THE CASE FOR PROSTITUTION IN EL PASO, TEXAS, 1910-1929

By

Nancy M. Battista

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in
History

Charlotte

2019

Approved by:

_____
Dr. Benny J. Andrés, Jr.

_____
Dr. Sonya Ramsey

_____
Dr. Mark Wilson

ABSTRACT

NANCY M. BATTISTA. The case for prostitution in El Paso, Texas, 1910-1929. (Under the direction of DR. BENNY J. ANDRÉS, JR.)

Turn of the century El Paso had it all: wealth, poverty, and an infamous red-light district. After the city shuttered the vice district in 1917, many of El Paso's men and women continued to champion regulated prostitution to curtail streetwalkers and call girls who solicited in the business district and residential neighborhoods. Many of El Paso's men and women considered prostitution prohibition folly, thus they proposed practical measures which allowed for fines and licensing fees to be assessed to feed the city coffers while imposing medical exams on sex workers to curb the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Residents supported a zone of tolerance where police allowed prostitutes to practice their trade without repercussion. This study presents the factors which led some working-class women to prostitution, explores the middle and upper-class men and women who called for regulated prostitution in contradiction to a nation teaming with social hygienists and uncovers the work of police matrons tasked with investigating suspected sex workers. Using the logbook of matron Victoria Mendez as evidence, the fanning out of prostitutes becomes clear. Whereas much research can be found on those who demanded moral policing, this work highlights a city of Texans who concluded that tactic a fool's errand.

DEDICATION

To Mariana Louise Battista, who makes me proud daily. I have become a bigger person as I've watched you grow. Your love and laughter surrounds me and encourages me to be the best I can be. And, although you said it first, and more important continue to affirm this in adulthood, I say to you today that which you have often said to me, "I want to be just like you when I grow up."

Love, Mama

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. Benny Andres, for the hours of time spent reading, editing, and encouraging me as I constructed this thesis project. Your mentorship is indispensable. At the outset of this study, I dreaded the marks of your red pen, but over time I came to anxiously await them as they led me to clarify my thoughts and to choose my words more carefully. Your support and advice helped me mature as a student and person as I learned to reach beyond what I thought I could do. You have taught me to organize my evidence to make the most compelling arguments.

I want to thank the history faculty of University of North Carolina at Charlotte who give their all. Notably, I would like to thank Dr. Sonya Ramsey who pushed me to include voices often ignored and Dr. Mark Wilson who has an uncanny talent for pulling from memory the titles of relevant historical literature upon request. I owe much to Dr. Karen Cox who finally broke my habit of using the passive voice. I want to thank Dr. Peter Thorsheim and Dr. Christine Haynes, current and former directors of graduate studies for keeping me on track. Lastly, I am indebted to Dr. Jurgen Buchenau, who as Department chair, leads this collection of outstanding historians and who encouraged me to enter the master's degree program. Thank you all for your dedication to my education.

I appreciate the technological skills of Sam Holden who collaborated with me on the maps that enhance this thesis. I consider them vital to understanding the changes in the sexual geography of El Paso.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Prostitution will always lead into a moral quagmire in democratic societies with capitalist economies; it invades the terrain of intimate sexual relations yet beckons for regulation. A society's response to prostitution goes to the core of how it chooses between the rights of some persons and the protection of others.

-Barbara Meil Hobson[1]

American Progressive Era reformers began the crusade to police the morality of their fellow citizens in response to social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution and a growing feminist movement. These white Anglo Protestants compared their values to those of other racial and ethnic groups, or the working class, and ordained themselves society's moral guardians. They cobbled together support from social hygienists, eugenists, and feminists who demanded the end to a sexual double standard, but it took America's twenty-eighth president, Woodrow Wilson, to embed state monitoring of moral issues into U. S. cities, towns, and rural areas.[2] As Wilson considered leading the nation into its first war on European soil, he and his administration developed a war machine that included a domestic social agenda calling for the eradication of red-light or restricted districts that peppered American cities. Wilson contended a national war effort could also facilitate a domestic social and health reform agenda.[3] As the Wilson administration mobilized troops anticipating entry into combat, it

---

[1] Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1990), 3.
[2] David Pivar, *Purity and Hygiene: Women, Prostitution, and the "American Plan," 1900-1930* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002).
[3] Samuel Walker, *Presidents and Civil Liberties from Wilson to Obama: A Story of Poor Custodians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 24-26; Saladin Ambar, "Woodrow Wilson Domestic Affairs," *UVA Miller Center*, https://millercenter.org/president/wilson/domestic-affairs.

collaborated with health and social reform organizations to contain the spread of sexually transmitted disease which historically had increased during times of war.[4]

In May 1917, with the adoption of the Selective Service Act, President Wilson and the War Department decided they had to protect civilians inducted into the military from contracting venereal diseases. To that end, the military, sanitary hygiene reformers and the Wilson administration formed an alliance to demand the closing of restricted areas in cities with military training bases. To succeed, they initiated a national propaganda campaign to promote sexual continence for unmarried soldiers and discouraged adultery among married troops.[5]

This thesis examines the U.S.-Mexico borderland city of El Paso, Texas from 1910-1929, to determine how residents reacted to evolving gender roles and President Wilson's policies. El Paso ranked high on the list of cities considered for a draft inductee training camp due to its proximity to the military installation, Fort Bliss. Additionally, this fort recently housed thousands of volunteer soldiers during the Punitive Expedition, a U.S. combat action against the para-military forces of Pancho Villa between 1916-1917. This combat mission under the command of General John J. Pershing, attracted numerous sex workers to El Paso to provide sexual service to soldiers.[6] Reacting to concerns over sexually transmitted diseases, Wilson's Secretary of War, Newton Baker, pressured El Paso leaders to clear vice from their city in order to get a training camp contract. El Paso

---

[4] Edward H. Beardsley, "Allied Against Sin: American and British Responses To Venereal Disease In World War I," *Medical History* 20, no. 2 (April, 1976), 189.
[5] Allan M. Brandt, No *Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 77-80.
[6] Charles H. Harris III and Louis R. Sadler, *The Great Call Up: The Guard, The Border, And The Mexican* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 17; H. Gordon Frost, *The Gentlemen's Club: The Story of Prostitution in El Paso* (El Paso, Mangan Books, 1983), 193-196.

leaders responded by closing city brothels located in the vice district that bordered the central business district, known as the Utah Street Reservation, but officials never attempted to remove prostitutes from their city. As a result, the sex workers relocated to other areas in El Paso.[7] This research project examines why El Paso's unwillingness to curtail prostitution allowed a vice district to reestablish after the war and thrive until the late 1930s.

While scholars have examined El Paso's history of prostitution from the perspective of business men, politicians, and law enforcement, they conclude their discussion in 1920.[8] This study extends the discussion to 1930 because during the 1920s, prostitution in El Paso entered a new phase. Hotels and apartments housed "loose women" replacing traditional bawdy houses.[9] To avoid law enforcement, sex workers communicated with clients via telephone, thus the term "call-girl."[10] Sex workers took advantage of the automobile by cruising streets, taking "dates" that taxi-drivers set up, or trolled for clients at roadhouses on the outskirts of town, all of which altered the sexual geography of the city.[11] Additionally, the reform efforts of many local and federal agencies against prostitution outlived World War I. Through an alliance of the Federal Health Service and Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Bureau, a majority of states and

---

[7] Ann R. Gabbert, "Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands: El Paso, 1890-1920," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 4 (October 2003): 575-604; Garna L. Christian, "Newton Baker's War On El Paso Vice," *Red River Valley Historical Review* 5 no. 2 (1980), 55-67.
[8] Christian, "Newton Bakers War"; Ann R. Gabbert, "Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands;" Grace Pena Delgada, "Border Control and Sexual Policing: White Slavery and Prostitution along the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands, 1903-1910," *Western Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (2012): 157-178.
[9] David C. Humphrey, "Prostitution in Texas: From the 1830s to the 1960s," *East Texas Historical Journal* 3, no. 2 (March 1995), 32-33.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

municipalities continued to discourage the sex trade.[12] El Paso remained an anomaly by promoting regulated prostitution in the 1920s, as did Mexico; therefore, this period deserves research attention.

Preliminary research for this project included consulting over thirty books and six articles, resulting in the following questions. If the government's attempts to control the spread of syphilis and gonorrhea hinged on a collaboration with reform groups, the federal and local governments, and the military, why did the eradication of prostitution fail in El Paso? Why did both influential men and women of El Paso reject morality policing? What role did sex workers play in this story?

Numerous primary documents support the arguments made in this thesis. They include the personal papers of reformer Belle Christie Critchett, court documents, and records of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce and police department. Some of the arguments presented, reflect an analysis of research developed from the logbook of police matron Virginia Mendez. The logbook provides an important glimpse into the work of Mendez and the women who inhabited El Paso's demimonde. The original maps found here were constructed from data in the Mendez logbook pieced together with information gathered from the 1922 El Paso City Directory. Additionally, an online interactive version of the map is available.[13] These maps provide a visual of how geographically widespread prostitution became in El Paso by 1922. This singular data set gives a partial picture, however, as over seventy-five other officers patrolled El Paso's streets, many also investigating and arresting suspected sex workers. Because of that, this remaining

[12] Karin L. Zipf, "In Defense of the Nation: Syphilis, North Carolina's "Girl Problem," and World War I," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 89, No. 3 (July 2012), 290-291.
[13] ArcGIS. See Appendix 1 for details on accessing the online map.

logbook becomes an even more important piece of evidence in understanding prostitution in El Paso.

To answer the research questions, this author examined newspapers and primary documents of El Paso's reform organizations, including the papers of women active in these organizations and those of the El Paso League of Women Voters. Local government records gave insight into municipal government's response to federal efforts. The evidence consulted challenges scholarship that suggests El Paso city officials and elites acted primarily for financial motives. Rather this thesis takes a bottom up approach to understanding why El Paso citizens failed to demand from local authorities the removal of prostitutes. To do this an emphasis must be place on what motivated reformers, city leaders, and law enforcement in El Paso and where they focused their attention. This study suggests they spurned the middle and upper-class urban cultural notions regarding sex that rapidly began to spread across the U.S. Instead, El Pasoans followed more traditional and patriarchal sexual notions that men innately required sexual intercourse. El Paso followed a course of regulation and intervention similar to that of France and Mexico. These borderland Texans chose to regulate prostitution to protect "respectable" womenfolk, by keeping "souled doves" from mingling with the population for the purpose of disease and crime prevention while allowing the city to fine sex workers which benefited the municipality's bottom line.[14]

[14] Beardsley, "Allied Against Sin," 192, 199, 201; Eric M. Schantz, "All Night at the Owl: The Social and Political Relations of Mexicali's Red-Light District, 1913-1925," *Journal of the Southwest* 43, no. 2 (Winter, 2001): 157-178.

1.1 Background

During the 1890s, women entered the public sphere either through reform efforts or as working individuals in the nation's industrializing cities.[15] Increasingly, immigrants flocked to new factories disrupting traditional gender roles and familial patterns.[16] In response to social and economic shifts, some influential Americans began to question whether women had failed in their primary duty to society, the preservation of the white Anglo-Saxon race threatened by miscegenation and eastern European immigration.[17] Between 1840 and 1900 the number of children per family dropped from 6.14 to 3.56.[18] Increasingly, women opted out of motherhood completely and followed a career path.[19] This provoked Theodore Roosevelt to complain that "women were shirking their natural maternal instincts."[20] Compounding these issues, the immigrant population reproduced at higher rates than native born white women causing deep anxiety among the Anglo elite.[21] For example, even in the borderland, in cities like El Paso, the demographics changed during this period. The 1900 census for the county of El Paso reported a diverse population of 39,000, made up of Anglos and Mexicans, but also African Americans, eastern Europeans, and Chinese. In both the 1910 and 1920 census the white native born El Paso population accounted for less than 40% of the total.[22] The U.S.-Mexico

---

[15] Brandt, *Magic Bullet,* 7.
[16] Ibid., 7-9.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 7.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21]Ibid., 7-9.
[22] U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1921*, "Population of Principle Cities," 55. https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1922/compendia/statab/44ed.html.

borderlands became a multi-ethnic, multi-racial melting pot where people intermingled socially and professionally.[23]

Furthermore, medical advancements during the first decade of the twentieth century forced health concerns to the forefront of debates surrounding immigration and industrialization. In 1906, municipal leaders and medical officials became acutely aware of the issue of sexually transmitted diseases, primarily syphilis and gonorrhea, when German physician and bacteriologist, August Wasserman devised a test for syphilis that enabled a more accurate collection of infection data.[24] Prompted by a growing concern about sexually transmitted diseases, the New York County Medical Society convened the Committee of Seven to study venereal disease. The Committee generated a report based on faulty or exaggerated information that indicated that 80% of the male population living in the city's five boroughs had been infected with gonorrhea at some point in their lives.[25] Although an exaggerated claim, it created a panic about sexually transmitted diseases. In 1909, more reliable military data confirmed new cases of venereal disease in 200 per 1000 of its soldiers.[26] The military concluded that prostitutes infected the soldiers, particularly in its more remote frontier posts, where these women plied their trade without repercussion and often approval from the field officers.[27]

---

[23] Julian Lim, *Porous Borders: Multiracial Migrations and the Law in the U. S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 2-3.
[24] Beardsley, "Allied Against Sin," 189.
[25] Brandt, *Magic Bullet,* 12.
[26] Ibid., 9-13.
[27] Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 125-128, 143.

The most flagrant cases of rampant prostitution occurred at garrisons along the U.S.-Mexico border.[28] The city of El Paso represented one of these cities. El Paso housed many U.S. troops who frequented the brothels and saloons until the Selective Service Act (1917) became law and the federal government and military put its weight behind social hygiene to build a more virile and efficient military force.[29] Remarkably, despite the propaganda, the efforts of the social hygiene movement, and the demands by federal and military officials, prostitution remained embedded in the community of El Paso almost a decade after the war ended.

As the prospect of war loomed, the fear of sexually transmitted diseases prompted Secretary of War Newton D. Baker to consider how he would protect young inductees from the temptation of "loose women" and alcohol ever present at military bases. He stated, "we have an inescapable responsibility in this matter to the families and communities from which these young men are selected, but, from the standpoint of our duty and our determination to create an efficient army."[30] This statement served as the foundation for requiring inductee training camps to be in vice-free areas to curtail male temptations.

When the U.S. entered the war in 1917, the government formed the Commission on Training Camp Activities to offer enlisted men healthy down-time options to discourage visits to prostitutes. The military used sex education, propaganda, and punitive measures to stop fornication and promote sexual continence. These tactics

---

[28] Nancy K. Bistow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering during the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 4-7.
[29] Ibid., 5.
[30] Ibid.

proved effective for U.S. troops stationed in France.[31] Yet, at the end of the war, the men stationed in support roles stateside or those awaiting overseas duty accounted for 76.6% of venereal disease cases after the government spent $50 million domestically on the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.[32] Clearly, the government may have disrupted red-light districts in the U.S., but men still frequented sex workers and contracted sexually transmitted diseases.

The medical community agreed with the military's intervention because it wanted to protect the Anglos from infection and disrupt miscegenation as well. To do that, many doctors allied with the eugenics movement. Medical experts and racial purists singled out immigrants and eastern European whites warning degenerate races had the power to "overtake the race."[33] Leaning on white middle-class notions that prostitutes came from the immigrant population, working class poor, or darker races, physicians invented an image conflating disease with the lower urban masses making venereal disease synonymous with the "other." The legacy of these policies increased gendered double standards. A vilification of prostitution and extra-marital sex spread across the U.S.[34] These policies initiated social engineering programs to diminish human weakness to promote efficient social order.

Thus, American reformers who supported social hygiene moved the dialogue in ways that shifted the discourse of disease prevention to include social issues plaguing an urbanizing nation, such as alcoholism, prostitution, and the threat of war.[35] Northern

---

[31] Beardsly, "Allied Against Sin," 189, 194-195.
[32] Brandt, *Magic Bullet,* 112-115.
[33] Ibid., 19-23.
[34] Ibid., 118-121.
[35] David J. Pivar, *Purity and Hygiene*, iii.

states attached themselves to the trend toward social hygiene first and more completely than southern counterparts, which may be indicative of fears related to denser populated urban areas. Cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York already closed their restricted districts by the time the U.S. entered the war, with southern states slowly acquiescing to reformers and government demands.[36] One holdout, El Paso made lackluster attempts to rid its city of prostitutes.

1.2 Historiography

A rich body of literature exists on prostitution, sex workers and Progressive Era social reform movements and their participants. After reviewing topical books and articles, this thesis builds on Ann R. Gabbert's article, "Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands: El Paso, 1890-1920" (2003).[37] Gabbert's well documented work includes the colorful period between 1890-1910, not included here, a time when the El Paso commercial sex scene flourished but appeared like that in other American cities. Unfortunately, Gabbert concludes her discussion right after World War I in 1920, omitting the 1920s and when El Paso sex workers spread into residential neighborhoods, solicited in the city center, and adapted to newly imposed restrictions by taking advantage of the mobility offered by the increased prevalence of automobiles, making these often ignored years worthy of attention. This thesis picks up where Gabbert left off.

Additionally, Gabbert argues that El Paso leaders concluded that morality took a back seat to the monetary benefits they and the city gained by allowing prostitution. Gabbert's research emphasizes financial reward, contending the decision to keep vice in El Paso hinged on its proximity to the border town of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Thus, she

---

[36] Ibid., 43-61.
[37] Ann R. Gabbert, "Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands."

maintains that leaders, who affiliated with the El Paso political machine, the Ring, and local businessmen, wanted to discourage sex buyers, or Johns, from crossing the border to Juarez to trade money for sex. By keeping prostitution flourishing in El Paso, municipal coffers benefitted from collecting fines that the city used to bankroll the police department.[38] Gabbert correctly argues that businessmen thought, "better to regulate and profit, than to suppress vice and send clientele and their money across the border."[39] Yet, businessmen further relied on the sex trade to encourage a vibrant tourism industry and entertain clients and military officers. Similarly, Garna L. Christian's article, "Newton Baker's War On El Paso Vice," argues that numerous city and business leaders profited from and considered prostitution a draw for conventioneers, thus they balked at vice reform efforts until the federal government threatened to diminish the importance of Fort Bliss during the Great War.[40] Fearing the loss of military related revenue, these elites threw their support to an anti-vice clean-up effort.[41] Along those lines, this study digs deeper into the financial argument by shining a spotlight on the powerful and influential El Paso Chamber of Commerce, an organization that wielded considerable sway over city leaders and their decisions surrounding the red-light district and later the zone of tolerance. Moreover, it highlights El Paso's desire to increase its convention business by encouraging men to visit the red-light district, an issue Christian mentions in passing.

Although Gabbert concludes El Paso profited from prostitution, definitive evidence suggests cities on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border benefited financially from the brothels and prostitutes that worked "the line." For example, Eric M. Schantz's

---

[38] Ibid., 576, 585-586.
[39] Ibid., 604.
[40] Garna L. Christian, "Newton Baker's War On El Paso Vice," 55-67.
[41] Ibid., 56.

article, "All Night at the Owl" (2001) argues Mexican profiteers and politicians lined their pockets from revenues earned through prostitution as did some American politicians, although in the U.S. they tended to guard this fact more from the public.[42] Schantz examined the Owl Resort in the Baja California city of Mexicali. His important work traced how post-Mexican Revolution politicians, such as caudillo Governor Cantú, exploited the fantasies and desires of U.S. patrons by taxing and personally profiting from "red-light" businesses as he engaged in nation-building projects using revenues collected.[43] Cantú established a restricted district not only to separate vice activities from those considered more respectable but to fund Mexicali infrastructure and education projects, similar to El Paso's practice of using vice fines to pay their police officers. The men who benefited worked in all levels of the municipal government structure and included low-level U.S. officials posted in Mexicali representing the U.S. government.[44] This research exposes the American hypocrisy that emerged in the 1920s as El Paso leaders called for their sister city, Juarez, to disband its vice district at the same time the Americans sanctioned a zone of tolerance for prostitution within their city.

The thesis arguments herein run parallel to Grace Pena Delgado's article, "Border Control and Sexual Policing" (2012) in which she examines prostitutes between 1903-1910, the motivations of sex workers, the problems that investigators faced in arresting them, and the vast network which supported the sex trade.[45] The commercial sex industry yielded huge profits, attracting exploiters who formed powerful alliances to protect their investment and disrupt investigations. Delgado presents a case study of Fred Stone, a

[42] Eric M. Schantz, "All Night at the Owl."
[43] Ibid., 557-578.
[44] Ibid., 562.
[45] Delgado, "Border Control and Sexual Policing," 157-178.

U.S. immigration officer stationed in El Paso, who became frustrated as he tried to eliminate the graft and local protection networks that protected ethnic Mexican sex workers. Stone faced uncooperative local law enforcement who flagrantly protected prostitutes, pimps, and local businessmen involved with the sex trade.[46] Delgado's research exposes the comingling of legitimate business owners with local authorities profiting from vice in El Paso and the following demonstrates that El Paso's roots in prostitution ran deep, making it difficult to eradicate.

Methodologically, previous studies have taken a broad canvas on the state, regional, or even national level, to argue the detrimental effects that the federal anti-vice campaign imposed during the Wilson administration had on the female civilian population, including sex workers. In contrast, this project takes a micro approach to uncover how El Paso's city and county policies enacted during the Great War influenced women during that conflict and in the decade after the armistice (1918). This approach complements broader studies that argued wartime policies maligned American women, especially those in marginalized demographics. Some of the most important research on this topic includes Mara L Kiere's book *For Business and Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933* (2010) and her article "Swearing Allegiance: U.S. war propaganda and the declining status of women in Northeastern Nightlife, 1900-1920" (2016). Kiere correctly presents the negative consequences of wartime policies on women as the federal government championed a patriotic duty to think of men in uniform superior to women and encouraged chastity among soldiers to prevent the spread of STDs. Federal officials employed propaganda to

[46] Ibid., 164-169.

portray women as sexual predators and carriers of sexually transmitted infection, ending in increased misogyny.[47]

Wartime policies designed to curtail men from fraternizing with prostitutes or women with "khaki fever," a term describing those enamored with men in uniform, also ended in marginalizing younger, less affluent, and non-white women. For instance, Karin L. Zipf's article, "In Defense of the Nation: Syphilis, North Carolina's "Girl Problem," and World War I," argues that federal efforts to control the sex life of American troops continued after the Great War. In its effort to curb STDs, North Carolina enacted gender and class-based laws in 1919 that re-enforced a sexual double standard targeting working-class women.[48] In response, prostitutes moved underground to escape venereal disease detention centers, quarantines, and forced VD treatments while men who patronized sex laborers went unpunished.[49] While the El Paso medical community utilized mandatory health exams and therapies also, regulation allowed them to more easily locate and diagnose women carrying sexual infections.

Positioning women as female predators assuredly harmed working-class women but, reform minded middle-class women who bought into that argument abetted the marginalization. Courtney Shah's article (2010), "Against Their Own Weakness," outlines the wartime policies that caused underprivileged women to lose what little stature they had.[50] Although San Antonio's white middle-class women achieved minor

---

[47] Mara L. Kiere, *For Business and Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010); Mara L. Kiere, "Swearing Allegiance: Street Language, US War Propaganda, and the Declining Status of Women in Northeastern Nightlife, 1900-1920," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 25, no. 2 (May 1, 2016): 246-266.
[48] Zipf, "In Defense of the Nation," 278.
[49] Ibid, 280.
[50] Courtney Q. Shah, "'Against Their Own Weakness': Policing Sexuality and Women in San Antonio, Texas, during World War I," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no. 3 (2010): 458-482.

gains by participating in vice clean-up and reform campaigns, working-class women became targets of vice investigators who abused the civil rights of women suspected of fraternizing with soldiers.[51]

Women in large cities and small towns felt the effect of Wilson's propaganda campaign designed to keep troops disease free. Scott W. Stern's book *The Trials of Nina McCall: Sex Surveillance and the Decades-long Plan to Imprison "promiscuous" Women"* (2018), provides in-depth research about the extent of the "American Plan," a program that imprisoned women without due process for examination and treatment of STDs. Stern's study focused on Nina McCall, an eighteen year-old woman from St. Louis, Michigan, a town with fewer than three thousand residents. Stern uncovered archival material to detail the experience of being incarcerated in a VD clinic during the World War I, something 50,000 young American women contended with.[52] This thesis contributes to the topic by exploring how federal and El Paso's municipal wartime policies disrupted the sexual geography of El Paso by detailing not only the events but the manner in which civic, business and medical leaders responded. Moreover, this thesis examines the frequently neglected way sex workers imposed their agency in response to the shifting patterns within the sex trade.

