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The War on Trafficking: The Effects of Anti-trafficking Rhetoric and Politics on America’s “Postracial” Caste System

Abstract

This essay explores the effects of contemporary post-racial “trafficking in women” and “modern-day slavery” discourse, strategies, propaganda, and policies—which encapsulate what the author refers to as the War on Trafficking—on the lived realities of African Americans in the United States. Rather than offer a solution to trafficking, this essay seeks to expand discussions of the interconnectedness of rhetoric and antiblack criminal injustice to include anti-trafficking discourse. Much like the “war on drugs” and the “war on terror”—in which the government has removed the signified acts (drug use and terrorism) from the context in which they occur to create moral panic and sustain America’s racial caste system—the author argues that the phrase “modern-day slavery” functions to create moral panic while simultaneously erasing the history of trans-Atlantic slavery from America’s consciousness and obscuring the intersecting historical and contemporary plights—individual, institutional, and systemic—of African Americans in the United States.