

Prostitution, Polygamy, and Power: Salt Lake City, 1847–1918. *By Jeffrey Nichols.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002. viii + 247 pp. Index, notes, bibliography, illustrations. Cloth, \$34.95. ISBN 0-252-02768-X.

Reviewed by Thomas C. Mackey

The history of criminal law may not at first appear to be a field with wide application, but a closer examination reveals that the field can suggest new interpretations of social, religious, women's, local, regional, and business history. Such is the case in this most recent contribution to the story of prostitution in nineteenth-century America. Jeffrey Nichols, an assistant professor of history at Westminster College in Salt Lake City, uses that city's lengthy and contested responses to prostitution as a template for understanding Mormon–Gentile relations, ways in which local business people accommodate the existence of prostitution, the influence of the trade on local and regional politics, and creative uses of municipal law in the American West.

When the Latter-Day Saints moved to Salt Lake City, their goal was to escape the persecution and prying eyes of the country's Protestant, Gentile, majority. But when the transcontinental railroad began to funnel large numbers of outsiders into Salt Lake during the 1860s and 1870s, a contest for power and authority began to take shape between the Mormons and the new arrivals that included women who settled in Salt Lake and took up the trade of prostitution. Add to this social mix the problem of Mormon polygamy, which separated the Saints from the strangers, and the stage was set for a struggle to control the city's moral standards. Gentiles, women's advocates, and segments of the local Mormon community certainly opposed prostitution, but representatives of these same constituencies singled out Salt Lake City in order to rail and lobby against the Mormon practice of plural marriage. On the other hand, some of the city's leaders actually saw in the presence of prostitutes on Commercial Street a sign that Salt Lake City was becoming more "American." Subsequent events represented a typical enactment of the workings of Victorian compromise: a tacit acceptance of prostitution in tandem with a public emphasis on economic development, and the gradual Americanizing of the Saints, which led to a slow retreat from the practice and doctrine of

polygamy. In 1908 the city established a regulated vice district for its prostitute population, with the result that a handful of prominent female residents and property owners became quite wealthy. This situation lasted until the first decade of the twentieth-century, when a nationwide cultural reaction against red-light districts led to a general backlash against prostitution, ending Salt Lake City's unique history of regulating economic development, religious conflict, and sexual politics through customary, criminal, and local law.

Nichols draws his research extensively from primary materials, and he refers appropriately to the secondary literature on the history of prostitution. In the process, he elucidates the complexities of the profession and its interconnections with the business community. Numerous business and political leaders joined prominent women involved in the sex trade to defend the regulation of prostitution as a positive good to the community. Nichols demonstrates how local economies and businesses adjusted to the Victorian compromise with public sexuality when it served larger social goals, such as "proving" how American Salt Lake City was and thereby deflecting Gentile concerns about polygamy. Well organized and written in an accessible style, this book is recommended for specialists in prostitution studies, western communities in the United States, and criminal-law history.

*Thomas C. Mackey is associate professor and chair of the History Department at the University of Louisville. He has published Red Lights Out: A Legal History of Prostitution (1987) and Pornography on Trial (2002). He is currently working on a book about New York City's long-lived, privately funded Committee of Fourteen, which was formed to fight vice.*