This thesis teases out the manner El Paso residents, including sex workers, utilized their agency in response to changes rather than assigning all decision-making to local elites and men. Prior to the 1917 bawdy house closures, prostitutes rarely operated nor left the confines of the red-light area. After city officials closed brothels to obtain a

---

[51] Ibid., 463.
[52] Scott W. Stern, *The Trials of Nina McCall: Sex Surveillance and the Decades-long Plan to Imprison "promiscuous" Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).

military training camp contract, sex workers scattered throughout residential neighborhoods.[53] El Paso's leaders responded by delineating a regulated, cordoned area for the sex trade to operate. Therefore, a discussion of why the city sanctioned a zone of tolerance for an additional ten years must include why the electorate continued to support those officials who implemented policies that allowed for the continuance of a vibrant sex trade. This research explores the contradiction of why socially respectable residents supported candidates who allowed socially unacceptable activity and the role of newly enfranchised female voters.

Moreover, the efforts of El Paso women's organizations and individuals to uplift and reform sex workers expands notable scholarship in that area. Middle and upper-class women in this border city appeared in sync with Protestant women that Peggy Pascoe examined in her book about mission homes. In *Relations of Rescue* (1990), Pascoe contends American West female reformers hoped to instill piety and purity in women they found immoral, such as unwed Denver, Colorado mothers or Mormon women living in polygamist marriages. [54] Additionally, El Paso women's charitable work and those of early frontier women such as that described by Anne M. Butler in *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery,* show a significant interest in family issues and runs parallel to Judith N. McArthur's thesis argued in *Creating the New Woman.*[55] McArthur persuasively contends Texas women clung to antebellum notions of womanhood, causing them to have a stunted spirit of social reform activity compared with their northern sisters. For

[53] Humphrey, "Prostitution in Texas," 30.
[54] Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6-8.
[55] Judith N. McArthur, *Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas, 1983-1918* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

this reason, Texas women chose more maternal projects, leaving controversial subjects to men and upholding their male hegemony.[56] An analysis of El Paso women's benevolent undertakings clearly confirms McArthur, with one notable exception. El Paso women forfeited to men discussions concerning prostitution long past other Texas towns. With the nation's entrance into the Great War, most female Texans found their voice on public policy issues as described in Shah's, "Against Their Own Weakness," research of San Antonio. There, women demanded participation and a voice in the successful campaign to clear the sex trade from their environs.[57] Shah calls El Paso's efforts to do the same "an often ridiculed … failure."[58] Fighting the same battle, the El Paso female voice can barely be heard.

Although El Pasoans initially got swept into the wartime patriotic fever to eradicate the sex trade in order to curb disease, El Paso backslided after the war. Christopher Capozzola describes in his book, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (2008) that most Americans, including El Pasoans, responded to the Wilson administration's successful propaganda by clamoring to enlist and served the nation on the home front by selling bonds, conserving food, and acting as watchmen.[59] However, the vigilante violence against prostitutes that emerged in other American cities, such as Rockford, Illinois, never developed in El Paso. El Paso leaders clamped down on the city's vice district to contain the spread of VD; however, it

[56] Ibid., 3-6.
[57] Shah, "Against Their Own Weakness," 472-474.
[58] Ibid., 459.
[59] Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

was the federal pressure associated with the potential training camp that forced them to shutter the red-light district.

A review of the literature pertaining to sex workers and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the nineteenth and early twentieth century undergirds this work.[60] An example of the important scholarship from a regional perspective is Anne M. Butler's *Daughter of Joy, Sisters of Misery* (1985).[61] Butler surveyed the lives of some prostitutes who lived and worked in the American West from 1865-1890. She argues that following the Civil War, sex workers became more visible figures in societies but no more accepted; yet still through their interplay in communities, they helped shape the way institutions in the region developed. For example, in remote military installations, similar to Fort Bliss, she found officers promoted prostitution because the women sexually served men when missions pulled officers away from the garrison. Because ranking officers brought their families to these frontier outposts, they believed men left behind would seek out sex workers over respectable female kin.[62] Research indicates this thinking continued into the 1900s and carried over into the civilian El Paso population, who considered prostitutes a sexual outlet for the various men who came through their city for business or military reasons.

---

[60] For more reading on sex workers, see Alice Cepeda and Kathryn M. Nowotny, "A Border Context of Violence: Mexican Female Sex Workers on the U.S.-Mexico Border," *Violence Against Women* 20, no. 12 (November 2014): 1506-1531; Catherine Christensen, "American Prostitutes in Baja California, 1910-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (May 2013): 215-247; Humphrey, "Prostitution in Texas; Siddharth Kara, *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. For reading on STDs and social response to them, see Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*; David J. Pivar, *Purity and Hygiene*.

[61] Anne M. Butler, *Daughter of Joy, Sisters of Misery*.

[62] Ibid., xvi-xviii, 125-128.

We can thank Judith R. Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (1980) for providing one of the first and essential glimpses into mid-Victorian England's construction of gender and class through the lens of the Contagious Disease Acts (1864-1886) and their effect on prostitutes.[63] The enormous collection of documentation surrounding the repeal of these Acts provided information for her to construct a historical accounting of a segment in the population often left missing, the sex workers. These Acts reframed the prostitute from a somewhat accepted working woman to a dangerous diseased woman requiring state control. The Acts allowed sexual and social ideology to become embedded in legislation, institutions, and social policy in England.[64] Similarly, the U.S. War Department, in response to pervasive prostitution found in garrisons along the U.S.-Mexico border, developed the "American Plan" to remove women suspected of fraternizing with soldiers and imprisoned them without due process for the duration of the World War I.[65] Many of the women affected by these actions found themselves incarcerated in El Paso where the federal government established one of three Texas facilities to house women who violated fraternization restrictions or those who cavorted with soldiers for profit or fun.[66] This work reviews this policy during the Great War and the decade after it concluded.

A clearer picture of El Paso's prostitute demographics can be gleaned from David C. Humphrey's article, "Prostitution in Texas" (1995).[67] He found the geographic location of El Paso to Mexico resulted in a higher number of Mexican sex workers.[68]

---

[63]Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
[64] Ibid., 192. 201, 254.
[65] Mara L. Kiere, *For Business and Pleasure*.
[66]Gabbert, *Prostitution and Moral Reform,* 602-605.
[67] Humphrey, "Prostitution in Texas," 27-43.
[68] Ibid.

Humphrey omits the dearth of occupational opportunity for ethnic Mexican women discussed in this thesis which forced many into the sex trade. Monica Perales' article, "On Borderlands/La Frontera" (2013) shows that race influenced gender relations at the U.S.-Mexico border.[69] Early 20th century Anglos sought to consolidate their social, economic, and political power and erected a racial hierarchy which controlled how men and women interacted intimately.[70] Interracial couplings involving white people, whether bound in love or commerce, disrupted political and social constructs which grew from Mexico's colonial past and the American slavery experience.[71] Clearly, El Paso's Utah Street Reservation, the red-light district, offered an array of women to any man with money to spend and this research scrutinizes the racial undertones of these transactions.

Barbara Meil Hobson's book *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition* expertly details the maturation of commercial sex and the efforts of reformers during the 1920s and this thesis adds to her analysis.[72] Hobson argues that historical arguments, such as that made in Mark T. Connelly's book *The Response to Prostitution in America* (1980) mischaracterize the roots of Progressive Era anti-prostitution campaigns that emerged as a response to long held gender role changes when women became more influential in public matters.[73] Rather, Hobson contends that during the first two decade of the twentieth century this activism reflected an increasingly popular American sentiment that the state had an obligation to assist the socially

---

[69] Monica Perales, "On the Borderland/La Frontera: Goria Anzaldua and Twenty-years of Research on Gender in the Borderlands," *Journal of Women's History* 25, no. 4 (2013): 163-173.
[70] Ibid., 167.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue.*
[73] Mark T. Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 8-9.

maligned, including sex workers.[74] To shuffle prostitutes into acceptable employment positions, reformers championed the suppression rather than the management of prostitution and reformers efforts influenced the closure of many red-light districts but, had unintended consequences.[75] Without a system of regulated prostitution, male managers or pimps became prevalent figures in a burgeoning black market sex trade across the U.S. The men protected sex workers from police raids or paid off law enforcement. Furthermore, Hobson presents data from a 1920s study of the Chicago sex trade which found there to be no native-born pimps in the city. The study indicated that the vast majority of sex managers were newly immigrated men who took advantage of a business that required limited financial investment, supplied considerable profits, and rarely resulted in criminal charges.[76] Correctly, Hobson connects pimping with the black market sex trade. Although pimps can be found in El Paso, the evidence presented here indicates that a regulated zone of tolerance allowed sex workers to manage their own business transactions independently. Even with El Paso's significant male immigrant population the regulated sex trade discouraged the pimp phenomena in the city.

Unable to quench commercial sex during the 1920s, U.S. police departments increased prevention strategies, including hiring more police women. Esther J. Koenig's article, "An Overview of Attitudes of Women in Law Enforcement," (1978) details the growth of women in law enforcement.[77] Post-World War I policewomen patrolled city streets and recreation venues to discourage sexual foreplay and juvenile delinquency or

---

[74] Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue,* 139-141.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 141-144.
[77] Esther J. Koenig, "An Overview of Attitudes Towards Women in Law Enforcement," *Public Administration Review* 38, no. 3 (1978): 267-275.

investigated parental abuses as American police departments became more concerned with preventing crime rather than responding to it.[78] At the 1922 International Association of Police Chiefs annual meeting, the attendees declared policewomen essential to law enforcement, however, in the field most patrolmen viewed the women and their prevention tasks inferior to male dominated punitive efforts.[79] In contrast, this thesis presents evidence that the El Paso police hierarchy and officers worked in tandem with female officers and expressed a genuine respect for them. This may be because the El Paso policewomen regularly accompanied male officers.

Across time and space, women entered prostitution most frequently in desperation but continued to work in the trade because of its lucrative nature, despite its inherent dangers. This thesis attempts to tease out the idiosyncrasies of that truism of sex work in El Paso. The legacy of prostitution in El Paso can be connected to its geographic location, boomtown status built on male dominated industries, and a community of women who set out to save, as opposed to throw aside, others they deemed morally unfit.

1.3 Primary Sources

A considerable collection of primary material supports the arguments herein. Unfortunately, most early El Paso police records fell victim to a fire during the 1950s; therefore, it became necessary to rely on newspaper accounts to fill in the blanks. Still, archived at the C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department at the University of Texas El Paso (UTEP), some police manuscripts remain. These documents include the logbook of Virginia Mendez, police matron. This journal details the matron's daily investigations and activities for ten months in 1922. This invaluable record allowed the

[78] Ibid., 268.
[79] Ibid.

author to corroborate with a technician to create the original maps included here and to make analytical assumptions. Set in counterpoint to the archival papers of Belle Christie Critchett in UTEP a comparison of social reform activities between working and upper-class women can be discerned. Critchett's papers included a plethora of pamphlets published by national reform movements, another invaluable research tool. Other primary sources came from the El Paso Historical Society and the El Paso County Library Borderland Collection where the El Paso Chamber of Commerce publications are located. Piecing this material together with the existing secondary material provides the evidence to support this thesis's argument.

1.4 Outline

Provocatively, El Paso men and women both supported regulated prostitution in their city and that provided a natural layout for this study. Chapter 2 debunks the notion that men supported a restricted vice district and prostitution exclusively for financial reward or lust. Without a doubt, before the Great War profit and personal pleasure motivated men. But, during and after the conflict, the reasons for their support became more complicated and intertwined with contemporary scientific data surrounding disease, especially pathogens transmitted through sexual relations. Therefore, business, political, and law enforcement leaders teamed up with the medical community to designate a zone of tolerance wherein sex workers could conduct business undeterred by law enforcement. This allowed the city to register sex workers, require them to undergo health examinations, and quarantine infected women for mandatory treatment of venereal infections to curb disease.

Chapter 3 looks at prostitution from a woman's perspective to uncover why those in El Paso failed to demand the eviction of sex workers in contrast to others across the country. This chapter argues that El Paso women considered the sex trade an unfortunate evil inherent to society; therefore, restricting prostitutes in a zone of tolerance protected the city's men from sexual temptation and removed exposure to offensive lewd behavior from the community at large. Therefore, the socially active women attempted to rehabilitate women who provided sex for money. Despite these exercises in reform, a considerable segment of prostitutes preferred or needed the money they earned through prostitution. Therefore, the overarching reason El Paso supported a regulated zone of tolerance can be attributed to a belief that prostitution's prohibition was unattainable and therefore regulation protected the community from disease and residents from sexual solicitations that became pervasive in residential neighborhoods after authorities shuttered the red-light district in 1917.

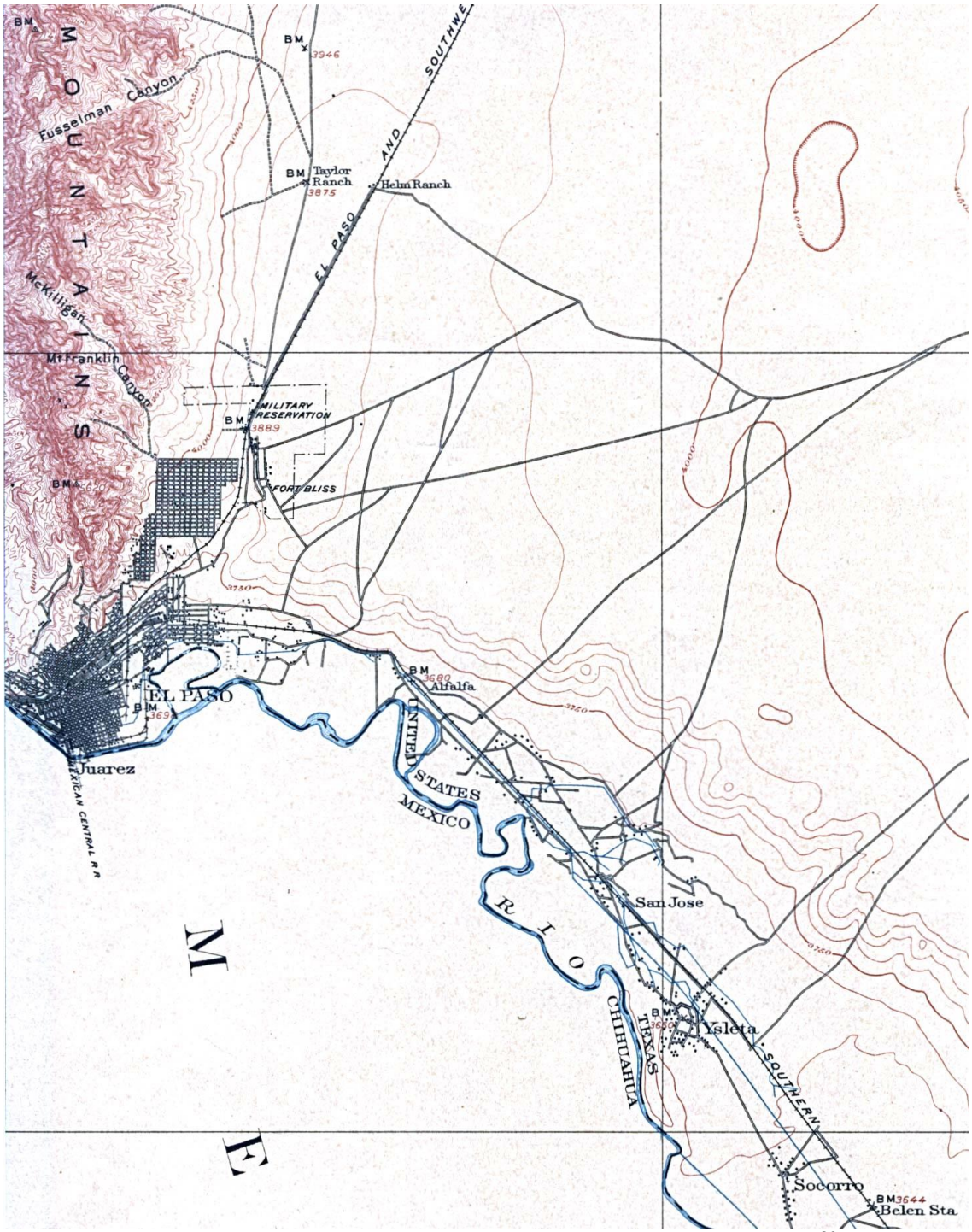

FIGURE 1: U.S.-Mexico border at El Paso and Ciudad Juarez.[80]

[80] Source: University of Texas Libraries, Perry-Castaneda Map Collection, El Paso 1908. http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/el_paso08.jpg

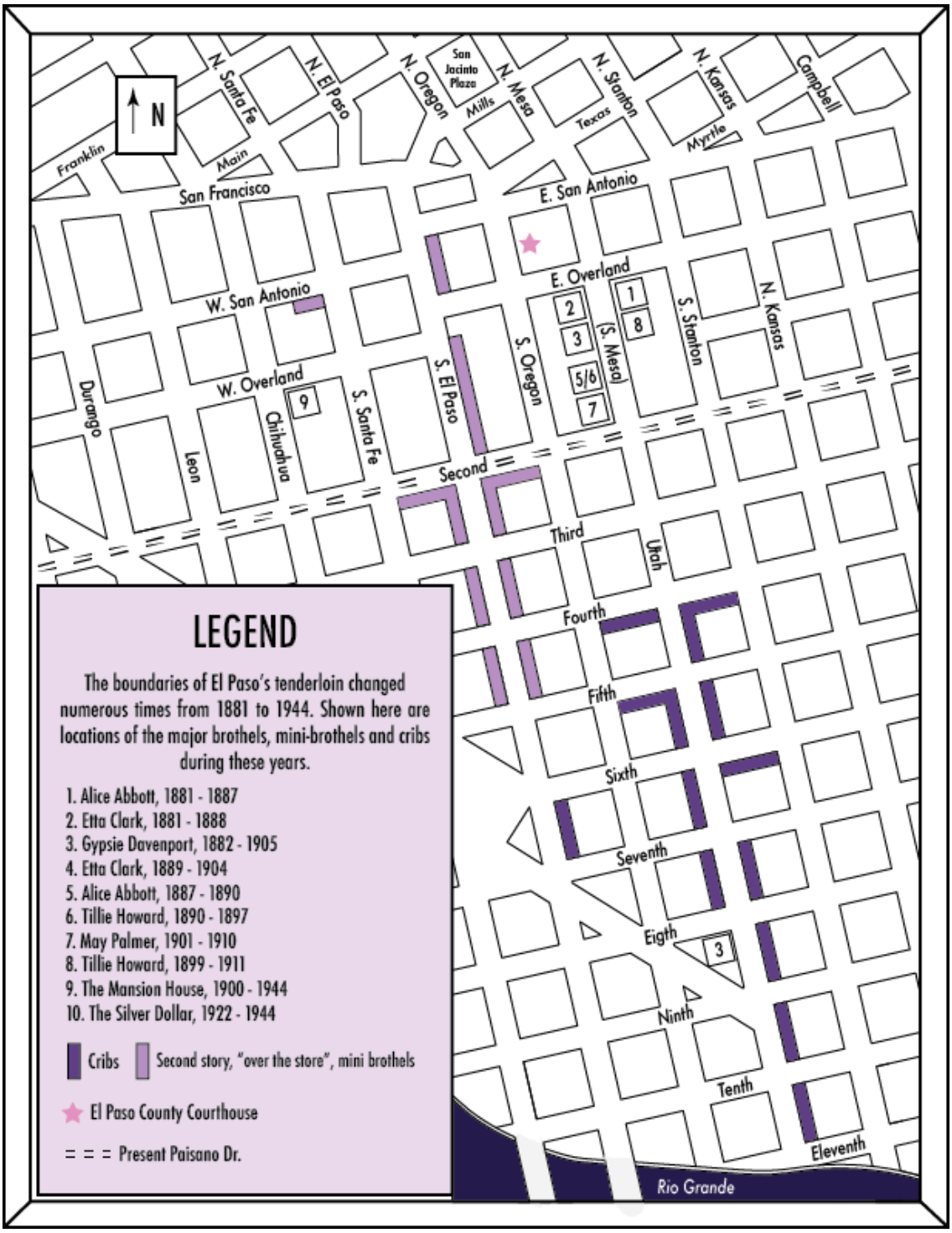

FIGURE 2: The Utah Street Reservation, El Paso's red-light district.[81]

[81] Source: H. Gordon Frost, *The Gentlemen's Club: The Story of Prostitution in El Paso* (El Paso: Mangan Books, 1983), 12.

CHAPTER 2: MORE THAN LUST: MEN DEFEND PROSTITUTION IN EL PASO, TEXAS, 1910-1929

Any visitor, soldier, or cattleman strolling through El Paso, Texas at the start of World War I found the city alive with contradiction and fantasy. This city had it all: wealth, poverty, and an infamous nightlife. When the lights came on in El Paso, situated on the U.S. Mexico border, visitors and locals often found their way to Utah Street, now Mesa Street, to gamble or drink, but generally to visit women who made their living selling sex. The high rollers may have stopped at Tillie Howard's place. Tillie's white card with purple script described the girls working in her brothel as "fine cuts," "gems," and on occasion virgins, known as "first chances."[82] The less affluent relieved their lust in rooms called "cribs" that less sought-after prostitutes rented. These cribs lined the southeastern streets and alleys of the red-light district, which everyone knew as the Utah Street Reservation. Although this vice district was shuttered in 1917, over a decade after the war many of El Paso's leaders championed regulated prostitution and rejected efforts to evict streetwalkers and call girls who solicited in the business district and residential neighborhoods.

Previous historians have examined why prostitution remained entrenched in El Paso whereas other American cities appeared to make strides in curbing it. This chapter expands on some of the notable work, like Grace Pena Delgado's article, "Border Control and Sexual Policing" which demonstrated that between 1903-1910 law enforcement often protected sex workers.[83] During the next twenty years protective services joined by many

---

[82] Tillie Howard business card in H. Gordon Frost, *The Gentlemen's Club: The Story of Prostitution in El Paso* (El Paso: Mangan Books, 1983), 82.
[83] Grace Pena Delgado, "Border Control and Sexual Policing: White Slavery and Prostitution along the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands, 1903-1910," *Western Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (2012): 157-178.

in business and politics kept the sex trade vibrant in El Paso by avoiding morality policing. Similarly, Ann R. Gabbert's article "Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands" explores the political machinations that influenced the sex trade between 1890-1920, the heyday of the El Paso's sex scene.[84] And, Garna L. Christian unravels why El Paso's "Sin City" reputation cost Fort Bliss a coveted training camp assignment during the Great War.[85] In contrast, this chapter builds on these studies by focusing on how the El Paso Chamber of Commerce influenced local government on issues pertaining to the sex trade, the lackluster efforts of law enforcement due to its symbiotic relationship with prostitution, and importantly what side the medical community took on these issues. Together, these men considered prostitution's prohibition a folly. They proposed practical measures allowing fines and licensing fees to be assessed to feed the city coffers while imposing medical exams on sex workers to curb the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. In so doing, they mimicked the practices of their southern neighbor, Mexico, as documented by Eric M. Shantz's article, "All Night at the Owl."[86] Support for sex work ebbed and flowed from the Great War (1917-1918) to the Great Depression (1929-1939). In the decade following the closure of the red-light district (1917) and its brothels, sex workers scattered to hotels, rooming houses, and roadhouses to ply their trade. For this reason, the oft neglected decade of El Paso prostitution in the 1920s deserves attention. The evidence presented in this chapter indicates that businessmen and city administrators

---

[84] Ann R. Gabbert, "Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands: El Paso, 1890-1920," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 4 (October 2003): 575-604.
[85] Garna L. Christian, "Newton Baker's War On El Paso Vice," *Red River Valley Historical Review* 5 no. 2 (1980): 215-247.
[86] Eric M. Schantz, "All Night at the Owl: The Social and Political Relations of Mexicali's Red-Light District, 1913-1925," *Journal of the Southwest* 43, no. 2 (Winter, 2001): 157-178.

sanctioned the sex trade for financial reasons, but also to contain crime. Meanwhile, doctors argued that regulated prostitution curbed the spread of sexual diseases.

