

THESIS

CRIMSON STREETS AND VIOLENT BODIES:
IDENTITY, PHYSICALITY, AND THE
TWILIGHT OF COLORADO'S VICE DISTRICTS

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

CRIMSON STREETS AND VIOLENT BODIES: IDENTITY, PHYSICALITY, AND THE TWILIGHT OF COLORADO'S VICE DISTRICTS

This master's project focuses on the changing moral and legal status of Colorado's vice districts during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The thesis argues that once informally organized vice districts were formally regulated and geographically delineated as "red-light districts" at the behest of middle- and upper-class Progressives near the end of the century they became more vulnerable to actual suppression. This result had not been anticipated. Reformers considered commercial sex an offensive but ineradicable behavior, and they hoped districting would be an effective way to control, document, and tax this vice – while keeping it separate and hidden from respectable society. To the surprise of reformers, the establishment of special vice districts rendered them not only more visible and subject to regulation, but also, more vulnerable to suppression and eradication. This may have seemed like a victory for vice reformers, yet prostitution did not disappear. Rather, the formal elimination of vice districts early in the twentieth century worsened the circumstances in which prostitution was practiced, and widened the differential societal treatment of prostitutes and their customers. Prostitution became more difficult to monitor and prostitutes became more susceptible to control by pimps, organized crime syndicates, and corrupt police. In addition to documenting the emergence and demise of

vice districts in Colorado, this project examines the identity and experience of the women and men who frequented vice districts as prostitutes, sexual clients, pimps, and drug dealers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the course of researching and writing “Crimson Streets & Violent Bodies” at Colorado State University I’ve had the opportunity to engage with some of the brightest minds in the historical profession. The personal and intellectual debts I have incurred here may be impossible to fully repay, but in this small way, I would like to thank all of those who both directly and indirectly helped me construct this thesis project and sharpen my skills as a historian. I embrace any remaining errors here as solely my own. I would also like to thank, quite broadly, the communities of Arcata, California and Fort Collins, Colorado for creating intellectual and innovative environments conducive to the writing of history – located in the heart of California’s redwood forests, and nestled at the base of the Front Range respectively, these cities have instilled in me a great appreciation for place and culture that permeate the thoughts contained within this thesis.

In particular, my master’s committee deserves significant attention for their herculean efforts to improve my writing and thinking. Foremost in my mind, Dr. Ruth Alexander has challenged and supported me at every level. Especially for a topic as well-traveled as prostitution within American historiography, my weekly conversations with Dr. Alexander continually unraveled new insights, approaches to difficult sources, and new aspects of historical significance that—without her guidance—would otherwise appear clumsy and half-developed. Her perspective opened this thesis up, from what started as a local history, into an interconnected regional and international history that accounts the significant contributions of scholars from many places, and many fields. Additionally, I’ve had the pleasure now of working with Dr. Alexander on other projects, too – most notably our work at the Public Lands History Center

with the Scotts Bluff National Monument in Gering, Nebraska. In both projects, Dr. Alexander encouraged me to explore the past freely, follow my ideas (some of them less substantial than others), and write a compelling narrative of events unbridled by convention while still in dialogue with both my historic actors as well as other scholars. Her constant rigor, precision, and sympathy are aspects I can only hope to emulate moving forward.

Likewise, Dr. James Lindsay and Dr. Zachary Hutchins proved to me that occasionally examining unexpected places and histories might reveal unexpected solutions to tough problems. As my minor field advisor in Middle Eastern history, Dr. Lindsay introduced me to languages, eras, cultures, and environments far removed from my topic of study. I had thought that the development of vice districts and red-light districts at the base of the Rocky Mountains to be rather specific and self-contained, but Dr. Lindsay's teaching sometimes asked me to put the square peg in the round hole – in answering the question: “How do we know what we think we know?” I was forced to apply historical techniques and ways of thinking about the world, especially in regards to identity construction and negotiation, to issues and complications contained within this thesis. While these connections may not be entirely apparent, my time spent studying the Middle East with Dr. Lindsay has, I hope, humanized my writing and made some of arguments more reflective of larger global patterns. In a similar manner, my time in the English Department, with Dr. Hutchins, helped me evaluate American history in a trans-Atlantic perspective. Watching ideas about the discovery of the New World flow from Brahmin New England, across the waters to Spanish archives, finding publication in England, and returning finally to the United States is not only an interesting experience but also an extremely valuable one.

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A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY & TERMINOLOGY

Writing about prostitution and urban districting in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries is a difficult task. For the historian, it involves wading through multiple layers of conscious and subconscious bias, deciphering outdated compliments and insults, interpreting unfamiliar and often violent behavior, and in the end the historian must still compose a narrative that is not only fair to its historical actors, but which also recreates a historic environment that is as complex as it is diverse; this is the great joy and struggle of historical scholarship. In order to do so here, in this Master's thesis project, I have drawn insights from works on critical race and gender studies, sociology, geography, as well as trends within social, borderlands, environmental, Middle Eastern, sensory, spatial, urban, and digital history. This intellectual framework, as multifarious as it is, reflects not only an excellent education at Colorado State University, but also the difficulty in writing about men and women who left almost no sources to directly trace. As such, some of the terms and methods I use within this thesis need some explanation in order to provide readers with a lexical foundation.

At the core of this thesis is the differentiation between “vice districts,” and “red-light districts.” Although these spaces shared many of the same features, like the presence of brothels, saloons, dance halls, and gambling dens, and both spaces often centered on one or two city blocks, these spaces ultimately had different life spans and different boundaries. The life of Colorado's “vice districts” therefore began in the earliest days of frontier settlement (1850-60) and continued until unprecedented pressure by local citizens forced “vice districts” to formally describe their boundaries. At this moment (approximately 1885-1904), “vice districts” categorically evolved into “red-light districts” that would, in theory, keep vice hidden from

respectable populations and allow moral reformers and vice regulators to better tax illicit sexuality and alcohol consumption and manage the spread of venereal diseases. It is important to note that this transition happened unevenly across Colorado and the United States. For instance, Denver's Market Street, arguably the largest and best known "red-light district" in Colorado, had its territorial limits slowly bounded by police enforcement over the course of several years, between approximately 1887 and 1904. By 1904 however, this space (as well as the "respectable" areas that surrounded Market Street) was radically different than thirty or even twenty years prior; virtuous families relocated farther away, sometimes across the city, and saloons and dancehalls moved in to accommodate the recognizable demand for adult entertainment. These new and glowing spaces would not last as long as their predecessor, the "vice district," and by 1920 almost every "red-light district" had been suppressed and its prostitutes forced, to catastrophic effect, onto the streets. When this project refers to both "vice districts" and "red light districts" simultaneously, it employs the shortened term, "districts." For the first time, this thesis charts the transformation in Colorado from unregulated "vice districts" into formal "red-light districts."

It is also useful here to distinguish between the many names nineteenth century men and women used to describe prostitutes and the spaces in which prostitution occurred. Women engaged in transactional sex were variably called "soiled doves," "fallen-women," the "*fille de joie* [loose women]," "the "demimondaine," "women of easy virtue," "women of ill-repute," "hookers," "whores," "cyprians," "*nymphs du pave* [women of the street]," "courtesans," "dance hall girls," "escorts," "ladies of the lamplight" and even "demons," and "creatures." This list is by no means comprehensive, and I repeat them here only to demonstrate their diversity as well as how some such terms were used by nineteenth century writers to connote positive or negative

associations depending on the woman in question. More often than not, these terms were used as a pejorative term, and therefore whenever possible throughout this thesis I use the relatively neutral term “prostitute” to describe women whose primary occupation involved transactional sex. In a similar manner, the buildings in which prostitution occurred contain a similar diversity which largely reflects the wealth and class of the intended customer. In so doing, prostitutes who served upper-class men assumed some of the attributes of genteel women, even though their role was primarily sexual. Men able to purchase sex from a “higher-class” of prostitutes thus limited the extent to which their immorality demeaned them in the view of society. From low-class to high-class, buildings are variously referred to as: “cribs, rooms, whorehouses, bagnios, bawdy houses, bordellos, brothels, and parlor houses,” while the district-space itself is often designated as the “demimonde,” the “street,” or the “underworld.” These terms, while clearly biased and problematic, can be useful for demonstrating how “insiders” (those who lived or worked within vice districts and later red-light districts) appeared to “outsiders” (those who considered themselves separate from the district).

This thesis frequently uses distinctions between “deviant” and “immoral” people and behaviors and “respectable” and “moral” people and behaviors; these are not meant to be value judgments but instead to illustrate categories that existed within the actions, thoughts, and beliefs of nineteenth-century Coloradans. In order to understand what was considered “deviant,” I rely on the theorizing of Kai T. Erikson who argues that “Deviance is not a property *inherent in* any particular behavior; it is a property *conferred upon* that behavior by the people who come into direct or indirect contact with it.” In this way, a woman may spend most of her time engaging in normative or “respectable” behavior like cooking or cleaning but may still be considered ultimately “deviant” by outsiders because of those instances when she engages in prostitution. As

Erikson writes, “When the community nominates someone to the deviant class, then, it is... in effect declaring that these details reflect the kind of person he ‘really’ is.”¹ In the context of Colorado’s districts, examining the ways in which the human body was exposed, purchased, described, belittled, or assaulted complicates the myth of a “wild west” and demonstrates how people adapted their bodies and the roles they performed to a physical and social climate that struggled to control human actions that would inevitably fall outside the accepted stream of behavior. Inversely, those behaviors that conform to (if only temporarily) widespread notions of social acceptability are referred to here as “respectable” and “acceptable” – this is not to say that there were only two ways of engaging in society, but rather that nineteenth century men and women tended to work with and utilize this binary, even if they didn’t have the words to express their discomfort with it.² Physical actions that were often considered deviant and examined in this thesis include: alcohol and drug abuse, dancing, foot racing, horse racing, punching, kicking, biting, stabbing, throwing objects, shooting guns, theft, home-invasion, suicide, and illicit-sex. These actions are combined into what I term as “physicality” to describe the ethos of deviant physical behavior that permeated Colorado’s districts and contributed to a unique subcultural identity.³

¹ Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1966), 6-7. Emphasis added.

² Historian Estelle B. Freedman argues that the respectable-deviant binary has long outlived its scholarly usefulness. This thesis addresses several problems that Freedman illustrated in the study of sexuality in American society by examining prostitution in a western context. Freedman first argued that historians must move beyond differences between normative ideology and behavior and instead understand and appreciate an important “third category,” which Freedman labels as “sexual politics.” This includes political efforts to transform sexual thought or practice (e.g. moral reform, anti-prostitution, or birth-control movements). The next problem is the assumption that ideology (such as late-nineteenth century Victorianism) precedes and then influences behavior, “that is to say that men and women internalized Victorian concepts of male self-control and female passionless and thus engaged less frequently in intercourse...” For more information, see: Estelle B. Freedman, “Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America: Behavior, Ideology, and Politics,” *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (December 1982): 196-97.

³ Drawing on insights from the burgeoning field of sensory history, this thesis posits that the physical relationship between people and the built and natural environments is just as important as the movement of ideas across time and space, and as such, primary and secondary sources should be analyzed in ways that draw-out and

This thesis focuses almost exclusively on Colorado towns and cities and therefore any comparisons to other regions, countries, or time periods must be taken with a grain of salt. That being said, this project's argument could in all likelihood be applied to other western towns and cities that were settled for the purposes of industrial mineral extraction. Places like Cheyenne, Wyoming or Carson City, Nevada experienced similar population fluctuations tied to the boom/bust economy, and many of the prostitutes who worked in Denver, Leadville, Aspen, or Telluride, Colorado traveled to other states to expand their markets, escape legal pressure, or simply because their madams and/or pimps forced them to relocate. Since this thesis combines analyses of identity formation with the social construction of space, this argumentation only can be applied to periods when districts existed in Colorado, roughly between 1860 and 1913. While the deviant physicality created within districts undoubtedly continued past the period of formal red-light districts and well into the twentieth century, prostitutes lost much of their individual agency with the suppression of a sheltering space. Situating this research in Colorado has many benefits however, from access to archival documents, and the state's geographic centrality, but also because of the ongoing commitment by Colorado's residents to remembering the past and complicating that legacy for future generations.

emphasize the use and movement of the human body. Especially in a historic context like frontier Colorado, where both working life and leisure were dominated by physical exertion, understanding the human capacity to expend energy, and the stresses that variably mark the body and mind, I contend should be fundamental aspects of studying the human condition. Human sexual behavior, as recreation, for procreation, or commercialized as in prostitution, forces the human body to respond similarly to hard physical labor. Modern health sciences estimate that the average heart rate of a healthy male while exercising should hover around 120 beats per minute (BPM). Interestingly, those figures are nearly identical during sexual intercourse. This implies that the human body responds similarly to both activities—and for historians of prostitution—the connection between labor and commercial sex is already apparent. Analyzing how bodies acted similarly and differently to stimuli, in terms of physicality, has the potential to reveal new ways of thinking about the people in a way that emphasizes their inherent connection to their surroundings. For more information regarding the science behind this, see: Eleanor D. Nemec, Louise Mansfield, and J. Ward Kennedy, "Heart Rate and Blood Pressure Responses During Sexual Activity in Normal Males," *Clinical Communications* 92, no. 3 (September 1976): 274-78; C. C. Rezk, R. C. B. Marrache, T. Tinucci, et. al, "Post-Resistance Exercise Hypotension, Hemodynamics, and Heart Rate Variability: Influence of Exercise Intensity," *Eur J Applied Physiology* 98, no. 1 (2006): 105-112.

INTRODUCTION – LOCATING DEVIANT SPACES

By day it would have been difficult to see the boundaries that separated Colorado's early vice districts from other neighborhoods. The signs dangling above doorways, gently creaking in the dry wind, read "parlor house," "cigar shop," or "saloon," but only rarely did they say "bawdy house," "brothel," or "bordello." Vigilant observers might notice the eponymous red candles and lanterns sequestered away behind thin silk curtains, waiting to be relit with the coming darkness, but there was little else to mark the vice districts as distinct from other places of commerce and residence. In front of these buildings, sun-burnt men with felt hats and women in long dresses came and went, perhaps carrying the day's groceries, a newsworthy tale, or clothes to be washed. Such scenes repeated daily throughout the West. As the sun set behind the Rockies, however, the streets were transformed. Drunken laughter, angry shouts, and bawdy songs filled the air. Oil lamps spilled light onto the street just as violence between the district's many occupants spilled blood. Brothels, cribs, and the spaces around them became sites not only of illicit sex, but also of alcoholic excess, drunken brawls, drug use, physical abuse, and theft. Come morning, however, little remained to show how severely society's norms of respectability had been breached. As before, vice districts took on the look of other neighborhoods and streets in Colorado's dynamic frontier towns.

In late-nineteenth century communities like Denver, Aspen, Telluride, and Leadville, the vice district became an unusual yet discernible location. The district loomed large in many of the frontier's growing towns and cities. Through the pioneer period and until the late 1880s in Colorado, when state and local governments led by progressive reformers attempted to bound, define, and ultimately control the vice trade, the western demimonde evolved conjointly

alongside other businesses such as tailors, outfitters, and hotels. As town names like Leadville and Silverton readily suggest, the principle economic activity in nineteenth century Colorado was industrial mineral extraction; transactional sex boomed as “miners mined the ground” and prostitutes in camp “mined the miners.”⁴ Mineral wealth translated into economic opportunity and as larger lodes were discovered, and more men (and corporations) arrived to extract the ore, these areas grew to accommodate the population influx and its expendable incomes. Eventually, as nuclear families intent on permanent settlement moved into Colorado, the character of the state’s emerging cities changed to reflect the values of the new migrants. The post-frontier arrivals brought with them expectations of a social fabric dedicated to normative gender roles, the rule of law, and sustained economic growth. They were not content to see illegitimate or illicit trade crop up alongside more “honest” businesses. At the urging of these new residents, gambling, drinking, and prostitution—activities that were briefly intermixed with conventional businesses—were then confined by local governments within enclaves of deviancy and labeled as regulated “red-light” districts.

The rampant growth that Rocky Mountain towns experienced during the 1860s was nothing less than astounding. Within fifteen years of the creation of the Colorado Territory in 1861, what were once crude mining and cattle camps typified by “gamblers of all shades, and roughs, and troops of lewd women, and bullwhackers” had evolved to a level of respectability and governmental order that the United States formally recognized Colorado as the “Centennial State” in 1876, with Denver as its “Queen City.”⁵ Despite that rapid growth, gamblers, roughs, and soiled doves remained in unregulated vice districts across the state. The U.S. Census for

⁴ Allan G. Bird, *Bordellos of Blair Street: the Story of Silverton, Colorado’s Notorious Red-Light District* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Other Shop, 1987), 24.

⁵ Reverend Joseph Cook, *Diary and Letters* (Laramie, Wyoming: Laramie Republican, 1919), 12.

Denver in 1870, showed over 360 women who self-identified as prostitutes; of those, 204 identified as white, 44 as black, two as Mexican, and three as East-Asian (the majority of the remaining 107 unlabeled women were most likely white).⁶ It is likely many women *did not* designate this profession on the census and worked other jobs primarily, as laundresses, kitchen maids, or household servants, yet still turned to prostitution to supplement their wages. Mining booms and their concomitant increases in single men spurred the creation of vice district and women's movement between normative and non-normative employment. Indeed, as mining towns grew, workplace opportunities for women also improved, allowing some to find alternative employment outside of the sexual exploitation of the crib or brothel. As the gender-imbalance typical to most frontier communities diminished and, and family structures started to mirror eastern cities, new businesses arose to cater to these "respectable" populations. A glance at Denver's earliest maps of the Holladay Street vice district show German groceries, Chinese laundries, Wells Fargo banks, the Kuner pickle factory, and by the 1880s the opulent Windsor Hotel – a building with mirrors made with diamond dust and gold-leafed bath tubs.

What made unregulated vice districts tolerable to the general population in frontier cities, despite their contradiction of social mores and the rule of law within, was their opaque nature in the eyes of the community. As the *Aspen Daily Times* commented in 1888, "while the general public is willing to wink at the infraction of the law, it demands that this evil shall be kept secluded" and more importantly that "the creatures who live such lives shall not obtrude themselves upon the public gaze."⁷ Like other communities in the Mining West, Aspen's economy was almost entirely invested in the extraction of precious metals (by 1891 Aspen

⁶ Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865-90* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

⁷ *Aspen Daily Times*, 1888 November 25 (Aspen, Colorado).

surpassed Leadville, Colorado in silver production), and consequently shared many of the same social and cultural characteristics.⁸ In this way, those “creatures” who attracted the enmity of this newspaper editor were not unique to Aspen; prostitutes such as these roamed from mining camp to town, crossed state lines, mountains, and sometimes even oceans in order to ply their trade. Frequent internal migration and deviant physicality were definitive features of frontier cities, supporting the interests and desires of populations that were skewed to single men with cash in their pockets and an interest in thumbing their noses at Eastern notions of male decorum. This study takes a close look at these deviant women and men of various origins and hopes in order to characterize what Ruth Rosen first identified as a unique subculture existing within American urban spaces.⁹

In the earliest period when mining communities first transformed into towns, large mineral deposits did not guarantee future returns. Here, in this inherently unstable economic and physical environment, corporate bodies combined with governmental and other respectable institutions to “hide” prostitutes, gamblers, alcoholics and other disreputable elements behind the curtains of the vice district. The disreputable elements helped to produce wealth at a time when mining had not yet proven its worth. Prostitutes, like exploited miners, were kept out of sight, as both immoral women and exploited men might have caused controversy about Colorado’s burgeoning growth. Over time, prostitution and the mining industry reinforced and sustained one-another. It is interesting then that prostitution would survive the initial frontier period and sustain its form, while the Silver Panic of 1893, and the attendant economic shockwaves that rippled across the nation, signaled the beginning of the end for many mining communities.

⁸ Charles W. Henderson, *Mining in Colorado* (U.S. Geological Survey, Professional Paper 138, 1926), 176.

⁹ Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1982), xii.

As vice districts became institutionalized into “red-light districts,” moral jurisdictions developed where licentious and violent “creatures” could be contained. For vice regulators, forcing all of Colorado’s prostitutes into regulated districts would keep the vice trade hidden, but also manageable. Yet, from today’s perspective, this urban transition from hidden vice and unregulated districts into regulated districts and visible vice remains unclear: what purposes did unregulated districts serve in nascent communities, and once towns became cities, why did social reformers and city planners allow these spaces to persist? What role did violence and illicit sexuality play in creating a separate and “monstrous” western subculture within districts? Furthermore, how did “regular” and “deviant” peoples – male and female – understand the district’s social and physical boundaries and either transgress, maintain, or ignore them? The answers to these questions reveal how Americans of multiple classes and socio-economic aspirations in the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century Mountain West mapped the spaces of the vice districts with their bodies – marking particular locales as places in which deviant behavior was tolerated, though at some cost, especially to women, and though these actions contravened conventional morality. This thesis argues that deviant physical behavior constituted a unique subcultural identity, and the relative visibility or invisibility of these “deviant” men and women is crucial to understanding the eventual suppression of red-light districts. Paradoxically, once vice districts were legally zoned and redefined as red-light districts, with the goal of hiding prostitution from the general public, prostitutes and red-light districts actually became more visible to the “public gaze” and more vulnerable to suppression.

The scholarship on prostitution in the American West has taken a dramatic turn away from mid-twentieth century novels and histories that depicted prostitutes as glamorous and feisty courtesans. Authors writing in the 1950s and 1960s, like Caroline Bancroft, whose connections

to Colorado and its history ran deep, accentuated the sparkling if turbulent lives of pseudo-historical women like Mattie Silks who became “the queen of Colorado’s tenderloin.” Though recent scholarship has improved our understanding of the experience of prostitutes, we still lack a complete understanding of the places where prostitution occurred and the relationship of those places, and the people working or consorting within them, to the larger society. Informal “red light” districts, formal vice districts, and the prostitutes and patrons who used them never existed apart from “respectable” or conventional society. Considering the scholarly coverage that saloons and brothels have received in the late-twentieth century, it therefore seems odd that until very recently relatively little attention has been paid specifically to the place where social deviancy was embraced and cultivated.

