

A Visual History Of Boston's Combat Zone

By [ANDREW PHELPS \(@andrewphelps\)](#)

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A Puritan City's Experiment In Adult Entertainment



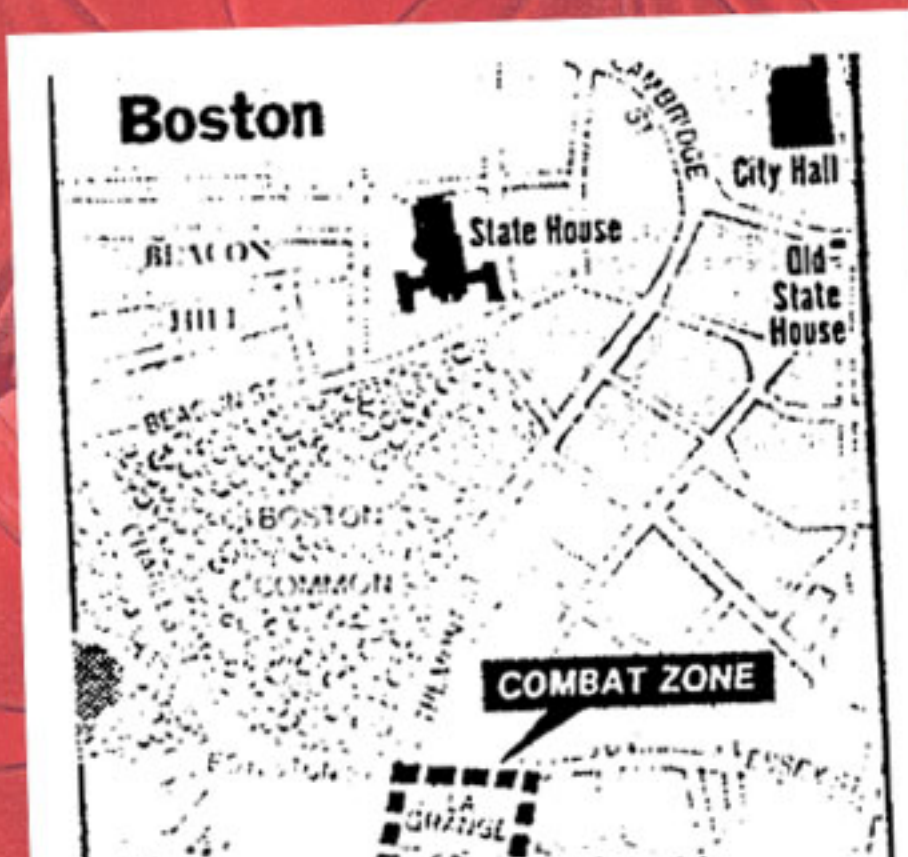
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BOSTON — When bulldozers demolished seedy Scollay Square in the midcentury to make way for Government Center, city planners worried the sex shops and peep shows would seep into Back Bay. To keep the unmentionable away, Boston tried a radical experiment: The edge of Chinatown was designated an adult entertainment district. Police looked the other way.

It became known as the Combat Zone, but it was never as dangerous as urban legend would have us believe. A real-estate boom and a crackdown on crime, in the 1970s and '80s, eventually pushed the pretty girls and peddlers away. By **WBUR's Andrew Phelps.**



Listen: Howard Yezerki describes this 1968 photograph by Jerry Berndt



The Boston Zoning Commission voted this month to set aside two downtown blocks, dubbed the "Combat Zone," for adult entertainment and to fight its spread elsewhere in the city. A spokesman said city fathers were resigned to the idea that sex entertainment would continue to be a fixture in Boston and thus would confine their efforts to containing it rather than trying to snuff it out.



Listen: John Goodman describes his 1978 photograph, "The Schlitz Boys"



***Pornography: shabby front for big industry**

Take a walk through the "tough" section of any big city—Boston's "Combat Zone," Baltimore's "Block," New Orleans's "French Quarter," or New York's Broadway and 42nd Street area. Sooner or later you'll come across it.