2.1 The Utah Street Reservation Years

Prior to World War I, men in El Paso stood against vice reform, including drinking, gambling, and prostitution, for a variety of reasons, but they agreed regulated prostitution benefited the city financially or themselves personally. Support for sex work ran counter to the national trend led by social hygienists insisting on an end to prostitution. It ran counter to early feminists' demands to end the sexual double standard. Here, residents maintained cross-border business, social, and familial relationships that influenced their views of sexual mores.[87] Arguments that supported male sexual continence and matrimonial monogamy proved less convincing. Professionals reaped financial profits from the sex trade, including business men and city politicians.[88] Some, including physicians and law enforcement, based their support on practical considerations and contended restricted districts allowed them better control over crime and sexual disease.[89] Conventional wisdom considered STDs came from sex workers who infected their clients.[90]

Over the years, in response to these arguments some members of the community or outsiders who pushed moral reform made their voices known, sounding familiar alarms. For example, in November 1910, famed Oregon preacher Elwood James Bulgin conducted revival meetings at city churches and at Fort Bliss. During this visit he held a

---

[87]Ann R. Gabbert, "Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands: El Paso, 1890-1920," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 4 (October 2003), 579.
[88]Ibid., 587-588.
[89] Mara L. Kiere, *For Business and Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 10.
[90] Ibid.

meeting one Tuesday evening. With outstretched arm and finger pointed, the lanky reverend told the audience he had a "full head of steam on board" as he railed against the "social evil," prostitution. Attendees heard him contend, "an impure man and woman is a treason against the state and they are worse than Benedict Arnold." He encouraged men "[to] be pure, too, for there is the foundation for all civil punishment."[91] In closing, he warned parents that "allowing hell holes [brothels] in El Paso … ruin[ed] the boys."[92]

El Paso Chamber of Commerce members may have heard or read Bulgin's remarks, yet they remained unswayed because many benefited financially from vice or sought to expand El Paso's city stature. Muckraker Owen White wrote about a fictious El Paso property holder, "if the rent didn't come in from the Parlor Saloon that he owned on the corner, and some of the cribs that he owned in the red-light district he wouldn't be able to come across with the thousand-dollar subscription to the new Methodist church."[93] Chamber of Commerce members owned red-light district real estate and promoted the city's nightlife to attract visitors or potential conventioneers and to entertain government workers who influenced contracts or legislation. The Chamber believed prostitution appealed to these men. James D. McNary, Chamber president in 1911, wrote that he considered entertaining visiting businessmen and dignitaries as his "public duty" even though he assured members that the Chamber board showed men a good time only to enhance El Paso.[94] That year, the Chamber hobnobbed with federal officials to

---

[91] Ibid.; During the Progressive Era many considered venereal disease a punishment for falling prey to sexual temptation.
[92] "Bulgin Praises Exposures By The Herald," *El Paso Herald,* November 16,1910, El Paso, TX, 10. For a photograph of Bulgin see, LOC *Prints & Photographs Online Catalog,* "Rev. E. J. Bulgin," http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2014698408/.
[93] Gabbert, "Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands," 585.
[94] Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce 1911, El Paso Library Vertical Files, Cement Industry-Chamber of Commerce Publications, EPVF-C of C-Annual Reports, 7.

successfully obtain $50,000 to maintain the El Paso facility of the National Quarantine Line, a place where officials inspected foreign border crossers for infectious diseases and disinfected them with gasoline.[95] Business leaders also entertained negotiators of the Chamizal border dispute with Mexico, a disagreement that arose as the borderline shifted due to changes in the Rio Grande River.[96]

El Paso aggressively promoted itself as a major convention destination. In 1912 El Paso landed the Spring Panhandle and Southwestern Stockmen's Association convention. Thousands of cattlemen flocked to the city to network and listen to industry and political leaders. Afterward, they meandered to the business district where merchants offered everything from riding gear to the latest fashions. For its part, the city had festooned the streets with lights and banners to welcome the visitors who filled hotel porches, clubs, and streets to capacity. Many clubs and "parlors" held open houses for some of the wealthiest ranchers in the country.[97] Afterward, the conventioneers praised the city's entertainment and hospitality. A vast majority of attendees agreed with John Means, the largest rancher in Valentine, Texas, who gushed, "We were entertained royally."[98] Buoyed by this success, the Chamber ramped up its convention business campaign. In 1912, it allocated $12,000 to entertain association leaders and locals donated an additional $45,000 to attract more conventions to El Paso. By year's end they

---

[95] Ibid., Celeste Menchaca, "Crossing the Line: A History of Medical Inspection at the Border," KCET June 24, 2014, accessed October 16, 2018. https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/crossing-the-line-a-history-of-medical-inspection-at-the-border.
[96] Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce 1911, El Paso Library Vertical Files, Cement Industry-Chamber of Commerce Publications, EPVF-C of C-Annual Reports.
[97] "Cattlemen Listen To Talks," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, March 6, 1912, 1; "Social Side Of The Cattlemen's Convention Is Proving Attractive," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, March 6, 1912, First Edition, 5.
[98] "Some Aftermath From Convention," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, March 9, 1912, 6.

had a commitment from the Fort Worth, Texas-based Cattle Raisers Association, beating out Oklahoma City, Houston, and San Antonio to host the group.[99]

The stockmen returned in 1915, bringing five thousand members to the city for its largest convention to date. Passenger rail services beefed up their schedules to accommodate travelers. Two weeks before the event, all El Paso hotel rooms had been booked, so the Chamber arranged to have 2500 rooms available for rent in local residences. And, the Albuquerque, New Mexico, contingent leased the top floor ballroom of the posh Hotel Paso del Norte and filled it with one hundred cots to accommodate its delegates.[100]

The Chamber attracted a variety of conventions to El Paso by playing up the city's "Sin City" reputation, which it deemed vital to attracting large groups who spent freely not only in the vice district but, in hotels and shops too. Businessmen discovered that the relaxed environment at the Utah Street Reservation helped sway policymakers or contracts El Paso's way. Since many members reaped profits from Fort Bliss contracts, the Chamber fraternized with high level military men such as Major General Wood, Chief of Staff of the Army and his entourage.[101]

Like the Chamber of Commerce, El Paso's politicians supported regulated prostitution when it benefitted them, but county and city leaders acted with a refreshing transparency. The voters here regularly elected candidates of the local Democratic political machine, known as the "Ring." Since the 1890s, the men of this group came

---

[99] Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce 1912, El Paso Library Vertical Files, Cement Industry-Chamber of Commerce Publications EPVF-C of C Annual Reports, 14-15.
[100] "Five Thousand Visitors Are Coming to El Paso For the Panhandle and Southwestern Stockmen's Convention," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, February 27, 1915, Cattlemen's Annual Edition, 1.
[101] Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce 1912, El Paso Library Vertical Files, Cement Industry-Chamber of Commerce Publications EPVF-C of C Annual Reports, 23.

from the business community, frequently gambled and visited brothels regularly. Consistently, this lot remained in office by routinely securing the large segment of the electorate who patronized vice establishments, including a majority of the pro-red-light district Mexican-American population. On occasion, a drive to reform resulted in the temporary shuttering of brothels, casinos, and dance halls; however, the closures had a brief shelf life.[102]

The establishments that comprised the Utah Street Reservation paid licensing fees and assorted fines, providing the city with a substantial percentage of its revenue stream.[103] On occasion reform-minded politicians launched unsuccessful campaigns to defeat El Paso's soft-on-vice political machine, the "Ring." These candidates stirred the reform pot enough to result in grand jury investigations.[104] For example, in 1913 Judge S. J. Isaacks empaneled a grand jury to investigate if the brothels of the red-light district should remain open. Eight votes were needed in order to shutter the brothels, saloons, and dance halls. Of the twelve men who comprised the group, three with ties to the "Ring" voted to close the vice establishments located in the "Reservation" and run the women out of town. That weekend the lights went out along the streets of this area and the women who worked the "cribs" relocated.[105] However, within a week, women returned to practice their trade and paid their fines as usual. Days after the grand jury decision, acting judge Sam Blumenthal fined the African American prostitute, Mary Grace, ten dollars for prostitution. Blumenthal asked the woman, "Don't you know that '"hustling"' is against

---

[102] Gabbert, "Prostitution and Moral Reform," 586-587.
[103] "Women Refuse To Pay City Fines," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, March 7, 1917, 1.
[104] Frost, *The Gentlemen's Club,* 174-176.
[105] "Grand Jury To Keep Reservation Closed," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, March 4, 1913, 8.

the city ordinance?" She responded, "Ah didn't know that."[106] Many considered this incident the unofficial reopening of the district, and later that year, Mayor C. E. Kelley framed his successful re-election campaign to go easy on vice. He also vigorously encouraged prostitutes and saloonkeepers to fund his campaign.[107]

Over time the El Paso political establishment had become a subset of the business community, led by the Chamber of Commerce. For example, Mayor Kelley served in government as well as having established the lucrative Kelley-Pollard Retail and Wholesale Drug Company.[108] Likewise, Mayor Tom Lea headed city government and a successful law firm.[109] The ties between the Chamber and city government most likely gave the business association considerable sway over city councilmen, who too owned local businesses.

For those tasked with the health and safety of the city, including the El Paso medical community, regulation seemed the practical solution because for the first three decades of the twentieth century, conventional wisdom among physicians considered prostitutes to be the original carriers of syphilis and gonorrhea who then infected clients.[110] This led many physicians to assign blame to sex workers while they protected married patrons of prostitutes by concealing sexually transmitted infections from the

---

[106] "Hustling" Is A Finable Offence," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, March 8, 1913, 8.
[107] Gabbert, "Prostitution and Moral Reform," 594-596.
[108] Clinton P. Hagman, "Kelly, Charles Edgar," *Handbook of Texas Online.* https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fke76.
[109] Biography, Tom Lea Papers, 1875-2007, MS 476, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas El Paso Library.
[110] Mara L. Kiere, *For Business and Pleasure*, 105; Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 3-5.

wives of these men because they feared this would cause divorce rates to rise.[111] Even Donald Hooker, President of the American Social Hygiene Association, debunked the suggestion that prostitution was the sole cause of venereal infections in 1915, but the medical community clung to notions connoting syphilitic sex workers as dirty rather than infected with a microorganism.[112] Therefore, El Paso's physicians argued that a regulated red-light district repressed the emergence of a black market of unknown freelance prostitutes or streetwalkers. Doctors regarded unregulated sex workers as a greater threat to the population than prostitutes who had the mandatory health examinations and treatments. While it may seem counter intuitive for physicians to support a regulated sex trade, physicians and the national public health service considered prostitution inevitable.[113] The El Paso medical community concurred with these notions, thus it took a pragmatic approach. The combined actions of the city and county physicians and health departments indicates they saw potential in corralling suspected carriers in order to examine and treat infected women in hopes of lowering the syphilis and gonorrhea rates in the community at large. Their approach evolved, and its defenders became more ardent and outspoken after the Great War.

Likewise, law enforcement defended regulation and policed a cordoned off area for vice operation as commonsensical and fiscally sound. Brothels, bawdy houses, and other places of assignation operated late into the evening and often served copious

---

[111] Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease Since the 1880s Expanded Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 17-19. Brandt offers an extensive argument about disease and image arguing that image influences research money expended for treatments including AIDS.
[112] David J. Pivar, *Purity and Hygiene: Women, Prostitution, and the "American Plan," 1900-1930* (Greenway Press, 2002), 75-80.
[113] Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in American, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1982), 176.

amounts of alcohol. The rowdy behavior often resulted in altercations between the patrons and the prostitutes or with other men.[114] Pre-and post-war police chiefs argued for maintaining a zone of tolerance in El Paso to keep the peace. Not coincidentally, the fines collected, along with donations made by prostitutes, dance hall operators, and saloonkeepers in the vice district, paid the salaries and expenses of the police department. The highly regarded chronicler of El Paso prostitution, H. Gordon Frost, described this process in his book *The Gentleman's Club* (1983).[115] At first, the police department created a position known as the "fines collector." His sole task required weekly visits to each crib and brothel located in the Utah Street Reservation to assess each prostitute a five dollar fine. Calls for sexual reform and fears over venereal disease led to the abandonment of this practice in 1913. As a result, the police, with the blessing of city officials, redressed the collection process. Going forward the police arrested and charged each prostitute weekly, dragging them into court, where the judge would fine each one ten dollars.[116]

Additionally, the vice district establishments and residents subsidized the police budget by purchasing advertisements in the department's annual reports. Together the El Paso police and fire departments sold advertisements to augment funding for the city's protective services. In 1912, the department sold twenty-four of these to saloons and barkeepers, many who rented upstairs rooms to prostitutes or ran brothels over their

---

[114] Newspaper accounts abound pertaining to these complaints. Keire argued that between 1890 and the end of the Great War the argument was not if, but where, restricted districts should be located, 1-2. Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood* argued that by the early 1900s vice became more professional and highly profitable businesses, p. 69-70. Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985) argues vice areas attracted migrant workers, military personnel, and legislators all of whom made boomtowns (like El Paso) possible, 101-102.

[115] Frost, *The Gentleman's Club.*

[116] Frost, *The Gentleman's Club,* 22-23, 182; "Overland Street building made history as famous brothel," *El Paso Times*, El Paso, TX, February 23, 1987, Main Edition, 2.

shops. One advertisement purchased by J. H. Adams for his *Lobby Bar* promoted his establishment as the "Headquarters For All Sports." The *Van Dyke Bar* simply touted itself as "A Gentleman's Resort," a term indicating a place for spirits, women, and gambling. [117]

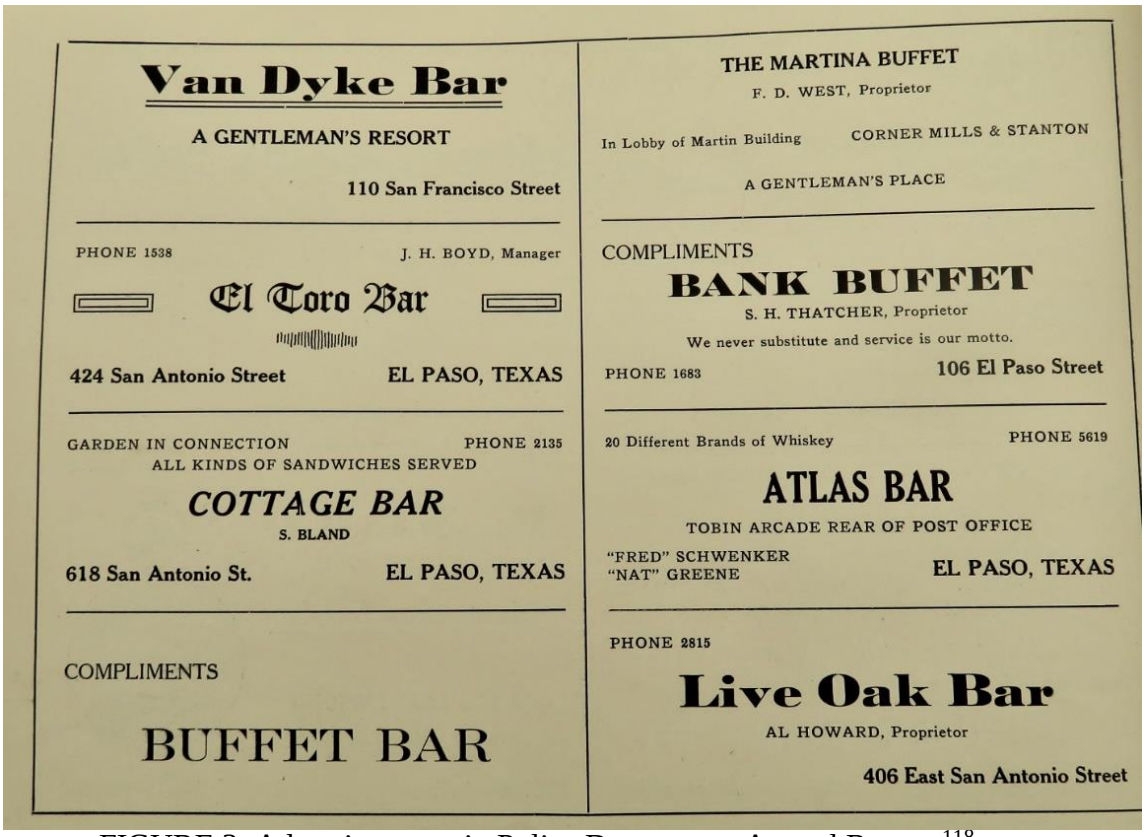

FIGURE 3: Advertisements in Police Department Annual Report.[118]

While the local population rarely complained about prostitutes who operated in the red-light district, they demanded the police keep them contained within those boundaries. In 1912 some madams and prostitutes began stretching the parameters of the

[117]Annual Report 1912, MS003 El Paso Police Department Notes, Folder 2 "Reports and Publications El Paso's Protective Forces, Box 2, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections University of Texas-El Paso Library.
[118] Source: Annual Report 1912, MS003 El Paso Police Department Notes, Folder 2 "Reports and Publications El Paso's Protective Forces, Box 2, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections University of Texas-El Paso Library.

red-light district. One woman, using the moniker June "Big Chief" Martin, established the Wigwam brothel. A few doors down, an ambitious prostitute turned entrepreneur, Hazel Ford (also known as Florence Williams), opened her bawdy house. Ford previously "worked the line" in the designated vice district at Tom Walker's Mansion House on the corner of Chihuahua and West Overland, which remained open until 1944. She had also turned tricks at Pearl Bebees's Utah Street brothel. For over a year, Ford, along with Ella Knox, Katie Colter, and Mrs. P. Smith plied their trade throughout the day often until 3:00 a.m. frequently servicing a dozen men nightly. Generally, the patrons stayed between twenty minutes to an hour. The operation went unnoticed or ignored by local authorities until a disgruntled neighbor, H. M. Walker monitored the activities of the house and took his detailed notes into the police.[119]

Presented with Walker's notes, the police raided both homes. Officer Barney Early identified both madams. The city charged and convicted them for running a bawdy house but the judge acquitted Knox, Colter, and Smith due to lack of evidence.[120] After this breach of the Reservation boundaries, the city council reassessed the red-light district's borderline and reaffirmed those initially set in place in 1890. It instructed the police department to continue to uphold the city ordinance that delineated the original boundaries and protections which read, "bawdy houses and inmates there of shall not be molested so long as they keep within this district."[121] Defending the unanimous vote Mayor Kelly said, "We don't intend that these people shall scatter … they are kept in the

[119] "Rowdy Women On Texas Street," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, September 2, 1910, 1; Frost, *Gentleman's Club,* faceplate.
[120] "Rowdy Women On Texas Street," *El Paso Herald,* September 2, 1910, 1.
[121] "Reservation To Remain Unmoved," *El Paso Herald,* "El Paso, TX, November 26, 1910, 1.

reservation." Agreeing, Alderman McGhee said, "We must have a district … or they will fill … the residence district of the city."[122]

2.2 The War Years

Some businessmen opposed regulation with the onset of World War I. This faction lobbied the federal government to locate one of thirty-six proposed training camps at nearby Fort Bliss. The U.S. Defense Department needed to house and train draftees after passage of the 1917 Selective Service Act, which gave President Woodrow Wilson the ability to conscript male citizens. Most likely, El Paso leaders wished to emulate South Carolina's Fort Jackson after reading media reports that Congress allocated over $9 million to construct buildings[123] Political and business bosses considered how this kind of investment at Fort Bliss could benefit the garrison, their city, and themselves. Additionally, Fort Bliss purchasing agents traditionally bought food, clothing, and equipment from local merchants and most soldiers spent their paychecks at area businesses. Should El Paso land a division training camp at Fort Bliss, businessmen anticipated that spending to increase dramatically as a division consisted of 30,000 men during wartime who might spend their down time and paychecks in local business establishments.[124]

Most businessmen realized El Paso's unique advantages of having Fort Bliss assigned as a training camp, including its diverse economy and as a transportation hub. Additionally, they remembered the economic boost they got during the 1916 border crisis

---

[122] Ibid.
[123] Jim Garamone, "World War I: Building the American Military, US Dept. of Defense, April 3, 2017. https://www.army.mil/article/185229/world_war_i_building_the_american_military.
[124] Garna L. Christian, "Sword and Plowshare: The Symbiotic Development of Fort Bliss and El Paso, Texas, 1849-1918" (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1977), 421, 429.

between the U.S. and Mexico's Pancho Villa, known as the Punitive Expedition. Military garrisons in the western tip of Texas, among them Fort Bliss, had housed 50,000 regular troops and national guardsmen at that time. With few options, the soldiers spent most of their paychecks in border towns like El Paso. Moreover, the military purchased goods and services from local merchants.[125] In view of the fact that some city leaders saw greater profit from an increased military presence than the revenues collected in the red-light district, and perhaps some were convinced to support the morality and anti-vice national sentiment, they withdrew their long-standing support of prostitution and saloons. Among them, Alfred Porter Coles, a prominent El Paso real estate tycoon and the President of American National Bank, who spoke to peer groups and municipal officials to coax them to support a closing of the Utah Street Reservation. He asked business associates, "shall we allow the prostitutes … to run the city?"[126] Taking advantage of increased patriotism and notions of family values he appealed to them to consider how vice influenced their children. He argued "if it is good to clean up [El Paso] for soldiers why not our own children."[127] Some Fort Bliss soldiers took issue with Coles, as evidenced by one who penned an editorial stating, "El Paso [has] little use for a man in uniform and they warn their daughters to keep away from soldiers. Why not close the [red-light] district to the men of El Paso and open it for men in uniform?"[128] Not surprisingly, the fair-weather support of businessmen waxed and waned depending on the

---

[125] Garna L. Christian, "Newton Baker's War On El Paso Vice," *Red River Valley Historical Review* 5 no. 2 (1980), 55; Garna L. Christian, "Sword and Plowshare," 396-400, 419.
[126] "Does El Paso Want To Be Clean? If She Does, Then She Can Be," *El Paso Herald*, March 4, 1918, El Paso, TX, 6.
[127] Ibid. For a detailed reading of increased patriotism which grew from a federal propaganda campaign see Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2008).
[128] Christian, "Sword and Plowshare," 445.

potential for financial profits. However, Secretary of War and Chairman Newton Baker was the man who made the final decision on camp locations.[129] He observed drunken soldiers leaving Utah Street brothels during the Punitive Expedition. The Secretary demanded if the city wanted to be in contention for a training camp it needed to eliminate rampant prostitution and saloons in El Paso. Motivated by his strict Episcopalian faith and strong belief in temperance, he tempted El Paso with a training camp possibility if they cleared vice from the city. After officials closed the red-light district, however, Baker never authorized the Fort Bliss training camp.[130]

Shuttering El Paso's red-light district forced prostitutes to find shelter in rooming houses and hotels throughout the city. This expected result concerned the medical community who lost track of the women they previously tested for diseases. Suddenly, without explanation, on December 10, 1917, Will Rogers, the County Health Officer, informed the county commissioners that the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) intended to locate the nation's fifth "venereal disease" clinic in El Paso.[131] Rogers presented letters between J.W. Tappan, the local PHS representative, and Rupert Blue, the Surgeon General, laying out a plan to open a facility to treat civilian men and women who became "infected by prostitutes." The PHS and the American Red Cross (ARC) partnered on this project to offer free but compulsory treatment. PHS promised to send a bacteriologist and a "venereal expert," while the ARC hired nurses and provided the medical supplies the

---

[129] Letter Newton D. Baker to Governors of all states and the State Councils of Defense, May 26, 1917, Washington, DC.
[130] Christian, "Newton Baker's War On El Paso Vice," 55-56.
[131] For more reading on the PHS, see Alexandra M. Lord, *Condom Nation: The U.S. Government's Sex Education Campaign World War I to the Internet* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010). Zipf argued the military decided the best way to control the spread of VD was to isolate afflicted women from the general population. Karin L. Zipf, "In Defense of the Nation: Syphilis, North Carolina's "Girl Problem," and World War I," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (July 2012): 276-300.

clinic required. PHS expected local cooperation and requested El Paso provide a suitable facility and hire police women to locate infected women. These actions signaled that Fort Bliss stood poised to become a training camp. Agreeing, the city commissioners readily acceded to government requests.[132]

V. V. Wood, the promised venereal disease expert, arrived in El Paso from Washington, DC. in mid-January 1918. He immediately assured women they would not be targeted. However, he ordered all females with syphilis or gonorrhea to remain at the clinic for the duration of a ten-day treatment while more serious infections required a longer county hospital stay. A week after this announcement, Hugh White, the city health officer, conferred with Lieutenant P. S. Madigan, head of the Fort Bliss infirmary. White told Madigan that El Paso meant to eliminate STDs in soldiers by requiring that those testing positive name the women responsible for their infection. Wood's plan required the arrest of all responsible female parties for treatment. After treatment, the clinic staff released American women and arranged for the deportation of Mexican women.[133] Wood failed to announce that the El Paso clinic arose as part of a federal program known as the "American Plan," which allowed the federal government to detain thousands of suspected prostitutes nationally, often for months.[134]

