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TODAY, IN 1959

President Eisenhower signed an executive order proclaiming Hawaii the 50th state of the union, five months after he'd signed the Hawaiian statehood bill.

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Raid highlights sex slave trade

Problem rampant in U.S., experts say

By Larry Neumeister
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Raids that uncovered more than 70 suspected sex slaves focused on 20 brothels in the East, but they illustrated a long-ignored national problem found in towns large and small, experts say.

"It's a very overwhelming subject for a lot of people to recognize that there is slavery at this time in our country," said Carole Angel, staff attorney with the Immigrant Women Program, part of Legal Momentum in Washington, a women's rights advocacy group. "It's hard for us as humans to contemplate what this means."

The concept of slavery in the 21st century is foreign to most people, agreed Jolene Smith, executive director of Free The Slaves, a Washington-based organization dedicated to ending slavery worldwide.

"Americans are conditioned to believe that slavery was a thing of the past," Smith said.

"We have to re-educate ourselves about this reality."

Last week, federal and local law enforcement raided brothels disguised as massage parlors, health spas and acupuncture clinics in New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Maryland, Rhode Island and the District of Columbia, arresting 31 people on trafficking charges.

Authorities said they also freed more than 70 sex workers.

"Human traffickers profit by turning dreams into nightmares," said U.S. Attorney Michael Garcia in Manhattan. "These women sought a better life in America and found instead forced prostitution and misery."

Angel said the raids should not give the impression that trafficking is limited to immigrants, who often are enticed into coming to America for legitimate jobs but then forced to work in brothels, sweatshops and restaurants to pay up to \$30,000 to their traffickers.

Such forced labor also thrives in agricultural and domestic work, as well as in sweatshops or unregulated industries, said Laurel Fletcher, pro-

fessor at the University of California at Berkeley International Human Rights Law Clinic.

Fletcher was one of several authors of a 2004 report believed to be the first comprehensive study of forced labor in the United States.

That study, by Free The Slaves and the Human Rights Center of the University of California at Berkeley, concluded that at least 10,000 people are forced laborers at any time across the United States.

The State Department estimates there are up to 800,000 trafficking victims worldwide.

The Berkeley study concluded that forced labor victims came from more than 35 countries, with the most from China, followed by Mexico and Vietnam. It found reports of forced labor in at least 90 U.S. cities, most often in areas with large immigrant populations.

The study also concluded that prostitution and sex services accounted for 46 percent of the documented forced labor. Domestic service made up 27 percent, agriculture 10 percent, sweatshop factory work 5 percent and restaurant and hotel work 4 percent.