Indeed, works like Thomas J. Noel’s *The City and the Saloon*, which focuses extensively on the saloons along Denver’s Holladay Street (known today as Market Street), note the presence of a town’s “moral geography,” but do little to describe how those boundaries were created and how they were enforced.¹⁰ While Noel focuses explicitly on alcohol sale and consumption, other aspects of the demimonde bleed into his work – drug abuse, prostitution, and violence appear as auxiliary facets to Denver’s vice district. Jan MacKell’s two books, *Brothels, Bordellos, and Bad Girls* and *Red Light Women of the Rocky Mountains* puts Colorado’s prostitutes and madams at the center of her narrative history, yet her sympathetic accounts of these women leaves unanswered many questions about how deviant subcultures in the Rockies were identified and organized.¹¹ And oddly enough for a university press publication, when MacKell does cite her

¹⁰ Thomas J. Noel, *The City and the Saloon: Denver, 1858-1916* (Denver: University Press of Colorado, 1996).

¹¹ Jan MacKell, *Brothels, Bordellos, & Bad Girls* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004); *Red Light Women of the Rocky Mountains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009).

sources, she relies almost exclusively on anecdotal evidence and popular secondary sources – a practice that has long-plagued the study of vice and prostitution.¹² Instead of romanticizing deviant behavior within vice districts and later within red-light districts, this project attempts to show that the tolerance of illicit sex and violence in frontier subcultures, harmed rather than glamorized female prostitutes.

Alternatively, in *Hell's Belles*, Clark Secrest demonstrated that vice, crime, and local popular culture were intimately interwoven throughout Denver's early history. Secrest success lay in his clever implementation of the Sam Howe Murder Scrapbooks, a 59 volume collection of newspaper clippings, which details countless murders and other criminal acts alongside political and cultural forces like the regulation vs. suppression debate, and evolving definitions of vice and morality. That being said, Secrest himself maintained early on that he had no interest in developing the “daunting task... [of a] psycho-social analysis of prostitution in the American West,” and chooses instead to leave this task to others.¹³ Indeed, when coupled with Thomas Noel's statement in Jan MacKell's foreword that *Red Light Women of the Rocky Mountains*—“will not bore readers with politically correct academic sermonizing and gender studies strutting”—one almost gets the impression that a critical examination of Coloradan vice is unwelcome or perhaps too unwieldy to attempt.¹⁴

The early historians of illicit sexuality wrestled with a dearth of sources written by prostitutes or by other, more reliable sources, and tended to glamorize prostitution and related

¹² Indeed, as Clark Secrest notes in his review of MacKell for the *Western Historical Quarterly*, “The sparse existing attributions too often cite obscure non-mainstream secondary sources. No comprehensive general history of Colorado was consulted for specifics or overviews, and but one general study of prostitution in the United States is cited-fleetingly-for perspective.” See: Clark Secrest, Review of Jan MacKell, *Brothels, Bordellos, and Badgirls: Prostitution in Colorado, 1860-1930*, *Western Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2005), 528.

¹³ Clark Secrest, *Hell's Belles: Prostitution, Vice, and Crime in Early Denver; with a Biography of Sam Howe*, *Frontier Lawman* (Denver: University of Colorado Press, 2002), xi.

¹⁴ Thomas J. Noel, foreword to Jan MacKell, *Red Light Women of the Rocky Mountains*, iv.

forms of vice rather than subject these illicit behaviors to critical inquiry. With the wholesale introduction of feminist scholarship in the early 90s, scholars such as Anne Butler looked at discernible spaces including military forts and city cribs and revealed the misery of average prostitutes “on-the-line,” or within vice districts: alcohol-fueled attacks by customers and other women, drug abuse, poverty, depression, and suicide were commonplace and affected prostitutes disproportionately in frontier communities. Evaluating prostitution within specific physical and social settings allowed historians to uncover circumstances that were far from glamorous, Indeed, the lived realities of prostitution left some women feeling that they had with no other option than to take their own lives with a gun, blade, or through an overdose of laudanum or other poisons. In many respects Butler’s work can be considered at the forefront of social histories on prostitution and deserves much credit for refuting the heavily romantic depictions of western social deviancy endemic to popular culture as well as early histories written by Bancroft and others. This project adds to Butler’s analysis by spending more time examining how these physical actions were linked, how they were perceived by patrons and residents of the vice districts, as well as by those in the larger community, and how men and women within vice districts interacted with one another, creating both individual identities and a distinct subculture within frontier communities.¹⁵ Butler and other historians have documented not only the enormous difficulties prostitutes faced but, also, the ways in which they attempted to exert agency and gain some control over their own lives and social reputations.

While it is useful to imagine new ways of looking at the sexual transactions that defined prostitution, most men and women engaged in the trade nevertheless understood it in moral ways. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries men and women across the nation

¹⁵ Other historians, such as Ruth Rosen, Barbara Hobson, Christine Stansell, Patricia Cline Cohen, and Estelle Freedman wrote revisionist histories of prostitution and female deviance in east coast cities during the 1980s and 1990s while Butler was working on prostitution in a western context.

became obsessed with abolishing the social evil. As historian David J. Pivar argues in *Purity Crusade*, “In the act of freeing the prostitute they, through the woman’s movement, would raise a higher standard of civilization that would require of men the same standards of purity previously demanded of woman alone.”¹⁶ Interestingly enough, Pivar asserts that by the end of the century, these same crusaders added prize fighting, intercollegiate football, ballet, and nudity in the arts to their public crusade which, in many ways, indicates a preoccupation with how the body was used, in both sexual and non-sexual contexts. Because this “crusade” ultimately chose to use the law to enact reform, the illegality of certain behaviors also became morally identified – when a woman was arrested for keeping a house of ill-fame, it was because she broke a moral law as well as a social one; laws proscribed boundaries, and behaviors broke them. From this perspective, the study of vice districts illuminate for historians how definitions of legal and illegal, of moral and immoral, and of conceptions of the human body transformed in quotidian ways and adjusted to the spaces they occupied and moved through.

The organization of space has aided several historians in circumnavigating the source problem endemic to studying prostitution. While the formation of unregulated “vice districts”—the informal predecessor to the well-known and regulated “red-light districts”—has not received serious attention, red-light districts have recently been examined for their significance in American urban history. As historian Mara L. Kiere argues in her work, *For Business and Pleasure*, the term “red-light district” appeared only in the mid-1890s when “mugwump” social reformers—focused on implementing the new science of city planning—attempted to concentrate vice into downtown districts that would protect well-mannered peoples from

¹⁶ David J. Pivar, *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868-1900* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), 7.

corruption, while still allowing men and women to appease their more base desires.¹⁷ In this interpretation, red-light districts were the pet-project of gilded age elites and progressive reformers who singlehandedly, it would seem, began the practice of bounding vice within special city districts. In doing so, Kiere argues against sociologist Robert Park's article from 1925, which speculates that red-light districts grew spontaneously in different neighborhoods.¹⁸ Like other authors, Kiere primarily examines vice in coastal communities like New York's Tenderloin, New Orleans's Storyville, or San Francisco's Barbary Coast—all famed in their own right—and for the most part avoids a discussion of similar continental districts in places like Denver or Leadville, Colorado. In this way, the “creation” of the red-light district was a top-down, elitist, and legalistic phenomena that occurred when progressives decided to change the face of urban society. However, the regions these authors analyze are almost entirely coastal cities – Wood's examination of Davenport, Iowa is situated closest in mileage to Colorado but Davenport ultimately developed in the context of Chicago's increasing cultural magnetism; especially in the years prior to 1871 when Denver was first connected to the rest of the country by train, small mining communities like Leadville, Aspen, and Telluride turned inward to deal with the vagaries of life in the Rocky Mountain west.

Regardless of a single vice district's relationship to regional or national metropolitan settings, historians, sociologists, and urban geographers have successfully demonstrated that much can be learned by examining the social history of prostitution and vice in relation to place-based histories of urban development. For Kiere and Sharon E. Wood, prostitution in the Progressive era was the product of lingering societal ills wrought by rampant industrial growth

¹⁷ Mara L. Keire, *For Business and Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 24.

¹⁸ Robert Ezra Park, *Human Communities: The City and Human Ecology* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1925).

and the wholesale introduction of women into the urban workforce. In this way, prostitution became a crisis of urban economies as well as a crisis of gender and morality. The intersection of labor, urban spatiality, and gender is best revealed in Wood's microhistory, *The Freedom of the Streets*. Wood traces the development of a "gendered geography" in Davenport, Iowa and finds that sexuality was "mapped onto urban geography." For Wood, "the distinction between the chaste women and the predator was fundamentally one of class... wives and daughters belonged at home, not in the streets or on the workforce."¹⁹ A woman's location on the streets defined her professionally and personally and placed her on the moral spectrum between deviance on one end, and socially-acceptability on the other. Kiere supports this argument by demonstrating that women on American streets became swept up during the early years of the twentieth century in what became known as the "white slavery scare" – an instance where national level politics conflated industrial, commercial, and moral anxieties. For progressive reformers, the business of vice seemed like "a trust composed of allied interests," which profited from the prostitutes' involuntary servitude.²⁰ Both authors therefore situate prostitution somewhat uniquely within the context of paid-labor or commercial activity rather than in the typical focus on public morality, yet they also recognize that morality was essential to Progressive reformers' critique of prostitution. The intersection between these ostensibly conflicting notions of commerce and morality was something nineteenth century Americans certainly recognized and debated in homes as well as in the halls of government.

Future works on prostitution and social deviancy in the American West must now account for new trends in spatiality and gender that put men and women in their local context.

¹⁹ Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 117.

²⁰ Keire, *For Business and Pleasure*, 123.

On American streets, women reckoned with moral, economic, political, and traditional forces that challenged how they navigated the urban landscape. As Wood suggests, the implications for these women if they trespassed the wrong space could be severe – the loss of their physical purity, moral standing, and social respectability. However, the significant progress that recent works have made in complicating material that is already well-trod has yet to make its way to the base of the Rocky Mountains. Latin-Americanists such as Grace Pena Delgado, Catherine Christenson, and Katherine Bliss have demonstrated the importance of the red-light district in attracting otherwise immoral trade and reinforcing traditional gender and social norms especially during the heyday of the Progressive Era along the U.S.-Mexico border. In Colorado, there is ample opportunity to situate the evolution of prostitution and the vice district within a frontier setting that was constantly in tension between behavior at the local level, and national-level ideological statements about proper American sexuality and bodily health.

With all of this in mind, this study is about gender, sexuality, and a unique physical space: the vice districts at the beating heart of many of Colorado's early communities. Vice districts are spaces that illustrate how human beings interact in very basic ways. The behaviors here are physical, they are intimate, and they reveal prevailing notions of class, race, and society. This project attempts to do several things at once. The primary goal is to use the space of the vice district to explore sexuality in the American West and conceptions of right and wrong in geographic settings where working men far outnumbered working women, and where women of middle-class and wealthy status were relatively rare. In particular, this project hopes to offer another way to characterize deviant behavior in terms of what I describe as "physicality," or quite simply, the ways in which people physically interacted with each other, animals, and the built and natural environments that surrounded them. This project hopes that looking at historical

thoughts and events in the context of their physical relationship to the world will complicate prior understandings of both violence and sexuality by revealing more than simply the harm that violence accomplished and the boundaries that illicit sexuality transgressed. Rather, I hope to show how both violence and illicit sexuality expressed vice districts' values, subcultural identity, connection to the landscape, and response to external moral condemnation. In contrast to evolving middle class desires to eschew hard-outdoor labor in favor of emergent "white collar" labor, working-class Coloradans around the turn of the twentieth century saw their lives in terms of bodily exertion: their quotidian workplace sacrifices in the mines, on the ranch, and in the home can be evidenced and thus reconstructed in the character of the vice district's subculture. Perhaps over the next couple of years, this project will move forward to reconstruct Colorado's "deviant" spaces using digital tools as part of an ongoing desire to better publish and democratize historical knowledge for popular audiences. Especially in Colorado, a state whose citizens continue to appreciate and enjoy learning about the past, reconstructing a district that today does not exist (except for Jennie Rodgers' famed "House of Mirrors," located at 1942 Market Street, Denver) has vast educational and analytical value.

In addition to documents published by moral reformers and women's groups such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, this project draws on diverse sources like Denver's own Saloon Keepers Union (and alternatively the Anti-Saloon League), to police and legal records, and the memoirs of frontier lawmen and doctors. That being said, by far the most voluminous accounts about the district and its men and women come from the dozens of newspapers that quickly sprouted across the Mountain West. This project utilizes material from approximately fifty of these regional newspapers in order to recreate Colorado's public sphere and demonstrate a latent acknowledgement of the presence of vice and violence, as well as the ways in which

these boundaries operated in a grey-area of acceptability. While the voices of western prostitutes in newspaper sources are hidden behind layers of writers, editors, and publishers, they still bubble to the surface when read with and in contrast to other accounts written by outsiders voyaging into or around the district. Because contemporary organizations and understandings of space are so crucial to this project, Sanborn Perris Fire Insurance Maps become an invaluable source for piecing together the experiences of men and women in and around districts, as well as for demonstrating the inherent ambiguity of social boundaries. Perhaps more so than any other social space, the vice district and red-light district had the propensity to combine people from all classes, ethnicities, countries, and hopes, for a vast variety of reasons, into one space. On Denver's Market Street, Leadville's State Street, or Aspen's Durant Avenue, preachers intermingled with pimps, doctors treated drug users, and Frenchwomen tussled with African-American prostitutes, while the "respectable" public eagerly consumed their stories in daily newspapers. Together, these sources illustrate a world in motion, one that attempted to wed the social virtues in the East such as abstinence and physical repression, gendered spatial segregation, and moral refinement, with the rugged, physical, and occasionally brutal realities of the West.

This project is organized into three chapters that trace the development of many of Colorado's vice districts during the waning years of the nineteenth century and into the early-twentieth century. Chapter One, "The Fast Element," focuses on the physical behavior of men and women within unregulated vice districts, and examines how these actions contributed to the consolidation of a subcultural identity within vice districts between 1860 and approximately 1885. In particular, I stress the ways in which prostitutes and the men who hired them used violence, dancing, racing, drug and alcohol abuse, as well as illicit sex, to set themselves apart

from respectable society and protect their own interests, with mixed results. In order to examine some of these behaviors as well as their potential consequences, this study focuses on women like Jennie Cummings, a prostitute from Leadville, who decided that her only recourse, when met by a perceived slight from another woman within the district, was “nothing but gore, and plenty of it,” which would allow her to “wipe out the insult hurled against the proprietress.”²¹ Indeed, the historic record is replete with incidences of violence within informal vice districts, and most scuffles ended rather innocuously but a noticeable minority ended in fatalities. This is certainly not to say that in places like “lusty Leadville” began every night with drinking and commercial sex and ended in gun fights, but rather that these events happened enough to warrant critical attention. Simultaneously, this chapter attempts to outline the spatial boundaries vice districts that otherwise were not designated on any maps, and instead were traced by physical behavior. The “Fast Element’s” deviant physicality is reflective of the nature of labor and industry on the frontier, but also of early gender imbalances and unequal access to public spaces. The boundaries of the earliest vice districts, therefore, are best understood at the crossroads of structure and agency, in a place where violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and illicit sex were performed by men and women to achieve their desire goals. For prostitutes especially, the proper performance as a bodily deviant had the potential to open more doors to respectability and financial solvency in male-privileged society than might be otherwise available. However, entering into the fast life of prostitution exacted a great toll on women’s minds and bodies, and frequently the short-term benefits of violence and deviant bodily behavior had long-term consequences.

²¹ Herald Democrat, “Boss Dog of the Bullring,” 1886 May 11 (Leadville, Colorado).

The second chapter, “Service to God, Mammon, and the Devil,” follows prostitutes and respectable citizens as they attempted to understand and negotiate the boundaries of the vice district during a period when many towns began transforming their districts into formally regulated red-light districts. In order to accomplish this task, this chapter is subdivided into two periods, which trace the transformation of vice districts into red-light districts. Period one demonstrates how, between approximately 1880 and 1886, the deviant and physical identity cultivated in Chapter One was used and manipulated by prostitutes and other deviant men and women to transgress the boundaries of vice districts and enter into the respectable sphere of public culture. The conduct of prostitutes was shaped in important ways by the social beliefs that existed beyond the vice districts’ borders. The tension over how best to present and conduct one’s body led to the performance of multiple identities such as the “lady,” “soiled dove,” and “demon,” that prostitutes used to facilitate movement between vice districts and the respectable cityscape. At the same time, districts continued to support a distinct subculture that fascinated outsiders and permitted women less access to respectable society than men. Successfully navigating this moral/immoral border, as many people did every day, proves that its location and moral rigidity was not proscribed but rather performed. In some cases, characterization as a respectable woman or as a prostitute literally depended upon which side of the street the viewer was standing on. Importantly, this section argues that the physicality of district insiders (sometimes literally) collided with notions of respectability advocated by outsiders, and this tension largely defined the informal vice district’s boundaries.

The second period examined in Chapter 2 is that of roughly 1886 to 1904, the years when Colorado’s vice districts evolved into regulated red-light districts. The red-light district, perhaps more than any other social space within city confines, had to contend with boundaries that were

defined by outsider forces but actively reinforced and sustained by insider behavior. As sociologist Robert E. Parks argued in the 1920s, those things that “we ordinarily regard as the city—its charters, formal organization, buildings, street railways, and so forth—is, or seems to be, mere artifact.” What Parks highlighted here is the process through which a city or town is understood by its population not merely through its walls and its laws but through behavioral interactions within its confines; indeed, “The city is not, in other words, merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction. It is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it; it is a product of nature, and particularly of human nature.”²² This section momentarily zooms out and away from Colorado in order to engage debates about the nature of venereal disease and its origins, the economics of vice, as well as the role of the media, and argue that these larger ideas about urban control and social welfare helped to crystallize the boundaries between moral and immoral spaces. During the period of institutionalized red-light districts, prostitutes found movement beyond the district much more difficult because of the separate deviant identity formed within early vice districts.

The final chapter in this study, “Fires of Incendiary Origin,” is concerned with how and why, during the first couple of decades of the twentieth-century, red-light districts across the United States were criminalized and prostitution suppressed. In Colorado’s towns where prostitution was *de facto* legal for most of its young and turbulent history, progressives who assumed local and regional positions of power sought to regulate and ultimately control the “social evil” through the emerging science of city planning. While the great debate over regulation vs. suppression of prostitution had been waged for most of the century at this point, the greatest change occurred when districts were bounded by law. In the theorizing of

²² Park, *Human Communities*, 1-3.

progressive reformers, within the red-light district taxes and vice-fines could more readily be applied, hygiene inspections for venereal disease would be better attended and subsequently treated, and most importantly – prostitution would be kept separate and subsequently *less* visible to the moral public. While the debate in most places in the United States heavily favored regulation over outright suppression, the very act of solidifying the vice district's boundaries into something that was recognizable, rigid, and codified into law made the districts paradoxically *more* visible and ultimately unacceptable to the growing middle class urban populations. This chapter argues that the deviant physicality formed in vice-districts, as well as the mandatory local performances of that identity across district boundaries, combined with national-level discourses in order to once and for all, suppress prostitution and remove red-light districts from the city's geography. Once red-light districts were suppressed, prostitutes did not disappear. Rather, prostitutes became increasingly vulnerable on the streets to the predations of pimps, organized crime, and corrupt police.

CHAPTER 1 – “THE FAST ELEMENT”

DEVIANT BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN VICE DISTRICTS

The settlement of Colorado would not have happened as quickly as it did if not for the discovery of gold and other precious metals deep within the Rocky Mountains during the middle of the nineteenth century. The tens of thousands of hopeful Argonauts who departed for Colorado during the first years of the Pike’s Peak Gold Rush (1858-1961) brought with them social and moral values cultivated in rural and urban communities in the East, and adapted them to rigors of the unrelenting western environment. Stubbornness, a strong constitution, and a tough disposition no doubt helped the earliest emigrants adapt to life in the frozen mountain valleys and exposed, windswept plains that characterize much of Colorado. That being said, the first mining camps in places like Arapaho, Pike’s Peak City, Montana, Highland, Nonpareil City were certainly *ad hoc* but not disorganized – Ned Wynkoop attested in 1859 that “The first thing Americans think of when they emigrate is to lay out a town-site, expecting of course that their own town will some day... become the metropolis of the world.”²³ From the beginning, the vice district emerged as an important part of the camp that privileged rowdiness and provided men the opportunity to purchase bodily adventure. As historians Marion Goldman and Paula Petrik have shown, enterprising women quickly followed these men and set up veritable “business empires” where commercialized sex became intrinsically interwoven into community life.²⁴ In many ways, the gold rush and its constant emphasis on rapacious mineral extraction characterized the way

²³Edward W. Wynkoop, “Unfinished Colorado History,” typescript, 9, Edward W. Wynkoop Papers, Colorado State Historical Society, grammar error in original. As quoted in: Elliot West, *Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 179.

²⁴ See: Marion Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners: Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Lode* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981); Paula Petrik, “Capitalists with Rooms: Prostitution in Helena, Montana,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 31, no. 2 (1981): 28-41.

prostitution developed in this region. The culture of mineral extraction also shaped how prostitutes behaved within vice districts even long after Colorado's distant mining camps became fledgling towns and cities.

The 1870s proved to be a defining decade for Colorado. Whereas other mining camps failed as easy river-based gold quickly evaporated, Denver survived its humble origins along the South Platte River and began operating as the region's central metropolis. It was an exciting time to live at the base of the Rockies. Within the first year of that decade the Denver Pacific and Kansas Pacific Railroad directly connected these towns by train, which boosted their economic potential, population growth, and made travel within Colorado and the West fundamentally easier. Indeed, upon arriving, Charles Post expected to find in Denver various frontier oddities and western fantasies, and so was "very disappointed to find so large and flourishing towns" with "lots of men, women, and children all busy and apparently a contented as people in Decatur."²⁵ Especially with statehood in 1876 and news of the fantastic Leadville strike of 1878-79, the urban landscape of Colorado underwent incredible change. In 1874 Denver first mustered-up a legitimate police force to deal with the vast network of lucrative and organized vice that comfortably occupied the heart of each frontier town. Mr. Charles Post may not have chosen to recognize or acknowledge vice among the apparently "contented" people of Denver, but illicit trades flourished there. Indeed, the vice trade was so powerful and so ubiquitous that Mayor Francis M. Case needed to warn his new police force that "you will have occasion to be in saloons and houses of ill fame, but let your visits be so few that you will never be 'familiar.'"²⁶ Up until this period, saloons, gambling and dance halls, and brothels—including their operators

²⁵ Gunther Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 185.