The stores are generally shabby, hole-in-the-wall affairs. Dirty windows, flaking ceilings, bare walls, and dull lighting contribute to an alleylike atmosphere.

The people who come and go—the browsers and the buyers—are mostly men. In one corner, on an elevated platform the cashier oversees the potential customers. No one talks. No one looks at anyone else. Silence reigns.

Boston's battle of peep shows

Peep shows — the newest form of pornography in Boston — are "popping up like dandelions in spring," according to City Hall, and officials are hustling to cut off the crop before it gets out of hand.

Several "adult" bookstores in the city's "Combat Zone" now are featuring coin-operated movie machines. Recently, at least one such bookstore on Charles Street on Beacon Hill, and another on Massachusetts Avenue in the Back Bay, also began advertising X-rated peep shows with large window signs.

This latest development on the Hub porno scene is a direct result of recent court findings that the Massachusetts law governing the issuance of theater and entertainment licenses is unconstitutional.



JOHN GOODMAN

There is a strong sense of "anything goes" in the area and a tacit understanding that the police were to direct their law enforcement efforts outside the zone.





JOHN GOODMAN



JOHN GOODMAN

Fight on Pornography, Mired in Confusion, Lags Across Nation

By **JAMES P. STERBA**

Special to The New York Times

DENVER Nov. 25—Pornography is flourishing nationwide 17 months after the United States Supreme Court, unable to define nationally what is obscene, told local communities to decide obscenity questions for themselves.

The chief problem is that local communities, including their judges, cannot decide, either.

