s discussion of “Orientalism Now,” in *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

86. Thomas Burkman, “Japan and the League of Nations: An Asian Power Encounters the ‘European Club,’” *World Affairs* 158 (1995): 45–57. See such language, for instance, in the British Mandate over the Cameroons - Report [League File R30/1/52035/5322, 1925] as well as French Mandate over Togo - Correspondence concerning the petition of the “Bund der Deutsch-Togoländer” [League file File R2336/6A/2705/2705, 1925], and The Permanent Mandates Commission - Working Papers [League File S261/1/50/2, 1921], 33.

87. *International Conference*, 1921, 118; and Sidney Harris (Great Britain), *International Conference* 1921, 158, 190.

88. Dr. Estrid Hein (Denmark), Traffic in Women and Children Committee, Minutes, 1928 [League File C-184-M-59-1928-IV\_EN], 24.

89. de Graaf, *International Conference* 1921,

90. Delegates often referred to the “urgency” of the problem. See, First Session of the Advisory Committee on Traffic in Women and Children, 1922 [League File. R664/12/21815], 111.

91. Maria Framke, “Internationalizing the Indian War on Opium,” *A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia: Intoxicating Affairs*, eds. Harald Fischer-Tine and Jana Tschurennev (New Brunswick, NJ: Routledge; 2014), 157. On the British, Dutch, and French on trafficking, see M. Haq, *Drugs in South Asia. From the Opium Trade to the Present Day* (London: Springer, Ashgate, 200), 69–93. It is equally important to remember that the narcotics traffic in Asia was itself a direct effect of British imperialism. See Diana Kim, *Empires of Vice: The Rise of Opium Prohibition Across Southeast Asian* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020). See also Susan Speaker’s excellent “‘The Struggle of Mankind Against its Deadliest Foe’: Themes of Counter-Subversion in Anti-Narcotic Campaigns, 1920-1940,” *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 3 (2001): 591.

92. Rachel Crowdy, “The Humanitarian Activities of the League of Nations,” *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 6, no. 3 (1927): 153–69.

93. Reports dealing with drug abuse often dealt with opium addicts in Asia. See, for instance, League Commission of Enquiry into Opium Smoking in the Far East, 1929 [League Files S190/1 – S201/12/4].

94. In the words of one delegate in 1921, it was “not quite dignified to mention the traffic in women and children in the same breath with the traffic in opium.” *International Conference*, 1921, 206.

95. *Report of the Special Body of Experts*, 44; *The Vigilance Record: Organ of the National Vigilance Association*, June 1931, 9 [in 10th Session of the Traffic in Women and Children Committee Report, League File R3039/11B/27935/2776].

96. Summary of the Annual Reports of the Year 1925, Prepared by the Secretariat, Submitted to the Committee, April 21, 1927 [League File 0000766652\_D0001], 308; Summary of Annual Reports for 1932–33,

Prepared by the Secretariat [League File R4677-11B-9175-2070], 45; Consultative Commission on the Trafficking of Women and Children, 1927 [League File, C.T.F.E./6E à 8E SESSION/ P.V], 233.

97. This disconnect is particularly stark in the introduction to the 1927 *Report of the Special Body of Experts*, 42.

98. Negro Movement – Various Resolutions and Correspondences with Individuals or Associations, 1928 Petition of the Universal Negro Improvement Association to the League [League File R2344/6A/7158/7158/Jacket1], 9.

99. W. E. B DuBois, “To the World (Manifesto of the Second Pan-African Congress) (1921),” *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 55, 63.

100. *Draft texts of Covenant*, 1919, 180.

101. Takashi Fujitani, “Imperialism,” in *The Interwar World*, eds. A. Denning and H. J. S. Tweek (New Brunswick, NJ: Routledge, 2023).

102. Some historians argue Wilson’s goal was to establish America’s credentials as the global superpower it would eventually become following the Second World War. Neil Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2005).

103. *International Conference*, 1921, 190.

104. de Graaf, *International Conference*, 1921, 113.

105. Maria Framke, “India’s Freedom and the League of Nations: Public Debates 1919–33,” in *Asia After Versailles: Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order, 1919–33* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

106. de Graaf, *International Conference*, 1921, 116.