²⁶ Eugene Frank Rider, "The Denver Police Department, an Administrative, Organizational, and Operational History, 1858-1905," Ph.D. Dissertation (Denver: University of Denver, 1971), 118.

and customers—would have been more recognizable and widespread than police stations, officers, and detectives. Mayor Case imagined the city moving toward a respectable future, with vice successfully contained. This vision was not easy to achieve.

Visitors stepping off of the first train to arrive in Denver in 1870 found at their disposal six churches, four schools, two hospitals, one library, and a staggering forty-eight saloons. Even these figures seemed modest by the beginning of the 1880s when Denver’s population exceeded 60,000 people and the year-end report from Police Chief David J. Cook counted 1,187 arrests for drunkenness and 53 for prostitution.²⁷ At this time, vice was bounded only loosely – while a saloon and brothel might open betwixt a launderer and drug store, these commercial activities were always removed from residential districts which might in turn explain why in 1880 there were so few arrests for prostitution – these activities were generally contained within the vice district. A strong subculture grew in these locations and deviant bodily behavior defined both the group, as well as the limits to their cultural territory. Before the mid-1880s when prostitution was confined to red-light districts in order to protect “decent” and “respectable” citizens from moral corruption, the vice trade grew semi-organically: where a saloon popped-up, it was useful also to have a gambling hall and a brothel, to provide the most opportunity for the customer to deviate from the norm and, perhaps most importantly, to maximize the potential nightly revenue. It is within this period, prior to formalized districting, that miners, clerks, businessmen, soldiers, and cattlemen spent their hard earned wages in an unregulated deviant space. These spaces were often violent spaces too, and this violence—along with illicit sex, drug and alcohol abuse, illegal racing and other demonstrations of the body—not only demarcated the boundaries of the vice

²⁷ Clark Secrest, *Hell’s Belles*, 133.

district, but also identified the ways disproportionately male and exploitative environment in which prostitutes navigated as they tried to subsist, and indeed improve their frontier lives.

The women who formed the ranks of Colorado's demimonde came from many places, and entered or were coerced into prostitution for many different reasons. However, most women working in prostitution didn't leave many sources behind for the historian to trace – the evidence that historians do have mostly arrives from prostitutes and madams who achieved some level of financial success and perhaps even fame. From these accounts, we can infer some overarching features about what life was like for most prostitutes. Ultimately, as historian Ruth Rosen notes, the average working class American woman in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries had little more than three choices: to sell her body in a loveless marriage made for economic gain, to sell her body as a poorly-paid unskilled worker, or to sell her body in the vice district.²⁸ On the frontier, many prostitutes entered the trade willingly as a way to escape the dull daily life on a farm, or to escape from familial or spousal abuse – a life in the district may have the best option in a worst case scenario. In any event, most prostitutes lacked the resources, the family support, or the opportunity to work in different occupations. When combined with a hard winter, an economic downturn, or the death of a husband, women turned to prostitution to solve their problems, often with the intent of marrying or eventually returning to more conventional occupations.

For instance, we know that Laura Bell McDaniels—eventually dubbed the “Queen of Colorado City's Tenderloin”—arrived in Salida, Colorado in 1886-1887 and only relocated to that town's vice district after her home was destroyed in a fire. Her time as a madam in Colorado was be marked with bloodshed and violence. Her entre into the “fast life” came after her husband

²⁸ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, X.

Tom publically murdered another man, Morgan Dunn, which caused the couple to separate, perhaps because the *Salida Semi-Weekly Mail* increasingly labeled Tom as a murderer despite the fact that the court found Tom innocent by reasons of self-defense. By 1888, Tom had disappeared and Laura Bell McDaniels resurfaced in Colorado City alone, where she opened her first brothel on Fifth and Vermijo Streets, perhaps with insurance money left-over from her destroyed home.²⁹ For McDaniels and others engaged in prostitution, violence, financial trouble, and abuse informed part of the reason why they started working in the sex-trade. As both a symbol of the violence inherent to prostitution as well as her own financial success, McDaniels mysteriously died at the age of 56 when her car overturned, crushing her. Theories abound that she was both drinking and driving or, more treacherously, that she was run off the road by a trio of moral crusaders.³⁰

McDaniel's story also emphasizes movement, first to Colorado, and then from town to town before ultimately settling in Colorado City. Indeed, a great "parlor house" circuit existed across the nineteenth-century West that allowed prostitutes (sometimes against their will) to relocate in new towns and to find new social and economic opportunities. Often, stories of prostitutes moving across the western world appeared only by accident. Newspapers were quick to note the appearance of prostitutes in 1865, when the *Brother Jonathon*, a U.S. paddle-steamer en route to Victoria, British Columbia sank off the coast of northern California: among the lost was Abraham Lincoln's physician and close friend, Brigadier General George Wright, as well as Roseanna Keenan, a madam from San Francisco, who was traveling with seven other "women of ill-fame."³¹ Likewise, the infamous gambler, card-dealer, and madam, Eleanor Dumont (known

²⁹ Jan MacKell, "Laura Bell McDaniel: Queen of the Colorado City Tenderloin," *Montana: Magazine of Western History* 54, no. 4 (Winter 2004), 50-51.

³⁰ MacKell, "Laura Bell McDaniel," 56.

³¹ Dennis M. Powers, *Treasure Ship: The Legend and Legacy of the S.S. Brother Jonathon* (New York:

widely by her pseudonym, “Madame Moustache”), traveled the West extensively – Eleanor Dumont appeared in Cheyenne, Wyoming with James Butler “Wild Bill” Hickok in 1870, in Eureka, California in 1877, in Deadwood, South Dakota in 1878, before returning to Bodie, California by 1879. Dumont followed various mineral booms and established brothels, made connections with local prostitutes and businessmen, and then left again when she couldn’t afford to pay her fines or when conditions between other madams deteriorated to the point of no return. In Bodie, overwhelmed with gambling debt, Dumont committed suicide through an overdose of morphine.³² While the exploits of Dumont are difficult to authenticate, when read in contrast with Keenan’s death and glimpses of hundreds of other prostitutes’ daily experiences (which are arguably more valuable as legitimate sources), they together emphasize a certain degree of social and geographic uncertainty. Violence and movement became defining aspects of a woman’s time in prostitution.

While most prostitutes’ lives were very difficult—the culture that surrounded prostitution exacted a steep physical and emotional toll—many women used these otherwise “deviant” behaviors too slowly, and imperfectly, improve their lives. These acts ranged from tavern brawls and murder, transactional sex, theft of property, and public displays of the body in motion that, depending on the venue, could otherwise be considered respectable, such as dancing, riding horses, and foot racing. Deviant physical behavior also constituted less obvious actions like alcohol and drug abuse that was arguably more devastating to a prostitute’s life but garnered less attention from reformers. These behaviors reinforced one another, and grew to become an interconnected part of the deviant landscape and character. Escaping all signs of the ordinary,

Citadel Press, 2006), 134.

³² Curt Gentry, *The Madams of San Francisco: An Irreverent History of the City by the Golden Gate* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 53.

prostitutes and other residents of the vice district reproduced this culture daily. As Caroline Bancroft suggests:

Here footraces, horseraces, beer drinking, dancing and carnival activities could take place without too much surveillance from the law. One evening in August of 1877 there was a large outrig at the Denver Park of what one newspaper referred to as “the Fast Element.” Mattie [Silks] partook freely of champagne and challenged Kate Fulton to a duel.³³ [See Image 1]

Surely these activities were diverting, exciting, and perhaps even fun for both observers and participants (perhaps, with the exclusion of Kate Fulton, who lost the duel). Quite quickly, these activities became defining characteristics of the vice district as well as the men and women who lived within its boundaries. While men could easily escape the stigma of life in a deviant space, however, women had a difficult time defending their reputations, ideas, and property from the growing paternalism of the disgusted, moral-middle-class. Thus, because prostitutes were unable to implement the protections of nineteenth-century feminine respectability, violence and other forms of deviant behavior became tools that women wielded in an attempt to change their lives and the world around them.

When Jennie Cummings, co-owner of the Odeon dance hall in Leadville, Colorado, discovered she was called a “natural bladder” by Bessie Howard, a prostitute operating out of a competing dance hall, she was understandably upset. Over a pint of gin that Sunday afternoon, she asked her friend and known prostitute Ollie Bartell what she should do about Howard’s denigrating remarks. “Do about it?” replied the intoxicated Bartell, “Do about it? Why I’d just go down there and slug her.” After debating both the “pros and cons” of such an action, the trio—including their mutual friend Miss Clayton—cooled down with a “schooner of beer” before

³³ Caroline Bancroft, “Mattie Silk’s Duel,” (1966) *Caroline Bancroft Family Papers* (Denver Public Library, Western History/Genealogy Department: WH1089, Box 7, FF-56).

deciding that “nothing but gore, and plenty of it, could wipe out the insult hurled against the proprietress.”³⁴ This article from the *Herald Democrat* demonstrates several interesting aspects about the ways in which violence was performed by those whose trade inherently placed them outside of the law. While it is tempting to lump Jennie Cummings’ ordeal in with other romanticized notions of western violence characterized by hair-trigger offenses and explosive reactions, a close reading of these accounts demonstrates how slow and deliberate these acts could be. Not only did the build-up to this event take place over many hours, but it also fulfilled the very precise purpose of connecting members of the same community together through a shared experience in deviant behavior. Jennie Cummings wanted her business to thrive, and so bloodshed helped maintain her reputation within the demimonde, but it also demarcated where violence and illicit sex could be performed. Cummings’ use of violence may even have had the added benefit of publicizing to outsiders that the Odeon dance hall as a place of deviant contact – a “respectable” man reading about the fracas in the newspaper could connect illicit sex, drinking, and violence to one specific location.

When dealing with people like Jennie Cummings and Ollie Bartell the historian of Colorado’s vice districts must be especially cognizant of the myriad myths and half-truths that litter this landscape. The foremost of these myths is that of the “wild west” typified by constant gun-slinging and rampant disorder and perhaps best represented by Hollywood directors like John Ford and Sergio Leone in his many “spaghetti westerns” from the 1960s. Yet, even long before actors like Clint Eastwood dodged bullets in westerns, Edward Lytton published dime novels like *Deadwood Dick* (1877-97) for eastern-American audiences who wanted entertainment over accuracy: the myth-making process happened early and often. While sex and

³⁴ *Herald Democrat*, “Boss Dog of the Bullring,” 1886 May 11 (Leadville, Colorado).

violence surely sell, and were proportionately exaggerated in Colorado's contemporary media, how should we today understand the brawls, transactional sex, and the murders that actually occurred? Was the western past, as per the assertions of modern writers like Eugene Hollon and Joe Franz, "...a far more civilized, more peaceful and safer place than American society today," or was it something less polarized?³⁵ All told, as in any social space, deviant behavior was a major part of the social picture. These behaviors were pervasive just as they were furtive – any notion of an Eastwood-style "wild west" is inaccurate, but so too is the countervailing idea of a halcyon mountain west. While other historians like Roger D. McGrath have looked at the role violence played on the frontier, in almost every setting, violence is unequivocally bad event – something that ruins lives and tears apart cities. For the first time, this project argues instead that violence and other long-romanticized aspects of western history served a discrete set of purposes that helped *and* hurt prostitutes, which in turn created a subculture that understood violence and used it both inappropriately, and at times, appropriately. Examining physical actions like drug and alcohol abuse, sex, fighting, dancing, and even foot-racing, places like Denver or Leadville lose their mythic origins in favor of a historic setting that emphasize the struggle over how to best (most properly) use one's body in the late-nineteenth century.

As such, the way one's body appeared and performed in unregulated districts helped prostitutes distinguish themselves as members of that community. It is not insignificant that when Jennie Cumming's friend Ollie Bartell arrived to fight that she "pulled up her sleeves, spit in her hands and rubbed them together" before beginning to "dance the jig."³⁶ The way she dressed and used her body was illustrative of an immoral and socially unacceptable physicality

³⁵ Eugene Hollon, as quoted in Thomas J. DiLorenzo, "The Culture of Violence in the American West: Myth versus Reality," *Independent Review* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 227.

³⁶ *Herald Democrat*, "Boss Dog," 1886 May 11.

that would allow her to navigate the power relationships within the vice district. Technically speaking, Colorado's legal statutes prohibited officers of the law and the courts from protecting vice interests, and so madams and prostitutes resorted to more immediate forms of justice to protect themselves and their property. Two years after the "natural bladder" incident in Leadville, a Madam Shipler asked "French Fedora," a popular prostitute dressed as a "Kiralfy ballet girl" to depart her home, which she had invaded sometime earlier. After Fedora flatly declined, the madam "waxed wroth, and arising, strode toward Fedora and smote her on both cheeks." After driving her from the building with the help of a friend and a conveniently placed water pitcher the three were summarily arrested by two patrolling officers and charged with prostitution.³⁷ To the three women, the altercation was an issue of hierarchy and community affirmation – when Fedora trespassed within the Madam's territory and refused her warning to depart she threatened not only the integrity of the home but also her status within the district. Fedora's participation in the "boudoir battle" made her equal to the Madam, if only momentarily. To arresting officers Cox and Morgan, however, the fact that these women were noticeably without a customer and fully (if unusually) clothed did not stop them from formally describing their behavior as "prostitution" in their report. These women expressed their agency through deviant physicality, "prostitution" therefore could be connoted to include all the different ways women used their bodies outside of the notions of proper behavior.

In large part this is because violence, just like illicit sex, were some of the trademarks of the vice district's women. While the charge of prostitution carried a greater fine than disorderly conduct, and the officer of record may have simply made a value judgment according to the women's perceived moral character, this seemingly unjustified charge can best be understood in

³⁷ *Herald Democrat*, "Sorrow Among Cyprians," 1888 March 20 (Leadville, Colorado).

terms of gendered notions of the body.³⁸ In the minds of these ostensibly law-abiding, moral, and responsible men the prodigious use of sex, violence, and other forms of deviant behavior by women within vice districts became inextricably linked. Legitimate physical violence has always been within the sole purview of men and by dispensing with this ideal so flagrantly the female members of the vice districts displayed to the eagerly spectating outside community that they, and their bodies, were somehow different and operated under different rules. For the uninitiated, entrance into the physical underworld could be jarring, and the behaviors within confusing: after an investigating detective followed a woman and a child through a backdoor entrance to the Log Cabin in Denver's district in 1889, even the sight of a woman playing with a dog, with male onlookers (described as "customers"), appeared "obscene" and inappropriate.³⁹ The detective's shock is illustrative of his socially acceptable identity stumbling onto a room full of deviant identities. When anywhere from "ten to one-hundred women" could ply their trade under one roof, and potentially engage in any number of deviant exchanges, the errant use of the body became a monstrous symbol the dangers that lurked within unregulated vice districts and the very visible boundaries that separated prostitutes from respectable society.⁴⁰

While violence and commercialized sex were the two most visible actions that prostitutes used to change their lives, other less-visible acts, such as theft, dancing, binge drinking, and opiate-use also served a purpose. Theft was one relatively simple way for members of the vice district to reaffirm power distinctions and improve one's economic situation. The vice district frequently engendered distrust between its casual visitors and its die-hard regulars – people whose pocket books and bodies were all tied in varying degrees to the environment and the

³⁸ Laura E. Woodworth-Ney, *Women in the American West* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 153.

³⁹ *Rocky Mountain News*, "Investigation of Denver Fire and Police Board Concerning Charges of Vice and Corruption, 1903," (1889 December 29), Governor James H. Peabody Papers (Colorado State Archives, Denver).

⁴⁰ *Daily Journal*, 1914 July 8 (Telluride, Colorado).

exploitation of Colorado's mineral wealth. "Honest" sites of prostitution, or places that customers trusted for fair treatment, generally existed only when income levels were stable. Industrial mining districts, however, were subject to boom/bust cycle of supply and demand. When customers were too few or paid too little, many prostitutes turned to petty theft, robbing the customers they had, as well as their fellow prostitutes, to smooth out rough times.⁴¹ In places like Leadville and Aspen, in which industrial mining was the principle activity, when a mine stopped producing or labor strikes ensued, the effect trickled down into the lives of prostitutes who then needed to find work elsewhere. Economic stress, anxiety, and depression thus had environmental causes which affected the way members of the districts operated on a day-to-day basis. In this way, environmental pressures led to years of labor strikes in 1880s Leadville, which in turn may have contributed to incidences of theft and violence. For example, this may explain why brothel owner Lillie Saunders destroyed fellow madam Mollie May's missing, and very expensive, sealskin dolman instead of returning it.⁴² Due to the economic downturn during this period, Saunders may have believed that destroying this hat, and harming her business-rival, was more useful than simply keeping the dolman for herself. While more humble items like towels, writing paper, or shoes were often stolen by prostitutes, they still represented the same act of invading another's space, crossing territorial boundaries, and acting in a manner that those outside the vice district would readily describe as immoral behavior.

While prostitutes robbed their customers and other prostitutes when they felt economically distressed, prostitutes were also the targets of theft by other members of the

⁴¹ Anne Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West 1865-90* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 43.

⁴² *Daily Herald*, 1884 March 22 (Leadville, Colorado). It seems likely that during periods of economic upheaval, incidences of theft would increase. This is reflected in the fact that during the period prior to formalized districting (roughly, pre-1885), prostitutes more frequently sought legal redress for theft rather than after, like Saunders's destruction of Molly May's sealskin dolman, in the Colorado's local courts.

district. The district's deviant spaces (saloons, wine houses, cribs, apartments, dance halls, etc...) reinforced unethical and immoral behaviors by focusing attention back inward into the district. Popular prostitutes and dance hall girls were often the targets of robbery because of the perceived wealth they wore over their bodies and purposefully showcased throughout the district.⁴³ One article from the *Leadville Herald* made the point bluntly: a trio of "bad burglars" broke into Bessie Howard's house while she was "tripping the light fantastic through the dreamy waltz at the Red Light dance hall [working at a dance hall]" and attempted to rob her of all her cash, because, "they were under the impression that a dance hall girl must necessarily have plenty of cash." Finding no money, the burglars fled, and investigating policemen described the scene of the crime as a "ladies furnishing goods store that had been struck by lightning."⁴⁴ Howard's wealth was actually invested in clothing and other goods that aided her in moving through and around the unregulated district. Bessie Howard's episode mirrors that of Lena Barth, another dance hall performer, whose home was robbed a few years later while she was inside sleeping. In this instance, the "sneak thieves" again found no valuables and made off with her "hose and other dance hall trappings."⁴⁵ At this point it may be useful to note that while dance hall girls frequently engaged in prostitution, being a dancer did not necessarily imply one traded in transactional sex. Nevertheless, dance halls became permanent features of vice districts, and later regulated red-light districts, and "dirty dancing" was hotly criticized by moral reformers who saw dancing as just as dangerous as prostitution (demonstrated more fully in Chapter 2). For these burglars and the local press, it was enough that these women assumed a deviant identity by

⁴³ See Chapter 2: "Service to God, Mammon, and the Devil"

⁴⁴ *Herald Democrat*, "Bad Burglars: Crooks Crack a Chestnut," 1887 July 12 (Leadville, Colorado). Notice the physical language used to describe Bessie Howard's dance routine.

⁴⁵ *Herald Democrat*, "Sneak Thieves," 1895 April 30 (Leadville, Colorado).

associating with other members of the demimonde and by using their bodies in ways “respectable” men and women found inappropriate.

Women working in Colorado’s vice districts found many solutions for reducing, if only temporarily, the burdens and pains associated with prostitution. Alcohol and drug abuse alters the chemical composition of the brain and at times causes the user to lose control of her body. As such, social reformers and prohibitionists across Colorado constantly advocated for social controls and identified vice districts liquor interests as one of their most terrible enemies.⁴⁶ Brothel owners incentivized drinking by connecting the sale of alcohol with the sale of sex. Some prostitutes received a percentage of the total amounts their customers spent on beer, wine, and liquor. Several prostitutes, including Madame Gould operated on Twenty-Fourth Street between Larimer and Market Street in Denver’s vice district, and used her addiction to tobacco to advertise her house. As popular historian Fred Mazzulla attests, because the sight of a woman smoking was so unusual, men would bring her cigars “just for the curiosity of seeing a woman smoke.”⁴⁷ However alcohol attracted the most attention from legislators and moral reformers who increasingly connected the sale of wine, whiskey, and spirits to transactional sex: the *Rocky Mountain News* in 1889 argued that beer halls “where the most fruitful source for breeding and feeding prostitution.”⁴⁸ Indeed, the opposition to women’s drinking of alcohol and the related

⁴⁶ Indeed, as legal historian Tom Romero notes: “New Year’s Eve, 1915, marked the end of an era in Colorado. At midnight 1916, Colorado became one of the first states in the nation to go dry [Chap. 98, Sess. Laws of 1915, amended in 1916 under Chap. 82, Sess. Laws of 1917, and by the so-called “Bone Dry Act,” Chap. 141, Sess. Laws of 1919, initiated and passed by Colorado citizens in November 1918]. Mourning not only the ready availability of fine spirits, but the closing of the Western saloon as a central community institution, patrons of Denver’s Heidelberg Café sang ‘Last Night Was the End of the World,’ as the barkeepers tapped their last glasses on December 31, 1915. For more information see: Tom I. Romero, II, “‘Last Night Was the End of the World:’ Prohibition in Colorado, *Colorado Lawyer* 32, no. 1 (January 2003): 41.

⁴⁷ Fred Mazzulla, *Brass Checks and Red Lights: Being a Pictorial Pot Pourri of (Historical) Prostitutes, Parlor Houses, Professors, Procuresses, and Pimps* (Fort Collins, Colorado: Colorado State University Archives; Denver, 1966), 31. In the years subsequent to Mazzulla’s publishing of *Brass Checks*, the eponymous brass tokens have since been discovered to be fraudulent. That being said, evidence of similar items exists in other settings.