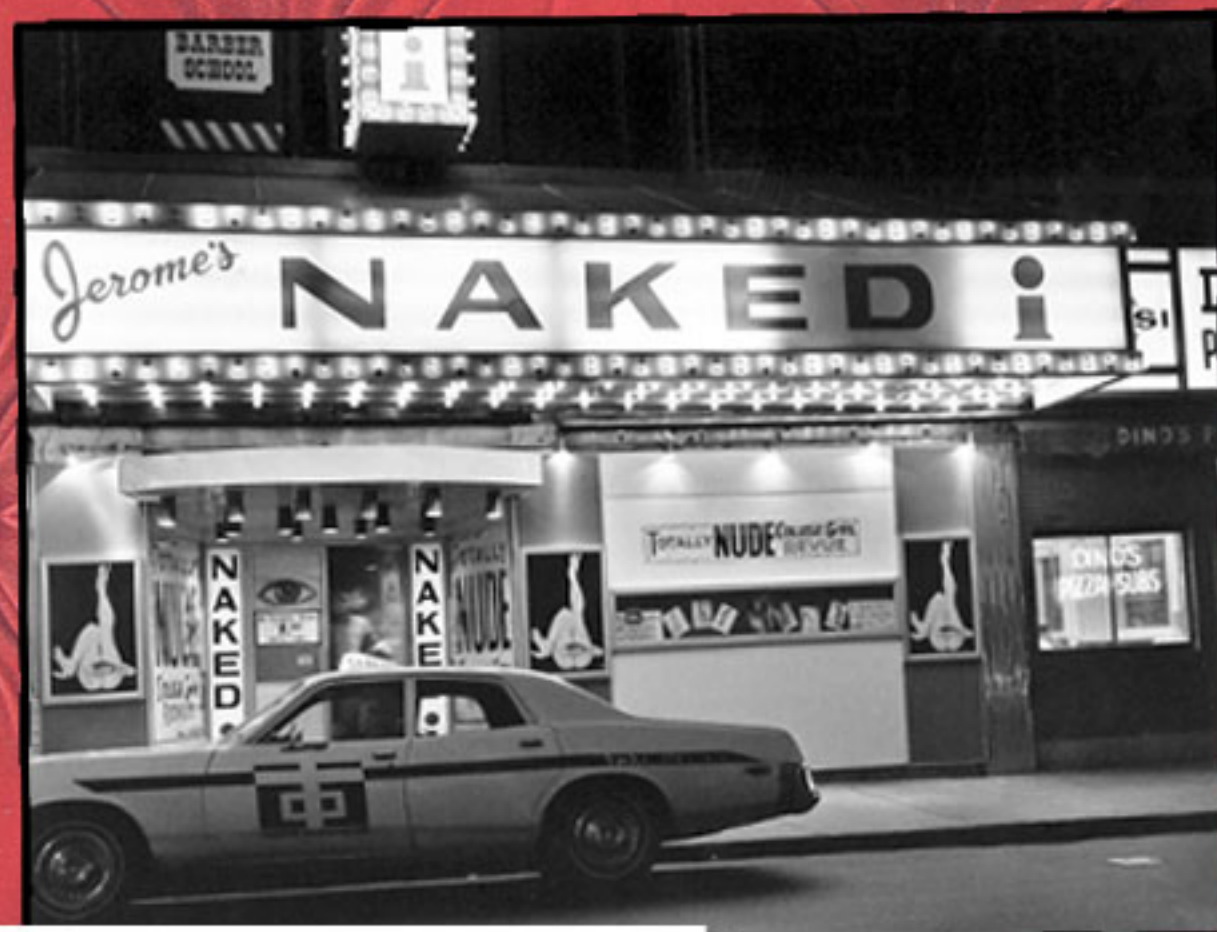




Associated Press

In Boston, the Zoning Commission set aside on Nov. 14 a downtown area called the "Combat Zone," for adult entertainment. Above is part of the two-block area.

Will Pornography Zoning Stand Up in Court?



ROSWELL ANGIER

In considering zoning, New York had two working plans to study.

A Detroit ordinance dispersed or "zoned out" adult entertainment activities. The alternative was Boston. That city adopted the European concept of red-light districts and "zoned in" its adult entertainment district. But Boston's combat zone, as it is called, has been recently plagued by violence. In Detroit, city officials have been generally pleased with the results of zoning. Since the Detroit ordinance was enacted, only a handful of new adult bookstores and theaters have opened. Others have closed voluntarily.



ROSWELL ANGIER

Missing Wallet Stirs Fight

The Harvard football team was having its annual post-season banquet at the Harvard Club on Nov. 15. After the dinner, more than 40 of the collegians went on to the Combat Zone. Leaving a place called the Naked i at the 2 A.M. closing, they encountered several women who reached enticingly into their van.

They left after being rebuffed, the police said, but one of the students noticed that his wallet was missing and they gave chase. Three men stepped out of the shadows and stabbed two of the youths. One of the Harvard students, Andrew Puoppolo, has been in a coma since, stabbed in the heart.

The police began to saturate the area. The Herald American, a Hearst paper, wrote that the "city responded with a shudder," and began extensive coverage of the juicy Combat Zone story.



ROSWELL ANGIER

Boston 'Combat Zone' Becomes Target of Police Crackdown

Move Called a Failure

On Monday, declaring the attempt to isolate the sexual activity a failure, Police Commissioner Joseph M. Jordan and county prosecutors met to plan a new crackdown, using the liquor laws and the District Attorney's major violators unit, set up last spring to deal with racial violence.

The concept behind Boston's zone, which clustered the X-rated businesses together, is somewhat different from the zoning being proposed in New York City, which attempts to keep the activity away from residential neighborhoods and spread it out.

The Boston area is filled with strip tease bars, many of them, according to their neon marquees, "world famous." X-rated movie houses, photo galleries in book stores selling various devices, including life-sized inflatable dolls.

Lights Going Up Again in Boston's Theater District



MARK LENNIHAN/AP

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WBUR's Lisa Tobin co-produced and edited this story.

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