After its first full month in operation, the clinic staff treated 542 men and women. Wood contended most came to the clinic voluntarily and described a bustling clinic that

---

[132] "Cooperate With Civilian Clinic," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, December 11, 1917, 3; "U.S. Clinic To Treat Disease," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, January 14, 1918, 4.
[133] "New Clinic To Open Next Week," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, January 30, 1918, First Edition, 3; "Soldiers Must Inform Clinic," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, January 24, 1918, First Edition, 5.
[134] Scott Wasserman Stern, *The Trials of Nina McCall: Sex, Surveillance, and the Decades-Long Government Plan to Imprison "Promiscuous" Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 5.

treated patients at 10:30 a.m. until late afternoons. However, as law enforcement and clinicians partnered to bring in sex workers, women began to feel targeted.[135] For years, the police collected the weekly fines from prostitutes; therefore, they recognized them immediately and brought them in for testing. In a popular *El Paso Herald* column, "Little Interviews," V. V. Wood, the disease expert, claimed that the clinic, "[was] not a cloak for the police department." Interviewed a month later for the same column he contended the clinic management had "no intentions of molesting [women] or curtailing their freedom."[136] However, historian Scott Stern argues that American Plan clinics routinely misled women to persuade them to voluntarily seek treatment. Once there, staff forced treatment and detained women the staff or police suspected of prostitution or lewd behavior.[137] Like others across the country, the clinic predominately treated female patients throughout the war. After the war concluded in November 1918, the county commissioners shut down the clinic two months later citing the city's refusal to lend financial support to the project.[138]

In the early days of World War I, cities shuttered red-light districts and evicted sex workers. El Paso too closed its segregated vice district but allowed prostitutes to remain in the city.[139] The 1917 police manual printed before the red-light district closed, outlined the duty of a patrol officer to "carefully watch all disorderly houses or houses of

---

[135] "Little Interviews: Treat 542 In February," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, March 1, 1918, 5.
[136] "Little Interviews," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, 6.
[137] Stern, *The Trials of Nina McCall,* 55.
[138] "Venereal Clinic to Be Closed by County Commissioners Mar. 1, "*El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, February 11, 1919, 11. For a military perspective of these events see, Gabbert, "Prostitution and Moral Reform."
[139] Kiere, *For Business or Pleasure,* 1-2, 21-22.

ill-fame within his post, and report his observations to his Sergeant or Captain."[140] This included bawdy houses described as "a house kept for prostitution or where prostitutes are permitted to resort or reside for the purpose of plying their vocation." [141] The manual also spelled out Article XXVIII, which specifically pertained to vice establishments, allowing soldiers access to all businesses providing "amusements" in the city. These included "disorderly houses" which the department defined as "any assignation house," where men and women met for the exclusive purpose of sexual intercourse, "or any theater, playhouse, or house where spiritous, vinous or malt liquors are kept for sale, and prostitutism [sic] lewd women or women of bad reputation are employed, kept in service or permitted to display or conduct themselves in a lewd or indecent manner."[142]

A significant change is seen in the 1918 booklet or "Annual Souvenir" prepared by the Police Department that indicated that the force had begun to cooperate with the mayor's office and the Chamber of Commerce to present El Paso in a favorable light for federal authorities. On the opening page it calls to mind a new patriotic fervor in El Paso claiming, "there is no niche in the hall of fame of American cities that it [El Paso] cannot attain."[143] This propaganda piece described leaders and officers as a "big family" who worked efficiently and with competence to rid the city of vice in a matter of months. "The chief, the inspector, all the major officers and every man on the force had worked indefatigably and determinedly," to that end.[144] Amazingly, while doing that they

---

[140] "Police Relief Association Annual Report 1917," MS003 El Paso Police Department Notes, Folder 2, Box 2, "Reports and Publications El Paso's Protective Forces, University of Texas-El Paso Library C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, 38.
[141] Ibid., 104.
[142] Ibid., 80, 104.
[143] Annual Souvenir El Paso Police Department 1918, MS003 El Paso Police Department Notes, Folder 6, Box 2, "Annual Souvenir El Paso Police Department 1918," University of Texas-El Paso Library C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections.
[144] Ibid.

recovered $100,000 in stolen property and apprehended “hundreds” of local and international criminals. The booklet described inroads made on social welfare issues as they placed “scores” of children in protective custody and saved a “large” number of young girls from “khaki fever,” a slang term describing the sexual excitement women experienced seeing soldiers in uniform which made them susceptible to sexual advances. It further noted its cooperation with the venereal clinic to set “fallen women” on the “right road.” The department manual eliminated the bar advertisements and definitions pertaining to prostitution yet, it did list a disorderly house as a place where “inmates” behaved badly and raucously becoming a “nuisance to the neighborhood.” These venues it noted served only “for [the] general resort for purpose injurious to the public morals.”[145] Thus, the infamous Utah Street Reservation came to a close.

2.2 Post-World War I

One year after the war ended and the closure of the VD clinic, the police reversed course and began issuing fines and protecting the women who worked in what El Pasoans came to know as a “zone of tolerance” within the same geographic boundaries as the old red-light district. Within the confines of a zone of tolerance, sex workers sold sex and police department leaders, with the approval of the city council, instructed officers to ignore the women. Commercial sex work, gambling and soon bootlegged booze openly resurfaced in El Paso. A review of archived El Paso County criminal records after the Great War until the Great Depression, indicate that police arrested prostitutes and then released them after they paid their fine. This was the same policy as before World War I. For example, police arrested Margaret Morales, charged her with fornication, and

[145] Ibid.

released her after she paid a fine of $74.05, a substantial sum at the time.[146] More frequently, in response to public outcries they targeted bawdy houses or rooming houses outside the zone of tolerance. For example, May Smith faced charges for setting up shop at 4081/2 N. Oregon Street, four blocks outside the zone of tolerance.[147]

Although the Chamber of Commerce continued to support a vice clean up in El Paso publicly, voices outside the association suggested members continued to patronize vice establishments. During Prohibition, beginning in 1919, it became increasingly common for people to link prostitution to gambling rather than banned alcohol. As a result, in 1923 the Chamber of Commerce of El Paso and the Chamber in the cross-border city of Juarez signed an agreement promising mutual efforts to stop "gambling, narcotic traffic, and improving the moral conditions" in the Mexican city.[148] Despite this agreement the electric streetcar that connected the two cities continued to ferry cross-border workers or Americans who wanted spirits, gambling, or prostitution. These vice patrons came to be called "sports." The bridge remained open twenty-four hours daily and the streetcar company kept the same schedule to accommodate workers and the sports. To discourage Americans from sinning in Mexico, the El Paso Chamber demanded Juarez prohibit gambling and U.S. officials threatened to shut the bridge during evening hours. Reluctantly, Juarez officials complied, but El Paso defaulted on its end of the bargain. The ensuing public bickering exposed the Chamber's hypocrisy.[149]

---

[146] Case File 9435, Margaret Morales, May 1920, MS132 El Paso County Records Criminal Cases. UTEP C. L. Sonnichensen Special Collections.
[147] Case File 10343, Keeping a bawdy house, May Smith, January 1922, MS132 El Paso County Records Criminal Cases. UTEP C. L. Sonnichensen Special Collections; "Four Indicted In Rooming House Cases," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, January 27, 1922, 7.
[148] Gabriela Recio, "Drugs and Alcohol: US Prohibition and the Origins of the Drug Trade in Mexico, 1910-1930," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34, no. 1 (February 2002: 26-27).
[149] "Gambling To Stay Until Bridge Is Opened By El Paso," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, December 18, 1926, 1.

During the 1920s some Juarez and El Paso residents, businessmen, and journalists pointed out the double standard of the American position. Two Juarez Chamber members, Ambrosio Escudera and A. Martinez, claimed prostitution and gambling to be more widespread in El Paso than their city. They reminded the Americans that for decades vice patrons from both nations enjoyed the brothels, casinos, and saloons that each offered, describing the clientele "a fifty-fifty proposition." Escudera and Martinez suggested El Paso should stop pretending that it had cleared out vice, challenging their American colleagues to "sweep in front of your own door before condemning" Juarez.[150] Americans expressed similar sentiments in various newspapers. Owen White, renowned El Paso journalist and author, wrote in the *New York Times* that El Paso's "captains of industry, business men, and bankers" continued to patronize the vice trade from "Saturday night until Monday morning."[151] Likewise, Reverend Ralph Curtis Jones wrote an editorial printed in the *El Paso Evening Post*, "personally, I detest … prostitution," but contended it ridiculous to call men "law-breakers" for visiting prostitutes when the practice had not been categorized a crime. Referring to Americans who disparaged prostitution in Juarez, he ended his piece, "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam of thine own eye; and then shalt see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."[152] These men, from both sides of the border, noted that American conventioneers, businessmen and laborers continued to fraternize with prostitutes in Mexico and the U.S.[153]

---

[150] "El Paso Urged To Clean Town By Juarez Men," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, September 28, 1927, 1.
[151] Owen White, "Juarez, A Gaudy Siren, Winks At El Paso," *New York Times,* New York, NY, January 11, 1925, SM2.
[152] Ralph Curtis Jones, "Thinking Out Loud: Hell, E.P. and Juarez," *El Paso Evening Post,* El Paso, TX, November 18, 1929, 6.
[153] Ibid.

Throughout the 1920s the El Paso convention business flourished. In fiscal year ending February 1923, the city hosted 4,371 conventioneers including 2000 delegates from the Texas State Federation of Labor and 872 from the Texas State Medical Association. That year the Chamber named Arthur L McKnight to head the entertainment committee to arrange evening activities for El Paso's largest event, the 47th Annual Convention of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers' Association.[154] Taken together, it stretches the imagination to think the El Paso Chamber members swayed these predominately male visitors away from its city's zone of tolerance or the expanding vice scene across the border in Cuidad Juarez.

As late as 1929, an *El Paso Evening Post* editorial written by N.B. y Prieto claimed that American entrepreneurs owned interest in vice establishments on both sides of the border, estimating that 98% of Juarez saloons and brothels were owned by these businessmen.[155] Ironically, the passage of the Volstead Act (1919) prohibiting the sale of liquor, gave a boost to the vice trade in both El Paso and Juarez.[156] Many Kentucky bourbon distillers, including the Dowling family moved their Waterfill and Frazier Distillery to Juarez. During Prohibition, Americans invested over $1 million dollars in Juarez bourbon distilleries that supplied the speakeasies in the U.S. Entrepreneurs opened bars in Juarez such as the Kentucky Club, Lobby Café, and Mint Café, catering to Americans thirsty for alcohol including celebrities. These establishments sold Mint

---

[154] Annual Report: Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce, Fiscal Year 1922-1923. El Paso Public Library Vertical Files, Cement Industry-Chamber of Commerce Publications EPVF-C of C Annual Reports.
[155] N.B. y Prieto, "Thinking Out Loud: Twin City Vice," *El Paso Evening Post*, El Paso, TX, November 20, 1929, 4.
[156] W. H. Timmons, "El Paso, Texas," *Handbook of Texas Online.* http://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hde01.

Juleps for 60 cents, shots of Johnny Walker at 50 cents, or D.M. American Whiskey for 25 cents a shot, all made in Mexico.[157] This lively trade sparked an increase in El Paso tourism and the bootleggers and rum runners who carried Mexican whiskey to American speakeasies. Cleverly, the El Paso Chamber tweaked its convention and tourism literature to market its city as a stop-over destination for those heading across the border.[158] As the editorialist, N. B. y Pietro noted, both El Paso residents and visitors bought and patronized prostitutes freely on both sides of the border in sanctioned commercial sex zones. As Pietro correctly pointed out El Paso police turned a blind eye to prostitution in the city's commercial sex zone, thus effectively maintained a red-light district, which suited the business community just fine.[159]

Such allegations or blatant police misconduct sporadically resulted in outrage from local moral reformers and citizens alike and sparked investigations into carnal conditions resulting in law enforcement crackdowns. During the 1920 political campaign candidates sparred over moral conditions in the city mostly based on rumor and innuendo. After the 1920 election, the city council held a hearing to probe into allegations pertaining to slack police policies concerning the sex trade. Over a four-day period the council invited citizens to testify to what they had witnessed. Then they interviewed law enforcement officers. The *El Paso Herald* concluded that police officers lacked basic

---

[157] No sound film, American Distiller Opens Plant Below Border, Introduces New Process To Age Certain Beverages Banned in U.S. U.S. *National Archives and Records Administration,* 1931. https://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php/Juarez,_Mexico_-_American_Distiller_Opens_Plant_Below_Border,_Introduces_New_Process_to_Age_Certain_Beverages_Banned_in_U.S.; Fred Minnick, "Cross Border Bourbon," *Whiskey Magazine.* http://whiskeymag.com/story/cross-border-bourbon.; N.B. y Prieto, "Thinking Out Loud: Twin City Vice," *El Paso Evening Post,* El Paso, TX, November 20, 1929, 4.

[158] "Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce, Fiscal Year 1922-1923," El Paso Vertical Files EPVF- Chamber of Commerce-Annual Reports, 18-19.

[159] N. B. y Prieto, "Thinking Out Loud: Twin City Vice," *El Paso Evening Post.*

information about the city and had trouble remembering details because they rarely kept written records. As a result, the district attorney rarely successfully prosecuted prostitutes operating outside the zone of tolerance due to lack of evidence. Secondly, juries often went easy on sex workers.[160] Lastly, vagrancy rarely resulted in convictions because the city required five men to testify that they paid money to the accused in exchange for sexual intercourse. Many clients of the accused refused to publicly admit to their actions thus the cases were dropped.[161] On cue, the day the *Herald* reported the council's findings, the police responded by arresting Maria Caves for operating a bawdy house. It had been the first conviction of its kind in months. According to court documents, the state fined her two hundred dollars, court fees of $35.15, and sentenced her to twenty days in jails, an unheard-of punishment in El Paso for this misdemeanor.[162] Obviously, the arrest and punishment was in response to the investigation. Commonly, the police targeted prostitutes shortly after investigations to scuttle criticism of their leniency toward these women then returned to conducting business as usual.

Often, violence within the zone of tolerance forced the police to haul in quarrelling prostitutes for questioning. This happened to Birdie Smith, an African American prostitute and madam the night of her thirty-first birthday. Officer June Hunt, a male El Paso city policeman and an uninvited guest entered Smith's home as she served enchiladas to her party guests. Within minutes, deputy sheriff Cruz Ortiz and colleague

---

[160] What Police Hearing Produced Of Interest To The Public," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, September 15, 1920, First Edition, 6.
[161] "June Hunt Is Freed On Charge Of Killing Deputy Constable Ortiz," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, May 5, 1921, 1.
[162] "Woman Given Heavy Fine In Disorderly House Case," *El Paso, TX,* September 16, 1920, 10; Case File 9556, Maria Caves, September 1920, MS132 El Paso County Records Criminal Cases. UTEP.

Merejildo Garcia barged into the home with Ortiz announcing he intended to arrest the women and the city policeman. Two other law enforcement officers soon arrived. The men scuffled and moved the fracas outside. Birdie testified to hearing shots fired and called authorities about a "police shootout."[163] According to testimony, Hunt shot and killed Ortiz. These questionable police intrusions into Smith's house resulted in her being charged with vagrancy and running a bawdy house but, the charges did not stick as usual due to lack of evidence.[164] Even though the city charged June Hunt with the murder of Ortiz when his case came before a judge the next year, he won in court due to lack of evidence, even though other officers witnessed the shooting.[165] Apparently, they could not remember or see clearly when questioned before the judge and jury.

The Ortiz killing triggered rumors in the general public regarding the relationship between members of the law enforcement and the vice communities. Many questioned how police could have missed Birdie's brothel operations right under their noses. Others maintained that many El Paso men knew of its existence and should have informed authorities. To quell these innuendos, the city council once again ordered another investigation.[166] Upon hearing of this, Chief of Police J. R. Montgomery told reporters his officers had the same desires of other men, saying "Personally, I do not believe the police are 100% pure." Nevertheless, he tried to avoid the sensational criticism put forth

[163] "Story of Ortiz Killing Is Told By 'Birdie' Smith, *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, August 27,1920, 5.
[164] Case File 9553 Keeping a Bawdy House, Birdie Smith, August 1920, MS132 El Paso County Records Criminal Cases. UTEP.
[165] "June Hunt Is Freed On Charge Of Killing Deputy Constable Ortiz," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, 1.
[166] "Council Starts Inquiry Of Police," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, August 24, 1920, 1.

by "vice-crusaders" and welcomed the investigation.[167] Like other El Paso vice scandals, the investigation went nowhere, and the police maintained the status quo.

After WWI, Mayor Davis and the city council attempted to reopen a sanctioned red-light district in the city and federal officials took notice.[168] Concerned about the council's intentions, the Federal Social Hygiene Board directed Walter Peters, Director of Investigations, to El Paso to assess the situation. Peters brought along an experienced New York social welfare worker, Elizabeth Bain, to discuss the situation with local civic club members and aid in the investigation. At local meetings, Bain regaled attendees of her war time duty in Paris and other European cities, where she recalled, she took "American soldiers out of the clutches of French streetwalkers."[169] Together, Bain and Peters informed club members they had found thirty brothels in the downtown area alone and claimed prostitutes worked and lived throughout El Paso's low rent boarding houses.[170] This accusation suggests the city and police looked the other way to sex work.

Only after impugning city officials to various organizations, such as the Women's Club, did Peters and Bain take their full report to Davis and the city council where the debate got heated. Some El Paso leaders questioned the limited value of a ten-day investigation. Undaunted, the duo told the assembly they located fifty-seven prostitutes, four whom claimed they operated without fear of raids in the past four years. The investigators located fifty-four in boarding houses, two in hotels, and a lone streetwalker.

---

[167] "City Police Under Fire Council Orders Inquiry It's Welcome, Say Chief," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, September 5, 1920, 1.
[168] Mary Macey Dietzler, Report: "The Campaign of the United States Government Against Venereal Disease," The United States Social Hygiene Board, June 1922, Washington, DC, 180.
[169] "Welfare Worker Is In El Paso To Help Educational Campaign To Stamp Out Social Diseases," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, February 9, 1922, 13.
[170] Ibid.

The mayor lost his patience stating, "FIFTY-SEVEN prostitutes in a city of 100,000 people are nothing to get excited about." He continued, "I would rather the [police] chief arrest the man who killed that old Mexican… than to see 200 prostitutes arrested."[171] He informed Peters and Bain that he and the council wanted police efforts focused on curbing violent crimes. Bain stirred the pot by suggesting friction between El Paso city and county law enforcement resulted in lax efforts on vice prevention. Mayor Davis responded, "if there is [friction] I don't know anything about it."[172] Yet, the Ortiz killing resulted from an altercation between county sheriff and the city police officers. Mayor Davis told the outsiders that police fined alleged sex workers regularly but failed to inform them that El Paso used those fines to defray law enforcement expenses. Councilman R.C. Semple added that higher fines did not curtail activity because the women did not have the money to pay them. In fact, prostitutes hired attorneys who took the cases to county court knowing prosecution required five men to testify the woman had solicited them, so the cases often failed, as happened with the Smith case.[173]

Continuing her allegations of lackluster police enforcement, Bain, the New York social welfare worker, told the men that Fort Bliss officers worked diligently to protect troops from temptations, suggesting the city follow that lead. That brought councilman W. T. Griffith into the fracas. "I was talking to the owner of one rooming house, Griffith stated, "she was paying … a sergeant of the army $50 a month for protecting her two [brothels] houses." Griffith contended that El Paso graft came from Fort Bliss officers not

[171] Bob Chapman, "Councilmen Resent Slurs Against City's Name Made by Vice Inspectors," *El Paso Times*, El Paso, TX, February 11, 1922.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.

law enforcement. [174] Bain would not let the matter rest, contending that the federal authorities might remove the soldiers from Fort Bliss if the city failed to clean up its act. Fully riled, Davis responded, "They won't be, with all due respect for your influence in Washington."[175] Dangling a carrot in front of the council, Bain inferred that Washington could consider sending more troops to the border fort if the city took a firm stand on prostitution. Again, the mayor challenged the Federal vice agents: "When there is cause for it, we will get them [the soldiers]."[176]

Bains and Peters failed to realize that El Paso politicians resented outsiders from Washington, let alone a woman from New York, telling them how to run their city or making threats. These men believed they knew what El Pasoans wanted and their re-election record proved that. Importantly, the investigators angered city leaders because they took their information to the local public and national press prior to consulting with them. City leaders objected when Peters and Bain claimed El Paso was the "most corrupt" city in the nation. Councilman Pitman spoke for the city fathers, "we have more interest in El Paso than you could possibly have."[177] Many others in the local government agreed with the mayor and the council. For instance, a former field investigator for the Public Service Bureau of New York now working in the El Paso government lent his support to leaders saying, "If I were head of El Paso's government, I wouldn't worry much … [things] could be a lot worse."[178] Charles L Vowell, a county prosecutor

---

[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid.
[178] "El Paso Is Clean Says Investigator Of Civic Affairs," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, February 11, 1922, 8.

campaigning for district attorney, expressed his sympathy for fallen women, arguing, "as men are not pure you may expect to find" prostitutes."[179] Although his opponent often referenced those remarks, Vowell won the election for DA, indicating a general agreement among the electorate on the subject.

More consensus on the federal and local level appeared within the medical community and coordinated efforts with some federal backing came to El Paso during the 1920s. The national medical experts issued strong warnings as the incidence of venereal disease increased significantly across the nation during the 1920s. In Washington, D.C., Congress responded by forming the Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board (ISHB). ISHB presented a report in June 1920 detailing STD infections. That fiscal year, the Army and Navy treated 35,000 new cases of sexually transmitted disease. Further, the report contained data for the general population. Conservative estimates suggested 326,000 American men, women, and children were infected with a venereal disease, yet the ISHB considered the number to be closer to 1.5 million, due to widespread underreporting among physicians. Aside from the obvious health risks, the report enumerated these infections resulted in $69 million in lost American wages and cost the federal government $15 million. To stem the tide, the Board stationed fifty-five vice investigators across the country in cities that reported venereal infections in their military population. In 1921 Fort Bliss became home to the 1st Cavalry Division with 27,000

[179] "Vowell Reads Herald In Reply To Peden Campaign Statement; Gives Prostitution Interview," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, July 12, 1922, 14.

troops.[180] When the El Paso District, home to Fort Bliss reported 207 cases, ISHB sent vice investigator Delores Mines to root out infected prostitutes.[181]

Once in El Paso, vice investigator Mines learned that after the county closed the venereal clinic in 1919, due to lack of funds, infected women had been detained for treatment at a cordoned off ward in the county hospital. This option proved unsatisfactory because women routinely complained about unsanitary conditions, while others escaped the facility. When the federal government allocated $3,000 in 1920 for a new center, the city relocated the ward to the top floor of the county courthouse, naming it Ward 522. Following Jim Crow edicts, the city segregated the hundred bed ward. A report pertaining to Ward 522 issued by the United States Social Hygiene Board underscores the racial prejudice that influenced reformers and medical community alike. It indicated white women stayed in a single room that held eighty-eight beds while it described the African American patients as black "inmates" who stayed in one of six, two bed "cells."[182] In addition, the sheriff's report suggested a general disdain for these patients revealing that the detainees received two meals daily and argued that to be enough, yet suggests they had been treated like convicts. By June 1921 this facility fell victim to funding issues and closed. During its time in operation, Ward 522 housed 915 women. Of those, 93% admitted to sexual relations with soldiers, and eleven had entered the facility voluntarily. Finding a high recidivism rate, the Board suggested additional social services, such as a

---

[180] "Fort Bliss, Texas," *The Military Standard.* http://www.themilitarystandard.com/army_base/tx/fort_bliss.php.
[181] Report, US Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board: For Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1920, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 11-12, 73.
[182] Mary Macey Dietzler, Report: "The Campaign of the United States Government Against Venereal Disease," The United States Social Hygiene Board, June 1922, 178-180.

training school to expand the employment options of sex laborers. After Ward 522 closed, women with STDs received treatment at the county hospital.[183]

Regardless of where the city located treatment sites, during the 1920s syphilitics received one of two treatments or a combination of both, but each had limited success and always had harmful side effects putting sex workers at further risk. Doctors injected a derivative of arsenic, Neosalvarsan, to patients. Pain from the injection lasted six days and required a narcotic to ease the suffering. Side effects included liver damage, rashes, and possible arsenic poisoning leading to death. For others, doctors surgically removed the syphilis chancres and cauterized them, afterwards applying a mercurial ointment. All patients received some combination of mercury, iodine, and arsenic that medical professionals at the time believed offered the best hope for cure.[184]

[183] Ibid, 180.
[184] "Of Syphilis and Salvarsan: The danger and promise of cure," Case Western Reserve University, College of Arts and Sciences, Dittrick Medical History Center, October 26, 2017. https://artsci.case.edu/dittrick/2013/11/08/of-syphilis-and-salvarsan-the-danger-and-promise-of-cure/. In the 1940s the use of penicillin replaced these treatments and continues to be a recommended course today.

