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Sex and Sexuality

Human Trafficking Panelist Goes Ballistic, Claims She Hates White People

By Vanessa L. Pinto Fri., Mar. 8 2013 at 3:39 PM 13 Comments

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Just when you thought Proposition 35, the controversial state law voters passed which stiffens fines for convicted human traffickers, couldn't trigger the community any more: A local Prop. 35 panelist lost control of herself during a recent forum discussing the pros and cons of the new law, which also forces convicted traffickers to register as sex offenders.



She had to bring race into the debate

On Tuesday at Golden Gate University, the GGU chapter of the NLG (National Lawyers Guild) organized an event entitled: *"Collateral Damage: Sex Workers and the Anti-Trafficking Campaigns."* The panel comprised Carol Leigh, a former sex worker and political activist; Cynthia Chandler, an attorney for Social Justice; and Stephanie Anderson, who represented St. James Infirmiry, a haven for respectful and compassionate medical care for many Bay Area sex workers.

The panel showed a portion of the impressive documentary, *Collateral Damage* by Carol Leigh, which traced the history of prostitution and detailed the history of anti-trafficking laws. Afterward, the panelists spoke, with Anderson pointing out that during her 10-year work with St. James she had "only seen two victims of trafficking, and [she does] not personally believe that trafficking is a problem."

Then Chandler chimed in:

Prop 35 will further criminalize and stigmatize people engaging in sex work, whether doing so consensually or not. It is overly broad in its language to the point of absurdity. Through its breadth, the law gives law enforcement and prosecutors

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wide discretion in its implementation. I find it unlikely that a wealthy person sharing wine or pot after a fancy night out and then having sex will face prosecution. Young people of color in urban settings will be disproportionately vulnerable, however. And as such, I believe that this proposition will have grossly racially disparate impact, while being arbitrary in its implementation. Such racism and arbitrary enforcement does not make for justice in my book.

Afterward, the panel gave the floor to the audience -- and that's when things got ugly.

A Caucasian woman in the audience spoke up, asking a series of questions: How are you supposed to know if someone is being forced to work in a sweat shop? How should you go about reporting a business for gross labor violations and misconduct? And what's more, how will you know if the police are really going to help them?

Anderson lost her temper in response to the questioning. She started to scream that the woman in the audience was "complicit in supporting" something "corrupt."

She continued her tirade, saying, "How dare you think you have to do anything! Who are you? What the hell can you do to help? Why do you think these women need help, what is wrong with you?"

Another audience member interrupted the outburst, reminding Anderson that "Hey, we are trying to have a dialogue here. ... Please calm down. She is just asking you a question out of concern, no one is putting you down. Can we please have an open discussion?" the woman said.

At this point, the moderator realized she'd lost control of the event. So like any good referee, she called for a time out. It was at this point that Anderson stood up and began to throw her belongings into her bag, muttering: "I hate white people, I fucking hate white people!"

(Anderson is Asian.)

Afterwards, Anderson gave us the following comment:

I, a person who works two part time jobs, has to go and present to a bunch of entitled white people, at a college that costs more in tuition than I make in a year, and that it's somehow my responsibility to coddle, educate, and train people on how their entitlements, their judgments, casual racism, and moralistic flawed reasoning affects me, my family, sex workers, people of color, marginalized, stigmatized, and criminalized populations, and [am] expected to be grateful for the opportunity, is vile and repugnant.

Leigh, another of the panelists, told us that presenters need better training to speak on such sensitive issues.

"These are delicate issues about race and the stigmatization of sex workers," she said. "I think that 'trafficking' has so many definitions. Of course, forced labor and abuse of labor in general, including sex workers, is a serious problem. If you define trafficking as prostitution per se, which the Trafficking Victims Protection Act does, then it is problematic to take a position opposed to 'trafficking' in that sense."

We then reached out to St. James Infirmary for comment, since Anderson was there as a representative from the clinic. Naomi Akers, executive director of St. James Infirmary, told us that "while these numbers are extremely low, St. James Infirmary does see trafficked victims, and it is important that is properly represented in public forums. My understanding is that information was not presented at Tuesday's panel. And [Anderson's] opinions were not representing the St. James authority, and she was not sanctioned to speak on the topic of trafficking.

"On behalf of the organization, we would like to apologize for any offenses or insults that were made on behalf of one of our staff members and we're open to having a dialogue with the community about the issue on how to be an ally. If someone is concerned about

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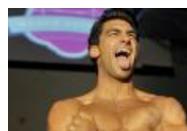
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someone being trafficked, we want to be open to helping them to be the solution and not to be demonized as part of the problem."

(St. James has confirmed that Anderson is no longer employed by the organization.)

Sabrina Morgan, a sex worker and an activist who was at the forum, said she saw venom coming from both sides.