107. Jo-Ann Wallace, “A Class Apart: Josephine Butler and Regulated Prostitution in British India, 1886–1893,” in *The Body in the Library* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Philip Howell, “Race, Space and the Regulation of Prostitution in Colonial Hong Kong,” *Urban History* 31, no. 2 (2004): 229–48; Daniel Gorman, “Empire, Internationalism, and the Campaign Against the Traffic in Women and Children in the 1920s,” *Twentieth-Century British History* 19, no. 2 (2008): 186–216; and Susan Pedersen, “The Maternalist Moment in British Colonial Policy: The Controversy over ‘Child Slavery’ in Hong Kong, 1917–1941,” *Past and Present* 171 (2001): 162–202.

108. Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 27.

109. “The Black Peril,” *The Common Cause* (September 21, 1911): 409.

110. This idea was widespread in the Victorian period. See Jeannette King, “What is a Woman? Victorian Constructions of Femininity,” *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction* (London: Palgrave, 2005).

111. “Solidaire,” *The Common Cause* (June 6, 1913): 131.

112. Margaret Cousins, “The Womanhood of India,” *The Student World* vol. xxii, no. 2, 1928 (original article, 1910). Included in Various Correspondence (Social Section) A – E, 1924-1933 [League File S164/19/2], 938.

113. Editorial, *The Shield: The Official Organ of the British Committee of The International Federation for the Abolition of State Regulation of Vice* vol. XI, no.103. (Oct.–Nov. 1908) [League File “R636/12/4616/647], 35.

114. Josephine Butler, “To the Missionary Societies and Christian Ministers of Great Britain” (January 1898) in Burton, note 90, 254; also, Burton, 128.

115. Cousins, “Womanhood on India,” 938.

116. Jessica Howell, “Climate and Race in the Age of Empire,” in *Climate and Literature*, ed. Adeline Johns-Putra (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 163–78. Memorandum of Warning issued to “young soldiers in India” (October 1905) on the “climate and conditions.” Confidential memo, “The Work of The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene in connection with The British Army in India,” 1933 [League File R4672/11B/10230/1522], 93.

117. Cousins, “Womanhood of India.”

118. Josephine Butler, “Our Indian Fellow Subjects,” *The Sentinel*, Sept. 1887, 9.

119. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan Education, 1998), 271–313.

120. Said, *Orientalism*, 205. Chapter 1, “The Scope of Orientalism,” focuses, in part, on the rhetorical tradition of reading “the Orient” as hypersexualized.

121. Shephard “Aspects of Moral and Social Hygiene in India,” 154.

122. Draft Letter to Council from AMSH, Sept. 1920 [League File R636/12/7171/647]. Traffic in Women and Children - Correspondence with other associations and answers to questionnaire [League File S154/9/1], 309.

123. De Graaf, *International Conference*, 1921, 113.

124. Resolution Two, Final Act, *International Conference*, 1921, 2.

125. International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children Geneva, 30 September 1921 [Certified True Copy, United Nations Treaty Collection, accessed, October 20, 2025, [https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=VII-3&chapter=7&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=VII-3&chapter=7&clang=_en), emphasis mine. See also Report on 1921 Draft, Presented by the Fifth Committee, Rapporteur: Professor Gilbert Murray, Representative of South Africa [League File A-132-1921\_BI].

