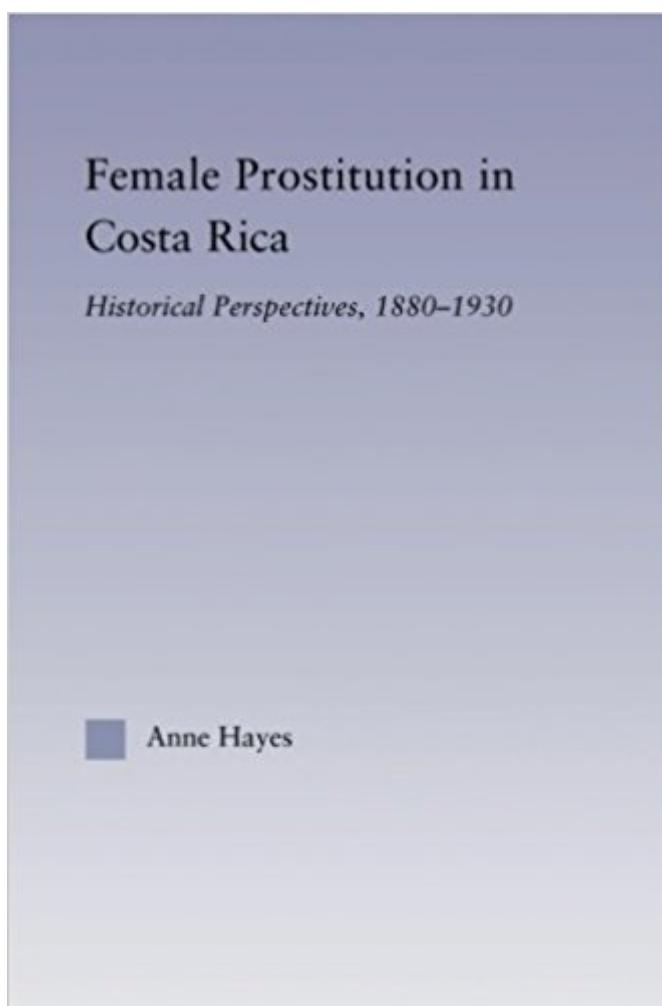


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Female Prostitution In Costa Rica: Historical Perspectives, 1880-1930 (Latin American Studies)



Synopsis

This book analyzes the development of female prostitution in the Pacific port of Puntarenas, Costa Rica during the advanced stage of the coffee exporting economy (1880-1930), at the height of the consolidation of the liberal state. Hayes argues that prostitution in the port differed from that of the coffee producing highlands due to differential economic, social, and political development. In the periphery of Puntarenas, the development of prostitution reflected a less stigmatized view of sexual commerce than that of the highlands, where prostitution, although legal, threatened the tenets of liberal nationalism based on racial homogeneity and family values. Women of the highlands were encouraged to reproduce the nation's "more European" stock of workers and to ensure the legal transference of property through legal church marriages - both part of a design to stabilize the coffee exporting project. By contrast, prostitutes and other working women of Puntarenas, many immigrants from the "less European" populations of neighboring regions and most in concubinage, were freer to do what the law prescribed - register as prostitutes in legitimate trade. Such regional disparities reveal weaknesses in traditional explanations of Costa Rican exceptionalism, which have rested on the premise of cultural homogeneity and have reflected the realities of only one region of the country. The book advances an alternative explanation for the development of the nation's more democratic institutions, situating Costa Rican exceptionalism in the nation's free labor system, of which the labor prostitute in Puntarenas provides an example.

Book Information

Series: Latin American Studies

Paperback: 244 pages

Publisher: Routledge; 1 edition (June 29, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0415882583

ISBN-13: 978-0415882583

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 2.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #5,180,467 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #96 in Books > History > Americas > Central America > Costa Rica #3071 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Hispanic American Studies #3555 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Latin America

Customer Reviews

Anne Hayes is a Post-Doctoral Teaching Fellow in the History Department of Fordham University.

Hayes' work on prostitution in Costa Rica fills a specialized historical void, but does so with a somewhat shallow analysis of sources. Hayes spends a great deal of time focused on the economic history of Costa Rica, and does not go to great lengths to tie prostitution into the history of the small nation. Hayes appears to ignore the preexisting historiography of prostitution, and her explanation of causes for the sex trade lacks the nuance of experts in the field. Hayes hinges her analysis on a poorly defined center/periphery power relationship, the economic demands of an export economy, and a revolving door of clientele for prostitutes in the port cities. While her work does contain certain insights on power relations and state desire for control over working class women, her observations are far from fresh and have been presented more clearly by other authors (Alain Corbin, Laurie Bernstein). Despite the title of her book, Hayes' research avoids the topic of prostitution when at all possible and focuses on other elements of labor and economic history without providing satisfactory ties back to her original topic. Above all else, Hayes' work lacks polish. It is clearly the product of a dissertation, and the content and clarity certainly do not warrant the \$120 dollar price tag.

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