⁴⁸ *Rocky Mountain News*, 1889 July 23; as quoted in Noel, *The City and the Saloon*, 86.

associations with prostitution resulted in plenty of legal action that attempted to prohibit women from entering into spaces where drinking occurred. As Thomas Noel notes, *A Reliable Directory of the Pleasure Resorts of Denver* (a pocket directory from 1892) "...contained parlor house advertisements boasting of 'boarders' who cordially welcomed strangers. Among the amenities usually listed were choice wines and liquors."⁴⁹

A prostitute's mobility also provided her some limited avenues to respectability. While prostitution provided women some freedoms and advantages that a socially acceptable lifestyle could not, namely the ability to operate publically, achieve some level of financial independence, and form casual relationships with men and have sex outside the bounds of marriage, there were just as many disadvantages to the "fast life." Engagement in prostitution often meant accepting the separation from one's family, the normativity of physical and substance abuse, and the consequences of contracting sexually transmitted diseases – many women thus endeavored to escape from prostitution through a legitimate marriage. In vice districts where women's identities were more fluid, as opposed to later red-light districts where they became solidified as deviant, marriage between a prostitute and her customer ("boyfriend") or even with her pimp were viable methods of escape that could potentially allow prostitutes to assume or reclaim the benefits of respectability. When these plans soured, as they sometimes did, the language of the district demanded blood. In 1896 Lake City, Colorado, one woman was evidently pressed to the point of no-return: "Jessie Landers, a prostitute, entered the saloon of her lover and fired three shots." The *Boulder Daily Camera* continued that "an onlooker, Louis Estep, aged 22, was shot and will die. The woman then shot herself in the side and may not recover."⁵⁰ In another incident of "terrible passion" a prostitute named Zell Glenmore, formerly of Cheyenne, Wyoming, was

⁴⁹ Noel, *The City and the Saloon*, 87.

⁵⁰ *Boulder Daily Camera*, "Lake City Tragedy," 1896 June 11 (Boulder, Colorado).

visited by her paramour West Moyer at her home when “words and a dispute” led to her stabbing him nearly to death.⁵¹ To the male newspaper writers living outside the vice district these actions, purportedly against men these women held dear, were exceedingly difficult to understand.

Limited evidence suggests that prostitutes in Colorado vice districts looked at marriage as a route from deviance back to respectability and reacted with great disappointment, even violence, when the possibility of using this route out of social marginalization and opprobrium fell through. When in 1890 a letter informed “a Cyprian by the name of Mabel Hurley” that her boyfriend of four years was paying undue attention to a “soiled dove” from Salida that would undoubtedly culminate in marriage, she took the train from Ouray to Grand Junction, confronted him in a brothel, and fatally shot him “in the left side below the heart.”⁵² Not only did violence and illicit sexuality create a deviant identity set apart from those outside of the vice district, it also provided these women the limited ability to shape their lives and the world around them by embracing different aspects of an identity largely foisted upon them by outsiders looking in and not understanding the deviation present. Violence, something legitimate within the vice district, aided prostitutes in protecting their bodies and their interests – effectively utilized, the threat of violence could scare away romantic rivals, ward off potentially abusive customers, and ensure one’s position in the vice districts hierarchy. More often than not, violent thought and action proved to be a double-edged sword for prostitutes. To tragic effect, violence reinforced the outside public’s vision of prostitutes as something less-than human and increasingly in need of regulation.

⁵¹ *Rocky Mountain News*, “A Double Attempt at Murder,” 1871 July 23 (Denver, Colorado).

⁵² *Solid Muldoon Weekly*, “Killed in a Grand Junction Dive,” 1890 April 4 (Ouray, Colorado).

Deviant physicality helped define the culture of the vice district, but it also made prostitutes appear increasingly more bizarre, scandalous, and dangerous to outsiders. In this way, as the actual power of physicality as a useful tool increased, prostitutes became consequently more vulnerable to disapprobation and violence, because this identity as a “violent body”—a purveyor of deviant physicality—inversely meant that prostitutes could be the recipients of violence. The violence undertaken by and against women in vice districts led to the perception, especially by male members of the press, that prostitutes were so unlike conventional women as to be veritable “monsters,” that is, figures of social and moral degeneracy that operated at the fringes of respectable society. Frequently, male writers for papers like the *Rocky Mountain News* portrayed altercations between prostitutes and friends, customers, or enemies as senseless acts by overly passionate, jealous, and often sub-human woman – someone far removed from eastern sensibilities of feminine virtue. In the description of Zell Glenmore’s stabbing of her boyfriend Moyer, the writer described her as a “demon of wine and of a crime-calloused conscience”: the act of stabbing her lover stripped away her humanity, diluted her senses, and hardened her heart.⁵³ Violence completed a physical transformation that had begun with illicit sex. Once prostitutes became labeled in the press as “demons,” “creatures,” and such non-human entities, that outsider-imposed identity became considered paramount; it did not matter that these otherwise normal women may have considered themselves mothers, daughters, or sisters first. This meant that average prostitutes ended up cultivating and appropriating multiple identities, perhaps unconsciously, in order to traverse the urban landscape: if the violent “demon” persona was useful for scaring off rivals or potentially for advertisement purposes, then the personae of “fallen woman” and “soiled dove” could be used to inspire sympathy and smooth-over otherwise visible movements out of districts by playing on gendered assumptions of female fragility. If a

⁵³ *Rocky Mountain News*, “A Double Attempt at Murder,” 1871 July 23.

prostitute couldn't be respected on grounds of her morality and feminine decorum, then the next best thing was to be considered a victim.

Unfortunately, when men performed violence against prostitutes, sometimes without direct cause, they frequently escaped justice. Men crossed both the social and physical boundaries of the district with ease; while never having to jettison their status as respectable males, they fully contributed to the vice district's physical atmosphere. When Barney Vanola, "said to be a Macquereau [pimp]," was allegedly robbed of seventy-six dollars by a black prostitute named Evelyn Moore in Ouray, Colorado, he shot and seriously wounded her, leaving her alone in an alley.⁵⁴ The *Ouray Herald* reported that when detectives found him playing cards, "he showed more concern regarding the game... than regarding his victim."⁵⁵ Perhaps Vanola rationalized his attempted murder due to Moore's skin color, sex, or class but he also performed the deed within the confines of the vice district and within the context of a violent space. In almost the exact same location, four years prior, "a burro puncher, Clarence Templeton by name, with a tough disposition... drew an ugly knife from his belt and began slashing [his creditor] Buskirk left and right"⁵⁶ The willingness of men like Vanola and Templeton to perform extreme

⁵⁴ The role of pimp's in frontier vice districts was not too dissimilar from the roles of pimps in vice districts like New York's Bowery, San Francisco's Barbary Coast, and in great cities across the continent. Pimps controlled the prostitutes under his command through a mix of physical, emotional, and substance abuse; a significant portion of a prostitute's earning went directly to the pimp. Early on in frontier vice districts, many women were able to independently run brothels and cribs without the need for pimps – only later during the red-light district period did male financial investments and social cache become useful for madams seeking to continue operating houses of "ill fame." In the best of circumstances, the relationship between pimps and prostitutes was purely businesslike, where prostitutes earned money, and pimps protected them bodily and found new customers, however this was exceedingly rare, and more often than not pimps treated prostitutes as human chattel and severely curtailed their social and economic freedom. After red-light districts were deregulated and prostitution suppressed in the mid-1910s, prostitution went underground, onto the streets, and into the unprecedented control of male pimps. Outsiders always considered pimps as the "lowest of the low" for relying upon the efforts of women to survive without actually performing any labor himself. For more information, see Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery* and Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners* and Secrest, *Hell's Belles*. Secrest argues that new prostitutes, in contrast to places like New York City and Chicago, often entered Colorado's brothels for independent reasons, rather than through white slavery rings present in other major cities during this time (185).

⁵⁵ *Ouray Herald*, 1907 March 22 (Ouray, Colorado).

⁵⁶ *Daily Journal*, "Cutting Affray at Ouray," 1903 March 3 (Telluride, Colorado).

acts of violence within the same vice district, instead of following available means of legal redress, suggests that these activities were normalized within its confines. From an interpretive vantage point, Vanola could sit down and play Faro, Euchre, or Hearts while quite literally red-handed because he shot Moore in a locality that embraced and justified violent behavior.

Likewise, the drugs and alcohol rebelliously consumed by prostitutes, as a comfort against the inequalities that lay before them, provided temporary benefits at the cost of long-term addictions. While the sale and over-indulgence of alcohol elicited fervent opprobrium from members of Denver's Anti-Saloon League, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WTCU), and other civic groups as a clear gateway contributor to prostitution and other acts, dependency on opiates like morphine and laudanum was rarely talked about by reformers. For outsiders, opiate use seemed to predominate in Chinese-American communities and only damaged "disreputable characters" from the district.⁵⁷ Especially for those women who were forced into prostitution by husbands, fathers, boyfriends, or pimps who threatened financial abandonment or physical violence, the institution provided little in the ways of comfort; a prostitute in early Colorado became very familiar with alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, and frequently suicide. For Dollie Cole, a "pretty Pine Street prostitute," death was the only answer to a life that "had lost its charms."⁵⁸ After three previous attempts, Cole attempted to kill herself by draining a bottle of laudanum. In this way, Dollie Cole followed in the footsteps of the well-publicized suicides of Grace Marsh (1885), Kittie Moore (1888), and Edna Bracket (1890) who, among others, self-administered morphine.⁵⁹ Public notices such as these were too common in late-

⁵⁷ *Solid Muldoon Weekly*, "A Shocking Adieu," 1885 September 11 (Ouray, Colorado).

⁵⁸ *Herald Democrat*, "Tried to Kill Herself," 1892 July 5 (Leadville, Colorado).

⁵⁹ *Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle*, "The Strange Story of Her life: Told by a Notorious Woman of the Town," 1890 August 15 (Leadville, Colorado); *Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle*, "Suicide," 1888 March 1 (Leadville, Colorado); *Dolores News*, 1885 July 4 (Rico, Colorado).

nineteenth century newspapers. For Lizzie Smith, whose friends solicited help paying for her burial following her overdose, her death was the result of her friendship with “the Parisian nymph and the Ethiopian prostitute,” and her habits, or her embrace of the district’s physical traits, “were nothing more than a slow but sure system of suicide.”⁶⁰ These deaths, all of which shocked their communities, demonstrate how interconnected and physical the problems were that prostitutes faced on a daily basis and how few options these women had to address them. Suicide, the final form of bodily control—choosing when, how, and why to end a life—was a decision firmly grounded in the physical and violent landscape.

Compounding the issue of drug abuse was the fact that it was all too easy for a despairing person to acquire opiates like morphine when they so desired. “Mrs. Mary Glover,” reported the *Rocky Mountain News*, “who lived upstairs at 2025 Curtis street until she died there at 10 o’clock this morning, bought 25 cents worth of morphine in a drug store at Nineteenth and Curtis streets at 11 o’clock last night.”⁶¹ Morphine was relatively inexpensive in the nineteenth century and therefore was the most frequent method of suicide by prostitutes. Despite the clear dangers opiates posed, and the racialized vitriol against Chinese “opium dens,” the importation of opium wasn’t made illegal until 1909 although it *was* subjected to high-import duties and many dealers simply choose to smuggle it into the United States.⁶² An investigation into an opium den on Arapahoe street in Denver:

...showed it to be full of smokers, a large portion of whom were women, in the several stages of stupefaction produced by the drug. There seemed to be no secrecy about the matter. Any one could gain admission by knocking at the door, and once inside the Chinamen could be seen, some lazily lighting their pipes in the bunks – others enjoying the

⁶⁰ *Solid Muldoon Weekly*, “A Shocking Adieu,” 1885 September 11.

⁶¹ *Rocky Mountain News*, 1896 May 6.

⁶² Secrest, *Hell’s Belles*, 115.

dreamy sleep produced by the opiate. Very few men were seen excepting the Chinese, but all of the women were Caucasians.⁶³

These drugs reduced pain and numbed the user from worldly sensations – many experienced positive “out-of-body” sensations; an escape from a physical identity that could be both liberating as well as restricting. Ingesting or injecting a lethal dose of poisons was not an act that prostitutes took lightly, and many alerted their friends in advance. Mary Glover told saloon proprietor Charlie Walbrecht that she was going to kill herself. Others left sad notes detailing their final thoughts before passing. Kittie Moore, mentioned above, described a “cold, cruel world, with no mercy or affections for those once fallen, like myself.” She hoped that “the next may be different, but there is little hope for those who have fallen like myself.”⁶⁴ For a prostitute whose body was controlled by others and was constantly monetized through transactional sex, incentivized drinking, dancing as well as fighting, the opportunity to temporarily—or permanently—take control may have been appealing.

In vice districts across Colorado, especially before the late 1880s when they became legally zoned into “red-light districts” to set them apart from the “white lights” of the opera and cinema, men and women used their bodies in ways that classified them as different. This was the “Fast Element” that used violence to maintain hierarchical distinctions and sex to earn a living. This group of people danced, raced, drank tonsil-varnish, nose paint, and maybe even an early Budweiser to escape from hardships in the brothel and the mineshaft – while often far removed from family in the East. If none of these diversions achieved the desired goal, then opiates were always an option and easily obtained. Indeed, the *Denver Medical Times* reported in 1903 that women were ten times more likely to use opium than men. While deviant physicality created a

⁶³ *Rocky Mountain News*, “Heathen Hordes: Chinese Still Crowding into the State, Ruining Labor and Encouraging Immorality,” 1880 October 27.

⁶⁴ *Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle*, “World Too Cruel,” 1888 March 1.

zone where prostitution could flourish, it nevertheless weighed heaviest on the women who embraced the violence, the financial insecurity, as well as the mobility that characterized the “Fast Element.” All these signs point to a distinct type of people. They were labeled by their contemporaries as deviants, demons, and morally corrupt, and eventually corralled into discrete subsections of cities and towns across the state of Colorado and the West. This life asked for much, and gave relatively little in return. Focusing on the violence and mobility inherent in western prostitution, and grounding those behaviors in a discrete space, reveals that prostitutes relied on vice districts to survive, that prostitutes partially defined themselves in physical consultation with that space, and most importantly, demonstrates that prostitutes were not passive victims but rather determined agents who used the tools before them to improve their lives, if only temporarily.

By 1890 the immoral geography of towns like Denver was set in stone and people of all classes and social aspirations navigated to, or away from, Leadville’s State Street, Aspen’s Durant Street, and Denver’s Market Street. These zones of tolerance were new—and the theory behind them untested—but the actions and behaviors practiced within, by the district’s violent bodies, were ultimately familiar because they continued to constitute the boundaries of deviant/acceptable spaces. The turn of the century saw red-light districts become international issues debated on both sides of the Atlantic; men like future mayor Robert E. Speer traveled across Europe wondering how best to govern a city like Denver that “... has more sunshine and sons of bitches than any place in the country.”⁶⁵ While the great Progressive Era debate over the regulation or suppression of prostitution raged all over the world, everyday men and women frequented, fought, and lived within Colorado’s newly organized red-light districts. How men

⁶⁵ Charles A. Johnson, *Denver’s Mayor Speer; the Forgotten Story of Robert W. Speer, the Political Boss with a rather Unsavory Machine who Transformed Denver into one of the World’s Most Beautiful Cities* (Denver: Green Mountain Press, 1969), 99.

and women transgressed these boundaries, and how these quotidian movements were briefly reflected in the national debate, is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2 – “SERVICE TO GOD, MAMMON, AND THE DEVIL”

MOVEMENT & SOCIAL BOUNDARIES WITHIN COLORADO’S URBAN SPACES

The vice districts of the Mountain West were infamous for combining all of the worst features of society into one place. Americans across the West looked at districts such as Denver’s Market Street as places where all their fears might become manifest: venereal disease borne by husbands infected mothers and eventually children; if alcohol didn’t end a man’s ability to work and provide for his family, then perhaps incessant gambling would; and as long as brothels existed along the row, mothers would continually worry about their sons and daughters being drawn to their siren call of sexual freedom and easy living. As discussed in the prior chapter, in these deviant spaces an entire subculture emerged that was characterized by a physical—“fast”—identity. While this subculture provoked censure and anxiety among some, it was obviously a source of pleasure for others and the public discourse about vice districts, not surprisingly, mixed shame and moral opprobrium with fascination and boasting. Indeed Market Street in Denver, and State Street in Leadville, continuously vied for the prime designation as “the most wicked street in the west,” and Denver near the turn-of-the-century could boast of “approximately one thousand ‘brides of the multitude’” available for those in search of sexual diversion. Of course, prostitution’s glamorous luster was a falsehood, deflecting the naïve viewer (or male customer) from assuming any responsibility for the harsh realities most women endured every day. Most “houses of ill-fame” were simply cribs wide enough for a door and perhaps a single window. These ram-shackle apartments offered quick and inexpensive sex (and women were encouraged by economics and their madams and pimps to move as quickly as possible through customers –

“the girls of the crib made no pretense of decorum.”⁶⁶ Moreover, as the population of respectable men and women increased in Colorado’s towns and cities during the 1870s and 1880s, even the false luster of vice wore thin, and it became more difficult for prostitutes and other “deviant” citizens to move across the vice district’s boundaries and temporarily appear respectable. Believing that prostitution would be impossible to suppress, during the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century, Coloradans attempted to control prostitution and other forms of vice across the state by containing it within formal red-light districts. This chapter explores both the movement of deviant westerners across permeable social and geographic boundaries in frontier urban settings and the shift toward “containment” in the late nineteenth century.

Long before the mapping of regulated red-light districts, however, vice districts had become an integral part of the west’s urban geography. The respectable people and buildings that grew up around the district found the behaviors within alien and dangerous, but also exciting and entertaining. Perhaps with the exclusion of religious spaces, no other feature of Colorado’s incipient towns and cities was more unusual or more remarked upon than the vice district. Like churches, halls of government, and cemeteries, public spaces carry with them proscriptive definitions about how people are supposed to appear and behave. These extra-legal rules about proper comportment are socialized in people from an early age and the discrepancies between how people make use of different spaces in different (and sometimes competing) ways helps to illustrate how men and women in the past created and patrolled social boundaries. Although in material terms, the wood that formed church pews was not too dissimilar from the wood that

⁶⁶ Cy Martin, *Whiskey and Wild Women: An Amusing Account of the Saloons and Bawds of the Old West* (New York: Hart, 1974), 168-172. The economics behind prostitution has been well documented by historians who emphasize how madams and pimps operated brothels as businesses. For more information, see: Marion Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners: Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Lode* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981); Paula Petrik, “Capitalists with Rooms: Prostitution in Helena, Montana,” *Montana: Magazine of Western History* 31, no. 2 (1981): 28-41; and Jacqueline Baker Barnhart, *The Fair but Frail: Prostitution in San Francisco, 1849-1900*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986.

went into a brothel's bed-frames, the public recognized that these different wooden artifacts, like the bodies that used them, symbolized different ways of being. For some people during the frontier period, these boundaries were too blurred:

A walk through our streets of a Sabbath afternoon usually shows everything quiet and orderly, save that occasional crowds may be seen... There is one locality [Denver's Holladay Street] where, a short time ago, on the "holy day of seven," a person could hear the sound of the clergyman's voice, the shout and tumult of a gambling saloon, and the laughter from a near brothel, without moving a single step. "Service to God, Mammon and the Devil, all within hearing of each other."⁶⁷

For this unhappy Denverite, the intermingling of acceptable space and deviant space was untenable; over the nineteenth century these feelings of spatial and moral discomfort would build until they gained the critical mass required to regulate prostitution in new "red-light" districts, generally by the early 1890s. For morally upright westerners in frontier cities, the amorphous and shifting nature of these boundaries, the product of bodies in motion, made the district hard to define and even more difficult to regulate. The answer to the problem of the vice district, for these critics, became heightened physical and moral containment.

Prostitution in informal vice districts was a constant source of fascination for the general public in the late-nineteenth century, demonstrated by city residents' eager reading of newspaper accounts of vice that sensationalized the people and behaviors that counted as unconventional, deplorable, yet entertaining. Capitalizing on State Street's notoriety, the *Herald Democrat* in 1887 sent a reporter through the "surging crowd of men and frail women" into one of the district's many dance halls where he describes one of the working women there: "she was attired in a dress of some gauzy stuff, which had been cut off at the top, bottom, and at the arm pits... she had a bountiful vein of goose flesh, which was plainly visible to the naked eye... the casual

⁶⁷ *Rocky Mountain News*, "A Sabbath in Denver," 1860 Oct 23 (Denver, Colorado). In this instance, Mammon refers to the New Testament embodiment of wealth and greed; most often it is personified as a male deity and sometimes included as one of the seven princes of hell.

observer was immediately impressed with the idea that she had too many teeth.”⁶⁸ For the author’s readership, understanding how one of these “creatures” looked in situ was useful because when women like her moved outside of the district they tended to dress and comport themselves differently. As Anne Butler notes, while the general American public has always been curious about prostitution, this fascination “has been marked by a prurient tilt towards sensational erotica and moralistic judgements.”⁶⁹ The public’s fascination with prostitution stemmed from the well-understood, yet still bizarre, act of commercializing sex. Everyday deviant physicality contravened so many normative rules about appearance and gendered conduct that it became difficult for reformers to analyze and comprehend. Likewise, the public’s mix of approbation and fascination surrounding the presence of vice districts can be credited to the district’s lack of legal and geographic definition. This made the space seem mysterious and exciting as a place where any number of fantasies could be duly satisfied because, officially, vice districts didn’t exist as formal aspects of the cityscape.

When prostitutes moved outside of the district and maintained their deviant physicality, their performances advertised their bodies and businesses and expressed a great deal of physical agency and freedom. Yet these appearances also began to wear on the respectable populations who inhabited these spaces. In 1882, with pomp and circumstance, two of Boulder’s reckless “painted-blondes” rode their horses onto the train station platform and “pranced around to the great amusement of the boys who happened there.”⁷⁰ Events like these colorfully showcased the body as it maneuvered (and sometimes at great speed) between competing moral realms – the entertainment value alone was undoubtedly a boon to working class communities and their

⁶⁸ *Herald Democrat*, “State Street at Night,” 1887 September 27 (Leadville, Colorado).

⁶⁹ Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery*, x.