"It felt to me that the otherwise well-spoken panelists were not expecting attendees' questions to come from an anti-trafficking framework and the tone in the room quickly became hostile on both sides," Morgan said. "If the panelists had prepared to deal with ... hostile, derailing, triggering, or difficult questions beforehand, they would have felt less attacked, and ready to present their thoughts in a way that could win the sex workers' rights movement new allies. Our activists would benefit from this type of training."

The only thing that really came out of this event is a little more evidence that people have a hard time expressing themselves without being angry when it comes to talking about hot-button topics like gun control, prostitution, and sex trafficking.

Hopefully another forum will address Prop 35, with speakers on both sides of the issue. The important thing is that people truly understand what it is they voted for last November, and why it may not be doing all the good they think it is.

Vanessa L. Pinto is a sex-positive writer in San Francisco. She writes for the [Huffington Post](#) and [Whore! magazine](#). Visit her at her [blog](#).

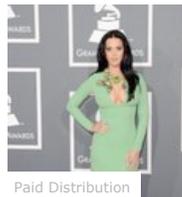
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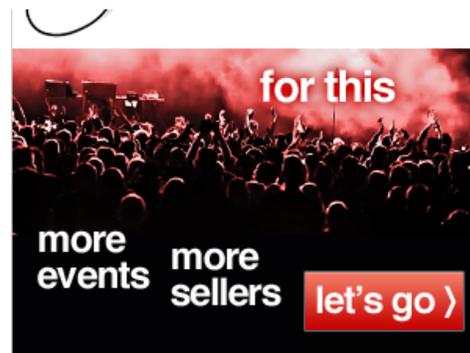
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Why wasn't I invited to speak? I was the proponent of prop 35

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Mar 12, 2013

Apart from the fact that recording and publishing statements, including excerpts from written communication after the event, without prior consent speaks volumes about Ms Pinto's ethical standards, two well-respected panellists and another person who attended the discussion have now thoroughly contradicted her claims. Summarising the topics discussed under the headline above is not only ludicrous; this article, for the most part, is a disservice to an important discourse affecting communities of all colours and walks of life.

3 [Like](#) [Reply](#)**cynthiachandlergg**

Mar 11, 2013

As a panelist in the aforementioned panel, I am shocked by the lack of fact checking of this piece and that it was published at all. On a small note, the quote allegedly taken from my talk was not what I talked about; it was taken from a response to a question the reporter Vanessa Pinto later posed to me through email. On a larger scale, the panel did not loose control; it was ending and was over time; the moderator did a reasonable job of wrapping it up to closure as we were over time at a very hard moment, reminding folks of how hard conversations about race are also important ones to have. And my fellow panelist Stephanie Anderson did not randomly get up and start shoving her stuff together; the panel had ended and everyone was packing up and leaving. It was at this time when most of the audience and some panelists had already left the podium that Stephanie mumbled some comments of frustration about white supremacy, under her breath. Comments, which to me appeared reasonable in light of arguably racists comments made by audience members and the ways that white feminist leaders disempower and tokenize Asian women generally.

I believe that what we all witnessed at the described panel was how the effects of unrelenting racism is triggering and causes real pain and injury to people, no matter how "professional" they are. Those of us engaging in social justice work impacting our communities know all too well that the stress of having to hold up one's head and move through all kinds of oppression for decades can just hit one like a wall, without prediction. What a shame the reporter chose not to focus on the toll of the trafficking debate on Asian women who are dehumanized and dis-empowered through either their objectification as victims through colonial feminism, or their malignment as collaborators in the oppression of their Asian sisters if they dare to dissent against colonialist feminism, or within the social justice movement itself through tokenization on panels and demands that they speak for all Asian women for the benefit of people in positions of social power.

If any great error of the panelists ought to have been reported, it should have been of my and my fellow white panelist Carol Leigh's failure to jump up and label the racism of the white audience members' comments in a manner that they could have heard. But we, like our white audience members, have the privilege accompanying whiteness of choosing to ignore or deny racism, and claiming comfort in silence or inaction when faced by instances of racism. White supremacy allows us to avoid conversations of racism and informs reactions like those exhibited by the audience of white upset and shock when faced with protests of a justifiably frustrated and harmed woman of color. Rather than critiquing Stephanie Anderson, we should have been called out

...that striking Supreme Justice, Justice has been called out on how white people are enabled to hide behind the comfort afforded by whiteness.

Such discussions would have promoted diversification, inclusion, and transformation for the social justice and sex worker rights communities. Instead, at best, Vanessa Pinto's piece takes on the antiquated, defensive tactic of blaming the messenger when the message is hard to hear. At worst, it is hyperbolic, race-baiting journalism contributing to divides in the movement.

Cynthia Chandler
Adjunct Professor of Law, Golden Gate University

3  Like Reply



vampvanessa_99

Mar 11, 2013

@cynthiachandler She was ballistic and intimidating, the moderator did call time when things got out of hand, as well as point out things went over time, due to the high emotions in the room. The first 45 minutes of the panel, was the documentary and then each panelists view on prop 35. After that the question and answer period was extremely hostile. People in the audience were intimidated, afraid to ask a question and Miss Anderson was asked to calm down by an audience member.