126. Sunil Rao, "The Grounding of Protection in International Law: The Convention of 1921," in *The Trafficking of Children for Sexual Exploitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 24–51.
127. In 1922, Crowdy floated the idea of making London, rather than Geneva, the site for the yearly meeting of the CTWC. Letter to M. Harris, 1922, Correspondence Following 1921 Conference [League File S154-9-2], 178.
128. Provisional Record of Second Assembly, 1921, 172, 173.
129. Provisional Record of Second Assembly, 1921, 175.
130. Provisional Record of Second Assembly, 1921, 176.
131. See Crowdy's reassuring letters to Forchammer and Avril de St. Croix, Correspondence Following 1921 Conference [League File S154-9-2].
132. Stephen Legg, "An International Anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations and India's Princely Geographies," *Journal of Historical Geography* 43 (2014): 96–110.
133. Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (London: Routledge, 2003).
134. Philippa Levine, "A Multitude of Unchaste Women: Prostitution in the British Empire," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 4 (2004): 160.
135. Stephen Legg, *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire: Scale, Governmentalities, and Interwar India* (Durham, NC: Duke, 2014).
136. S. E. Edwardes, Position of India in Regard to the International Convention of 1910, *International Conference 1921*, 120.
137. During the 1920's, abolitionists shifted from supporting age limits to eliminating them altogether (effectively making all prostitution slavery). See Piley, "Claims to Protection," 101.
138. Edwardes, *International Conference* [League File R655-12-13895-18324], 122.
139. For more on Edwardes, the League, and climate, see Ashwini Tambe, "Climate, Race Science and the Age of Consent in the League of Nations," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 28, no. 2 (2011): 109–30. Throughout the interwar era, British colonial authorities signalled their willingness "to endorse local patriarchal practices" that benefited conservative elites. Janaki Nair, "Imperial Reason, National Honour and New Patriarchal Compacts in Early Twentieth Century India," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 66 (2008): 209.
140. "It might perhaps be preferable to say that the question had to be determined by considerations of local interest, i.e., principally by climatic and physiological conditions." Belgian Delegate, Joint Meeting of the Traffic in Women and Children Committee, 1924 [League File R653/12/58980/13720/Jacket2], 281. "The legal age of marriage, for instance, varied according to local custom and climate . . ." Polish Delegate, Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People Minutes of the Second Session, 1926 [League File C-264-M-103-1926].
141. Draft letter from Crowdy, Oct. 1921, Correspondence Following the 1921 Conference [League File S154/9/2], 267.
142. See Knepper for influence of Americans on the CTWC, in "The Investigation into the Traffic in Women by the League of Nations," 53–56.
143. Edward Ross Dickinson, "Population and Demographics," in *The Interwar World*, ed. Andrew Denning and Heidi J. S. Twork (London: Routledge, 2023), 32–49. Also, Alison Bashford, "Migration: World Population and the Global Color Line," *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). For quintessential racist reaction to immigration, see Lothrop Stoddard, *Rising Tide of Color and the End of World White Supremacy* (New York: Scribner, 1921); and Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Le mythe de la traite des blanches* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009), 115.
144. Kozma, "Women's Migration," 95; also, Stefan Slater, "Pimps, Police and Filles de Joie: Foreign Prostitution in Interwar London," *The London Journal* 32, no. 1 (2007): 53–74.
145. As the journalist Arthur Sweetser put it in 1930, it was fortunate that the 1921 convention also had the effect of "tightening the previous control" on immigration. Arthur Sweetser, "The First Ten Years of the League of Nations," *International Conciliation* 13 (1930): 54. Important recent work on the disciplining and exclusion of immigrant sex workers in the interwar era include Liat Kozma, "The League of Nations and Colonial Prostitution," in *The Routledge Companion to Sexuality and Colonialism*, ed. Chelsea Shields and Dagmar Herzog (Abingdon/Oxford: Routledge, 2021), 188–98; and Julia Martinez, "The League of Nations, Prostitution, and the Deportation of Chinese Women from Interwar Manila," *Journal of Women's History* 33 no. 4 (2021): 67–91.
146. The 1926 Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery Amalia Forclaz, "The League of Nations and Slavery, 1919-1926," *Humanitarian Imperialism: The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880–1940* (Oxford: Oxford Historical Monographs, 2015).
147. See Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, Chapter One, and Megan Donaldson, "The League of Nations, Ethiopia, and the Making of States," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 11, no. 1 (2020): 6–31.
148. Donna Guy, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). See section on Egypt, *Report*

*of the Special Body of Expert on the Traffic in women ad Children, Part Two*, 1927 [League File 766738], 58–65. The “special powers” of Britain are identified in the Unilateral Declaration of Egyptian Independence, 1922.

149. Provisional Record of Second Assembly, 1921, 21.

150. Mr Balfour’s Speech to the Imperial Conference, July 1921 - Communicated by Mr P.J. Baker [League File R1594/40/17581/17581], 3

151. Manley Hudson, “America’s Role in the League of Nations,” *The American Political Science Review* 23, no. 1 (1929); and Roth Williams, “The Technique of the League of Nations,” *International Journal of Ethics* 34, no. 2 (1924): 127.

152. Antony Anghie, “Decolonizing the Concept of ‘Good Governance.’” in *Decolonizing International Relations*, ed. Branwen Gruffydd Jones (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 125