⁷⁰ *Boulder County Herald*, 1882 September 22 (Boulder, Colorado).

exhausted laborers. Ultimately however, to the detriment of prostitutes, these appearances reinforced the public's perception of their apparent "inhumanity" when, for instance, a prostitute and her companion went tearing through Ouray's streets, ignorant of the fact that "the horse was covered with foam and hardly able to breathe..."⁷¹ When events like these made their way to the press, the vice district and its denizens served readers with robust and romantic imagery that, in its frequent exaggeration, distorted conditions on the ground by accentuating the perceived glamour of prostitution, which in turn attracted tourists and their expendable incomes. Indeed Ouray's infamous dance hall, the "220," was at one point described as "the most recherché of the kind ever known in this part of the country. Twenty-two drunken prostitutes all dancing at one time. Great town is Ouray for Tin-horns and scarlet daughters."⁷² Part of what made these accounts so compelling is their general acknowledgement and reinforcement of the idea that within vice districts, persons can wear their bodies differently than without. The district's dualism, best represented by fantasies and horrors endemic to prostitution, promised very earthly rewards and punishments for those who indulged in the physicality of the space.

If deviant physical behavior was central to the subculture of the vice district, and potentially at odds with the mainstream Victorian culture practiced without, then it becomes important to ask how prostitutes moved and behaved outside of the district setting. The demographic shift from mining camps populated predominantly by single men, to cityscapes with a diverse population of respectable and deviant members, created a "moral borderlands," or a transitory area between districts and the rest of the "respectable" urban landscape, that prostitutes navigated daily with positive and negative repercussions. Whereas male dalliances in the district could be considered acceptable, if still frowned upon, women had a much more

⁷¹ *Solid Muldoon Weekly*, 1889 June 21 (Ouray, Colorado).

⁷² *Solid Muldoon Weekly*, 1887 February 11 (Ouray, Colorado).

difficult time crossing the moral borderlands. When Mabel Hurley, discussed in Chapter 2, traveled the 99.7 miles between Ouray and Grand Junction in order to shoot her lover, how did she act, look, and think while she crossed out of deviant space and into spaces controlled by otherwise law-abiding, respectable, peoples? The answer to this question illustrate the performative nature of gender and sexuality while inherently developing the notion of separate social identities for those who closely followed the prescribed vision of “correctness” and those who did not. Importantly, these identities could be traded when the situation demanded it. In this way, moving across the line meant that Mabel Hurley donned both the clothes of a respectable woman, and also her attitude and demeanor while in transit to Grand Junction – she performed the part of the “lady” until she was ready to reassume her status as a “deviant.”

Thus, prostitutes often understood the deviant identity placed on them by outsiders and adapted the way their bodies looked and moved in order to transgress the moral borders that kept them separate. This transformative ability was not a secret, however, and fascinated writers endeavored to share this aspect with those who cared to listen. In 1901, Edna S. Brainerd published a short story in the *Summit County Journal* that described a farmer who fell in love with a woman who worked as a writer in the city. In actuality, she was a “painted lady” (a prostitute) that adopted the personae of a writer as she traveled outside of the district. Her disguise was so effective, that only after she revealed her secret months into their flowering courtship did she transform again, and only then did the farmer see the “pathetic, drooping figure of the woman before him.”⁷³ The illustrations that adjoin the story nevertheless draw her as young, beautiful, and well dressed – a stark contrast to the goose-fleshed dance hall girl mentioned above [See Image 3]. Physically speaking, the loose, revealing dresses, shifts, and

⁷³ Edna S. Brainerd, “I’m Just a Painted Lady,” *Summit County Journal*, 1901 June 15 (Breckenridge, Colorado).

skirts worn by prostitutes in the district not only proved shocking and sensuous, but also facilitated deviant movement and behavior. The long, high-necked, woolen dress illustrated in the story of the “Painted Lady” similarly reflects acceptable middle-class female values epitomized by stiffness and sedentary activity. Throughout most of the story, this woman was able to leave the red-light district and also fall in love, but only as long as her body was “painted” in respectable, moral colors.

The story of the “Painted Lady” ends on a bittersweet note, with the farmer professing his undying love for a woman so damaged by the rough physicality of the vice district. As they walk back on the country road towards the city, “with its tawdry shams, where the edges were raw-cut and raveled and where everything was pretense and tinsel,” the author describes “her limp skirts dragging in the dust and the little bangles jangling at her belt” in order to more fully illustrate her transformation back into a prostitute. For the eponymous Painted Lady, maintaining her deception wasn’t an act of malice, rather, she simply enjoyed the benefits that respectability afforded her. At first, she thought the farmer saw through her disguise, “but when you [the farmer] didn’t seem to see—or to care—I just went on letting you think well of me.”⁷⁴ The author’s motivations in writing this story are unclear, but the narrative of the “Painted Lady” suggests a public acknowledgement that prostitutes carefully moved across different social boundaries, and in this story, operated as a metaphor for the unwelcome and corrupting spread of modern social problems. Fictions like Edna Brainerd’s may have some basis in fact – her critiques of the harshness of city life and the problems of prostitution are not unique in the Progressive Era. In Brainerd’s rendition, the Painted Lady’s mother was a Dance-hall girl (she

⁷⁴ Brainerd, “I’m Just a Painted Lady,” *Summit County Journal*, 1901 June 15.

was “born in the wings of the theater” and grew up in the demimonde) and love, with the possibility of marriage, was a viable escape for her and many other real-world prostitutes.

How men and women perceived each other, thus depended on which side of the street the viewer was positioned on. This is vividly portrayed in 1882, when Denver’s exasperated city fathers passed an ordinance forcing all “women of ill-repute” to wear yellow ribbons to publically designate their status as prostitutes. In response, the infamous madam Jennie Rogers, in accordance with contemporary fashion sense, ordered yellow dresses made for all of her “ladies” to wear when advertising within and outside of the district.⁷⁵ While the ribbon law was quickly repealed, this example illustrates that prostitutes recognized the existence of social boundaries and transformed their appearance and behavior to reflect that difference – a physical metamorphosis was required to leave the district (as prostitutes) and emerge on the other side as “ladies.” While the roles their bodies would perform had not changed—they continued to engage in illicit sexual activity—dressing, acting, speaking, and behaving properly helped prostitutes transgress boundaries while simultaneously reaffirming them.

Outsiders also entered into districts with preconceived notions of how prostitution was enacted and what that relationship was supposed to look like in the deviant environment. Especially for men whose line of work cut them off from families and legitimate sexuality—cattlemen, rail workers, loggers, soldiers, and miners—the women working in Colorado’s brothels and cribs were, for some, a source of companionship as well as sex. The “fast life” provided customers the illusion of a cohesive and benevolent social group that was at least ostensibly designed to reduce inhibitions through alcohol, drugs, and bodily contact and foster a sense of welcome and inclusion within the “fast element.” Alternatively, Madams and “Macs”

⁷⁵ Secrest, *Hell’s Belles*, 263.

(short for the French version of pimp: “macquereau”) made sure their women played on these emotions in order to drive sales of alcohol, dances, and of course transactional sex. While some prostitutes certainly did form emotional attachments to their customers, and hoped that the relationship would blossom into marriage and potentially an escape from prostitution, many more saw the interaction in businesslike terms – the fantasies created in the media did not always translate into the realities of life on the line. Men who expected romance in red-light districts expressed dismay that “the whole thing, from the time you got in the room until the time you came, didn’t take three minutes. Then she’d wash you off again, and herself. Then she’d get dressed, without even looking at you.”⁷⁶ One prostitute could not help but wonder why visiting men would want more: “They had only bought my body, I could not see why they should want more. My love was not for sale, piecemeal, to every man who had the price to pay for my body.”⁷⁷ This insider intimately knew that red-light districts were defined by physical bodily use – here, just as on the ranch, in the factory, or in the mine, sentimentality and intentionality was less important than the performance of the body and the extraction of whatever resource was at stake.

Crossing the “moral borderlands” was not always easy, and both respectable and deviant persons often failed to trespass unnoticed; paradoxically, these failed boundary transgressions impressed upon the respectable community the critical importance of surveillance and the likelihood that an immoral intruder (like the “Painted Lady) and the larger trade of prostitution would be exceedingly difficult to monitor and suppress. Understandably, when Belle Jones, Daisy Smith, and Annie Griffin moved beyond the red-light district, removed their clothes, and

⁷⁶ Oral Interview with Rose, *Storyville*, 154. As quoted in Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 96.

⁷⁷ Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, *The Women’s West* (Omaha: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 202; Original in Madeleine Blair, *Madeleine: An Autobiography; with an Introduction by Judge Ben B. Lindsey* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1919). University of Pennsylvania, Digital Library.

danced nude at the corner of Nineteenth and Larimer Streets, they stood in opposition to the correct stream of behavior and were arrested for their “naughty capers.”⁷⁸ Or inversely, when William L. Carter, a “reputed mining man from Salida,” entered into Denver’s red-light district and was robbed of \$140, a portly sum—he promptly reported the theft to the police—the *Telluride Journal* chided that “a man with good sense usually sneaks back home and tries to forget it.”⁷⁹ In each of these instances Coloradans who crossed the social line and expected to encounter a sympathetic environment on the other side found themselves subject to censure or punishment instead. When outside the district, women who performed the role of the “lady” gained some prostitutes a level of legal protection and status that they wouldn’t normally enjoy, yet this only worked in the appropriate social setting. In contrast, when U.S. Marshals Cyrus ‘Doc’ Shores and Jim Clark wandered through Telluride’s vice district they encountered “the boss of one house” who approached them as a social equal, dressed as, and acting like, a proper “lady.” She wanted to know if Clark would take her aged and sick dog “out of town” and put him out of his misery. In response, “Clark immediately jerked his six-shooter out and shot... the dog through the shoulders and the dog fell...”⁸⁰ Clark, a former gang member and man with a “tough disposition” understood violence as well as the correct place to perform it; assuming the role of “lady” had little effect on the condescending Clark while the Madam was still within a deviant space.

That being said, outside agents of respectability most likely did not fully understand the process through which intracommunal boundaries were formed by the people who moved within and through them. When Dr. John Elsner first started practicing medicine in Denver in the early

⁷⁸ Robert L. Perkin, *The First Hundred Years* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), 371.

⁷⁹ *Telluride Journal*, 1905 December 14 (Telluride, Colorado).

⁸⁰ Cyrus Wells ‘Doc’ Shores, *Memoires of a Lawman* (Denver Public Library: Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver, Colorado) Box 2, Folder FF56, File 15-16.

1870s, he wore a silk hat and an umbrella. His work mandated that he spend a great deal of time within the vice district where “it gave opportunity for many gun shot injuries to be treated.” Within twenty-four hours of moving back and forth across the threshold of deviant/normal space, he received a placard with a “skull and cross bones at the top” drawn across the top, which read: “dispose of your hat and umbrella, as it is a violation of the vigilantes.”⁸¹ While who, exactly, “the vigilantes” were remains unknown, the importance they placed upon appearance is important. Whether this story is exaggerated or even apocryphal, it nevertheless demonstrates that the Doctor’s physical appearance and behavior underscored him as different and also, that his perceived identity was malleable and susceptible to coerced change at the behest of those who refused to condone moral fluidity. From that moment forward, he only wore a *felt* hat while traveling through the district.

Inversely, the early fluidity of moral boundaries, while increasingly deplored by respectable society, could occasionally work to the advantage of respectable women. The permeable boundary and its markers were well understood by a “prominent lady” of Pueblo, Colorado, who learned in 1889 that her husband had been visiting the “bagnio of the Creek sisters.” She then “armed herself with a knife and entered the place and attacked one of the inmates, Myrtle.” Notably, this woman of high social-standing descended into the vice district and picked up a knife—adopting the accoutrement and deviant identity of the space—and slashed the prostitute. Upon leaving the district, and reassuming her identity as a woman of proper virtue and behavior, the consequences of her actions fell away and furthermore, “attempts

⁸¹ Dr. John Elsner, “Reminiscences,” c. 1890 (Denver Public Library: Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver, Colorado) OV Box 1, Folder Wh1758, File M34-174. In the original, the author incorrectly left a space between “gun” and “shot.”

have been made to hush the matter up, out of respect for the relatives and friends of the lady.”⁸² Here, the benefits of class, flexible boundaries, and her performativity combined with the normative spatial-behavior of the brothel to free her from justice and accountability for her crime.⁸³ Violent behavior could be performed as long as it happened in the right place. Until the development of formal red-light districts in the years to come, this evidence suggests that the boundaries of these unregulated communities were not drawn on the ground, but rather worn on the sleeve or carried in a holster.

As historians and geographers have shown, vice districts – as a unique social space, with their own boundaries and internal customs – have the propensity to create unique social norms within their confines. In analyzing historical actors in accordance with the spaces they lived in, supported, and patrolled, districts demonstrate aspects of prostitutes’ lives that otherwise would be missing from the historical record. Perhaps this is most illustrative in the moments when prostitutes and “respectable” people alternatively moved across the line, either successfully or unsuccessfully. The historian looking at vice in Colorado however is more likely to encounter evidence where these transitions failed (as mentioned above), but that does not necessarily imply that all attempts to navigate the districts borders were unsuccessful, given the large numbers of prostitutes and the fact that “the dog didn’t bark” – in reference to the famed Sherlock Holmes story, *Silver Blaze*, published in 1892. This suggests that prostitutes engaged in acceptable society successfully and invisibly, some of the time, but clearly not all of the time. Take for example complaints received by the *Rocky Mountain News* that “Recently some of the most

⁸² *Aspen Daily Chronicle*, “Special to the Chronicle,” 1889 August 8 (Aspen, Colorado).

⁸³ Some theorists in philosophy and gender studies, notably Judith Butler, have argued that even commonplace communication and speech acts are performative, in that they serve to define identity. In this way, performativity reverses the idea that an identity is the source of more secondary actions (speech, gestures). Instead, actions, behaviors, and gestures construct identities. This view is influenced by post modernists including Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. For more information, see: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

notorious courtesans have cut conspicuous figures in the midst of refined and fashionable audiences” when endeavoring to see theatrical and other performances at Denver’s Guard Hall. The major problem for this writer is that after getting a male “to engage front seats, and by this artifice secure prominent places in the hall,” women of ill-repute then caused “respectable folks” to “sit with them or go out, whichever they prefer.”⁸⁴ Clearly then, well-connected and wealthier prostitutes donned respectable attire and attended refined entertainment with an ostensibly respectable male consort. This happened enough for people to complain in the local newspapers. Moreover, if these women would have perhaps chosen to sit elsewhere in the theater, they may not have been noticed – at least in this instance prostitutes attempted to don a different socio-sexual identity than the monstrous label that respectable society placed upon prostitutes.

By the mid-1880s, the lines that separated the deviant community from the respectable community had solidified socially and geographically – successfully transgressing the moral borderlands was certainly more difficult than in the previous decades and the consequences for prostitutes was more severe. Constant pressure from a growing number of moral reformers and vice crusaders meant that women caught soliciting outside of the district faced stiffer fines, with longer incarceration terms, and had less-visible public support. By the mid-1880s the “red-light district” as we think of it today had become institutionalized and its borders consolidated. By this period, visitors arriving to the Centennial State could expect the presence of the red-light district and even expect certain amenities and diversions upon their arrival. Newspapers regaled readers with wicked and exuberant stories about districts as they developed across the country, and encouraged them to see red-light districts as both urban abominations and as places of desirable opulence, excitement, and gratification. The vast interconnectivity of transnational debates and

⁸⁴ *Rocky Mountain News*, “Unwelcome Presence,” 1875 December 2 (Denver, Colorado).

fascinations with prostitution can be evidenced by the 1890s in Denver's district, which boasted such foreign luxuries as a population of approximately two hundred French prostitutes.⁸⁵ As vice spread across the western world, the features of red-light districts took on similar characteristics, and reformers eager to contain the spread of prostitution participated in national-level discussions of regulation and suppression that reached from New York's Bowery District, south to Storyville in New Orleans, center to Market Street in Denver, and far west to the Barbary Coast in San Francisco.

When city councils throughout Colorado attempted to recognize, control, and ultimately tax the vice district they effectively made the area all the more visible and condemnable to the public eye. The process was messy, and some members of the public recognized the contradictions inherent to organizing illegitimate activities. When the Aspen City Council "threw the stigma of lewdness and infamy" over the southeastern section of that city, roughly "east of Galen[a]s street and south of the alley between Cooper and Hyman avenues," some reformers realized that by creating a red-light district, they had contained within those boundaries some respectable working-class families, that might have otherwise never visited a red-light district.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the introduction of the Midland railroad to Aspen and the location of its depot on Durant Avenue—at the heart of the red-light district—created an even bigger problem for moral crusaders. When visitors stepped off the platform, the first thing they saw was "the sign of prostitution, the half clad women standing at the windows and doors of the houses." The fear was that the affluent stranger, unfamiliar with the bodily symbols that made these areas special and separate, would gain the impression that the entirety of the city was "most unfavorable" and

⁸⁵ *Aspen Daily Times*, "After the Prostitutes," 1889 May 4 (Aspen, Colorado).

⁸⁶ *Aspen Daily Times*, 1885 February 26 (Aspen, Colorado).

therefore stymie the influx of tourist dollars and potential investments in the city.⁸⁷ For the working women of these places, however, these areas on the district's borderland (as well as within newspapers) proved to be an important location from which to advertise their wares. Indeed, in a *Fort Collins Courier* op-ed, one man commented that it was "no wonder prostitutes are plenty... when they are drummed for publicly at the depot."⁸⁸

Transitioning between acceptable and deviant forms of physical behavior proved increasingly difficult for prostitutes and also produced a sharpening of moral boundaries for other women, especially those who were young, unmarried, and looking for entertainment in commercial settings. In the first decade of the twentieth century the outrage against the red-light district encompassed both prostitution and red-light dance halls, which were perceived to be places of moral degradation. "If she wants to dance, send her to dancing school, if she still wants to dance, get her a job in the chorus..." opined one concerned man from Durango, Colorado, noting that "Now is the time to act."⁸⁹ Ultimately dance halls were subjected to increased regulation and supervision by police matrons epitomized by Denver's first female police detective, social worker Josephine Roche, who held the title of inspector of public amusements. Roche made a name for herself along Holliday/Market Street in Denver by breaking up fledgling romances and stepping between honky-tonk brawlers.⁹⁰ Despite the unprecedented efforts of women reformers like Roche, dance halls – such as those located within or near the vice district like the Red Light in Leadville – could neither escape Roche's hatchet nor their deviant legacy. Indeed, in 1908 Aspen mayor Dr. Mollins gave his expert opinion about one recently opened site: "to my personal knowledge, seventeen girls have been ruined as the direct cause of that

⁸⁷ *Aspen Daily Times*, 1888 November 25 (Aspen, Colorado).

⁸⁸ *Fort Collins Courier*, "From Monday's Daily," 1882 July 20 (Fort Collins, Colorado).

⁸⁹ *Durango Democrat*, "Editorial," 1905 May 14 (Durango, Colorado).

⁹⁰ Noel, *The City and the Saloon*, 88.

public dance hall.”⁹¹ Mollins placed the “ruination” in the act of dancing. In a similar manner, President Speer of Denver’s Fire and Police Board (and future mayor) “went slumming” in 1901 to investigate the situation of vice within the district. Speer concluded that “dance hall girls do not wear enough,” and reporters were quick to note that the President did “not object to the lack of clothing on the grounds of decency but because the weather is not warm enough to justify the exposure which he saw.” Oddly enough to onlookers, Speer saw illegal vice and countenanced it – “chucking it under the chin, so to speak.”⁹² Like other forms of recreation, dancing could take on a respectable form as well as a deviant form, and the location of the dance hall largely defined which was paramount.

In contrast to the accommodating inspector Speer, for many Coloradans, the district’s physical subculture appeared bizarre and otherworldly. For moral reformer Ernest A. Bell, these territories were transformative, and appeared before onlookers like “a lake of fire, perpetually engulfing unwary and unprotected girls, along with the willfully depraved.” Crossing the fiery line between proper Victorian stiffness characterized by outward sexual-repression and the “fastness” characterized by districts was dangerous because to outsiders it threatened to permanently transform a person’s body. Bell stressed this transition from moral to immoral not by targeting alcohol or drug abuse—issues that actually, chemically, alter the way the body functions—but rather at dancing: “The girl who dances is in very great peril, and she puts young men with whom she dances under greater temptation than herself. Soon after the fatal plunge a girl becomes immodest, indecent, lawless, homeless, a victim and distributor of vile diseases.”⁹³ This transformation was a powerful force in the eyes of the outside community. In order to

⁹¹ *Aspen Daily Times*, “Dr. Mollins Denounces Place,” 1908 February 28 (Aspen, Colorado).

⁹² *Aspen Tribune*, “President Speer,” 1901 January 24 (Aspen, Colorado).

⁹³ Ernest A. Bell, *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls, or War on the White Slave Trade* (Amazon Digital Services: Kindle Edition, 2015; originally published [N.C.: G. S. Ball, 1910]),

survive, when female members of the demimonde attempted to leave the district they often attempted to look and act like “acceptable” members of the outside community and consequently carried with them multiple identities. Outsiders like Bell however, did not see how a prostitute could embrace ostensibly conflicting personae and instead envisioned the character of a woman proceeding linearly from the base-state of moral/normal/proper directly into the state of immoral/deviant/physical. When teenage gambler Charles E. Henry murdered dance hall girl Effie Moore in a fit of jealousy on the night of November 13, 1887, he was acquitted of his crimes on the grounds of “transitory frenzy” and “acting most queerly.”⁹⁴ The arguments for Charles Henry imply beyond a doubt that he murdered Effie Moore – this example powerfully illustrates how some people in turn of the century Colorado envisioned the space of the red-light district as an incredibly dangerous place with the propensity to transform men and women alike, a place that had the power to corrupt women into depravity and turn men into beasts.⁹⁵ Entering cost women their virtue, but with enough time and distance, men could be cured of the district’s evil influence.

As Clark Secrest notes, in 1894 Denver attempted to ban prostitution within newly created red-light districts, but the move was widely unpopular and ultimately ineffective.⁹⁶ Quite simply, the average Coloradan acknowledged how useful the red-light district was in promoting vice-tourism and trade. Instead, as the nineteenth century wound to a close and the twentieth

⁹⁴ Sam Howe, *Sam Howe Murder Book, 1883-1920* (Colorado Historical Society Library: Denver, Colorado, Sam Howe Murder Books), as quoted in Secrest, *Hell’s Belles*, 138.

