

## Prostitution is a racialized hate crime against women

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Racists target the humanity of those they attack. In the Atlanta spa deaths, two Chinese women and [four Korean women](#) were targeted for mass murder by a racist white man. We wonder, who are the women who were murdered? What forces channeled them into the Atlanta massage brothels? Are their families and friends grieving for them? Where are their children? We know that 89% of women in the sex trade including massage prostitution urgently [want to escape](#). What were their plans for the next week or the next year of their lives? *How could we have left them so vulnerable?* And now, how can we do justice to their lives and their deaths?

Two of us are Asian, we immediately understood the implied threat of the murders: every Asian woman is vulnerable. That is the reality for every Asian woman because we cannot choose when we are viewed as Asian or as women. Fueled by white supremacy, anti-Asian racism has increased during the coronavirus pandemic, with bigots [blaming Asians for COVID-19](#). Even in Canada, with national leaders urging kindness and patience, we have experienced a [dramatic increase](#) in violence against Asians in public spaces – women and especially elderly women are targeted. The freedom of each individual woman is [curtailed](#) as we are warned to avoid parks, public transit, and other public sites of attacks.

Despite the pandemic, Asian massage brothels do a brisk business with sex buyers paying for the women inside. The violence, racism and misogyny targeting Asians in North American public spaces is distilled and intensified in the racism of sex buyers at massage brothels like those in Atlanta—where sex buyers are shielded from public view and protected by public authorities. These men are paying for the women to gratify the men’s [racist and misogynist stereotypes](#) of Asian women as [submissive, exotic, or hypersexual](#) in a setting where the women’s lack of power is all too real. Sex buyers are protected by the pretense that they are there for a legitimate service.

City officials in Atlanta and elsewhere collude in that same pretense, licensing these facilities while turning a blind eye to the [obvious red flags](#) that these businesses were brothels and trafficking sites. All three Atlanta spas (Gold’s Spa, Aroma Therapy, and Young’s Asian massage) are locations where Asian women are trafficked for prostitution. All three spas are locations where [prostitution is advertised online](#). Gold’s Spa has a history of [prostitution arrests](#). Two of the spas are located in Atlanta’s red light zone where the sex trade thrives. San Francisco’s mayor acknowledged in 2006 that although its massage parlors were licensed, they were “[emblematic of a booming Asian sex-trafficking business that operates with near impunity](#)...” including pimps confiscating the women’s passports, keeping the women in debt-bondage by charging exorbitant fees for food and rent, and fining the women for displeasing sex buyers.

The City of Atlanta should recognize that the spas are trafficking women and should shut the brothels down rather than continue to protect sex buyers, as [Robert Kraft was protected](#) in Florida, at the expense of the Asian women who should never have been arrested.

The global sex trade increasingly contributes to the dehumanization of all Asian women. When cities license Asian massage parlors, they not only abandon women, but they also send the message that Asian women’s rights, safety, and personhood is secondary to men’s demand for prostitution and the pimp/ trafficker’s demand for profit. As an Atlanta sex trade survivor explained to the authors, “*As long as places that are known for pimping women are allowed to function as high-volume legal businesses, these women will not have hope or feel safe. It gives a strong impression that the city and APD are turning a blind eye.*”

In the next few days, the public will hear that the only way to protect women is to decriminalize the pimps, brothel owners and their sex-buying customers. This is a lie that, if believed, has deadly consequences for Asian women. These killings should not serve to immunize the men who harm us - no benefit should flow to the pimps, sex-buyers or traffickers. Rather, we need to abolish the racist and sexist practice of prostitution by offering women real alternatives to escape the built-in oppression that serves us up to men like Robert Aaron Long.