FIGURE 4: Ward 522 at the El Paso County Courthouse.[185]

As El Paso grew the city addressed health concerns. Data from the 1920 census showed local authorities that El Paso county had a population of 101,877 residents and 77,560 lived in the city.[186] To tend to their growing population the city and county leaders developed a plan for a new city-county hospital. Officials assigned a team of surgical doctors to oversee plans for the new facility in 1925. The physicians advocated for a state-of-the-art genitourinary clinic to treat the growing incidence of sexual disease.[187] Increasingly, the El Paso medical community struggled to find ways to curb venereal disease. County physician, T. J. McCamant, took an adament stand at the 1927

[185] Source: Courthousehistory.com. http://courthousehistory.com/gallery/states/texas/counties/el-paso
[186] "El Paso Population." http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/el-paso-population/.; The County Information Program, Texas Association of Counties, "Historic El Paso County Population: 1850-Present." http://www.txcip.org/tac/census/hist.php?FIPS=48141.
[187] "Surgeons Plan Well Equipped Public Clinic," *El Paso Times*, El Paso, TX, June 16, 1925, 1.

State Medical Association symposium on venereal infections, arguing against the use of code words such as "venereal disease" or "social disease" because of the stigma attached to them, and as a result less research money was allocated for therapeutic solutions.[188] The doctor implored his colleagues to use specific medical names for syphilis and gonorrhea, because when "call[ed] … by their proper names" a solution can be found. In closing, he argued, to control venereal disease one of two things must occur: either prostitution should be regulated or abolished. Controversially, McCamant ended his speech saying, "because of the impossibility of the latter [prostitution abolishment]," he proposed imposing strict rules on prostitution to encourage the abandonment of the profession.[189]

In mid-May 1927, Dr. McCamant addressed the El Paso county commissioners to clarify and update them on the growing venereal crisis and prostitution. Between January and April 1927, he stated doctors treated 1,178 female cases of syphilis and 926 for gonorrhea. Because of repeat infections in many women these figures do not represent the number of local women infected. For McCamant the "only solution is to have a restricted district," a city sanctioned red-light district rather than the current zone of tolerance because the city council regularly changed its boundaries and rules on a whim making it difficult to police. McCamant advocated for increasing fees to make prostitution less profitable for sex workers. According to the doctor, city officials only identified between fifty and eighty prostitutes who were required to submit to medical exams every ten days. He explained the hitch this way: "A woman may be free of disease

[188] Allan M. Brandt argued this in his book (1987) *No Magic Bullet.*
[189] "Frankness Urged For Sex Subjects," *El Paso Times*, El Paso, TX, April 27, 1927, 3.

today and have it again tomorrow." He implored the commissioners to consider more stringent regulations and corralling the sex trade in a manageable defined area.[190] McCamant, like other progressive physicians across the country, understood that without improved systematic therapeutic treatments the venereal disease crisis would continue. For these men, prevention and treatment overrode sexual morality concerns.

El Paso leaders seemed unable to face prostitution and the venereal crisis as a united team. Despite the work of McCamant and other likeminded physicians, Police Chief Armstrong and district attorney Vowell took different approaches to prostitution and STDs. The district attorney promoted a plan to evict and prosecute any sex workers conducting business in rooming houses north of First Street to essentially narrow the boundaries of the "zone of tolerance."[191] Chief Armstrong announced a strategy to stop assessing fines for prostitution altogether, although the women would still be subjected to frequent medical exams to determine their venereal disease status. Armstrong based his decision on three truths: the inevitable demand for sex by Johns, the fines made sex workers turn more tricks to pay the fines and forced eviction from El Paso would encourage other women to replace them. Going forward, the Police Chief planned to advise officers to focus on keeping sex traffickers out of residential neighborhoods. His agenda ignored the vice situation. Instead he focused the department's energies on property crimes and increasing cooperation with Mexican authorities to diminish more violent and important criminal activity. His closing comment indicates the futility of the state's attempts to curb vice while understanding that these activities should not be

[190] "M'Camant Urges Restricted Zone," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, May 10, 1927, 10.
[191] "Police War Against Vice In S. El Paso," *El Paso Evening Post,* El Paso, TX, August 16, 1928.

prevalent in residential neighborhoods: "I will give my best efforts … keeping El Paso a clean city."[192]

As the years passed and regardless of who held positions of power in El Paso's political and law enforcement agencies, white male leaders continued to shift positions on prostitution, which undermined a long-term strategy. Upon the promotion of L. T. Robey from captain to police chief in 1928, the department took District Attorney Vowell's stance on locating the zone of tolerance south of First Street.[193] Once on the job, Robey, alongside Detective Chief J. W. Stowe, called the proprietors of rooming houses to a stationhouse meeting. Robey began the meeting talking about prostitutions, stating, "It is impossible to stop it." He favored a zone of tolerance with medical scrutiny. To that end, he and Stowe announced the new rules going forward. All sex laborers needed to keep their activities confined to rooming houses south of First Street and could not operate from the first floor of those buildings. Those abiding by the new mandates would be protected from arrest. All others would be prosecuted. He backed up his threat pointing to arrests that day of seven women and two men accused of running a bawdy house north of the line establish in the 1925 Vowell proposal. The police raided those rooming houses that rented their first floor to prostitutes, taking six others into custody. Furthermore, the department banned women on upper floors from advertising their services in open windows or from the top of stairwells.[194]

---

[192] "Chief Armstrong Asks Cooperation To Prevent Crime, *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, October 16, 1925, 1.
[193] "Police Chief Want To Retire," *El Paso Herald-Post,* El Paso, TX, January 16, 1943, 1.
[194] "Police War Against Vice In S. El Paso," *El Paso Evening Post,* El Paso, TX, August 16, 1928, 2.

The situation took an unusual twist less than a year later, when Robey moved the permitted regulated sex boundary further south to Seventh Street and claimed to target all "police characters." Robey's position closed the decade promising to evict any "undesirables" from El Paso.[195] The pendulum in El Paso had swung again, this time against prostitution.[196] But a scandal rocked Robey's department in March 1929 and resulted in a Civil Service commission probe when Chappo Lopez, convicted of running an illegal casino on Alemeda Street, testified that he paid El Paso peace officers protection money. During the probe officers testified against their colleagues and bosses, revealing a department in disarray. Claims of on the job drinking, patronizing prostitutes, and a practice of taking "rewards" for retrieving stolen property emerged from the testimony given by beat cops, detectives, and ranking officers alike. Significantly, men told how they frequently questioned known prostitutes to gather information about male criminal suspects.[197] The practice of protecting sex workers had returned despite Robey's vow to clean up El Paso's streets.[198]

---

[195] "Police Declare War On Inmates Of City's "Zone Of Tolerance," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, April 24, 1929, 2.
[196] Frost, *The Gentlemen's Club,* 208-230.
[197] "Lopez Paid Money For Protection, Is Charge," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, March 4, 1929, 1, 10.
[198] Robey remained El Paso's police chief until he retired in July 1943. Throughout most of his tenure a zone of tolerance remained a part of El Paso ending shortly before the US entered the World War II.

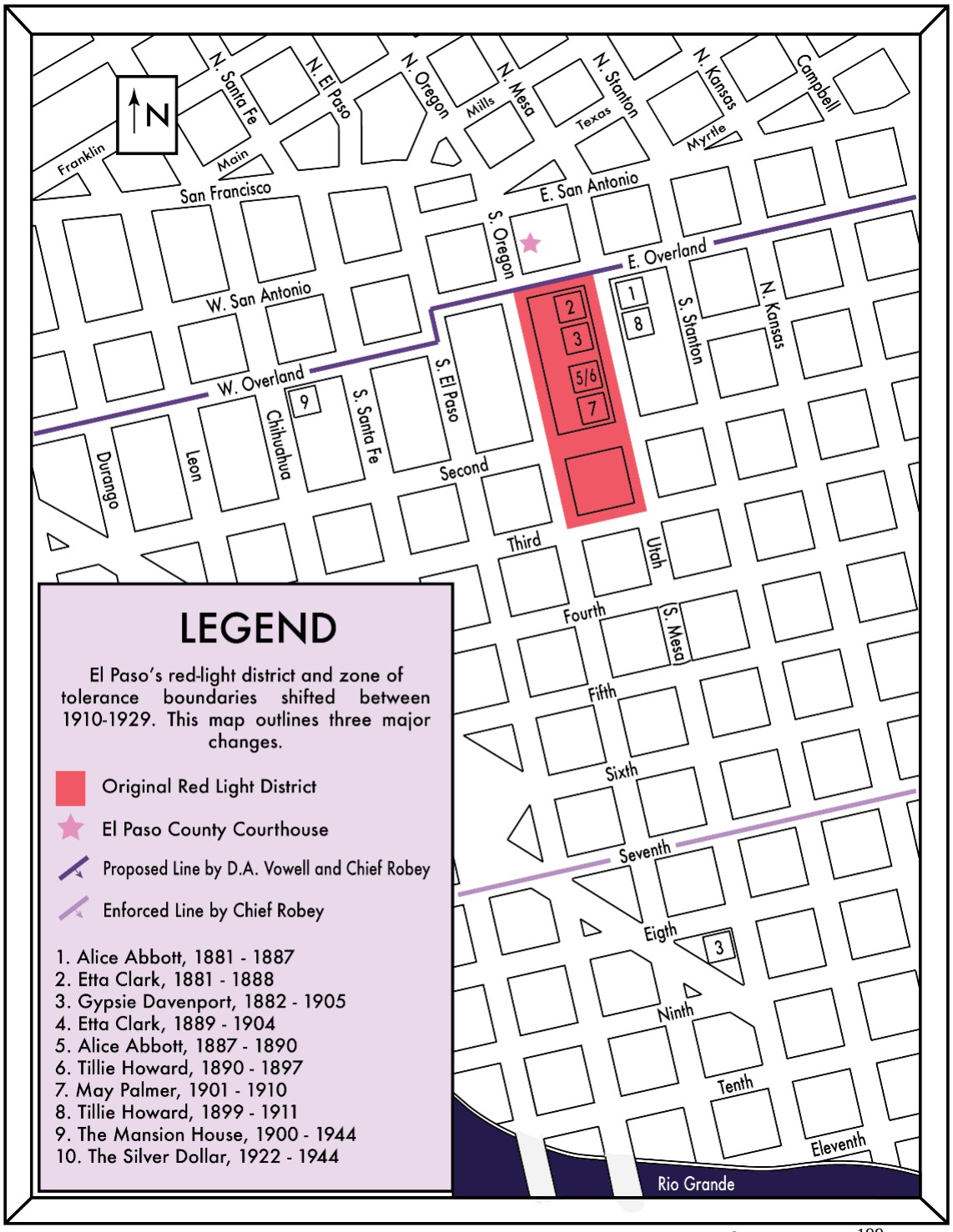

FIGURE 5: The Red-light District and Changes to the Zone of Tolerance.[199]

[199] Source: Nancy M. Battista and Sam Holden

Together with city officials, law enforcement allowed prostitution within a zoned area designated in 1890 and reaffirmed those boundaries on numerous occasions, continuing to use fines collected from prostitutes to defray police department expenses well into the 1920s. Likewise, the ebb and flow of support for regulation coincided with their presumed potential gain. Most agreed with District Attorney Vowell, who told an audience in 1926, "The person who can invent a way to stop … prostitution will be famous overnight. It hasn't been done yet."[200] Pre-war business men took advantage of the city's reputation as "Sin City" to entice conventioneers or entertain clients and government officials. Many of them owned properties within the red-light district and charged occupants higher rents as the city banned them from living elsewhere. "Ring" politicians, many of them frequent patrons in the district campaigned on-easy-on vice platforms that men favored. For the medical community, physicians concluded their ability to identify prostitutes facilitated medical treatment thereby curbing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Meanwhile, the police collected fines and permit fees to pay the department's salaries and expenses, like in Mexico while keeping a less desirable element cordoned from the respectable. During World War I, most chose to support the closure of the local red-light district, some more enthusiastically, mainly because they saw the profit potential if Fort Bliss became a training camp. Once the Great War concluded, many men promoted the "zone of tolerance" while others wanted to reestablish a vice district. In the red-light district or later in the zone of tolerence, the prostitutes of El Paso continued to ply their trade as long as they abided the ever-changing edicts handed down by local officials.

---

[200] "Vowell Says Gaming Will Not Cease," *El Paso Herald*, El Paso, TX, September 25, 1926, 1.

The editors of the *El Paso Herald* penned an astute opinion piece that fit the city's relationship with the sex trade. Written in 1913, it easily can describe the thinking of El Paso residents in 1929 as well. In part it read, "The problem is as old as written history." The issue rarely found agreement between men and women let alone within the sexes. The editors recommended enacting commonsense laws to control the trade to benefit the good of the majority. It pointed out the problem stemmed from a lack of social and economic opportunity for the women involved in the trade. Prostitutes filled a need within a population that believed men's good health required frequent sexual intercourse. The editors concluded that the state could only fail because most considered the issue of prostitution a moral question and therefore it should not come under government authority.[201]

Generally, the upper and middle class El Paso population feared disrespectable women acting immorally, comingling and possibly influencing the respectable population. At the same time, with the closing of the Utah Street Reservation, less affluent people demanded that city powerbrokers keep the peace in their communities where most of these women could find affordable housing. This complaint crossed gender lines. This chapter broadened Ann Gabbert's argument that men retained a restricted vice district for financial reasons by including a review of why the medical community advocated for regulation. This chapter demonstrates that lust hardly factored into the equation because those needs could be met across the nearby border. Rather, men reached their conclusion based on the benefits they saw in restricting prostitutes and how they could profit. The next chapter will examine how women came to the same

[201] "A New Deal Anyhow," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, March 3, 1913, 6.

conclusion about commercial sex, reform, and the segregation of paid sexual activities and explores the factors that pushed some lower-class women of all races and ethnicities into the sex trade.

CHAPTER 3: EL PASO WOMEN RECLAIM THEIR OWN

In February 1922, El Paso theatregoers attended a performance of Robert H. McLaughlin's controversial play *The Eternal Magdalen* at the Texas Grand.[202] The plot deals with both the hypocrisy and compassion that rocked a community after a religious-based vice clean-up campaign resulted in the town disbanding its red-light-district, only to have crime escalate across the city and sex workers move into the residential areas of the rich and powerful. The review in the *El Paso Herald* reminded residents, "Let him that is not guilty of sin, be the first to cast a stone at her [sex worker]."[203] While characters in the play grappled with issues surrounding sexual morality, one actor opines, "If it had been possible to stop vice, it would have been stopped long ago; it will be stopped when you change human nature."[204] Later, the wife of a prominent man acknowledges to a reporter had her fortune and circumstances been less fortunate, "would I not have taken the same steps" as a prostitute?[205] Although the play was set in the fictional town of Edenburg, Illinois, it could well have been El Paso, Texas. The review placement in the *El Paso Herald* the following day on a page a with the banner "Social and Club News: Women's Interests" suggests many in the audience, including a contingent of women, related to the experience of prostitutes scattering into their neighborhoods after their city shuttered the red-light-district. They sought viable solutions to keep sex workers from conducting business near their homes. Moreover, a

---

[202] Robert H. McLaughlin, *The Eternal Magdalene* (New York: Samuel French Publishing, 1915), 1-116. https://archive.org/details/eternalmagdalene01mcla/page/n5.
[203] "Social Evil and Church Hypocrisy Boldly Treated In "The Magdalene," *El Paso Herald*, El Paso, TX, February 20, 1922, 4.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid.

review of their charity work suggests most philanthropic minded women considered education and the moral rehabilitation of young women a valuable tool to reduce the number of sex workers rather than the more common practice of trying to eradicate prostitution by rounding up and evicting prostitutes from a city's limits.[206] Although El Paso women never condoned sex labor, they considered those in the sex trade worthy of reform efforts.

This chapter argues most El Paso sex workers came to the trade due to financial desperation, not faulty morality. Plays such as *Eternal Magdalene* made a segment of women across class lines aware of the situation, and sympathetic women offered support and alternative sources of income for these "fallen" women. Furthermore, evidence suggests some affluent women supported a system of regulated prostitution in a zone of tolerance, a city designated area wherein trafficking in sex went undeterred by the police, to curtail sex work in their residential neighborhoods and to reduce their children's exposure to sexual solicitation. In particular, the city hired police matrons to deal exclusively with women's issues and ferret out prostitutes who roamed outside the zone of tolerance. Although tasked with apprehending prostitutes, matrons often served as proto-social workers and advocates for arrested sex workers and their families. A discussion of the socio-economics of El Paso and cross-class feminine reform efforts related to sex workers uncovers the deep rootedness of sex labor in the city, perhaps indicating many women agreed with those who considered the sex trade inevitable and cast their ballots for candidates whose platforms supported opportunity enhancement and

---

[206] Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19.

regulated prostitution over morality policing. This argument complicates the present historiography on prostitution and the women's reform movement.

The academic literature on sex laborers and the women who attempted to reform them is abundant and some pertains to El Paso or offers insight into its conundrum with the sex trade. First, this research extends into the twentieth century, Judith R. Wolkowitz's superb work detailing what drove women to sex work during the 1800s in England and builds on the acclaimed study by Anne M. Butler on early American West prostitution.[207] El Paso serves as an anomaly to Mara L. Keire's argument in *For Business and Pleasure.* Kiere argues that until the U.S. entered World War I, Americans grappled with where to locate red-light districts and not with prostitution prohibition.[208] Rather, El Pasoans, continued for decades following the war, to debate where to locate a zone of tolerance rather than demand city officials evict the sex workers. El Paso contrasts with Courtney Q. Shah's article "Against Their Own Weakness,'" where she argues that middle-class female reformers launched a successful campaign to extinguish the sex trade in San Antonio, TX. The El Paso female reform movement detailed in this study, tended to be more concerned with expanding opportunities or giving a second chance to white sex workers. Although historian David C. Humphrey suggested in his article, "Prostitution in Texas," that El Paso's large Hispanic population resulted in more prostitutes of Mexican ethnicity, particularly near Fort Bliss, he ignores the social and employment conditions that limited ethnic Mexicans' options.[209] Undeniably a higher

---

[207] Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980); Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).
[208] Mara L. Kiere, *For Business and Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010).
[209] David C. Humphrey, "Prostitution in Texas: From the 1830s to the 1960s," *East Texas Historical Journal* 3, no. 2 (March 1995), 29.

percentage of ethnic Mexican women worked in the sex trade, but Harrison's omission of discrimination and limited opportunity inaccurately continues the unfounded notion that women of color are more sexually available due to an innate heightened sexual promiscuity. Harrison also ignores the Anglo propensity to more frequently associate sexual disease and prostitution with Mexicanas, as city leaders pushed the zone of tolerance deeper into Segundo Barrio. The evidence indicates that low wages combined with ethnic or racial prejudice diminished employment opportunities not only for ethnic Mexicans and blacks, but also impoverished white women. As a result, in desperation they sold their bodies for income.

This chapter examines three segments of the female population in El Paso. It reviews the sex workers, the benevolent women who struggled to reform prostitutes, and the police matrons that worked within the demimonde. First, it delves into the employment and social struggles working-class women faced in El Paso and how this pushed some into sex work. Next, it considers why the women's reform community often took a pro-regulation stance to aid in rehabilitation efforts. Finally, the chapter explores the city's first policewomen and their reactions to those they worked with to bring into custody or treatment or those they persuaded to stay away from sex labor.

3.1 Sex Workers

Why women entered El Paso's sex trade can be linked to employment biases and the lack of financial opportunities rooted in gender, racism, and ethnicity. Locally, wages paid to women fell well below those earned by El Paso's men. Although El Paso's economy boomed, many of its industries, such as mining, smelting, railroads, and the military, depended exclusively on male laborers, leaving working-class women vying for

positions in light industry, such as fabric mills and laundries or as domestics. These positions paid significantly less than those dominated by men. According to J.A. Happer, principal at the real estate firm Latta & Happer, El Paso's commercial district business owners paid its employees approximately $3 million in monthly wages. But, the bulk of the payroll went to those enterprises employing males. To illustrate this, in 1912, the monthly wages at Global Mines reached $225,000, Douglas Smelters meted out $150,000 and Southern Pacific Trainmen spent $100,000 on monthly wages.[210] Furthermore, in 1912, Happer and a contingent from the Chamber successfully lobbied Washington to expand Fort Bliss, yet laundresses were the only jobs at the military base for women. And, many of those women took side jobs as prostitutes to supplement their low income.[211]

Even in industries traditionally utilizing female workers, wages in El Paso lagged behind those earned in other cities. The commercial laundry business, for instance, grew in El Paso, but wages stagnated. In 1919 a female laundress averaged a weekly wage of four dollars.[212] In contrast, that year the women employed at laundries in Galveston, Houston, or San Antonio brought home on average fourteen dollars per week. These paltry salaries made El Paso laundresses the lowest paid in Texas.[213]

---

[210] *El Paso's Protective Forces 1912,* MS003 El Paso Police Department Notes, Folder 2: Reports and Publications El Paso's Protective Forces, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas El Paso Library.
[211] *Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce 1912,* El Paso Vertical Files, Cement Industries-Chamber of Commerce, 22; Humphrey, "Prostitution in Texas, 28.
[212] Department of Commerce and Labor, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1912*, no. 35, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 311. https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/66/item/22020/toc/515414.
[213] Mario Garcia, "The Chicana in American History: The Mexican Women of El Paso, 1880-1920: A Case Study," *Pacific Historical Review* 49 (January 1, 1980), 330- 333.