⁹⁵ Furthermore, although further research is needed to substantiate this claim, it may be the case that the fluid performativity utilized by prostitutes eventually became considered a critical aspect of the deviant subculture and monstrous archetype. Whereas a respectable woman’s primary identity was expected in nineteenth century American culture to slowly progress linearly from daughter-to-wife and from wife-to-mother (each role dependent upon men to define and consolidate) a prostitute’s physical identity substituted male power for horizontal mobility. In this theorizing, prostitutes set aside what outsider men considered proper female relationships and thus became monstrous non-women.

⁹⁶ Secrest, *Hell’s Belles*, 133.

triumphantly erupted, vice districts evolved into formal, regulated, red-light districts where prostitution could be contained and taxed. By the end of the century the deviant identity of the district had solidified into a recognizable form: when Denver's police sergeant George E. Tarbox shut down a rooming house on Larimer Street (outside of the district), and despite the insistence of the proprietor that "I see none of my lady lodgers doing anything wrong," Tarbox responded that "You may not see anything wrong, madame, but we know they are not proper women. Such women must stay below Larimer Street [within the red-light district] hereafter."⁹⁷ In this way, the formal red-light district created along Market Street allowed women to continue practicing physical deviance, but not exercise the geographic mobility that they once enjoyed. For many progressives, the transformative power of city planning was a sincere attempt to help those women that hitherto had been left to morally, socially, and biologically degenerate in the shadows of an industrializing nation.

In order to perfectly map what vice districts looked like in 1890, at the beginnings of its consolidation and enforcement, the historian must look at the Sanborn-Perris Map Company's fire insurance maps. As historian-preservationist Kim Keister states: "Sanborn maps survive as a guide to American urbanization that is unrivaled by other cartography and, for that matter, by few documentary resources of any kind."⁹⁸ Extant Sanborn maps exist for most of Colorado's towns with more volumes having been published for larger cities like Denver which is covered from 1887-1951. The maps themselves are large-scale lithographs printed on paper where one inch represents fifty feet (1:600) in real-space. As stated, the years surrounding 1890 are the most significant for historians and cartographers alike because during this period districts became definable. The large folding map attached here [See Image 2] represents, for the first

⁹⁷ *Denver Republican*, "Not Proper Women," 1894 April 25 (Denver, Colorado).

⁹⁸ Kim Keister, "Charts of Change," *Historic Preservation* 45, no. 3 (June 1993): 42-49.

time, the entirety of Denver's Market Street red-light district in the year 1890 from roughly 16th-23rd Streets straddling Market Street.⁹⁹ When these images are laid together in series, instead of apart as they are traditionally divided and organized in Sanborn's enormous (21x25 inches) bound volumes, they portray a unique environment that is imperfectly bounded. Existing alongside brothels, cribs, and parlor houses (which Sanborn sheepishly labels as "female boarding" houses) the map-user finds laundresses, grocers, warehouses, and factories that may have served as day-time employment for many of the district's dwellers. Importantly, Sanborn-Perris Map Co. also identified, near the center of the district, where Chinese people made their homes – here Sanborn used the racialized "Chine D" to describe these dwellings. For this map company, it was important to not only illustrate fire-insurance liability, but also to demarcate the racial and moral lines that vivisected city spaces.¹⁰⁰

It may be useful at this point to discuss the importance of French social scientist Henri Lefebvre and his so-called "trialectic" on the creation of social spaces and spatial analysis in general. A social space is anywhere humans gather and interact. Henri Lefebvre emphasized that in human society all "space is social: it involves assigning more or less appropriated places to social relations....social space has thus always been a social product."¹⁰¹ In his path breaking 1991 work, *the Production of Space*, Lefebvre argues that the social production of urban space in modern society is fundamental to the reproduction of social relations, and therefore of capitalism itself. The social production of space is commanded by a hegemonic class as a tool to reproduce its dominance. Lefebvre argued that every society—and therefore every mode of production—produce certain spaces, their own space. The world of frontier Denver, or of a western vice

⁹⁹ Sanborn-Perris Map Company, "Denver Insurance Maps," Volume 2 (New York: 1890), sections 35-42, 46-54.

¹⁰¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 26.

district, cannot be understood as a simple agglomeration of people and things in space – it had its own spatial practice, making its own space (which acted in its own self-interest). This line of reasoning aligns with Lefebvre’s argument that the intellectual climate of a city is very much related to the how that society produces and characterizes its spaces.¹⁰² Thus if every society produces its own space, any "social existence" aspiring to be or declaring itself to be real, but not creating its own space, would be a strange and peculiar abstraction incapable of escaping the ideological or even cultural spheres that surrounded that particular existence. By living and working within red-light districts, prostitutes and their customers contributed to the creation of a new social identity, or “existence.” In this light, districts then serve as a legitimate and self-regulating space for prostitutes to engage in commercial sex that would theoretically not draw the ire of the community at large.

As more people traveled west to Colorado the perceived need to contain vice grew commensurately. The transnational social debate over whether to suppress prostitution or to regulate vice in districts had travelled to, and reached, its climax by the late 1880s in Colorado. Suppression was a straight-forward, yet difficult task, one that required broad social support and a cooperative legislature – something entirely lacking in late-nineteenth century cities like Denver. Alternatively, regulation could proceed quickly, and it promised to yield revenue from fines and licenses, while offering the potential benefit of curbing the spread of venereal diseases,

¹⁰² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 59. Of note, scholars of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have utilized the “Lefebvrian Trialectical Approach” successfully to illuminate some of the complexities surrounding transnational prostitution especially after the enactment of prohibition in the United States. For more information and useful works on *zonas de tolerancia*, see Christensen, Catherine. “Mujeres Públicas: American Prostitutes in Baja California, 1910-1930.” *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (May 2013): 215-47; Curtis, James R. and Daniel D. Arreola. “Zonas de Tolerancia on the Northern Mexican Border.” *Geographical Review* 81, no. 3 (July 1991): 333-46; Delgado, Grace Peña. “Border Control and Sexual Policing: White Slavery and Prostitution along the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, 1903-1910.” *Western Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 157-78; and Fischer, Robert. “Mobility and Morality at the Border: A Lefebvrian Spatio-Temporal Analysis in Early Twentieth-Century Ciudad Juarez and El Paso.” *Historical Social Research* 38, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 176-96.

something that frustrated ministers, family-units, and social reformers had long advocated for. Venereal disease and the sex-trade, argued many, destroyed the virtue of women, demolished families, and if left unchecked might—through venereal disease—painfully unravel American civilization. Dr. Frederick Bancroft, Denver’s city physician between mid-1872 through 1876, had spent much of his career advocating for more control and regulation over Denver’s brothel district:

The social evil is becoming so open and bold and so pernicious in its effect on society that it cannot long go unrestrained or unregulated. No one but the physician who sees in the wives and offspring of the transgressors the corroding and contaminating effects of diseases contracted in houses of ill fame, can form [an] estimate of the fearful consequences entailed by this evil upon the present and future generations.¹⁰³

Although Bancroft wrote fervently with eloquence and force, his warnings went repeatedly ignored and underappreciated by a frontier society that had grown accustomed to vice and immorality. It took almost fifteen years for Colorado’s towns and cities to respond Dr. Bancroft’s warnings and the apparent threat of prostitution. Between roughly 1870 through 1886, the expansive boundaries of vice districts became slowly consolidated and loosely contained through quotidian interactions between the public, the police, and the “fast-element.” The vice districts that developed within urban centers during this period became surrounded on all sides by “respectable” forces. By repeatedly crossing into “respectable space,” prostitutes and other deviant members of the vice district illustrated for reformers how difficult it would be to remove prostitution from the urban landscape.

As historians like Mara Kiere and Sandra Wood have demonstrated, prostitution and perceived moral depravity in part was encouraged by industrialization that for the first time began to place women in the work force and outside of conventional gender norms. Where once

¹⁰³ Frederick J. Bancroft, “Annual Reports,” 1875 May 7 (Denver Public Library: Western History and Genealogy Collection, Caroline Bancroft Family Papers, OVbox2, FF113).

small, informal vice districts only needed to maneuver past local opponents to vice (and because of early gender imbalances there could only be relatively few people who would stand against the lucrative vice-trade), now by the turn of the century the debate took on proportions of national significance and innumerable studies were published and committees formed to address the growth of red-light districts that occurred in almost every major city. Indeed, in 1902 the “Committee of Fifteen” attempted to narrow down the causes and any potential solutions for dealing with prostitution in New York City. In their report titled, “THE SOCIAL EVIL,” they described the material conditions that contribute to prostitution:

In many cities there are great classes of women without any resources excepting their earnings as needle-women, day-workers, domestics, or factory hands. These earnings are often so small as barely to suffice for the urgent needs of the day. A season of non-employment presents them with the alternatives of starvation or prostitution.¹⁰⁴

While many found these social and economic factors disturbing and troublesome, especially in regards to the late-nineteenth century notions of racial purity tied to female sexuality, most reformers saw districting as the only effective solution to a problem that they saw going back as far as the beginnings of western civilization: “The trend of Jewish Legislation may accordingly be described as repressive; that of Greece and Rome as regulative.”¹⁰⁵ The arguments raised by the Committee of Fifteen emphasized suppressing the “flagrant incitement to debauch” while “much could be gained if vice could be made relatively *inconspicuous* except to its votaries.”¹⁰⁶

Dr. Frederick J. Bancroft, whose condemnation of the physiological toll prostitution in Denver was often ignored, surely would have sympathized with the works of the Committee of

¹⁰⁴ Edwin R. A. Seligman, ed. *The Social Evil: with Special Reference to Conditions Existing in the City of New York; a Report Prepared [in 1902] Under the Direction of the Committee of Fifteen* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912) as presented in Gerald N. Grob, ed. *Prostitution in America: Three Investigations, 1902-1914* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 9.

¹⁰⁵ Seligman, *The Social Evil*, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Seligman, *The Social Evil*, 125. Emphasis added.

Fifteen. Men like Bancroft thought prostitution was unlikely ever to disappear—the Romans couldn't eradicate the trade, “as is clearly shown throughout the pages of ancient history and the bible”—but he could attempt to reduce the spread of venereal diseases which infected both the innocent and the undeserving. Bancroft acknowledged that “regulation may not materially diminish prostitution,” but “it sensibly lessens the terrible consequences of it.”¹⁰⁷ When coupled with the economics of vice, which directly delivered thousands of dollars a week through taxes and fines for prostitution or “keeping a disorderly house,” and indirectly through bribes, pay-offs, and simple commercial spending, the red-light district was too valuable to eliminate wholesale. Most present throughout the state of Colorado in the early 1890s agreed that districts were useful and valuable, if a somewhat regrettable aspect of the city's geography, and therefore in order to guard this immoral institution (and control the health and utility of the bodies within it) the district needed to be separate and discrete. Reformers such as these attempted to hide vice by reducing solicitation on the street, through compelling “haunts of vice” to assume “the appearance of decency.” By removing every aspect of conspicuous advertising (except, of course, the red-light district itself), they ultimately, however, failed to understand that the boundaries of earlier vice districts were designated by human behavior and social performance – not by legal definitions or through the discomfort of the growing middle class.¹⁰⁸ Any attempt by moral reformers to cover-up vice by enforcing zones of tolerance ultimately failed to actually reduce the frequency of deviant behavior, and those within red-light districts continued to drink, fight, and have illicit sex. Ultimately, the transformation from a loose, mobile, and unregulated vice districts into an organized, locatable, and describable red-light district made those behaviors within all the more visible to outside viewers.

¹⁰⁷ Bancroft, “Loose Clippings,” Undated (Denver Public Library: Western History and Genealogy Collection, Caroline Bancroft Family Papers, OVbox2, FF113).

¹⁰⁸ Seligman, “The Social Evil,” 125.

The institutionalization of red-light districts in the mid-1880s demonstrates that Coloradans were finally prepared to move beyond the rampant exuberance that characterized the frontier and settlement periods. Districting also tacitly acknowledged the importance of prostitution and the vice trade in encouraging vice-tourism, in bolstering liquor interests, and in periodically refilling the city's coffers through raids and fines. Clearly red-light districts were controlled at least nominally by elites, some of whom, like Denver's newly elected Mayor Robert W. Speer in 1903, were clearly corrupt and received kick-backs and bribes from prominent members of the district. Simply and elegantly, enforcing district boundaries during this period (whether through legal or corrupt means) helps illuminate how prostitutes and other participants in the district's subculture developed a place where their deviant identity was normal and could be accepted. In Denver's district, men like Police Chief Cook in the late-nineteenth century "knew the populace would excuse the antics of the red light ladies so long as the ladies stayed where they belonged."¹⁰⁹ Yet this subculture was defined by its mobility and physicality – where once prostitutes roved more-or-less across the cityscape, soliciting from alley, window, and doorway, by the end of the 1880s they had to remain confined to their space. The district therefore was inherently designed to keep vice-interests active and healthy, yet separate and different, all-the-while maintaining the approval of the voting public. Tensions immediately arose between citizens attempting to respect the boundary, and from prostitutes and others attempting (at times successfully) to cross that border. This interaction was doomed to fail. As the *Tribune-Republican* lamented in 1886:

For a long time this class of people has been known to dwell upon one street in this city [Denver], and that thoroughfare has been tacitly given up to them. They have often gotten away from the limits prescribed, but the police have driven them back again. Lately, however, the spread of this evil has been more than usually great. There are now quite a

¹⁰⁹ Secretst, *Hell's Belles*, 134.

number of these places running in full blast in Larimer and Lawrence streets, and several carried on in a most quiet manner in Arapahoe, Curtis, and Champa streets, and there is one quite notorious on Seventeenth, near Curtis street.¹¹⁰

Before this time, when the boundaries of vice districts were ill-defined and organically grown and the population was disproportionately male, all the benefits of a vice district could be safely utilized by the public at large. When “respectable citizens, pure women and innocent children” arrived, quickly they demanded that they “not be obliged to witness the evidence of its [the vice trade’s] existence.”¹¹¹ This visibility soon forced prostitutes into dangerous conditions and condemned red-light districts to a fiery ruin.

¹¹⁰ *Denver Tribune-Republican*, “Female Sporting Class,” 1886 April 18 (Denver: Denver, Colorado).

¹¹¹ *Denver Tribune-Republican*, “Female Sporting Class,” 1886 April 18.

CHAPTER 3 – “FIRES OF INCENDIARY ORIGIN”

VISIBILITY, BOSS SPEER, AND THE SUPPRESSION OF RED-LIGHT DISTRICTS

The dawn of the twentieth century gave moral reformers across the nation much to look forward to: vice had more-or-less been effectively contained within red-light districts and progressive governments were taking hold from San Francisco to New York. The hope some harbored that regulation might suppress vice, however, seemed illusory. In the afterglow of Colorado’s New Year celebrations, on January 21, 1900, and adjacent to an advertisement for “Dr. W.A. Cook’s” cure for “Venereal Disease and Sexual Weakness,” (guaranteed to cure recently contracted Gonorrhea within 48-60 hours) the *Aspen Daily Times* featured a hopeful poem by Margaret Elizabeth Sangster. Sangster was a popular poet, author, and social critic, who stressed a vision of a better world where Americans “...could but begin on New Year’s Day a clean new life, and could drop the old / old sins, old shames, old thrusts of pain and the myriad things Gold only knows / and into the sweet year, clean of stain, could step with the freedom of full repose...”¹¹² Readers from Aspen to Denver and Boulder to Durango might have applauded the sentiment but acknowledged the reality – the brothels, cribs, and dance halls conglomerated within districts seemed effectively invulnerable to assault. The newly elected Mayor of Denver and head of Colorado’s Democratic political machine, Robert W. Speer, promised to eagerly-turned ears and skeptical eyes that “Social evils that *cannot be abolished* will be restricted and regulated so as to do the least possible harm.”¹¹³ As disreputable and dangerous as prostitution, drinking, fighting, and dancing appeared, most understood that these behaviors would simply be

¹¹² *Aspen Daily Times*, “City Briefs,” 1900 January 21 (Aspen, Colorado).

¹¹³ Robert W. Speer, “Inaugural Address,” (1903) as quoted in Rider, “The Denver Police Department,” 538. Emphasis Added.

tolerated and hidden away – the war against social deviancy could never be won. Few expected that within twenty-five years of Sangster’s poem, in the early years of the 1910s, the recently formalized red-light district would fundamentally vanish from cityscapes across the country, and the face of prostitution would forever change.

How could this happen? The death knell for organized vice in Colorado would arrive at about the same time as state-wide prohibition and the First World War. By February 23, 1913, the *Rocky Mountain News* pronounced that Denver’s immortal Market Street District would be abolished by the Fire and Police Board: “There was a hurried exodus by women when the word came. All were told that the word was final and there was to be no dallying. ‘Move or be arrested. Tonight is the deadline.’”¹¹⁴ Historian Mara L. Kiere argues that part of the cause behind this shift was the disaggregation of services like sex from the sale of alcohol, especially with the introduction of laws like Colorado’s “Bone Dry Law,” which caused business owners to emphasize other, more respectable, forms of entertainment, and which drove patrons of Denver’s Heidelberg Café to sing “Last Night Was the End of the World,” as men and women drained their glasses on December 31, 1915.¹¹⁵ Timothy J. Gilfoyle argued in *City of Eros* that districting failed for myriad reasons, including prohibition, the improved working situation for women, and public awareness campaigns directed to inform the working class about sex and venereal disease.¹¹⁶ Likewise, in *The Lost Sisterhood*, Ruth Rosen cites numerous state laws modeled on the Iowa Abatement Act of 1909 and the opprobrium of reformers against the district’s failure to

¹¹⁴ *Rocky Mountain News*, “Redlight District Abolished,” 1913 February 23 (Denver, Colorado).

¹¹⁵ Keire, *For Business and Pleasure*, 105; Romero ““Last Night Was the End of the World:” 41.

¹¹⁶ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1720-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 306-11.

entirely contain prostitution.¹¹⁷ For these authors, red-light districts were created by elites and eventually torn down through complementary legal action.

While these Progressive Era forces undoubtedly contributed to the way vice-interests in Colorado were understood, debated, and interacted with by state and local governments, these answers alone do not fully describe the long history of vice districts and the eventual suppression of red-light districts. Especially in the thirty-year period leading up to formal districting (as discussed in the previous chapters), when vice districts were only bounded by physical behavior, why did reformers not simply enact new laws that would remove this population from the cityscape? Or more appropriately, why did the laws that reformers *did* enact, not work? The answer lies in the relative visibility of prostitution and vice when districted and non-districted. Before zoning, vice was ambulatory and irregular – a target as elusive as it was despised. And although the territory Colorado’s prostitutes occupied was effectively known, it was nevertheless difficult to conceive of and attack because of its working class popularity, its mobile inhabitants, and its economic power. Once legal zoning took effect in the late-1880s to early-90s, vice became visible, identifiable, and ultimately vulnerable to complete suppression. This effect is entirely paradoxical to the stated understanding of most social reformers: they deeply felt that vice needed to be contained within districts because, in addition to being better able to tax/fine prostitution and measure the spread of venereal disease, districts seemed to be the only way to keep “monstrous” yet ineradicable conduct out of sight of the rapidly growing public. The legacy of the settlement period and the early growth of vice districts set a pattern of physical and moralized behaviors that could never be stopped as long as it was on the move. Once trapped by social and legal boundaries, however, the “Fast Element” could no longer outrun middle class

¹¹⁷ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 28.

and elite factions aspiring to redefine the America's moral geography in terms of social and sexual purity.

Those middle class and elite moral reformers and vice crusaders who wished to manage and control the vice trade in Colorado and elsewhere subscribed to nationally popular notions of the correct use of the body that demanded bodily cleanliness and sexual restraint. Bourgeois notions of proper comportment such as these were far-removed from the existence of most of the working poor who engaged with working society in physical terms. Indeed, the pragmatic-minded editors of the *Solid Muldoon Weekly* were quick to recognize that “the suppression of prostitution and gambling is next to impossible in all mining camps,” and further admitted that “they [the miners] seem to enjoy their society.”¹¹⁸ Regardless, by the waning years of the 1880's places like Durango, Colorado had attained “too high a state of civilization” to allow boys to be lured into depravity by “the influence of demon inmates...”¹¹⁹ For many in the rising middle class, the red-light district's deviant culture was bizarre, difficult to comprehend, and ultimately dangerous. To outsiders, who saw prostitutes as red-horned demons, their deviant behavior could only be tolerated as long as it occurred within the red-light district – in this understanding, those men and women who entered the district must therefore be somewhat inhuman. When “acceptable” citizens saw prostitutes such as these leave the district, and shamble up and down their respectable city streets, despite the introduction of numerous city ordinances, fines, and arrests, many quickly began to assume that “the devil was on their [the prostitute's] side.”¹²⁰

Even with the seeming invincibility of vice interests, the debate continued in many of Colorado's towns as to how to properly regulate a portion of the community that simultaneously

¹¹⁸ *Solid Muldoon Weekly*, 1885 July 17 (Ouray, Colorado).

¹¹⁹ *Solid Muldoon Weekly*, 1886 May 21 (Ouray, Colorado).

¹²⁰ *Solid Muldoon Weekly*, 1886 June 21 (Ouray, Colorado).

provided a considerable income to the city treasury while also threatened, in the eyes of many reformers, to undo moral society. Contrary to state statutes that made the “keeping of such places a punishable crime,” most communities embraced a de facto interpretation that, in addition to generating money from vice-fines, allowed the police and local governments to keep records detailing who these women were (although frequently registered under pseudonyms), and to control/combat outbreaks of venereal disease.¹²¹ Indeed, brief accounts of paralegal transactions between working women and the government were commonplace in newspapers across Colorado. One-sentence blurbs dominate their descriptions: “Ida Jones, prostitute; fined \$5 and costs, paid;” “She paid her fine of \$10 and was released;” “May Jones, prostitution and drunk; fined \$10 and costs; paid.”¹²² When the prostitute sold her body within the red-light district she performed an economic activity that epitomized the government’s inability, or lack of desire, to suppress large swathes of their population engaged in the social evil.