Beyond that, St. James Infirmary confirmed she was not sent by them to speak on this panel, nor was she allowed to speak on panels at all. They had no idea she was at this meeting, so essentially she went rogue and this is what came of it.

I stand by my piece and I know what I saw and heard on this day. Miss Anderson would still be employed, if I made this up, sadly I did not. She attacked people for asking questions and essentially made the statement that no one is exploited or trafficked and that pimps and madams are a myth. I talked to several members of the audience after, who wouldn't comment out of fear of Miss Anderson. I simply reported what I saw, it could of been her or anyone else and I would of reported it the same.

Vanessa L. Pinto

Like Reply



dpwaggoner

Mar 11, 2013

This article grossly misrepresents what actually happened. I also attended the panel discussion. No no one was "screaming" or went "ballistic." The moderator ended the discussion because the allotted time had elapsed, not to call a "timeout." Anderson said nothing about hating anyone during the discussion. It is deeply disturbing that the Weekly gets it so wrong and that the Infirmary fired Anderson.

3  Like Reply



vampvanessa_99

Mar 11, 2013

@dpwaggoner I have the entire panel on tape and I stand by this article. She did indeed say: "I hate white people, I fucking hate white people" I tape everything that I attend and all of my interviews. Miss Morgan's comment verified that as well.

Best,

Vanessa L. Pinto

Like Reply

**apwaggoner**

Mar 11, 2013

[@vampvanessa_99 @dpwaggoner](#) She may have said that, but it was not during the panel discussion. And, she wasn't screaming or ballistic. And the moderator didn't call a "timeout." The whole exchange was the last 5 minutes of a 90 minute program that had gone over its time allotment.

2 Like Reply

**randolph.fleming**

Mar 11, 2013

Not surprised by this , at all... I'd like to inform / remind all folks of the Professional Left that most of their philosophical / intellectual benefactors in history , were white males ; i.e. Karl Marx (German Jew . Possibly Sephardic) and Freidrich Engels...So....

1 Like Reply

**elvago trago**

Mar 11, 2013

Racism is acceptable in our society as long as it's directed at light skinned people. She will suffer no adverse consequences for her hate filled outburst and the whole thing will blow over faster than you can say "double standard".

See Carol Leigh's response below if you doubt me.

2 Like Reply

**112233**

Mar 11, 2013

[@elvago trago](#) Actually, she has been fired for it.

1 Like Reply

**ImPolitic**

Mar 10, 2013

Hey, I'm always among the first to bash whitey, and I can't deny that even I have often had things slightly easier in America because I'm white. If we really believe in equality, however, we can't indefinitely turn a blind eye to people from minority groups who somehow think racism is okay when they do it. Many people have observed how rapidly oppressed minority groups become oppressors when they become majorities. Whatever Andersen's works and motivations, her statements are a strikingly clear expression of racial prejudice. Speaking in public forums inevitably involves fielding questions from clueless or obnoxious attendees. If she can't handle the tension of a heated public discussion without blowing up and bitching about white people in general, she shouldn't be speaking on panels in public.

1 Like Reply

**Wendy Price**

Mar 10, 2013

Nuts.

Like Reply

**carol_leigh**

Mar 9, 2013

I didn't think my friend Stephanie's reaction was at all as extreme as portrayed by Vanessa. Others with whom I spoke agreed. I think it is a matter of the lens of the beholder.

I was primarily surprised that Vanessa felt that this issue so overshadowed the discourse on trafficking. I believe that Vanessa was responding to her own personal issues while pointing the finger at how Stephanie was responding to the audience member.

In terms of training, the point I am making is that anti-prostitution groups are quite well funded, training armies of speakers. Stephanie's response made much more sense to me than Vanessa's response as a journalist. so training

...more serious than Vanessa's response as a journalist, so training was not exactly the point of this encounter, although certainly there should be more funds to train sex positive writers, as well.

I was also surprised that Vanessa didn't connect to the point that emerged in the encounter (also explicit in my movie): The public discourse/media campaigns about trafficking presents a view that leads to racism, disempowerment of women, migrants, sex workers, and especially women of Asian descent who are suspected of being trafficking victims. One always has to worry which 'well meaning person' will take it upon themselves to call the police, who, in turn, can look into one's immigration status, or aspects of one's work. There is a very mean and unconscious side to the rescue industry.

Notions about how westerners 'help' have been widely challenged in work (some links below). "White Savior Industrial Complex" Teju Cole <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>

"Kristof's paternalistic smarm: the Soft Side of Imperialism redux" Laura Agustin <http://www.lauraagustin.com/kristofs-paternalistic-smarm-the-soft-side-of-imperialism-redux>

This issue that was invoked by the student's presentation of her question is central to current controversies about trafficking frameworks. I am primarily very disturbed that the result of this situation was the scapegoating of Stephanie, who is a very brave woman. Collateral Damage.

4  Unlike Reply

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