One former El Paso prostitute detailed how money drove her into the sex trade in an interview given to author H. Gordon Frost for his oft cited book, *The Gentlemen's Club*.[214] Born in Mexico in 1903, this anonymous girl fled her dysfunctional family at age twelve, leaving behind a deceased mother, drunk father, and six siblings. Alone, the future sex worker arrived in El Paso because she heard rumors of "gringos" paying well and plentiful jobs. She hoped to send money to Mexico to help with raising her brothers and sisters. She secured a position as a housekeeper in El Paso, earning three dollars per week. After two years she resigned and became a waitress at Hendricks Sanitarium until she turned seventeen. To supplement her income there, she became a "taxi dancer," a female paid to dance with a different man for each song. Within a week the police raided the place and arrested the young woman, but she earned more money dancing than waitressing and decided to move into sex work in order to support her family in Mexico. In 1920, a Mill Street hotel hired her as a prostitute. She charged five dollars a trick, half of which she turned over to the hotel owner. After expenses, she pocketed about a dollar for each transaction, generally amounting to twenty-five dollars a night in profit. At age nineteen, she opened her own shop, "The Popular" which catered to soldiers. She recalled on pay days, servicemen lined the halls and stairs waiting their turn.[215]

The connection between low wages and the potential for women to become part of the sex trade was not lost on El Paso residents, particularly during the El Paso Laundry Strike of 1919. Despite tremendous odds, ethnic Mexican laundresses walked off the job,

---

[214] H. Gordon Frost, *The Gentlemen's Club: The Story of Prostitution in El Paso, 1890-1920* (El Paso: Mangan Books, 1983).
[215] Interview, Anonymous, In Frost, *Gentlemen's Club,* 203-207. The entirety of the interview can be read in Frost's book detailing her successful career which extended into the 1940s.

facing down hostile owners, city officials and organized male labor.[216] Because Mexican tradition dictated that upon marriage a wife remained homebound to care for her family, the strikers were predominantly single unmarried daughters or mothers without husbands.[217] According to the 1920 census, ethnic Mexican women accounted for 92% of El Paso laundry employees.[218]

Initially it fell to journalists from the *El Paso City and County Labor Advocate* to press the women's case to the employers and make the public aware of their plight. Utilizing the tropes espoused by the alarmist sexual hygienist movement connecting sexually transmitted diseases to prostitution, reporters pointed out that low wages pushed women into the sex trade. Writers penned articles that noted the empty talk and promise of vice "cleanup campaigns" pointing out the lack of employment options for women.[219] These Mexican single women earned an unlivable wage of $4 per week in 1919 while the national female wage averaged $13.55 per week.[220] Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that on average in 1919 a U. S. family spent annually $676 on food articles alone and families residing in Texas often exceeded that figure.[221]

The *Labor Advocate's* story of the Laundry Strike was read across the state and the nation. A Texas Welfare Commission (TWF) study on the strike argued that women who earned less than $1 per day abandoned their moral virtue and entered the sex trade

---

[216] Irene Ledesma, "Texas Newspapers and Chicana Workers' Activism, 1919-1974," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (October 1, 1993), 310.
[217] Garcia, "The Chicana in American History, 326.
[218] Ibid., 319.
[219] Ledesma, "Texas Newspapers and Chicana Workers,": 312-314.
[220] Paul H. Douglas, "Wages and Hours of Labor in 1919," *Journal of Political Economy* 29, no. 1 (1921): 78-80.
[221] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Retail Prices, 1913-December 1919: *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, no. 270, (February 1921), 69, 167. https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/161/item/5364?start_page=86

out of necessity. With the TWF study, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) pressed the strikers' case. The AFL sent C. N. Idar to address the El Paso Ministerial Alliance. He explained to the ministers that low wages and the strike had left the women little recourse but to find alternative income sources such as prostitution. These combined efforts galvanized community support and locals raised $3,000 to aid the strikers and persuaded church leaders to become involved by investigating wage issues.[222] The Laundry Strike's publicity revealed to El Paso residents that low skill level resulted in low wages leaving some women with few choices for survival other than the sex trade. But, a year after the strike, the local "Help Wanted-Female" advertisements in newspapers indicated the vast majority of jobs available for women still involved cooking, cleaning, or laundry. In one edition of the *El Paso Herald* various employers sought seven housekeepers, two office workers, one saleslady and one teacher. The disparity in compensation between the sexes continued, too. For example, one advertisement for a female domestic offered $50 per month while a railway sought firemen and brakemen trainees and offered wages of $250 per month.[223]

Aside from low wages and limited job opportunity, ethnic Mexican and African American women dealt with racial discrimination along the border, particularly after the 1910 Mexican Revolution when scores of Mexican refugees fled to U.S. border cities escaping violence and diseases.[224] Further, xenophobia skyrocketed after World War I. This can be readily discerned because newspaper help wanted advertisements revealed

---

[222] Ledesma, "Texas Newspapers and Chicana Workers," 312-314.
[223] "Help Wanted-Female," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, October 16, 1920, 22.
[224] Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 125-126.

the prospective employers' prejudices. In an April 1928 Help Wanted-Female column, only about 25% of the advertisements did not indicate a racial or ethnic preference.[225]

Furthermore, ethnic Mexican women suffered employment obstacles because of a language barrier. Many Anglo women wanted and needed to communicate instructions to their domestics in English. In one case, Mrs. Johnson, who resided at the McCoy Hotel and who advertised for a domestic excluded Spanish-speaking applicants. The advertisement read, "GOOD English speaking girl, colored referred, for general housework, one who can cook."[226] A more demanding woman on Wyoming Street advertised for a white childless English-speaking woman to clean her home.[227] This evidence suggests that working women, particularly the female ethnic Mexican population, encountered mounting employment roadblocks, which made the sex trade a viable option for some.

A precise ethnic or racial description of who entered El Paso's demimonde cannot be ascertained due to the underground nature of sex work making it difficult to assess its extent or uncover the stories of participants. Still, testimony during a 1913 grand jury investigation revealed that 397 women worked El Paso brothels and cribs that year.[228] But, how many went unnoticed cannot be determined. Most likely, the grand jury figure accurately portrayed those who worked within the still legal red-light district, the Utah Street Reservation but, probably missed most freelancers or street walkers. Since the city regulated operations within the vice district, a clearer picture can be gleaned about the sex workers within its confines. For example, it can be determined that El Paso madams

---

[225] "Help Wanted-Female," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, April 24, 1928, 8.
[226] "Help Wanted-Female," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, January 19, 1913, 10.
[227] "Wanted Help-Female," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, January 8, 1915, 14.
[228] Humphrey, "Prostitution in Texas," 29.

hired white women, some African Americans, and occasionally Mexican women as sex laborers but refused entry to Black and ethnic Mexican men. More frequently, women of color worked in the cribs, or small drab rooms that lined streets adjacent to the established district.[229] As the Great War approached and federal and military officials pressured the city to close the Utah Street Reservation, some prostitutes moved across the border to El Paso's twin city, Ciudad Juarez, to ply their trade and escape increased STD examinations and fines. Evading law enforcement suggests an inability to police the sex trade but also reveals the tenacity exhibited by prostitutes to get around paying fines and being subjected to examinations.[230] Increasingly, regulation cut into profits because a diagnosis of syphilis removed women from the sex scene entirely until they completed the required medical treatments.

Evidence presented here suggests that in the decade after the Great War, although the city closed its vice district, the Utah Street Reservation, the number of participants in the sex trade increased, spreading into residential areas and adapting to added restrictions imposed by city officials and technical innovations such as the telephone and automobile. As the automobile and telephone became more popular, these technologies also became vital tools of the sex trade after El Paso terminated the red-light district in 1917 and prostitutes attempted to avoid police detection. Many conducted business transactions with their clients over the phone, explaining the term "call girl."[231] Others struck up partnerships with taxi drivers who steered clients their way or took them to road houses

---

[229] Ibid.
[230] Catherine Christensen, "Mujeres Publicas: American Prostitutes in Baja California 1910-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (2013), 224.
[231] Humphrey, "Prostitution in Texas," 32-33.

on the outskirts of El Paso. At times they solicited men from the backseat of cabs.[232] With new mobility and not restricted within the perimeters of a vice district, prostitution moved into residential neighborhoods. Whereas the 1913 grand jury determined just under 400 sex workers existed in the city, after the vice district closed in 1917, evidence suggests their numbers increased. During Mayor Charles Davis' 1921 re-election campaign, the candidate touted 1,055 arrests for people soliciting sex, including, 323 men, and the rest women.[233] Eight months later, the Ku Klux Klan provided evidence that numerous brothels operated openly in El Paso and that at least 500 prostitutes resided there, many in the affluent residential neighborhoods boldly confronting potential clients.[234] As shown in chapter one, although El Paso had closed its red-light district, city officials sanctioned a zone of tolerance at first in the original vice district then moving it south of First Street then later to south of Seventh Street. Here sex workers continued to operate undeterred by law enforcement, yet often prostitutes took a chance for arrest and operated outside this designated area.

Now, prostitutes set up shop in rooming houses and hotels intermingling with those who considered themselves more respectable. Typically, a prostitute and her client would register at a hotel under the guise of being married.[235] To curb these evasive strategies, residents from all corners of El Paso lodged complaints with law enforcement, who investigated accusations of lewd behavior. For example, on February 27, 1922 an officer responded to a letter from an unknown accuser alleging the immoral behavior of

---

[232] Ibid.
[233] "Mayor Charles Davis Defends City Administration at Regular Meeting of League of Women Voters," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, March 4, 1921, 9.
[234] Shawn Lay, *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Perspective of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 76.
[235] "Anti-Vice Ordinance Is Passed, To Become Effective At Once; El Paso To Get Band Concerts," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, February 2. 1922, 10.

Francisca Pastrana who lived at the Denver Hotel. A week later, a complaint by a resident who reported illicit activity at 1111 Juarez Alley initiated an investigation, but the accusation was found to be unwarranted. Likewise, Father Macias, of Guardian Angel Church, brought law enforcement to the home of twelve year old Martina Iglecias, because the priest thought the young girl had slipped into sex work. Frequently, officers searched rooming houses where they might haul in four or five girls indicating the women had set up an unofficial brothel as happened on June 6, 1922 when a police officer arrested Consuela Saldivar, Chole Rodrigues, and Josephine Calderone all at 1009 7th Street.[236] These examples reveal that when the city closed its vice district, the women of the demimonde did not abandon the trade, rather they brought their business closer to their clients. As a result, men seeking sex no longer needed to travel to a cordoned area but could now access sex workers near their workplaces or even their homes and travelers might be solicitated as they departed the train depot.

Surely some women came to El Paso because Fort Bliss, mining or smelting operations, and the railroad promised a high concentration of men, but most came thinking the boomtown offered job opportunities. Once relocated, many women found otherwise and moved into commercial sex to help their families in Mexico or survive as abandoned, single, or widowed women, often with children. As cities across the nation took up the mantle of reform, El Paso's municipal leaders imposed restrictions on sex labor but did not prohibit its sex workers from conducting business. Therefore, like other successful business professionals, prostitutes adapted to changing conditions. The locations of arrests or investigations expose how they dodged detection by assuming false

[236] Virginia Mendez Logbook, February 25, 1922, MS003 El Paso Police Department Notes, Box 5, Folder 1: C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, UTEP Library. Hereafter, Mendez Logbook.

identities or scattering across the city. After the Great War and after women's suffrage, some of El Paso's women decided they would rehabilitate their city's commercial sex workers.

3.2 Reformers

The changing sexual geography did not go unnoticed by El Paso's women, including those in the upper and middle-classes who participated in assorted clubs or church organizations. Fundamentally, many El Paso women supported the continuation of a regulated sex trade in a determined area because they believed sex for hire was inevitable, thus it should be cordoned off from residential neighborhoods to protect their children being influenced or worse tempted by women peddling sex. This contradicted their counterparts in other cities who came to condemn restricted areas as "showplace[s] for sexual exhibition" that implied a social acceptance of sex for profit.[237] Throughout America, women actively opposed the reemergence of commercial sex districts, such as described by Courtney Shah in her San Antonio study.[238] Furthermore, El Paso's women avoided controversial social issues such as the topic of vice, and focused on family issues pertaining to education and newborn wellness. Until El Paso women gained full citizenship with suffrage in 1920, the overarching focus of philanthropic endeavors remained on children, often skirting topics pertaining to sexual morality. In the 1920s, social reformers established a Home for Girls but upheld El Paso's male hegemonic power to set restrictions on prostitution as detailed in Chapter 1. An analysis of El Paso

---

[237] Pamphlet, "The Community Prostitution and Venereal Disease: A Plan For Organized Action, The American Social Hygiene Association, 1919, no. 182, 30-31. Belle Christie Critchett Papers, 1915-1986, MS 386, C. L. Sonnichsen Department. The University of Texas at El Paso Library, Folder 21, Box 8. Hereafter, Critchett Papers.

[238] Courtney Q. Shah, "Against Their Own Weakness': Policing Sexuality and Women in San Antonio, Texas, during World War I," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no. 3 (2010): 458-482.

women's benevolent undertakings set in counterpoint to those in other cities clearly confirms women allowed El Paso's men to regulate commercial sex.

Prior to the Great War, across America women's groups supported the social hygienist movement and crusaded to extinguish sex for profit. In the American West, white middle-class Protestant women exploited gender distinctions to serve as the moral arbiters in emerging cities where men routinely exploited women. As reformers, they imposed rigidity, piety and purity on those they intended to rescue. Uplift efforts became less popular in cities as professional social workers became common, notions of Victorian social values declined in popularity, and downtrodden women continued to be rejected by general society despite completing social programs.[239] Yet, many El Paso reformers continued to impose white middle-class Protestant notions of sexual propriety on those they labeled other, mostly women of color, those who practiced other religions, or belonging to a lower socio-economic class.

During World War I, American white women became more active publicly. In San Antonio, Texas these female reformers condemned the sex trade through their religious organizations when church leaders warned congregants that a city's reputation for a flourishing prostitution district, such as San Antonio's vice area, the Sporting District, reflected poorly on all the respectable citizens. Stirred by preachers and federal social hygiene propaganda campaigns, church going women of San Antonio Texas and 500 San Antonio Women's Club members collaborated to demand city officials close the red-light district and evict sex workers from the city limits. Together the sex labor reformers demanded and played a powerful role in shuttering San Antonio's red-light-

[239] Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Motral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 33.

district. The women espoused a message of patriotic motherhood, positioning themselves as the natural protector of their daughters' moral values and sons' health. As such, they targeted girls of questionable character or behavior and prostitutes alike, labelling them sexual predators.[240] In comparison, El Paso women took a back seat, allowing men to lead the charge to round up sex workers who tested positive for a STD during the war years, but ignored healthy prostitutes.

Unlike San Antonio women, the El Paso womenfolk concerned themselves with more traditional wartime feminine projects. Many El Paso wives joined the American Red Cross (ARC) while others hosted teas or card parties to support ARC. Some women responded to federal calls to conserve food products including Edna J. Evans. Evans led a lecture series sponsored by *The El Paso Herald* to teach homemakers food conservation tactics to cut down on the use of meat, fats, sugar, and wheat so that the military would have access to more foodstuffs. Members of the local suffragist organization, the Equal Franchise League, hosted a community night of music to benefit soldiers' families. The younger wives met weekly at El Paso High School to attend a lecture series to help them understand current events and global issues. In addition, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) held monthly meetings during the war years, espousing the prevailing argument that liquor use consumed vital grain supplies from the military, yet this group made no mention of the "social evils" of sex work.[241]

---

[240] Shah, "Against Their Own Weakness,' 472, 480.

[241] Pamphlet, "El Paso Celebrates Her Women," (1982), El Paso Historical Society, Folder: El Paso Celebrates Her Women 1982; "El Paso Women Give Novel Torpedo Teas to Assist in Navy League Work," *The El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, March 4,1918, 8; Edna J. Evans, in Herald's Cooking School, Tells How to Conserve Food," *The El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, March 4, 1918, 8; "Equal Franchise League Is In Favor Of Community Singing," *The El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, July 9, 1917, 8; Dorothy B. Johnston, "Women Of The City Are No Longer Idling; All Their Clubs Are Now Doing Something Useful," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, October 15, 1917, 8; "Women's Organizations," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, March 3, 1917, 11.

Before and after the armistice in 1918, another area of philanthropic work that El Paso women pursued included the Americanization of the ethnic Mexican population with an unstated purpose of converting this mostly Catholic population to Protestantism. The reformers hoped converts would accept their sexual mores that rejected sex outside of marriage. Female Methodist missionaries came to El Paso to establish a settlement house in the Chihuahuita section of Segundo Barrio to foster Mexican assimilation and conversion to Protestantism. Many of the Mexicans who lived in this part of the city abutting the border were forced to take low paying jobs and due to a segregated education system, many remained unschooled.[242] From 1912 forward, the organization used funds collected from every state in the union to construct the facility including a fifty dollar donation that came from an unnamed Philadelphia brothel.[243] It was not unusual for brothel owners or madams and successful sex workers to contribute to benevolent organizations. Once open, the missionaries offered room and board to single Mexican women and formed a kindergarten.[244] After the war, the Methodists expanded the program to include classes in citizenship, English, and cooking, along with organizing a Boy Scout den and a Bible study. The women of this settlement house espoused the "melting pot" mission hoping to convert the mostly Mexican Catholic population to Protestantism leading converts to accept the moral values Protestants espoused.[245] After suffrage, El Paso's reforming women became increasing interested in preventing young

[242] Vicki Ruiz, "Dead Ends or Gold Mines?: Using Missionary Records in Mexican-American Women's History," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 12, no. 1 (1991), 35.
[243] Prostitutes often contributed to benevolent organizations and otherwise supported their community. This includes El Paso madame Gypsie Davenport who sheltered a young girl after being raped by her father. Frost, *The Gentlemen's Club,*128-131.
[244] "Another $10,000 Charity House Ready To Serve Chihuahuita," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, November 11, 1912.
[245] Ruiz, "Dead Ends or Gold Mines?" 37-38.

women from becoming sex laborers by indoctrinating them with Protestant literature, such as the Bible to promote sexual continence.

Houchan Settlement House offers a glimpse into the importance the female population placed on family, home and Protestant moral values to improve social conditions. Although the organization received the majority of its funding from sources outside El Paso, a review of newspaper articles suggests local women's groups donated in other ways. The First Methodist Women's Missionary Society hosted a Halloween party providing jack-o'-lanterns, refreshments, and games. The church's Queen Esther Circle hosted an Easter Egg Hunt for the girls enrolled in the sewing and cooking classes. Civic groups, such as the Suffrage League held a book drive to benefit the Houchan House.[246] The interaction with community women and the settlement house suggests an approval for this ministry, but more importantly, it offers a glimpse into the importance the female population placed on family, home and Protestant moral values to improve social conditions. As El Paso women saw the Mexican immigrant population increase, as factory work replaced local artisans, and as the Great War came and went, it can be argued that women's groups concluded that instilling Protestant religious values might steer marginalized women away from sexual temptations. One of El Paso's most accomplished reformers, Belle Christie Critchett reflected on the meaning of home: it "is the bulwark of our nation, the solid rock on which rests the hope and safety of our government, and without which our beloved land would sink into debauchery as black as that of the dark ages of history."[247] Critchett, the quintessential El Paso female volunteer

[246] "Women's Organizations," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, November 3, 1914, 5; "Parties," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, April 6, 1915, 6; "Organization Of A Suffrage League Of El Paso Women Desiring Ballot," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, January 13, 1915, 5.
[247] Essay, undated, Critchett Papers, Folder 5 "Home," Box 1, Series II.

and activist, came to the border city with her husband Otis A. Critchett in 1902. Following the death of their only child, she became a leader in civic and political issues. As a teacher, writer, and suffragist, Critchett promoted, among other things, the legal status of women, social responsibility, child welfare, prison reform and the rehabilitation of delinquent girls. The mourning mother served as Publicity Chairperson for the local Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.T.C.U.) and President of both the League of Women's Voters and the El Paso Home for Girls. In these positions she attended numerous national conferences and corresponded with state and federal officials firmly stating her positions. Her archival papers at the University of Texas-El Paso reveal that she, alongside other women in El Paso's reform community, tried to reconnect sex workers to the established community rather than ostracize them.[248]

Often serving as spokesperson for progressive women, Chritchett voiced the need for her fellow reformers to "take pity on God's neediest children," the prostitute or "delinquent" girl. She challenged judges to "realize that delinquents with venereal disease are people who cannot meet society's obligations and are therefore not criminals. These are maladapted women and judges must be trained to recognize them."[249] She argued that vagrant women who served prison time needed retaining. Therefore, Critchett considered it the duty of penal institutes, "to release prisoners who are trained so that they can be constructive citizens."[250] The voices of Critchett and other feminists in El Paso grew

[248] "Historical Sketch," Critchett Papers, www.utep.edu/library/_Files/docs/special-collections/finding-aids/MS386_belle_critchett.pdf.
[249] Prison leaflet, Critchett Papers, Folder 8 "The Delinquent Girl and Woman," National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor, New York, 1919, 58, Box 7, Series IV.
[250] Annual Report 1924-1925, Texas Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor, Austin, TX, Critchett Papers, Folder 13 "Prison Leaflets," Box 7, Series IV.

stronger when Texas became the ninth state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment June 28, 1919.[251] In mid-October, Texas women formed the Texas League of Women Voters, an arm of the national organization, and women reformers got right to work.[252]

Nationally, the activist grassroots organization provided the American electorate with public information to promote more informed voting and lobbied for social reform legislation pertaining to social justice and economic reform. The issues they intended to influence included child labor practices, public health, and education. Their top priority became supporting the passage of the Cable Act, which would give independent citizenship to women married to immigrants ineligible for citizenship. The League aspired to be non-partisan and did not support individual candidates or specific political ideologies although it did intend to influence the platforms of Democrats and Republicans by advocating women's issues.[253]

Like many arms of larger groups, the El Paso League of Women Voters followed the tenets of the national group but set as a primary mission the protection of all female workers, regardless of age or status. The League took to heart the words of social worker Mary McDearmon and Georgia M. Russ, the departmental social worker for the states of Texas, Arizona, Arkansas and Oklahoma, who espoused the importance of vocational training for women.[254] The social workers spoke of those engaged in the commercial sex

---

[251] Mackenzie Warren, "Today in Texas History: Women Get the Right to Vote," *Texas on the Potomac,* June 23, 2008. https://blog.chron.com/txpotomac/2008/06/today-in-texas-history-women-get-the-right-to-vote/.

[252] Dorothy D. DeMoss, "League of Women's Voters of Texas," *Texas State History Association.* https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/wel05.

[253] John Gizzi, "League of Women Voters: A Legacy of Liberal Issues and Causes," *Organization Trends,* Capital Research Center. file:///C:/Users/Primary%20User/Desktop/Thesis/League%20of%20Women%20Voters.pdf. League of Women Voters, "History." https://www.lwv.org/about-us/history#.XHmsmto6pLw.gmail.

[254] "Women In Meeting Vote To Cooperate In Work Of Eradicating Social Evil," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, February 20, 1920, 8.

industry and argued that given a chance most would choose socially acceptable career options. McDearmon and Russ proposed that El Paso would benefit if it established an industrial school within the venereal disease clinic which had continued to operate in the city to treat infected sex workers. VD patients could receive treatment and instruction concurrently to prepare them for re-entry into non-vice labor. Within a month, League members began to "reclaim their fallen sisters" by supporting a bill to erect a facility for delinquent girls and a juvenile court.[255] The women envisioned a place for vocational training, options for recreation to keep students from being drawn back into the lucrative sex trade, and expanded sex education program for youth and adults, and provided the latest STD scientific treatments.[256]

In early spring 1920, the League of Women Voters kicked off its initial planning sessions. Knowing little about commercial sex, other than its existence, Critchett and her fellow reformers set out to understand the underbelly of their city. The women tasked Dr. Alice B. Merchant with gathering data and statistics to familiarize themselves with local needs. They invited Dr. T. J. McCament who administrated the existing VD clinic to present a lecture to the membership on his work and the clinic's needs. He confirmed what the assembly had assumed, that of the 1400 women treated over the course of the clinic's existence, 900 entered the commercial sex trade out of financial duress. He emphasized the dire need for these women to gain access to vocational training. Dr.

---

[255] "The Forum," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, May 14, 1921, 6; "Women In Meeting Vote To Cooperate In Work Of Eradicating Social Evil," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, February 20, 1920, 8; "El Paso League of Women Voters Receives Much Praise From "The Woman Citizen," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, March 27, 1921, 13.

[256] Pamphlet, Critchett Papers, Folder 30 Publication and printed material-*A History and a Forecast,* The American Social Hygiene Society (about 1920s), 15, Box 10, Series V: Other Reform Issues.

McCament estimated that 60% of the women then in clinical treatment would leave sex work if they had the skills to earn a living wage.[257] Still, the doctor failed to realize that without improved employment options for working women in El Paso it remained impossible for many to earn enough to survive, especially those raising children. In the following months, the group received a commitment from an El Paso County home demonstrator to offer homemaking instruction free of charge at the proposed facility. The self-proclaimed reformers anticipated that selling the products the former prostitutes created would help defray some of the operating costs.[258] To their credit, the League gathered information and educated their membership on the commercial sex conditions in El Paso and energized the community by getting newspapers to report on their efforts. As a result, prostitution became an issue in the 1921 mayoral election.

The women cast their first ballots on April 12, 1921 when the city held elections for municipal offices and both parties sought the support of the newly enfranchised women. The Republicans put forth Scott White, the proprietor of a local pharmacy on Oregon Street, for mayor and the Democratic political machine, the Ring, selected incumbent mayor Charles Davis. Both parties knew the issue of reforming sex workers appealed to voting women. White trumpeted his status as a political outsider who promised to clean up the city's commercial sex, gambling and alcohol problem, which he blamed on Davis' corrupt municipal administration. Mayor Davis argued that increasing vagrancy charges could not be substantiated in one breath, while also bragging about law

[257] "League of Women Voters Plans to Collect Data Concerning Need for Detention Home for Girls," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, November 10, 1920, 10.

[258] Ibid.

enforcement's high arrest rates for solicitation in the next.[259] It might seem women would flock to the Republican candidate who proposed a strict prohibition on the sex trade; however, Davis understood the female electorates' determination to reclaim the women they considered "fallen sisters." Thus, the incumbent announced at a League of Women Voters meeting that the city had purchased a property, the Marr home, which would be used for the Home for Girls. He promised attendees that if re-elected the group's pet project would be the council's first item on his agenda. On election day 90% of eligible women cast their votes as opposed to 75% of men. The Ring won the election by sweeping all precincts.[260]

Despite Davis' pledge to put the Home for Girls at the top of his to-do-list, it took another three years for it to open in 1925 for the dual purpose of caring medically for young women and training them for a brighter future. Upon residents' arrival at the home, the young women, mostly between the ages of fourteen and twenty-three, underwent a demeaning but compulsory examination for STD infections. Matron Etta Davenport oversaw operations which included religious instruction to indoctrinate patient-students in Protestant moral values. The naive reformers thought these skills would give the Home's residents a chance to enter the legitimate labor force. They received occupational training in garment sewing and alterations. The American Red Cross taught classes in home healthcare. A little over two year after its inception,

---

[259] "G.O.P. OPENS CITY CAMPAIGN; PROMISES TO CLEAN UP, REDUCE TAX RATE AND TO ECONOMIZE," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, March 17. 1921, 4; "Mayor Charles Davis Defends City Administration at Regular Meeting of League of Women Voters," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, March 4, 1921, 9.