From the perspective of the outsider-looking-in, regular fines effectively transformed the bodies of prostitutes into a commodity closely resembling the gold ore in Telluride, the silver in Silverton, and the lead in Leadville. While at times the romantic image of the galloping, fair-haired, gun-slinging prostitutes characterized newspaper accounts, at other times their bodies were seen as another resource to extract from the dark places of the earth. In fact, as Telluride’s *Daily Journal* noted, when, in 1904, nearby Salt Lake City experienced a “boom” the city council notified the “keeper of houses in the Red-light district of an advance in their monthly ‘fines’ from \$20 to \$100.”¹²³ Changes in the local environment had a direct bearing on the

¹²¹ *Fort Collins Weekly Courier*, 1889 June 6 (Fort Collins, Colorado).

¹²² Respectively: *Leadville Herald Democrat*, 1889 December 13 (Leadville, Colorado); *Leadville Daily & Evening Chronicle*, 1890 August 15 (Leadville, Colorado); *Leadville Daily & Evening Chronicle*, 1890 August 28 (Leadville, Colorado).

¹²³ *Daily Journal*, 1904 February 7 (Telluride, Colorado). Quotations in original.

prostitutes whose fortunes and behavior echoed that of the mineral economy. Importantly, a large portion of the money earned within districts went towards bribes, pay-offs, and kick-backs in order to ensure police cooperation and favorable governmental policy.

This long history of corruption certainly hindered the suppression of red-light districts. As towns began to rely less upon the mining industry, and more middle-class families arrived throughout the state bringing with them increased work opportunities for women in Colorado's cities, the economic and cultural distance between respectable families and the red-light district grew proportionately. Still, corruption was rampant and many within municipal government publically refused to combat this growing evil. The *Castle Rock Journal* directed plenty of ire at the *Rocky Mountain News* because it protected "gamblers, thieves and prostitutes in Denver from defeat just as fearlessly as it did [for] the Democratic party a few weeks ago."¹²⁴ In Leadville, Alderman Hayhurst objected to a motion that "all saloons, gambling house, dance houses and variety shows be closed at 12 o'clock on Saturday nights... and remained closed until 5 o'clock on Monday morning" citing the fear that the town might become a "prohibition town."¹²⁵ Claims of incompetence on behalf of city council members, policemen, and mayors—and occasionally charges of outright corruption and unsavory boss-politics—abounded in communities whose red-light districts brightly convulsed at night, as the vice contained within threatened to break loose with every cheer and shout. While many voiced their dissatisfaction with the presence of the district, actually removing the "social evil" amounted to a nearly herculean task. Adding insult to injury, the media and government seemed to stand together to protect vice-interests throughout the region. Indeed, the *Fort Collins Express* levied this claim against the editor of the *Fort*

¹²⁴ *Castle Rock Journal*, 1884 Nov 26 (Castle Rock, Colorado).

¹²⁵ *Carbonate Chronicle*, 1889 February 11 (Leadville, Colorado).

Collins Courier in 1883 and in rebuttal the *Courier* replied that “he did his duty; or tried to at least... but owing to the tricks of lawyers... these attempts were fruitless.”¹²⁶

By the 1890s the red-light district was finally recognized by reformers as what it was – a living, breathing, physical entity that could not simply be sequestered away behind the thin veil of legal zoning. The violent bodies that lurked in these “zones of toleration” became increasingly outlandish and by the early twentieth century the question remained: “why doesn’t it [the city council] perk up a bit more and, in keeping with the state law, close the houses of easy virtue that still exist...?”¹²⁷

The frustration that reformers felt and the hope that Sangster expressed in her New Year’s poem would only have been exacerbated by the rise of Robert W. Speer to Denver’s Mayorship in 1903 [See Image 3]. Speer first arrived in Colorado, like many others in the late-nineteenth century, to combat his tuberculosis and find real and perceived health benefits afforded by the drier western climate. With his health restored, Speer’s climb to the top of Colorado’s Democratic Party was meteoric – his first major commission as Denver postmaster in 1885 launched him into positions of prestige and power as police commissioner, fire commissioner, and president of the Board of Public Works.¹²⁸ From these lofty vantage points Speer assembled a political machine well-lubricated by ballot-stuffing, patronage, bribery, poll-herding, and vote buying – which a panegyrist to follow described as “a masterpiece of its kind.”¹²⁹ In his memoir, Jacob Valentin Schaetzel reminisced that “it seemed rather obvious” to him as a boy “that this racket must have had police protection.” For Schaetzel, growing up as a

¹²⁶ *Fort Collins Courier*, 1883 January 18 (Fort Collins, Colorado).

¹²⁷ *Aspen Daily Times*, 1915 July 22 (Aspen, Colorado).

¹²⁸ J. Paul Mitchell, “Boss Speer and the City Functional: Boosters and Businessmen versus Commission Government in Denver,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (October 1972): 157.

¹²⁹ Edgar C. MacMechen, *Robert W. Speer: A City Builder* (Denver, 1919), 14. As quoted in Mitchell, “Boss Speer,” 147.

second-generation German American in turn-of-the-century Denver, government corruption was not only widespread – it was also a useful way to earn a little money: “On Election Day my father received many silver dollars from customers for the “votes cast” for the politicians who provided the pay-off.”¹³⁰ Over the course of Speer’s nearly thirty years of public office and boss politics, not only did he tirelessly advocate for public works projects (paving roads, expanding the city zoo, distributing free shade trees, etc...), but he simultaneously shielded Denver’s vice-interests from regulation. As the clamor for moral reform grew to a roar, Speer’s “protection” of the red-light district made the district *more* visible to the public.

Speer’s power, like the power gained by many other social-progressives in the early-twentieth century, was intimately tied to his connections with various privately owned public utility companies. How Speer managed Denver’s vice as well as city improvements, during his long term as “Boss of Bosses”—a term he never attempted to deny, “I would rather be called a boss than a tool without energy and friends.”—should be considered part of a larger dialogue across the Atlantic world about how the municipal government and the people should interact, and how social problems like poverty, poor sewage and transportation systems, and especially venereal disease should be controlled.¹³¹ This is what historian Daniel T. Rogers has described as a “transatlantic network” of progressive social and political thought. As Rogers argues, the “making of the Atlantic era in social politics hinged on a new set of institutional connections with the industrializing nations of Europe. It required new sorts of brokers to span that connection.”¹³² Speer was a part of this connection, and in 1911, at the height of his political might, Speer traveled for two and a half months in Europe, spending the most time in the

¹³⁰ Jacob Valentin Schaezel, *Memoires of Denver* (Denver, 1970), 49.

¹³¹ Johnson, *Denver’s Mayor Speer*, 1.

¹³² Daniel T. Rogers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1998), 4.

German cities of Dresden and Dusseldorf. In the latter city, the group he traveled with noted how “the developments of cities so far as their planning is concerned belongs to an age by itself... Dusseldorf is practically the age of Denver. And yet over here they make a city clean or beautiful by methods of revenue impossible for us to conceive...”¹³³ Despite Denver’s relative isolation at the base of the Rockies, a transatlantic connection quickly emerged, and the intellectual origins of Colorado’s progressive regulation of prostitution and vice can be traced overseas.

Back home, Speer faced significantly more difficulty than Wilhemine Germany in creating the ideal city, one that not only demonstrated the importance of Denver in relation to other Rocky Mountain towns, but a city that balanced its private interests with the public good. Speer’s emphasis on controlling prostitution in red-light districts not only reflects the peculiarities of a latent frontier community, but also a transnational progressive solution to a problem, indeed “*the social evil*,” that affected communities the world over. Helping the working class, protecting the middle-class from the turbulence of the deviant, working class, increasing the city’s moral and economic reputation, and keeping the money flowing into both the city coffers and private pockets, was a full-time job for boss Speer. In doing so, Speer courted powerful men in control of public-service corporations. Denver Tramway Company’s president, William G. Evans, was one of Speer’s biggest contributors and power brokers. As part of his efforts to hew Denver to the popular “City Beautiful” movement by building large thoroughfares and boulevards, Speer emphasized electrifying the Queen City, and in return for making Denver the “city of lights” the Denver Gas and Electric Company paid the city upwards of \$50,000 annually.¹³⁴ Surely, Speer wasn’t referring to the “red lights” of the Market Street District. This relationship between the Democratic Party, headed by Speer, and private corporations grew fat

¹³³ Johnson, *Denver’s Mayor Speer*, 154.

¹³⁴ Johnson, *Denver’s Mayor Speer*, 111.

and powerful – juvenile court judge, Benjamin Barr Lindsey, spent most of his judicial and political career fighting what he described as “the Beast.” Lindsey saw the Beast everywhere—in church leadership, public infrastructure, in the courts, and conspicuously at the University of Denver where Henry Augustus Butchel was Chancellor as well as a local Methodist minister—and the Beast insidiously, to Lindsey’s reckoning, kept the public happy with the early twentieth century form of bread and circuses. Speer’s construction of very visible public improvements, like the renovation of the Cherry Creek embankments for flood control and beatification purposes (completed in 1911), was hugely successful in appealing to the large segments of both the working and middle classes.¹³⁵

While Speer’s vice-grip on Denver politics was anything but unique for civic leaders in the early twentieth century, the mayor’s contentious legacy attached to the Market Street district illustrates not only how lucrative vice management could be, but also how ingrained the district had become to the cityscape. Some members of the public had nothing but praise for Speer’s management. Madam Laura Evens would later comment that “Mayor Speer was a wonderful man. He kept Market Street open.”¹³⁶ Others took a sharper tone. Benjamin Lindsey, forever the champion of just and moral politics, railed against the graft and corruption that led children like Jacob Schaetzel to “have crime forced upon them,” simply by living and schooling close to Market Street. In 1902 he declared that “the surroundings of children are tainted with the foul and pestilential vapors of the evils [of red-light districts]” and that decent people must “war upon these places” in order to free themselves from the deadly influence of the “devil’s agents.”¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Benjamin Barr Lindsey and Harvey J. O’Higgins, *The Beast* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1917), 260-61.

¹³⁶ Secrest, “Hell’s Belles,” 302.

¹³⁷ Colin B. Goodykoontz, *Papers of Edward P. Costigan Relating to the Progressive Movement in Colorado, 1902–1917* (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1941), 7, 15-6.

Lindsey's focus on children not only echoed his judicial position, but also lingering Progressive Era beliefs in Social Darwinism that made healthy children, both in body and mind, the saviors of the race. Should children fail to recognize their potential because of "vapors" or otherwise, or if they became too closely associated the "devil's agents" and contracted a venereal disease like syphilis, they threatened the entirety of the Anglo-American race that was already perceived to be under attack by immigrants in Colorado and on both shores.¹³⁸

Schaetzel's early home was located on 22nd and Arapahoe Street, and his primary school on 24th – both were only a stone's throw from the red-light district. Like most school children, Schaetzel's memory focused most heavily on teachers like Madge Hurst who was clearly "experienced" but also "quite stern." But also, he remembered how newspapers like the *Durango Democrat* characterized his school as tough and gang-afflicted: "Denver should move the 24th Street School away from Market Street. The children attending are being educated in matters unwholesome to the mind and body."¹³⁹ As part of his critique of the Democratic leadership, Judge Lindsey made his opinions well known, advocating that this school in particular be moved and rebuilt – that the children deserve a "magnificent building, well ventilated, surrounded by green plots where mothers and children may sit in the evening."¹⁴⁰ Both progressives like Lindsey, and Progressive-Democrats like Speer understood that spaces were important places that had the power to sway public opinion. Whereas Speer emphasized the financial qualities of urban space, Lindsey advocated for the moral and social effects; in effect, spaces had the propensity to develop both good traits (i.e. sedentary traits like sitting on the lawn) and evil traits (i.e. characterized by movement and deviant physicality) in those who occupied them.

¹³⁸ Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 88.

¹³⁹ Schaetzel, *Memoirs of Denver*, 17; *Durango Democrat*, 1906 November 18 (Durango, Colorado).

¹⁴⁰ *Aspen Democrat*, "Prominent People in Favor of Public Baths," 1904 August 4 (Aspen, Colorado).

Writing of his experiences nearly 70 years later, Schaetzel recalled men watching what they imagined to be prostitutes as they ventured outside of the red-light district. Although they weren't soliciting, "You could always tell them by their short silk skirts, fancy shoes, silk stockings, short cut hair and powdered faces. Some of the girls were smoking cigarettes, some were walking alone and some with other girls."¹⁴¹ Similarly, although Mrs. A. H. Majors noted that "people of the half world [red-light districts] were never presumptuous, loud or boisterous in public places," she could always identify a prostitute when she moved outside of the district: "It was only the women of the half world who smoked in those days."¹⁴² Prostitutes such as these had their own space, the red-light district, which was supposed to be more-or-less walled off from the larger respectable population. Before legal zoning and police enforcement, prostitutes could trespass these boundaries freely either by avoiding distinction or by playing the role of the "lady." After zoning however, the deviant physical identity of the district was required to stay *within* the district. When it did not, respectable society had reason to protest. It did not matter that the prostitutes Schaetzel remembered were not attempting to solicit sex; what did matter and what stuck in his memory was that these women moved beyond their designated space. The prostitute's deviant physicality, now represented by her public smoking, marked her as monstrous, and gave-away her identity as a member of the demimonde.

Mayor Speer's belief in the efficacy of districting certainly served his many financial, social, and governmental needs and, despite the blatant corruption that marked his reign, the "Boss of Bosses" succeeded in pushing through many positive changes that greatly impacted the

¹⁴¹ Schaetzel, *Memoirs of Denver*, 4. In this case, the perspective of a child is uniquely interesting for studying subjects like vice because their viewpoint is physically incompatible with and mentally unprepared for the nuance behind deviant bodily behavior.

¹⁴² A. H. Majors, "Life in North Creede in the Early Days," *Colorado Magazine* (November 1945), 267-269.

welfare of most of the working class. Reforms targeted at cleaning up wastewater and urban pollution, the donation of shade trees, and the paving of Denver's dirt roads made Speer popular among the types of people who lived near, and frequented, the district if not immediately within the district itself. On the other end of the arena, Speer's "Protestant Progressive" enemies found themselves divorced from the ungrateful populations that their political agendas hoped to "uplift." As historian R. Laugen notes:

In the capital city and many mountain mining towns, political campaigns routinely became aggressively physical contests. Elections often generated street brawls over ballot-box stuffing... Machine activists [Democrats], most from the working class, earned the opprobrium of moral reformers as the masters of rough street tactics.¹⁴³

To these workers, Speer's two successful terms as mayor clearly served the interests of the general populace and they in turn were willing to demonstrate their support by using the language and physicality of the streets. For this Boss, his allegiance to the teeming masses coupled with the clout of vice-interests and utility corporations allowed him play moral/economic classes against one another and maintain his position of control.

Nevertheless Democrats in city governments, epitomized by Speer, had to walk a fine line between utilizing the districts without explicitly supporting the behaviors that occurred within. His theory, as recorded by his biographer Charles Johnson, that the "vices that have been practiced for so many hundred years, and which, I am sorry to say, will continue for many hundreds of years more," failed to appease his enemies, who quickly combined burgeoning prohibition movements with advances in the social sciences to levy attack after attack at those who "protected" districts from above.¹⁴⁴ At the national level, new laws like the White Slave Traffic Act of 1909 (alternatively known as the Mann Act) and various Red-Light Abatement

¹⁴³ R. Todd Laugen, *The Gospel of Progressivism: Moral Reform and Labor War in Colorado* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2010), 19.

¹⁴⁴ Secrest, *Hell's Belles*, 307.

Acts emboldened reformers to attack the more visible elements of prostitution: the site of the brothel and the landscapes of the district.¹⁴⁵ These laws put unprecedented power in the hands of vice-crusaders who now had the legal might not only to prosecute vice, but also to identify, disrupt, and label vice wherever they saw it. In this way, even suspicion that a woman was keeping a house of ill-fame was enough to force her to prove her innocence in court. Although protected, districts from Leadville to Ouray, Colorado could no longer pretend that their zoned boundaries kept them hidden.

Moreover, in the early 1910s medical scientists on both sides of the Atlantic began working against the notion that districting was the most effective way to prevent the spread of venereal disease. Indeed, in the thirty years since regulationists like Dr. Frederick Bancroft in the 1880s began to control vice and manage sexually transmitted disease through districting, little had been done from the medical perspective to actually stop or even slow down its spread. Although men like Bancroft proved sympathetic to prostitutes, and earnestly endeavored to improve their physical well-being, by the first few years of the twentieth century the best that physicians such as Bancroft could boast was the creation of vital statistics detailing who was infected. In part, this perspective stemmed from the deeply gendered belief that prostitutes (i.e. women) were the sole source of venereal disease and that as long as the women were contained and managed venereal disease could slowly be eradicated. It was the long-held opinion of Dr. William Sanger, studying New York City, that rampant prostitution made the city a “hot-bed where... syphilis may be cultivated and disseminated.”¹⁴⁶ For Doctors Bancroft and Sanger,

¹⁴⁵ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 29. As Rosen notes, by 1917, thirty-one states had adopted some form of the Iowa Abatement Act that “permitted any private citizen to file a complaint against a particular building used for prostitution. After the court issued a temporary vacate order to the owner, a hearing would be set to determine whether or not a particular building had in fact been used for “immoral purposes” (28).

¹⁴⁶ William W. Sanger, *The History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effects throughout the World*

among others, it was the duty of the physician to combat venereal disease in the district; at this point, nineteenth century laws against prostitution and vice have had very little effect: “Great as this Evil has always been, it cannot be denied that... the *progress of society* tend, at least in large towns, greatly to increase it.”¹⁴⁷ This argument, however insidious or well-intentioned, simply rebranded the Victorian ideal of the “cult of domesticity” in a way that emphasized female immobility by locating and “protecting” a woman’s sexuality behind closed doors. The comparative mobility that men enjoyed, on the other hand—either as a product of evolving labor systems that sent men further afield each day or through engrained beliefs in the male ownership of the outside “sphere”—allowed them to remain invisible and eschew any responsibility for the spread of venereal disease.

Despite the beliefs of anti-regulationists who feared that districting would be all-together ineffective and would only centralize and advertise vice interests, their position did not gain a central organizing philosophy until the publication of Abraham Flexner’s *Prostitution in Europe* (1914), which effectively demolished the regulationist argument.¹⁴⁸ Like Sanger almost fifty years prior, Flexner traveled to Europe in order to better understand the efficacy of districting in regards to the spread and control of venereal disease. Flexner compellingly illustrated that the European model was rubbish, and that regulating prostitution behind district boundaries did little to stop transactional sex or the spread of diseases. Flexner also deviated from the belief that women were “the fountain head from which venereal diseases originate... the poison which inoculates the living and contaminates the yet unborn.”¹⁴⁹ To solely regulate the female

(New York: Harper & Brothers, 1869) Project Gutenberg Digital Edition, 2013; [EBook #41873], 633.

¹⁴⁷ Sanger, *The History of Prostitution*, 669. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁸ Mark Thomas Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 81.

¹⁴⁹ Charles Rosenberg, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, eds. “Report of the Vice Commission of Minneapolis to

prostitute, argued Flexner, was to imply “the absence of any expectation of male self-restraint; it is society’s tacit assent to laxity.”¹⁵⁰ Flexner’s assessment would lend fuel to a fire of reform and social activism that was already raging across Colorado.

When attempts at suppression proved inconclusive, ineffectual, or just temporary, and total reform required a complete upending of corrupt local governments, some social reformers chose to take the law into their own hands. The physical makeup of the red-light district’s boundaries is what was ultimately attacked when citizens complained that “a great many of their vices come to the *public eye* which should be confined to resorts, and people have commenced to talk.”¹⁵¹ These men and women demanded that “some steps” be taken to “drive the low-down, un-sexed wretches who hang around the places, from the town.” Because the red-light district was defined by physical behavior before men like Speer and his political machine enforced its boundaries, the ephemeral rule of law could not hope to contain a subculture that defined itself on mobility and physical agency. Notice briefly that the moral-reformer uses very physical language to describe and dehumanize those prostitutes “seated in doorways... their strumpets keeping them company, their arms about them,” with “obscene remarks deluging the air.” The perceived lack of social order within the district exasperated firebrand reformers who wanted to fix a territorial body that they saw as unseemly and dangerous to the growth of American civilization in the West. Even men in transit to red-light districts were unwelcome, as “bands of men” often “insulted and frightened” respectable women. In Fort Collins, one editorialist threatened that “Unless the city does something to break up the nest [brothels] referred to, the citizens will take the matter into their own hands, and will not be responsible for the

his Honor, James C. Haynes, Mayor Minneapolis, 1911,” in *Sex, Marriage, and Society: The Prostitute and the Social Reformer* (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 45.

¹⁵⁰ Abraham Flexner, *Prostitution in Europe* (Montclair, New Jersey: Patterson Smith, 1969), 219.

¹⁵¹ *Daily Journal*, “Better Have a Care,” 1907 May 16 (Telluride, Colorado). Emphasis added.

consequences.”¹⁵² The threat these moral crusaders posed to the district was very real, and publically broadcasted: “...if this evil is not remedied, there is another way in which the nuisance can be regulated without appeal to the municipal authorities.”¹⁵³

The suppression of red-light districts proceeded unevenly across Colorado but in every instance women were forcibly ejected from their homes and businesses and onto the streets. In doing so, these women left behind not only their livelihoods but often also their belongings as brothels, cribs, and dance halls burst into unexpected flames. Even relatively early, the moral crusade avoided targeting individual prostitutes, gamblers, and rougns and instead focused their efforts on assaulting the body of the red-light district. Vice crusaders (either in fits of desperation or righteous indignation) often turned to arson to remove districts that public outcry, moral sentiment, and local and state legislation could not. As early as 1878 Madam Sue Brown, owner of the “Temple of Venus” in Boulder, Colorado, thought she smelled smoke, and thinking it was a lamp turned too low, she entered the adjoining room only to have “the flames burst in upon her.”¹⁵⁴ This event would be one of the seven times that an incendiary attack would attempt to force her out of business. By the end of the century these kinds of assaults would become much more common. In Colorado Springs, “fires of incendiary origin, thought to have been started by the anti-vice crusaders,” destroyed the entirety of that area’s red-light district with the material and structural losses rising to \$55,000 (which is approximately equivalent to \$1,480,000.00 in 2014 U.S. dollars).¹⁵⁵ In much the same way that a bushel of dynamite might destroy a mine and access to precious metals, the destruction of the red-light district forcibly relocated its occupants

¹⁵² *Fort Collins Courier*, 1884 October 30 (Fort Collins, Colorado).