[260] "Complete Returns From The Vote In City Election," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, April 13, 1921, 4; H.L. Kiefer, "Charles Davis Is Reelected Mayor Of El Paso; Democrats Win By Vote of 5621 To 2279," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, April 13, 1921, 4.

Critchett proudly announced, "of the more than 60 girls who have been cared for by the El Paso Home for Girls during the two and a half years of its organization, approximately 85 percent have been reclaimed," from vice activities.[261]

While the facility could support fifteen residents, by 1926 it suffered declining enrollment. The women reformers considered this due to declining need rather than an unrealistic mission that failed to consider the lucrative nature of sex work. The income derived from commercial sex allowed prostitutes to support families in the U.S. or Mexico, for instance. As the population of El Paso soared it became increasingly difficult to find affordable housing. Moreover, others rejected the idea of toiling in laundries or as domestics for $4 dollars a week when they could earn $20 dollars a day, even more on the men's payday. On the other hand, the Home did experience limited success due in part to Critchett's passion, the League and the community writ large who offered their skills, donated furniture, equipment, and food to encourage the young women who other cities left behind or evicted. While the reformers never eradicated prostitution in El Paso, they continued to believe that they could significantly minimize it by implementing and lobbying for social policies that reduced the need for women to enter the sex trade in the first place.

As demonstrated by Mayor Davis' re-election in 1921, even given the opportunity to vote for a candidate who proposed to stamp out and evict sex workers from El Paso, most of the female electorate concluded that moral healing and vocational training offered the best chance to curb the sex trade and their maternal instincts moved them to

[261] "Officers Named For Girls' Home," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, September 17, 1925, 12; "Home For Girls To Extend Work," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, July 30, 1926, 8; Clippings, Critchett Papers, Folder 4 Clippings, 1 of 2 about 1921-1930, Box 8, Series V: Other reform issues.

resist eradicating prostitution and instead support regulating it. Davis and Democrats imposed a zone of tolerance which offered the League's many middle and upper-class women both an opportunity to reclaim women from the sex trade and offer them protection. Additionally, many reforming women clung to the late 19th century mentality that men required frequent sex and prostitutes protected them and their daughters from unwanted advances, particularly from Fort Bliss soldiers or the many travelers and business men passing through the city. Therefore, they supported local law enforcement efforts to rehabilitate rather than evict sex workers. Some of El Paso's working-class women considered sex workers capable of change, too. Among them, were numerous women of the city's law enforcement community.

3.3 Police Matrons

This section discusses the role of female police matrons and their role in regulating sex labor in El Paso. As early as 1845 the New York City Police Department employed women to serve as social workers. Over forty years later, in the 1890s, police departments gave the widows of fallen officers' jobs as police matrons, a pseudo death benefit. The first police matrons never patrolled the streets or had the authority to make arrests. That changed in 1910, when the Los Angeles Police Department swore in the nation's first "policewoman" with equal powers held by male officers. That woman, Alice Wells, held badge number One and worked alongside men patrolling the streets.[262] In El Paso, Ida Newton earned the honor of first police matron or policewoman on

[262] Betsey Brantner Smith, Police History: The evolution of women in American law enforcement," *Survival Insights* Policeone.com., June 30, 2015. https://www.policeone.com/police-history/articles/8634189-Police-History-The-evolution-of-women-in-American-law-enforcement/.; Mary Aldrich-Moodie, "Staking Out Their Domain: Women in the New York Police Department, 1890-1935" (PhD diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002).

November 15, 1917, the year the city shuttered its red-light district. Newton's hiring after the U.S. entered into World War I probably was a consequence of the draft that pulled significant numbers of young men out of the domestic work force and certainly reflected a growing concern within some circles that the city needed to curtail vice in El Paso if it wanted the federal government to select Fort Bliss as a training camp. Newton, a widow with five children, passed the civil service exam with especially high marks; took the job after years as an El Paso dressmaker, and served on the force for twenty-seven years.[263]

City officials, social services executives, and leaders of charitable organizations considered Ida Newton's hiring a positive act. Pointing to cities like Los Angeles and Dallas, Mrs. T. W. Lanier, the women's Liberty bond committeeperson, noted that, "practically everywhere that policewomen have been tried they have become permanent."[264] Emma Webster of the Rescue Home, J. B. Gwin, of Associated Charities, and Mrs. H. T. Bowie, president of the YWCA concurred, offering a variety of reasons.[265] These advocates based their endorsement on gendered tropes that set women as the moral authoritarians and guardians of society's proper deportment. Furthermore, they linked the lower-class with moral inferiority.[266] Therefore, when interviewed by a reporter from the *El Paso Herald,* the proponents noted that women handled issues surrounding family and children better or cited that a policewoman's presence at the station house might make male officers act more conscientious. The reporter wrote that

---

[263] Jane Pemberton, "Policewoman Was Homefront Helper," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, November 15, 1944, 7.
[264] "Police Women Valuable Aids to Police Force of Any City, Assert El Pasoans," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, October 23, 1917, 9.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Ibid.

"among certain classes of citizens," interacting with a female officer might elevate the moral values of those deemed less fortunate, referring to the working-class or impoverished women.[267] Those interviewed for the piece, drew attention to the lack of men available for police service in 1917, as many had enlisted or been drafted. Former police chief B. J. Zabriskie acknowledged rumors of sex workers being abused by police during raids, often dragged from their residences wearing nothing but the clothes on their backs. He hoped a female presence might temper that behavior.[268] During the 1920s, El Paso employed more female officers. Their primary responsibility was the prevention of prostitution through interaction with El Paso's female population and arresting sex workers they discovered operating outside the city's sanctioned zone of tolerance. Oftentimes, policewomen acted as social workers or family counselors to those they encountered.

Broadly, the El Paso Police Department followed the guidelines presented by the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) with respect to assignments given to its female officers, but the police department went further by assigning women to investigate and apprehend suspected vagrants.[269] According to ASHA recommendations, cities needed policewomen to protect youthful girls from the temptations of liquor, drugs, or pre-marital foreplay, which the association determined led to moral lapses.[270] In El Paso, police brass wanted female officers to pay keen attention to delinquents on the verge of

---

[267] Ibid.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Pamphlet, *The Community, Prostitution, and Venereal Disease, A Plan For Social Action,* American Social Hygiene Association, 1920, Critchett Papers, Folder 21 Publications and Printed Material, Box 8, Series V.
[270] Ibid., 23.

participating in vice activities, known as "border-line cases" by frequently patrolling places young people congregated. Additionally, ASHA considered it imperative that incidents of runaway children be investigated "with a view of proper disposition of each case."[271] Thus, El Paso policewomen expended copious amounts of time attempting to keep women from entering the sex trade as they patrolled city streets, hotels, and low rent rooming houses investigating citizen complaints of lewd behavior.

According to archival records at the University of Texas El Paso library, Virginia Varela Mendez served as one of El Paso's first policewomen between 1920-1924. The police department undoubtably hired her because of her bilingual skills and familiarity with the predominately Mexican southside of El Paso. Born in 1885, Mendez an El Paso native, grew up with two sisters, and in adulthood she had a daughter. Mendez attended Holy Family Catholic Church, became politically active in the fifth precinct and participated in other civic organizations. She received praise from her superiors for her extensive work in the ethnic Mexican community.[272]

Mendez's daily logbook, archived at the University of Texas El Paso provides invaluable information about female officers' routines, responsibilities and interactions in the community. This document does not contain detailed reports, rather it lists the investigations, arrests, patrols, and individuals Mendez came into contact with between February 25, 1922 and December 26, 1922.[273] The logbook notes the outcome and location of each of Mendez' encounters, information that can be used to draw conclusions

---

[271] Ibid.
[272] "Sister Vitalis Requiem Mass Scheduled," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, July 23, 1958, 17; "May Sell Beer During Voting," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, November 30, 1934, 1; "House Warming Launches New Clinic," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, July 25, 1935, 6; "Mrs. Mendez Gets Probation Post," *El Paso Herald,* March 2, 1927, 11.
[273] Mendez Logbook, February 25, 1922-December 26, 1922.

regarding prevention tactics within the police force, gender, race and ethnic relations, and the scattering of sex workers into the community at large after the red-light-district closed in 1917. It further indicates that this policewoman, and perhaps the others as well, felt a compassion for many sex workers she dealt with and went beyond the call of duty to help them and their families.[274] The logbook, used in conjunction with newspaper articles and oral histories, indicates that El Paso's policewomen or matrons hoped to prevent sex work, arrested those suspected of it, but acted charitably to both.

At first glance, one is struck by the number of runaway girls Mendez tried to locate and her success rate. During the 230 days Mendez made an entry in the journal, she hunted 122 times for runaways.[275] The number of runaways, however, far exceeded 122 because many fled in pairs or groups and Mendez investigated multiple cases on numerous days. For example, she searched for the thirteen and fourteen year-old Gomez sisters, Amelia and Anita, on May 18, 1922.[276] Mexican immigrant parents followed patriarchal traditions that linked lost virginity to lost honor. Parents viewed unchaperoned city streets as a threat. For Mendez, locating runaways saved young women from possibly falling into the lucrative sex trade for excitement or to survive. The young women, on the other hand, frequently thought their restrictive parents unbearable and chose to leave home, at times with a boyfriend. To illustrate, on March 9, the parents of sixteen year old Josie Montoya reported their daughter missing. Mendez located her at 3618 Medina with her lover. Mrs. Montoya "agreed to a marriage" to save Josie's

[274] Mendez Logbook, February 25, 1922.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid, May 18, 1922.

honor.[277] That same day she began an investigation into Beleu Reyes. The logbook entry noted that Beleu's parents had not seen her in eight days which suggests the young woman had wandered off previously.[278] The notation anomaly, further indicates that most parents contacted authorities in a timely fashion as no other entry gave days missing. Sometimes, upon hearing the girl's side of the story or investigating reports of parental misconduct, Mendez determined the parents unfit and took the child to Emma Webster, matron of the Rescue Home.[279]

For instance, following her interview with Maria Hernandez on March 9 at the Iturbide Hotel, Mendez removed the women's four children from her.[280] Then again in early May, Mendez located the fourteen year-old Sophia Levario. After interrogating the young women, she took her to the Rescue Home.[281] Without fail, runaway investigations led Mendez to search the marginalized southside of El Paso because runaways could hide in the alleys and blend in with the community at large. Mendez used her familiarity within the Mexican Segundo Barrio area of El Paso to find the runaway girls, often the day her parents reported her lost. For example, Mendez located sixteen year old Celistina Mansiques at 578 9th Street.[282] Five days later, she returned runaway Francis Ortega who she located at 416 Davis Street to her parents.[283] Again, on April 29, 1922 Mendez tracked down fifteen year-old Martina Ontiveros at 3405 Alameda Street.[284] After

[277] Ibid., March 9, 1922.
[278] Ibid., March 9, 1922.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid., March 9, 1922
[281] Ibid., May 2, 1922.
[282] Ibid., April 10, 1922.
[283] Ibid., April 15, 1922.
[284] Ibid., April 29, 1922.

smoothing ruffled feathers between the parents and their daughters, she left most in the home.[285] Generally, the runaway investigations ended in this way.

It is impossible to underestimate the importance city officials attached to runaway cases. Leaders considered these young women ripe candidates for commercial sex and male exploitation as they tried to survive on the streets alone. In late June, the *El Paso Herald* published an article linking immigrants from countries where patriarchal tradition thrived to increased runaway numbers.[286] The author interviewed Mrs. W. G. Butterfield, of the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Bureau of Missing Persons, who argued that in patriarchal families, parents forced teenage children into the labor market then demanded they turn over their paychecks for the family's benefit. According to Butterfield, "many come from countries where women and children are beasts of burden."[287] Expending valuable resources on a bilingual female officer to investigate runaways with Spanish surnames, indicates an assumption by the police department of vulnerability in the ethnic Mexican female population. Of Mendez' runaway investigations, only two had non-Spanish surnames.[288] It can be reasonably assumed that the police department was keenly aware of the need to service the ethnic Mexican residents by having a Spanish-speaking policewoman to assist families, but also to protect the Anglo community from ethnic Mexican runaways they deemed potential prostitutes and thus VD carriers. Virginia Mendez's numerous arrest records for vagrancy occurred outside the Mexican

[285] Ibid.
[286] Louise Landis, "Delinquency Is Caused Not So Much By Parties As By Lack Of Pleasure," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, June 28, 1922, 1.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Mendez Logbook, February 25, 1922-December 26, 1922.

neighborhood and in the commercial district where white men worked and socialized (see Figures 7,8.9).[289]

According to El Paso's first policewoman, Ida Newton, experience taught her that "most runaways left home seeking excitement or to flee strict parenting."[290] Alone on the streets, facing poverty, some resorted to prostitution out of desperation. Once involved in the sex trade, Newton said, "many girls who have been found in South El Paso rooming houses absolutely refuse to accept a lifting hand … some are just plain ornery."[291] Newton claimed that two types of young women ran away from home, the ones who, "have a morbid curiosity of the white lights [the demimonde], and they want to taste of experience … other girls run away with no evil intention in their heart, but gradually, step by step, they fall by the wayside."[292] Newton viewed post World War I prostitution as a "reaction of war conditions" as women gained "a greater feeling of independence, and now if they go into the white lights, it is usually their own fault."[293] She estimated that 80% of runaways willfully opted into the lucrative sex trade rather than through male coercion, often setting up shop close to the Mexican border in El Paso's southside rooming houses.[294] Newton made a good point. Whether they were locals, Mexican immigrants, or interstate runaways, some young women came to boomtowns like El Paso to escape small towns they considered boring. Not able to fend for themselves they turned to the lucrative sex trade. Money drew women to sex work. The potential for

---

[289] Ibid.
[290] "Girls No Longer Are "Led Astray" Police Matron Absolves Mere Men," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, July 19, 1929, 21.
[291] Ibid.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Ibid.

higher wages kept them from considering working in the traditional labor market, where as previously noted, women's compensation lagged well behind other Texas cities.

Additionally, policewomen patrolled venues frequented by young women to break up intimate contact with men and dissuade the use of drugs and alcohol easily assessable in El Paso or across the border in Juarez. For instance, Mendez wandered through dark "picture shows" where young people escaped the watchful eyes of adults or walked through the Cotillion Dance Hall separating couples who she found doing the newly in vogue "cheek to cheek" dancing.[295] Quite often, Mendez and her colleague Kate Farnham, staked out the Sante Fe International Bridge to observe girls and women returning from Juarez cabarets and jazz bars. During the school year these border crossing women tended to be working age women, but during summer break, the officers encountered teenage girls who had told parents they had gone to a movie. In Juarez bars and resorts, opium, cocaine and morphine could be easily found and consumed. Farnham said, "girls who yesterday were demure schoolgirls, chewing their pencils over algebra problems today are confirmed 'snowbirds.' [cocaine users]"[296] Farnham and Mendez approached women returning from Juarez drinking establishments to warn them that drinking alcohol or drug use led to moral lapses. Overtime, female revelers contacted Farnham to ask about the safety of particular bars.[297] Farnham prided herself on not arresting girls, even after checking their permits and finding them underage, contending, "there is no girl so bad that good cannot be found in her if proper influence is brought to

[295] Mendez Logbook, February 25, 1922.
[296] "Policewoman Works Hard Trying To Save Women And Girls From Prison," *El Paso Herald,* April 24, 1923, 16.
[297] "El Paso Women In The Public's Eye," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, October 6, 1921, 13.

bear."[298] The matrons' bridge reconnaissance became more important during Prohibition, as the El Paso drinking crowd or "sports" and American vice tourists crossed into Mexico seeking liquor, making women more vulnerable to exploitation.

In spite of prevention, as Mendez patrolled southside rooming houses, hotels, and streets, she encountered situations that required her to arrest sex workers. On February 25, the first date entered in her logbook, she listed the arrest of seven women accused of solicitation at four different locations. Mendez apprehended two each at the Lenox and Denver hotels, two at the rooming house at 410 Montana Street, and one at 600 Hilgado Alley (see Figure 6). Customarily Mendez took the accused to the courthouse where a judge determined the necessity of an STD test. Those infected went to the VD clinic. The quantity of solicitation arrests made in pairs and groups indicates that most El Paso sex workers preferred to operate with at least one partner.[299]

[298] Ibid.
[299] Mendez Logbook, February 25, 1922-December 26, 1922.

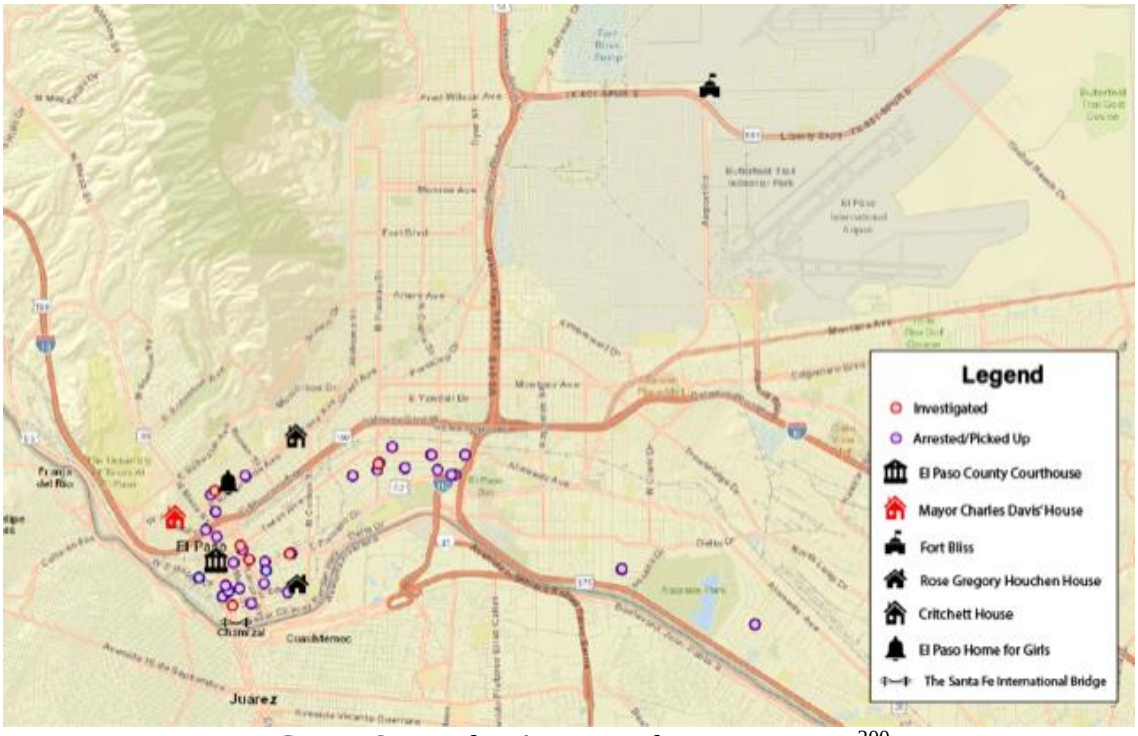

FIGURE 6: Mendez Arrests and Investigations.[300]

Mapping out Mendez's arrests and investigations confirmed residents' fears that prostitutes had scattered across their city had merit. Sex workers had invaded their respectable neighborhoods after the city closed the red-light-district in 1917. For example, Mendez alone arrested fifteen prostitutes within one mile of Mayor Charles Davis' home (see Figure 7). The policewoman conducted nine arrests or investigations within one mile of the reformer Belle Christie Critchett's residence (see Figure 8). Davis and Critchett lived alongside some of the El Paso most influential residents. Moreover,

[300] Source: Nancy Battista, Samuel Holden, compiled from Mendez Logbook, El Paso City Directory 1922 UTEP to the Portal to Texas History UNT Libraries. https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth285900/., Online version available at ArcGIS Online, "Map 3 Mendez Logbook. https://www.arcgis.com/home/signin.html?returnUrl=https%3A//www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html%3Fwebmap%3De1095ad784104f8a9e33b44216a2d849.

sex workers conducted business within sight of the courthouse. Mendez arrested eighteen and investigated four within one square mile of the courthouse, facility considered the center of the city (see Figure 9).[301]

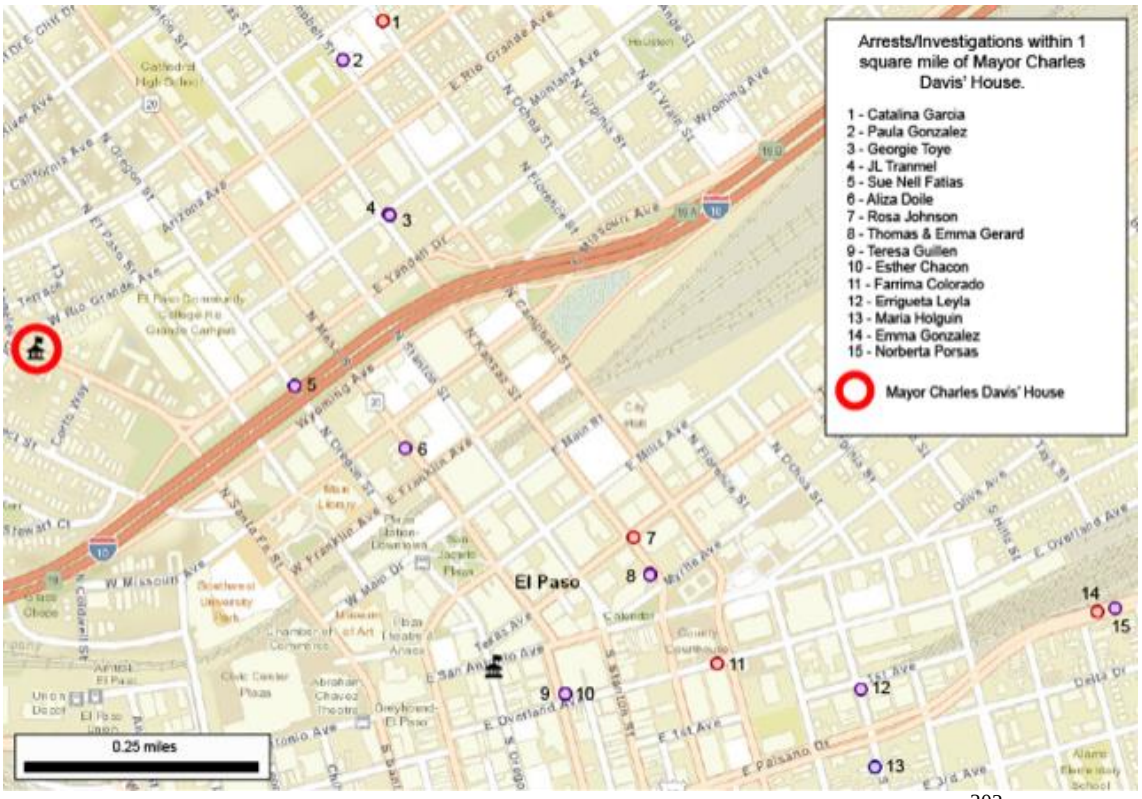

FIGURE 7: Arrests and Investigations Near Mayor Davis Home.[302]

[302] Source: Nancy Battista, Samuel Holden, compiled from Mendez Logbook, El Paso City Directory 1922 UTEP to the Portal to Texas History UNT Libraries. https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth285900/.

FIGURE 8: Arrests and Investigations Near Critchett Home.[303]

FIGURE 9: Arrests and Investigations Near El Paso County Courthouse.[304]

[303] Source: Nancy Battista, Samuel Holden, compiled from Mendez Logbook, El Paso City Directory 1922 UTEP to the Portal to Texas History UNT Libraries. https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth285900/.

[304] Source: Nancy Battista, Samuel Holden, compiled from Mendez Logbook, El Paso City Directory 1922 UTEP to the Portal to Texas History UNT Libraries. https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth285900/.