¹⁵³ *Solid Muldoon Weekly*, 1889 June 21 (Ouray, Colorado).

¹⁵⁴ Sanford Charles Gladden, *Ladies of the Night* (Boulder, Colorado: Self Published, 1979), 5.

¹⁵⁵ *Aspen Daily Times*, 1909 January 10 (Aspen, Colorado). See also: Samuel H. Williamson, “Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1774 to Present,” *Measuring Worth* (April, 2015). [Current data is only available till 2014.

from a special deviant landscape into a charred wasteland. One year later in 1910, another incendiary attack threatened to destroy Denver's notorious "Eastern Club" creating a scene of "great excitement" as "women and men of the resort [were] forced to flee without having time to dress."¹⁵⁶ Besides the obvious threat to life and property, incendiary attacks such as these must have been frightening and psychologically scarring events for prostitutes who, more often than not, had few places they could turn to for food, shelter, and emotional comfort.

While human beings do not technically need brothels and cribs to engage in illicit sex, these buildings nevertheless kept prostitutes and prostitution temporarily sheltered from the public eye. It would take the outbreak of war in Europe, and the danger posed by venereal disease to fighting men, to finally spur the long dormant federal government into action. Until 1914, prostitution and the management of venereal disease and vice had always been the responsibility of local governments. It was only at this local scale, from the perspective of a bystander on the streets, that prostitution and its undulating form could even begin to be recognized and dealt with. As Denver's rather modern-minded city physician, George W. Cox wrote in 1882, "The reason" that prostitution could not be legally prohibited was clearly gendered and simple:

Laws are made by men; made in the interests of men; made so as to protect men and punish women for the sins of men; and so in the enforcement of such one-sided rules we offer a premium on our own guilt without a corresponding recompense for any good that may abide in the female. We can not eradicate it; and past experience gives us such small encouragement that we even hesitate to hint at means to modify it.¹⁵⁷

However, as military bases cropped up across Colorado to train and house the nation's patriotic, young, male recruits, the red-light district quickly became a problematic institution that threatened the fighting efficacy of the state's untried soldiers. The U.S. military ignored Cox's

¹⁵⁶ *Aspen Democrat-Times*, 1910 April 22 (Aspen, Colorado).

¹⁵⁷ George W. Cox, "The Social Evil," *Transactions of the Colorado State Medical Society at Its Twelfth Annual Convention* (Denver: Edwin Price, 1882): 65-80. Errors in original.

strong feminist message and instead emphasized policies that characterized female prostitutes as the generators of venereal disease and thus insisted upon the closure of nearby and prominent districts. Speaking after the war, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels commented in 1919 that, “One of the compensations for the tragedy of war is the fact that an enlightened opinion is behind the organized campaign to protect the youth against venereal disease.”¹⁵⁸

While suppression of prostitution took many forms, the debate in once-frontier communities over vice was intrinsically concerned with how the body should move in the twentieth century. As Sharon Wood demonstrates in her microhistory of Davenport, Iowa, only in the early-twentieth century did working-class women have the opportunity to earn a living in professions that were not teaching, nursing, or prostitution, but also forced them to enter onto the streets where they had to contend with other “visible” women. She writes that “As the country’s urban landscapes changed in the early phases of industrialization, first separating ‘home’ from ‘work,’ members of the middle class increasingly associated respectability with wives and daughters who remained at home.”¹⁵⁹ Since space largely defined morality, leaving the home—even with the best intentions—threatened the status of the woman. The district made it even more difficult to differentiate between a prostitute and an otherwise respectable female worker because both were trespassing on ground that had traditionally been defined as male territory. Concurrently, as various historians have demonstrated, between 1880-1920 (the central years of districting) young, unmarried women experimented with dating and sexuality in transformative ways. These “charity girls,” while not prostitutes, “treated” men to physical companionship in exchange for dinner, a night on the town, and other such entertainments.¹⁶⁰ In effect, the overall increased visibility of all classes of women in public places made the glow of the red-light

¹⁵⁸ *Denver Post*, “Denver Municipal Facts,” (1919 April 22).

¹⁵⁹ Wood, *Freedom of the Streets*, 28.

¹⁶⁰ Kathy Piess, “Charity Girls and City Pleasures,” *OAH Magazine of History* (July 2004): 14.

district all the more brighter. In the end, Colorado's prostitutes would respond to the closure of red-light districts in the same way that they had always responded to persecution – they would simply move on.

In contrast to a sedentary historic past, Colorado's red-light districts demonstrate in unadulterated terms that mobility and deviant physicality were defining characteristics for a large segment of developing western communities. In these designed locations, prostitutes, fighters, gamblers and other members of the "Fast Element" were caught in a Catch 22 whereby the district that was once so protective and welcoming (indeed "wide open") was, by the second decade of the twentieth century, so constricting that removal beyond its boundaries threatened not only one's individual well-being (through fines or imprisonment) but also the ability for the red-light district to continue operating. Dressed in bandoliers, working clothes, tattered dresses, or while wearing nothing at all, working class men and women understood their daily existence in terms of physical expression and exertion; recall briefly Ollie Bartell who in Chapter 1, "pulled up her sleeves, spit in her hands and rubbed them together" before beginning to "dance the jig."¹⁶¹ Whether in silver mines in Silverton, or while selling one's body along Aspen's "row," or in developing textile factories in Denver, the language of the underclass took on overtly physical characteristics that mirrored their frontier lives and frontier environment. This physicality within the district, once made visible by the creation of regulated red-light districts, swelled to monstrous proportions and eventually became the epitome of late-nineteenth century fears of racial suicide, class struggle, and the decline of civilization. Quite simply, the red-light district could not withstand the limelight.

¹⁶¹ *Herald Democrat*, "Boss Dog," 1886 May 11.

CONCLUSION – “MAKING SCARCE”
LAW, MOVEMENT, AND LIFE AFTER DISTRICTING

By the 1910s, the progressive era experiment with districting as a way to control and manage prostitution had largely failed in both mountain towns and big cities. Whereas reformers wanted invisibility and control, instead, districting had the inverse effect of advertising and empowering (even through corrupt means) a space that had long played an important role in local, regional, and transnational social politics. Examining popular social spaces, like vice districts, that have unique characteristics particular to the population and environment, and watching those traits interact with Western social politics formed on both sides of the Atlantic, reveals aspects of prostitute’s lives that otherwise would be invisible. The physicality of the space remained throughout this transition from vice district to red-light district, and in many ways, prostitution within red-light districts failed because prostitutes and their employers could not maintain their deviant, violent, and legitimate frontier subculture in the face of progressive-era visions of the proper utilization of space. These two forms of spatial-use—negotiated daily at the border—became incompatible, and the social effects of prostitution, both good and bad, more visible to an increasingly anxious public who increasingly rationalized the world around them in scientific and solution-based ways. For prostitutes in Colorado’s districts, this crack-down on “the social evil” was shocking: the space that once protected these women, provided them with a sense of community, of sisterhood, and formed the basis of a uniquely western identity, suddenly disappeared. While the greater public watched on, laughing at the sight of prostitutes fleeing a blazing brothel, or at the end of a policeman’s billy-club, these women suffered untold miseries

and sorrows. In the end, prostitutes had a difficult choice: abandon the deviant identity, or attempt to recreate it elsewhere.

Again, it is important to restate, that the regulation and the suppression of prostitution in red-light districts did not proceed evenly across Colorado, or even across the United States. The battle over the proper use of city spaces, and in many respects it was a battle, continued to be fought well into the twentieth century. The physical subculture of the district and the working class continued, now with greater social and legal consequences. The night of July 20th, 1915, proved to be a busy night for police magistrate D. Updegraff in Telluride's police court:

...the windup of which was the assessment of a fine of \$40 and costs, or a total of \$50 against Charles Allen for beating up a [prior] denizen of the red light district last Friday. Allen pleaded guilty... but upon recommendation of Attorney Stemen, Judge Updegraff suspended the fine until Wednesday noon, with the understanding that Allen will make himself scarce in this vicinity by that time, and this he will no doubt do.

In the period of informal vice districts, this kind of abuse would have barely made the local news, let alone would it have gone to trial. Before the 1880s, Charles Allen would have largely escaped justice, relying upon the vice district to hide and protect him. Likewise, his victim would find retribution, or not, as the district allowed. If the beating was severe enough, she could turn to the courts to punish the man who had exceeded the district's understanding of a legitimate use of violence. Instead:

...A warrant was then sworn out for the woman in the case, Alma Terry, her hearing being set for tonight at 5 o'clock, but she decided not to stand trial and early this morning secured a horse and rode over the range to Silverton, which is probably what the officials desired.¹⁶²

With the suppression of the red-light district, Alma Terry could not stand trial because to do so, was to admit before the judge and jury that she had engaged in prostitution after the closure of the red-light district; she would then face high fines and jail time. Since Allen's fine was

¹⁶² *Telluride Daily Journal*, "Given Walking Papers," 1915 July 20.

dependent upon the testimony of Terry and she did not present herself, his charges were dismissed, and he walked free. Clearly, the violence of the red-light district still festered in these places, and Terry's response was to seek a safe harbor elsewhere – over time, as more and more of Colorado's towns closed down their districts, these safe places became increasingly difficult to find.

Therefore, many women decided that in order to continue working as a prostitute, their best bet was to leave the United States altogether. In a fascinating display of nineteenth century Atlantic world social politics, the deviant behaviors formed at the base of the Rockies, were contained by districts modeled after European institutions, filled with workers from as far-ranging places as Paris to Chile, before heading south, to Mexican border towns, in order to escape persecution. At the height of prohibition, places like Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros, Mexico saw an incredible spike in the population of single, white women engaging in Mexican prostitution. In these places, *zonas de tolerancia* [zones of toleration] offered protection and employment opportunities to American prostitutes. Historians like Grace Peña Delgado and Catherine Christensen have already examined prostitution in a borderlands context. As Delgado asserts, the U.S. state, through its immigration bureaucracy at the southern line, “wielded authority as arbiter of legal admission into its states and territories and, in so doing, constructed national identities on the basis of controlling the entry of women whose sexuality challenged prevailing notions of female moral authority.”¹⁶³ This article dovetails well with Christensen's arguments about how women in border *zonas* appealed to prevailing notions of race to manipulate governmental bodies on either side of the border. Christensen argues that just as the state manipulated prostitutes' moral and national identities,

¹⁶³ Grace Peña Delgado, “Border Control and Sexual Policing: White Slavery and Prostitution along the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, 1903-1910,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 178.

individual prostitutes in Baja California and other border communities “leveraged their American Identity in Mexico to claim a more privileged racial status” when they felt that a fine was too onerous or when local factions attempted to supplant their activities in the vice-districts.¹⁶⁴ In doing so, the socio-deviant space of the *zonas de tolerancia* became a powerful community locus that presented Mexican spaces as “wild,” “booming,” and “licentious” – characteristics that were directly add odds with the developing revolutionary notion of *mexicanidad* that advocated for restricted female sexuality and rational progress. Additional research might potentially reveal how prostitutes from places like Colorado, brought with them Rocky Mountain understandings of physicality and movement, and adjusted to a new social, cultural, and racial landscape.

In Colorado, those prostitutes who stayed, and either tried to convert to a “normal” life, or attempted to continue prostitution on the streets, faced nearly insurmountable social and economic barriers. Mayor Creel of Denver, who supplanted boss Speer upon his death, implemented a plan of reform that emphasized prostitute’s status as victims, and not as criminals, and in following with Progressive Era paternalism, sent a portion of arrested prostitutes to a municipal farm in Henderson, Colorado, where they were given an opportunity to work off their sentences in an agricultural environment, learn a trade-skill, and find treatment for venereal diseases.¹⁶⁵ However, many “reformed” women returned to the “fast life” and increasingly turned to pimps for protection while they themselves evolved into “street walkers” who prowled greater distances, and penetrated territory previous untouched by prostitution during the period of formal districting, and in turn found significantly less protection from the physicality that still defined Colorado’s underworld. Many of the characteristics of modern American prostitution

¹⁶⁴ Catherine Christensen, “Mujeres Publicas: American Prostitutes in Baja California, 1910-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (May 2013): 246.

¹⁶⁵ Secrest, *Hells Belles*, 305.

find their origins in this period, following districting, when pimps and criminal syndicates controlled female prostitutes through a combination of physical violence, emotional coercion, and drug and alcohol abuse. Survivors of human sex trafficking in the twenty-first century describe being beaten, and numbed by addiction, before being sold into prostitution. In an interview with the *Guardian*, Jennifer Kempton, described being “branded like cattle” in 2012 as her pimp tattooed her body with names and gang-insignias as a sign of ownership and control.¹⁶⁶ Her story of physical and chemical abuse, sexual exploitation, and attempted suicide has marked parallels to that of late-nineteenth century prostitutes, but without the protections of the vice district. Understanding these connections might deepen our understanding of the best ways to help victims of sex tracking today, both domestically and abroad.

Unfortunately, justice in the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century—as it does today—proceeded unevenly across social, racial, and class lines. This thesis has largely avoided the significant contributions of African Americans, Mexicans, Chinese and other people of East-Asian origins in developing the urban landscape in Colorado, and further research into how moralized, Progressive Era understandings of gender and sexuality intersected in vice districts and red-light districts will yield more information about the construction of social spaces, who was included, and who was excluded. In many towns and cities, vice districts and red-light districts often formed with different racial and ethnic bastions near the center—places like “Hop Alley” in Denver’s Market Street district—where minorities, especially Chinese men and women, could recreate a sense of community in the West, and also commiserate about its inequalities – and there were many.

¹⁶⁶ Annie Kelly, “‘I Carried his Name on my Body for Nine Years:’ the Tattooed Trafficking Survivors Reclaiming Their Past,” *The Guardian* (2014 November 15).

The boundaries that surrounded Colorado's vice districts are nearly as invisible to historians as they were to the people they contained. Yet they did exist and were navigated daily by people from different social backgrounds, aspirations, and hopes. Understanding how bodily behavior allowed these lines to be crossed, maintained, and destroyed simultaneously helps explain the incredible longevity of prostitution, how seemingly extreme acts of violence kept occurring, as well as providing a brief glimpse into how late nineteenth century minds conceived of a world that simultaneously rejected and avidly embraced binary generalizations of moral/immoral, deviant/acceptable, and man/woman. Furthermore, examining how bodies were used vis-à-vis how they were described by newspaper outlets and perturbed citizens alike make readily apparent the importance of movement within and without the deviant community. Prostitutes occupied an interesting place in Colorado's cityscape, and their movements always inspired comment, in both positive and negative ways. Catholic Priest, J.W. Barker, was stunned to hear that he refused to "officiate at the burial of a woman who died recently in the Red Light district," claiming that "the report is false." Barker continued, arguing that "I think such a poor, unfortunate girl had as much a MORAL right to a decent burial, as a woman who would start or circulate a falsehood, or who will tattle in order to make trouble among her neighbors."¹⁶⁷ Ultimately, these women were more than social "outliers" – they were members of a vibrant subculture who occupied a space and profession outside of what many nineteenth-century men and women conceived as normal. In doing so, they created a unique and tempestuous space formed by people moving in bizarre and immoral ways that directly contributed to the social and economic development of a "respectable" cityscape: in many ways, Coloradan's can still hear the uproar.

¹⁶⁷ *Telluride Daily Journal*, "Editorial," 1915 July 20. Capitalization in the original.

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IMAGE APPENDIX



Image 1: Mattie Silks and Her Horse

“Mattie Silks and Her Own Horse (c. 1880-90).” Photograph. Denver, Colorado: Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Department (X-27055).

<http://cdm16079.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15330coll22/id/44722>

(accessed 2015 February 3)

This image shows famed brothel-owner Mattie Silks [featured on the left], an unnamed woman, and her unnamed horse that Silks used to parade and advertise her prostitutes throughout early-Denver and before vice was bounded into the red-light district. For a woman of Silks’ class and reputation, it was largely inconceivable to “respectable” society in the mid-late nineteenth century that she would own her own horse – let alone employ it in such visible and physical pursuits such as racing and parading. This horse represented several things for Mattie Silks: (1) her economic and social elevation attributed to her successful management of several brothels, (2) her breaking of normative gender roles, and last, (3) it demonstrated her identity as a member of the “Fast Element.”

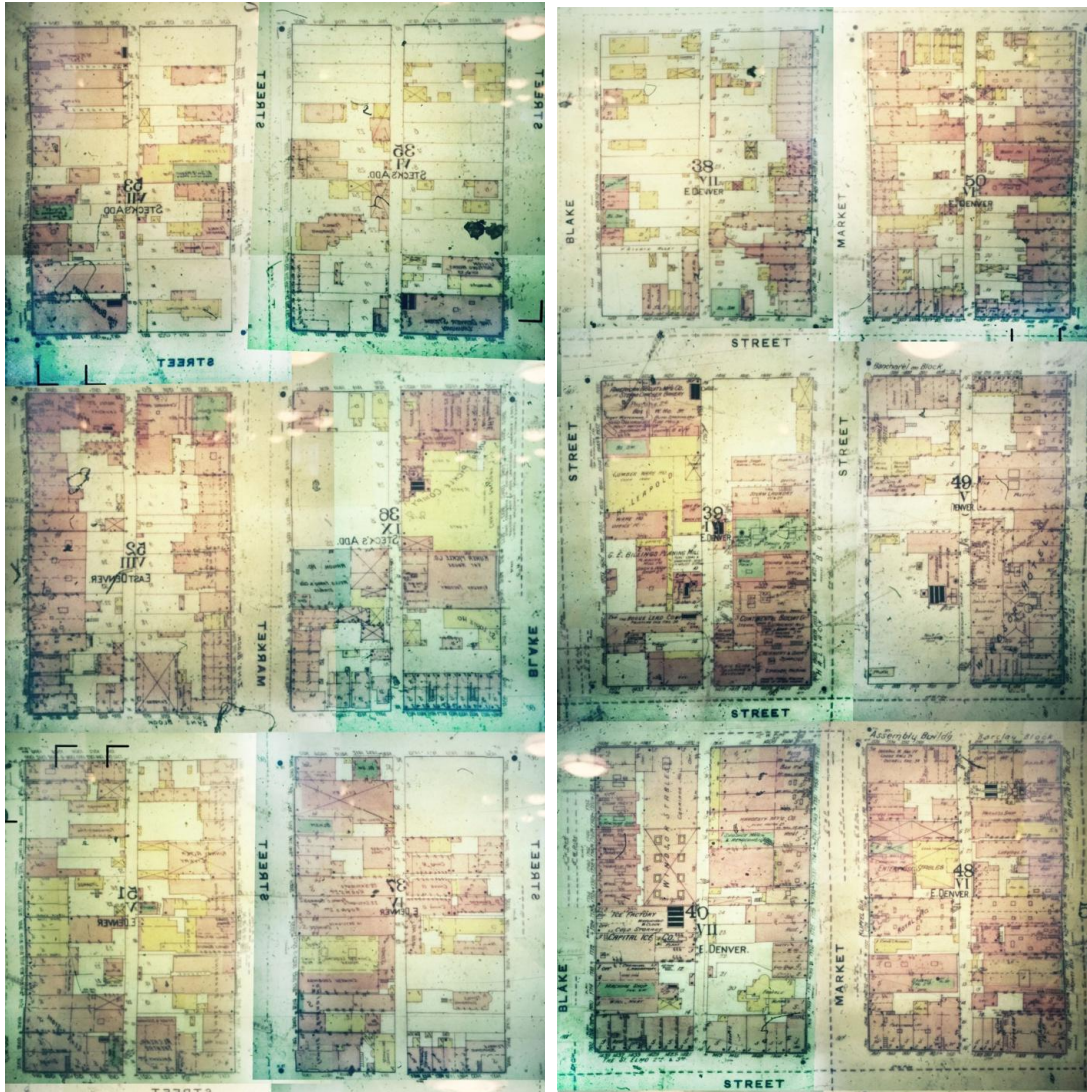


Image 2: Sanborn Maps of Denver's Market Street Red-light district

Sanborn-Perris Map Company, "Denver Insurance Maps," Volume 2 (New York: 1890), sections 35-42, 46-54. Courtesy Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Department (Denver, Colorado).

This image (divided in two for formatting purposes; read from top-bottom, over, top-bottom) illustrate the entirety of the Holladay/Market Street red-light district in 1890 Denver. These Sanborn maps were photographed individually and digitally edited into a full-scale composite image, provide a glimpse into a geography that had only just become legally zoned and enforced. This map euphemistically labels many buildings as "female boarding" – or houses of prostitution. Of note, these maps also detail the location of the majority chinese area at the spatial-center of the district. The surrounding buildings provide inferences into "legitimate" businesses that may have employed many of the districts "immoral" occupants.



Image 3: “The Painted Lady”

Summit County Journal, “I’m Just a Painted Lady,” 1901 June 15 (Breckenridge, Colorado).

These images describe two encounters between Jeb and the “Painted Lady” – of particular note is the way the female body is clothed and positioned. She wears not the tattered rags of the stereotypical prostitute and she engages in gardening (in the former) and writing (in the later). Both activities are well within the accepted guidelines for feminine behavior, allowing her to not only leave the red-light district, but also court with a reputable man from the countryside and potentially escape the deviant identity projected upon her by outsider society.



Image 3: Mayor Robert W. Speer

Rhoads, Henry Mallon. "Denver Mayor Robert W. Speer (c. 1904-1918)." Photograph. Denver, Colorado: Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Department (Rh-862). <http://cdm16079.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15330coll22/id/18127> (accessed 2015 February 3).

Robert W. Speer (b. 1855 December 1 – d. 1918 May 4) was the “boss” of Denver’s Democratic Party Machine and served four terms as a progressive Mayor between 1904-12, and 1916-18, when he died of Spanish Influenza while in office. Speer’s political legacy is divided between his extremely progressive urban reform projects that saw city streets paved, canals and other waterworks cleaned and revitalized, and free shade trees provided to low-income areas and his protection of Denver’s vice interests and his corrupt election practices that saw ballot-stuffing, cronyism, and bribery among other acts.