As a result of this, Virginia Mendez followed citizen tips which came to the department in the form of letters or telegrams detailing observations about various women suspected of soliciting sex on neighborhood streets. At other times, Mendez used her knowledge of the area and trolled hotels such as the Denver, Lenox and Fairmont and rooming houses, known hangouts for those in the commercial sex industry.[305] One night she dragged in Emma and C. A. Gerard, G.E. Meek, and "their people" all prostituting out of the Worth Hotel.[306] This scattering and proximity into residential neighborhoods underscored the need to police outside the zone of tolerance.

Although Mendez typically indicated an address of an arrest or investigation in her logbook, she rarely jotted down personal detail about suspects. Therefore, scant clues must be gleaned from the logbook. For example, Mendez worked exclusively with females as she arrested Eusebio Megia for rape and removed two boys from abusive homes.[307] Mendez never indicated race unless dealing with Black women. On April 28, 1922 she recorded the arrest of "4 nigger women" and again on March 16 she identified the target of an investigation as a "Nigger woman."[308] She demonstrated her racism when she failed to put the Black women's names in her logbook even though throughout her journal she included both a first and last name in all but a few incidences. Mendez, however, apprehended or investigated many more ethnic Mexican women for prostitution than those of other racial backgrounds. Of the fifty-one women she took into custody,

[305] Mendez Logbook, February 25, 1922-December 26, 1922.
[306] Mendez Logbook, September 1, 1922.
[307] Mendez Logbook, April 22, 1922, April 28, 1922.
[308] Mendez Logbook, April 28, 1922, March 16, 1922.

nearly 65% had Spanish surnames.[309] Despite her hectic routine she took time to help many she brought into custody.

A matron's job description included police and social work. Reviewing the pages written in Mendez' hand, one is struck by the number of times she aided the women who ended up in the venereal disease clinic. From her description, it can be determined many of these VD patients had children at home or had not been allowed time to gather their belongings before their incarceration and forced treatments, as previously indicated by former police chief B. J. Zabriskie. Time and again she went to prostitutes' homes to collect clothes for them or escorted them to gather their belongings. On occasion, the officer took women home to visit with their young children.[310] One day she escorted a young woman to the notary to conduct business, in another instance she took someone to the Mexican Consul.[311] Mendez and other policewomen frequently offered valuable assistance to the women accused and convicted of sex work.

Aside from Virginia Mendez other police matrons, including Callie Fairley, lent support to the women they arrested for prostitution during the decade after World War I. Matron Fairley, known throughout the El Paso business community and in the police station as "The Moocher" for her ceaseless efforts to collect donations for incarcerated prostitutes and runaways. When she came around, men would whisper, "Look out here comes the Moocher."[312] Fairley tiered her donation requests, asking for a dollar from police officers but suggesting more from business leaders and city or county officials

---

[309] Mendez Logbook, February 25, 1922-December 26, 1922.
[310] Mendez Logbook, March 23, 1922, April 6, 1922, April 11, 1922, May 26, 1922, June 1, 1922, July 8,1922, August 2, 1922, August 8, 1922, August 16, 1922, August 18, 1922, August 24, 1922, September 6, 1922, September 13, 1922, September 16, 1922, September 23, 1922, October 21, 1922.
[311] Mendez Logbook, April 26, 1922, December 22. 1922.
[312] Rachel Murphree, "Borderlands: The Moocher: Callie Fairley, First Woman Vice Detective in El Paso 27 (2009) El Paso Community College Libraries. http://epcc.libguides.com/c.php?g=7542758p=5406012.

who sent their money to Fairley's superiors earmarked for "the Moocher." Fairley teamed up with "Mother Warren," a Salvation Army worker to do what no El Paso social service agency did - help prostitutes and runaways in financial straits. During their workdays, both women saw runaways from across the country pour into El Paso, many of the women turned to sex work to survive. Fairley said many, "were not the type of girls that you would lock up."[313] She took the donations and purchased return fares home, food, and coffee for these women. Fairley recalled, Mother Warren, "paid for a room in one our downtown hotels by the month," when she found "a girl that I felt was worth the while, I would put her in that hotel room and she would have a meal ticket till we could raise enough money to send her home."[314] Clearly, determining who Fairley deemed worthy connotes a sense of self-superiority and racial preferences. It can be hypothesized that because Texas hotels were segregated, Fairley assisted exclusively white women. In her oral history interview, however, she noted that "the trying time was when the government decided to have segregation," indicating these restrictions tightened the circle around those she could help and dismay about that.[315]

Not to diminish the work done by middle and upper-class women such as Belle Christie Critchett, the League of Women Voters, or the Methodist missionaries at the Houchan Settlement House, but the evidence presented in this thesis suggests that working-class women like the cadre of police women and social workers like Mother Warren who offered practical assistance to women entangled in the sex trade allowed

---

[313]Transcript, Callie Fairley, "Oral History: Law Enforcement in El Paso," October 24, 1963, *Password,* 42, no. 1(El Paso, El Paso Historical Society, Spring 1977), 4-5.
[314] Ibid. The room most probably was in the Phoenix Hotel where newspaper accounts indicates Warren had put others during this time period. See for example, "Delaney's Auto Crash Probed," *El Paso Times,* El Paso, TX, February 25, 1925, 2.
[315] Ibid.

prostitutes and their families and children much needed assistance especially when they found themselves confined to jail or the VD clinic. The police matrons were working mothers themselves and they had to set aside moralizing to tap into their maternal instincts to give aid to young women in desperate situations. Similar to the middle-class reformers, Fairley considered herself fortunate when after helping girls "in trouble" she discovered they had married and lived a life deemed respectable by society's standards.

Finally, Kate Farnham, Mendez' sometime partner whose genuine goodwill toward sex workers, mothers, and daughters stemmed from her contention, "that I can exercise a greater influence over girls by treating them like they are humans not by assuming a superior or authoritarian air," and highlights the importance of women in police work.[316] She confined her efforts to young girls because "so many … do imprudent things without realizing it."[317] Farnham acquainted herself with many of El Paso's young women to enable herself to better relate to them when she encountered them in vice related situations. Mothers came to know her when she toted a daughter home intoxicated. On such occasions, Farnham cautioned mothers about giving youngsters too much liberty. She coaxed the older women to find ways to interact with their daughters to foster greater communication. Farnham considered modern parenting the root of moral lapse.[318]

The policewomen who patrolled the trenches where sex work flourished became best suited to assist sex workers. Female officers came to understand and feel compassion for women driven to sell their bodies so they could feed themselves and their families.

---

[316] "El Paso Women In The Public's Eye," *El Paso Herald,* El Paso, TX, October 6, 1921, 13.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid.

Women like Ida Newton, Virginia Mendez, Callie Fairley and Kate Farnham must have concluded that practical assistance helped sex workers more than the lofty time consuming education ambitions undertaken by the middle and upper-class women in their city. In their profession, police matrons charged with conducting vice investigations, witnessed daily the revolving door of sex workers and the widespread incidence of prostitution. Much like their male counterparts at the police department, they considered the zone of tolerance a viable option for corralling sex workers in an effort to control the spread of STDs and protecting young women from experimenting with sex.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

El Paso's relationship with prostitution between 1910 and the onset of World War I mirrored that of most other American cities, especially those in the American West. Red-light districts, brandishing catchy names, flourished because famous gunslingers, civic and business leaders, along with working-class men patronized the numerous well-appointed brothels or dim cribs to mingle with women who earned their living selling sex. After a test to detect syphilis became available in 1906, American city fathers partnered with the medical community in their respective municipalities to contain the spread of venereal diseases by expanding the regulations pertaining to prostitutes. El Paso followed suit. After all, El Paso business leaders wanted to protect the health of their families but also continue to collect rent payments from the buildings they owned in the red-light district. Additionally, the proprietors of hotels, shops, and restaurants reaped large profits from conventioneers whose associates chose El Paso in part because the vice district had a reputation as one of the best in Texas, if not the West. Similar to other American cities, men set the parameters and regulated the vice district in El Paso as their women tended to matters in the private sphere. This cozy relationship between the sex trade and American power brokers stalled when the U.S. entered the Great War, as cities shuttered their vice districts in a fit of moral and patriotic fever. El Paso, however, only closed its vice district after being pressured by the federal government. Military officials dangled the possibility of making El Paso's Fort Bliss a recruit training camp if the city complied with a vice clean-up campaign. El Paso made lackluster attempts, but a Fort Bliss training camp never materialized. Unlike other U.S. cities, soon after the armistice

in 1918, the city council took the provocative move of delineating and sanctioning a zone of tolerance within which prostitutes went undeterred by law enforcement.

At first glance, the story of El Paso's prostitution may appear to be one merely defined by the city's proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border, a line drawn to separate two nations, but where Mexican and American inhabitants interacted despite being divided by their respective governments. On deeper examination, the people's support for regulated prostitution reflected shifting social constructions occurring between 1910-1929 as gender roles shifted. Women more frequently crossed a line drawn by men, as they entered the public sphere and later influenced policy for the first time after earning the right to vote. The Great War set the stage for women to find a place in some exclusively male occupations, like police work. Even though the main task of police matrons became containing the incidence of prostitution, they took the opportunity to define their role as investigators and proto-social workers. Equally important, men with power frequently jumped a line between business and politics, a situation that colored their decisions. Likewise, sex workers took advantage of modernizing shifts, socially or technologically, to redress how they operated. The majority of people in El Paso held firm to the position that prostitution's prohibition was a fools' errand, therefore they continued to elect those who kept the status quo and focused on prevention, and regulation to curb the spread of STDs, while upholding a zone of tolerance within their own city.

Those who supported regulated prostitution in a clearly outlined geographic area argued that it protected the community from exposure to lewd behavior, but also worked to prevent the detrimental aspects associated with illicit sex, such as illegal alcohol consumption, illicit gambling, and the spread of sexually transmitted disease. In other

American cities, residents embraced a different path, believing regulating vice signaled the acceptance of the sexual double standard and foreshadowed the ultimate moral degradation of society as these restricted areas provided men greater opportunity to partake in extra-marital or pre-marital sexual encounters. In contrast, the majority of El Pasoans concluded that men innately required sex, therefore regulating and surveilling temptresses kept men less vulnerable to solicitation in everyday situations and residential areas. Even El Paso's medical community sided with regulation, arguing it allowed them to conduct exams and give treatments to sex workers they considered prone to being infected with diseases.

Accepting men's sexual desires influenced the manner in which middle-class reformers struggled with prostitutes. Women reacted similarly to that of the well-to-do widow in the play *The Eternal Magdalene,* questioning how poverty might determine their own choices. Therefore, women reformers opted to encourage sex workers to emulate their Protestant moral values and hoped to train them for socially acceptable occupational pursuits. Unlike the men and women across America who participated in the jailing and evicting of prostitutes, El Pasoans collected donations or otherwise aided sex workers, to find their way back home or into what they considered respectable society.

No city completely eradicated sex trafficking. Most had at least one weak link, but El Paso had three. The American Social Hygiene Association noted that prostitution flourished due to active or passive tolerance in the ranks of law enforcement.[319] In El Paso, the police routinely turned a blind eye on prostitution outside the restricted zone on top of actively fraternizing with sex workers. Secondly, ASHA blamed city officials for

[319] Pamphlet, "The Community Prostitution and Venereal Disease, The Social Hygiene Association. Critchett Papers, Box 8 Folder 21, 15.

the existence of prostitution in America because leaders either overtly or covertly accepted sex trafficking.[320] Time and again, El Paso reinstated a restricted zone and officials instructed peace officers to leave undisturbed the prostitutes operating in that area while placing meaningless restrictions on sex workers. Finally, ASHA argued prostitution only existed with citizen approval.[321] Because El Pasoans viewed men's sexual proclivity natural, outrage over commercial sex never reached the ballot box, therefore city authorities failed to put the squeeze on the police department demanding the situation be addressed. Voters continued to elect men who failed to make commercial sex unprofitable for the patrons that kept the trade alive. City leaders assessed minimal monetary fines on sex workers who responded by turning more tricks. Thus, those fines effectively stimulated the trade. The fining system established by the city council essentially turned the municipal government into a "super pimp," as these lucrative payments became indispensable to the city budget.[322] For their part, residents resisted state intervention in matters of sex because they considered them to be moral not legal matters. And, perhaps this deeply held conviction underscores why the men and women of El Paso supported a system of regulated prostitution. Moving forward from 1916, most cities closed their red-light districts, although a smattering of them re-opened. By permitting prostitutes to operate undeterred in the zone of tolerance, El Paso, for all practical purposes can be considered one of the few.

[320] Ibid.
[321] Ibid.
[322] Ibid., 14.

REFERENCES

Primary Sources

Archival Collections

Critchett, Belle Christie Papers. 1915-1986. MS 386. C. L. Sonnichisen Special Collections Department. University of Texas at El Paso Library.

"El Paso Celebrates Her Women." 1982. El Paso Historical Society.

El Paso County Records Criminal Cases. 1873-1920. MS 132. C. L. Sonnichisen Special Collections Department. University of Texas at El Paso Library.

El Paso Police Department Notes. MS 003. C. L. Sonnichisen Special Collections Department. University of Texas at El Paso Library.

EPVF. Cement Industry-Chamber of Commerce Publications. El Paso Public Library.

Lea, Tom Papers. 1875-2007. MS 476. C. L. Sonnichisen Special Collections Department. University of Texas at El Paso Library.

Newspapers

El Paso Evening Post, 1928.

El Paso Herald, 1910, 1912, 1913, 1915, 1917, 1918, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1929.

El Paso Herald-Post, 1943.

El Paso Post, 1929.

El Paso Times, 1912, 1919, 1922, 1925, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1987.

Johnston, Dorothy B. "Women Of The City Are No Longer Idling; All Their Clubs Are Now Doing Something Useful." *El Paso Herald,* October 15, 1917.

Landis, Louise. "Delinquency Is Caused Not So Much By Parties As By Lack Of Pleasure." *El Paso Herald,* June 28, 1922.

Prieto, N. B. y. "Thinking Out Loud: Twin City Vice." *El Paso Evening Post,* November 20, 1929.

White, Owen. “Juarez, A Gaudy Siren, Winks At El Paso.” *New York Times,* January 11, 1925, SM2.

Government Sources

American Distiller Opens Plant Below Border, Introduces New Process To Age Certain Beverages Banned in U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 1931. No sound film. Accessed April 5, 2019. https://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php/Juarez,_Mexico_-_American_Distiller_Opens_Plant_Below_Border,_Introduces_New_Process_to_Age_Certain_Beverages_Banned_in_U.S *American Distiller Opens Plant Below Border, Introduces New Process To Age Certain Beverages Banned in U.S.* National Archives and Records Administration, 1931. No sound film. https://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php/Juarez,_Mexico_-_American_Distiller_Opens_Plant_Below_Border,_Introduces_New_Process_to_Age_Certain_Beverages_Banned_in_U.S

Baker, Newton D. Newton D. Baker to Governors of all states and the State Councils of Defense, Washington, D.C., May 26, 1917. In *Social Hygiene*, III, no. 1. Accessed April 5, 2019. https://books.google.com/books?id=ZcUtAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA433&dq=Newton+D.+Baker+to+Governors+of+all+states+and+the+State+Councils+of+Defense,+May+26,+1917&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjY7rr4__rgAhXMMd8KHXczCKsQ6AEIKjAA#v=onepage&q=Newton%20D.%20Baker%20to%20Governors%20of%20all%20states%20and%20the%20State%20Councils%20of%20Defense%2C%20May%2026%2C%201917&f=false.

Department of Commerce and Labor. *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1912,* no. 35. Accessed April 5, 2019. http://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/66/item/22020/toc/515414.

Dietzler, Mary Macey. The United States Social Hygiene Board. *The Campaign of the United States Government Against Venereal Disease.* June 1922.

Garamone, Jim. “World War I: Building the American Military,” U. S. Department of Defense, April 3, 2017. Accessed April 5, 2019. https://www.army.mil/article/185229/world_war_i_building_the_american_military.

Library of Congress *Prints & Photographs Online Catalogue.* Accessed April 5, 2019. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2014698408/.

U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1921*. “Population of Principle Cities.” https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1922/compendia/statab/44ed.html. Accessed April 5, 2019.

US Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board. GPO 1920.

Websites

ArcGIS.com. Accessed April 5, 2019. https://www.arcgis.com/index.html.

Ambar, Saladin. "Woodrow Wilson Domestic Affairs." UVA Miller Center. Accessed April 5, 2019. https://millercenter.org/president/wilson/domestic-affairs.

DeMoss, Dorothy B. "League of Women Voters of Texas." *Texas State History Association.* Accessed April 5, 2019. https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/wel05.

El Paso Population. World Population Review. Accessed April 5, 2019. http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/el-paso-population/.

Gizzi, John. "League of Women Voters: A Legacy of Liberal Issues and Causes." *Organization Trends.* Accessed April 5, 2019. file:///C:/Users/Primary%20User/Desktop/Thesis/League%20of%20Women%20Voters.pdf.

Hagman, Clinton P. "Kelly, Charles Edgar." *Handbook of Texas Online.* Accessed April 5, 2019. https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fke76.

"Historic El Paso County Population: 1850-Present. The County Information Program, Texas Association of Counties. Accessed April 5, 2019. http://www.txcip.org/tac/census/hist.php?FIPS=48141.

"History." League of Women Voters. Accessed April 5, 2019. https://www.lwv.org/about-us/history#.XHmsmto6pLw.gmail.

McLaughlin, Robert H. *The Eternal Magdalene.* Accessed April 5, 2019. https://archive.org/details/eternalmagdalene01mcla/page/n5.

Menchaca, Celeste. "Crossing the Line: A History of Medical Inspection at the Border." Aired June 24, 2014. KCET. Accessed April 5, 2019. https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/crossing-the-line-a-history-of-medical-inspection-at-the-border.

Minnick, Fred. "Cross Border Bourbon." *Whiskey Magazine.* Accessed April 5, 2019. http://whiskymag.com/story/cross-border-bourbon.

Smith, Betsey Brantner. "Police History: The evolution of women in American law enforcement." *Survival Insights,* June 30, 2015. Accessed April 5, 2019. Ahttps://www.policeone.com/police-history/articles/8634189-Police-History-The-evolution-of-women-in-American-law-enforcement/.

The Military Standard. "Fort Bliss, Texas." Accessed April 5, 2019. http://www.themilitarystandard.com/army_base/tx/fort_bliss.php.

Timmons, W. H. "El Paso, Texas." *Handbook of Texas Online.* Accessed April 5, 2019. http://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hde01.

Secondary Sources

Beardsley, Edward H. "Allied Against Sin: American and Bristish Responses To Venereal Disease in World War I." *Medical History* 20, no. 2 (April 1976): 189-202.

Bistow, Nancy K. *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering during the Great War.* New York: New York University Press, 1996.

Brandt, Allan M. *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease Since the 1980s Expanded Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Butler, Anne M. *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985.

Capozzola, Christopher. *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Cepeda Alice and Kathryn M. Nowotny. "A Border Context of Violence: Mexican Female Sex Workers on the U.S.-Mexico Border." *Violence Against Women* 20, no. 12 (November 2014): 1506-1531.

Christensen, Catherine. "American Prostitutes in Baja California, 1910-1930." *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (May 2013): 215-247.

Christian, Garna L. "Newton Baker's War On El Paso Vice." *Red River Valley Historical Review* 5, no. 2 (1980): 55-67.

Christian, Garna L. "Sword and Plowshare: The Symbiotic Development of Fort Bliss and El Paso, 1849-1918." PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1977.

Connelly, Mark T. *The Response to Prostitution in American*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.

Delgado, Grace Pena. "Border Control and Sexual Policing: White Slavery and Prostitution along the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands, 1903-1910." *Western Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (2012): 157-178.

Donovan, Brian. *White Slave Crusaders: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Crusaders, 1887-1917.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

Douglas, Paul H. “Wages and Hours of Labor in 1919.” *Journal of Political Economy* 29, no. 1 (1921): 78-80.

Frost, H. Gordon. *The Gentlemen’s Club: The Story of Prostitution in El Paso.* El Paso: Mangan Books, 1983.

Gabbert, Ann R. “Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands: El Paso, 1890-1920.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 4 (October 2003): 575-604.

Garcia, Mario. “The Chicana in American History: The Mexican Women of El Paso, 1880-1920: A Case Study.” *Pacific Historical Review* 49 (January 1, 1980): 315-337.

Harris, Charles H. III and Sadler, Louis R. *The Great Call Up: The Guard, The Border, And The Mexican.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015.

Hobson, Barbara Meil, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition.* New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1990.

Humphrey, David C. “Prostitution in Texas: From the 1830s to the 1960s.” *East Texas Historical Journal* 3, no. 2 (March 1995): 27-43.

Kara, Siddharth. *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Keire, Mara L. *For Business and Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933.* Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Keire, Mara L. “Swearing Allegiance: Street Language, US War Propaganda, and the Declining Status of Women in Northeastern Nightlife, 1900-1920.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 25, no. 2 (May 1, 2016): 246-266.

Koenig, Esther J. “An Overview of Attitudes Toward Women in Law Enforcement.” *Public Administration Review* 38, no. 3 (1978): 267-275.

Lay, Shawn. *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Perspective of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

Ledesma, Irene. “Texas Newspapers and Chicana Workers’ Activism, 1919-1974.” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (October 1, 1993): 309-331.

Lim, Julian. *Porous Borders: Multiracial Migrations and the Law in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

Locke, Joseph L. *Making the Bible Belt: Texas Prohibitionists and the Politicization of Southern Religion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Lord, Alexandra M. *Condom Nation: The U.S. Government's Sex Education Campaign World War I to the Internet.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010.

McArthur, Judith N. *Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas, 1983-1918.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.

Moodie, Mary Aldrich. "Staking Out Their Domain: Women in the New York Police Department, 1890-1935." PhD diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002.

Murphree, Rachel. "The Moocher: Callie Fairley, First Women Vice Detective in El Paso," *Borderlands* 27 (2009).

Pascoe, Peggy. *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Perales, Monica. "On Borderlands/La Frontera: Gloria Anzaldua and Twenty-five Years of Research on Gender in the Borderlands1. *Journal of Women's History* 25, no. 4 (2013): 163-173, 371-372.

Pivar, David J. *Purity and Hygiene: Women, Prostitution, and the "American Plan," 1900-1930.* Greenwood Press, 2002.

Recio, Gabriela. "Drugs and Alcohol: US Prohibition and the Origins of the Drug Trade in Mexico, 1910-1930." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34, no. 1 (February 2002): 21-42.

Rosen, Ruth, *The Lost Sisterhood, Prostitution in America, 1900-1918.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1982.

Ruiz, Vicki. "Dead Ends or Gold Mines?: Using Missionary Records in Mexican-American Women's History." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 12, no. 1 (1991): 33-56.

Shah, Courtney Q. "'Against Their Own Weakness': Policing Sexuality and Women in San Antonio, Texas, during World War I." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no. 3 (2010): 458-482.

Shantz, Eric M. "All Night at the Owl: The Social and Political Relations of Mexicali's Red-Light District, 1913-1925." *Journal of the Southwest* no. 2 (Winter, 2001): 157-178.

Sonnichsen, C.L. *Pass of the North: Four Centuries on the Rio Grande.* El Paso: Texas Western Press, The University of Texas at El Paso, 1968.

St. John, Rachel. *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Stern, Scott W. *The Trials of Nina McCall: Sex Surveillance and the Decades-Long Plan to Imprison "promiscuous" Women.* Boston: Beacon Press, 2018.

Walker, Samuel. *Presidents and Civil Liberties from Wilson to Obama: A Story of Poor Custodians.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Walkowitz, Judith R. *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Zipf Karin L. "In Defense of the Nation: Syphilis, North Carolina's "Girl Problem," and World War I." *The North Carolina Historical Review* 89, No. 3 (July 2012): 276-300.

APPENDIX

To access the user-friendly interactive map culled from the Mendez logbook, login to ArcGIS.com with the username: Mendezlogbook1922 and the password: Notation131. Search Mendez Logbook Map 3. After accessing the map click on the map image that appears on the left side of the screen. Then click on the Content box located on the left side of the screen. Close the error message that pops up. This will access the legend which contains the names of the women Mendez arrested and investigated. Next, expand or zoom the map, clarifying arrest and investigation locations. Clicking the pink or purple dots brings up the woman's name, location and date of an arrest or investigation.

The program allows the user to measure distances between incidents or gather information in a given radius. Click on the measure tab located at the top of the map. You will be given an option by icon to measure distance or radius. The furthest right option allows you to change the units of measurement. For example, to determine the distance between two points place your curser next to a colored marker and double click. Another smaller white dot will appear. Set your curser at another location and double click and the distance between the two will appear. Use the help tab for specific questions.

Although an edit option is available, users are not permitted to alter the map for it is under copywrite.