

Prostitution at the Border Towns: Moral Reform and Abolition along the  
U.S.-Mexico Border, 1903-1920

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### **Abstract**

This paper argues that the hardening of the U.S.-Mexico border came through the changing definitions of prostitution in the United States and Mexico. In doing so, the border became a place that limited the movements of prostitutes due to the changing ideals about morality and hygiene within the United States and Mexico. The close scrutiny and surveillance of both prostitution and the vice industry at the borderlands, prompted the rigid control and militarization of the borderlands later in the twentieth century. Regulation and abolishment came through different means in which each country saw prostitution. In addition, this paper is focused on the development of the vice industry in Tijuana to further elucidate the hardening of the border in the early twentieth century.

In 1909, immigrant inspector J.C. Nardini reported on the state of prostitution in San Diego. Particularly interested in the surveillance of foreign prostitutes, Nardini created a list of “houses of prostitution and assignation” to prevent prostitutes from entering at the United States-Mexico border. Nardini expressed that the list “will enable immigration officers at port of entry to look with suspicion upon any aliens coming to these addresses.”<sup>1</sup> Prostitution had not yet been fully abolished in 1909, however certain stipulations in the 1903 and 1907 immigration act made prostitution illegal for immigrant women if they had been in the country for less than three years.<sup>2</sup> In San Diego, prostitutes had been able to continue the trade as long as procurers opened and conducted business in the red light districts of the city. Nardini found that a majority of prostitutes in San Diego were American born women and those who were immigrants had been in the United States for more than three years. However, concerns over immigrant prostitutes increased the surveillance of these establishments because of its relative location to the U.S.-Mexico border. Nardini highlighted the growing attitudes against immigrant prostitutes in the United States. Attitudes afforded by the fear of sexual contamination of the American body politic in particular to the contamination of white purity.

The surveillance of foreign prostitutes at the U.S.-Mexico border signals an important shift in the nation-making process because it created an early version of border control and

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<sup>1</sup> J.C. Nardini to Commissioner General of Immigration No.1002, 3 June, 1909, Folder Continuance of 52484/20, Accession #00142-005-0435, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA).

<sup>2</sup> The immigration acts of 1903 and 1907 prohibited foreign women in the sex industry for three years in order to deter the formation of red light districts. The acts also put stipulation and fines on procurers involved in the trade.

militarization.<sup>3</sup> By 1903, immigration laws targeted immigrant prostitutes and procurers in an attempt to limit the establishment of red light districts and the contamination of morality in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Later, the Immigration act of 1907 broadened the definition of a prostitute to include any immigrant women perceived to be immoral and if suspected of prostitution they would be susceptible to deportation. This early system of border control came in reaction against the fear of white slavery and the transnational movements of immigrant prostitutes that had been fueled by progressive era resentments of social evils. What was perceived to be a social evil in the states remained tolerable in the northern Mexican cities where vice interest reigned over the governmental policies of Mexico.<sup>5</sup> Seemingly, the presence of sex and vice commerce provided both sides of the border with a different quandary. Since prostitution falls within two main distinctions that separates both nations, one side favors the regulation of prostitution, while the other deems the trade as immoral, the United States-Mexico border proved to be a point of contention.

On the United States front, the paradigm shift towards the abolishment of social evils led to the increase surveillance and scrutiny of prostitution.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, the movement of prostitutes

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<sup>3</sup> Grace Pena Delgado, "Border Control and Sexual Policing: White Slavery and Prostitution Along the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, 1903-1910," *Western Historical Quarterly* 43 (Summer 2012): 160.

<sup>4</sup> Edward P. Hutchinson, *Legislative History of American Immigration Policy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion on Baja Californias vice industry see, Alfredo, Gómez Estrada José. *Gobierno Y Casinos: El Origen De La Riqueza De Abelardo L. Rodríguez*. (Mexicali: Universidad Autónoma De Baja California 2002). Alfredo argues that through lax governmental policies the vice industry in prospered while *jefe políticos*, like Abelardo Rodríguez, lined their pockets with money from vice business.

<sup>6</sup> See Grace Pena Delgado, "Border Control and Sexual Policing: White Slavery and Prostitution Along the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, 1903-1910," *Western Historical Quarterly* 43 (Summer 2012). Catherine Christensen, "Mujeres Publicas: American Prostitutes in Baja California, 1910-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2:

across nations alarmed social purist's fears of miscegenation and white slavery. The U.S.-Mexico border became the battleground in the fight against contamination of the body politic.<sup>7</sup> For the Mexican government, commerce in sex resembled a necessary evil and reform designated the prophylaxis of venereal diseases associated with prostitution. However, clandestine prostitutes continued regardless of the state's motives and those who did follow state orders felt powerless in regards to their labor.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Mexican prostitutes linked their identity with prostitution to the nation and legitimized their work within it. Upon crossing to the United States, they were met with opposite ideologies. For both nations, prostitution symbolized different aspects of their society. One formed prostitution as a social evil that needed to be abolished while the other formed prostitution as a necessary evil that needed to be regulated.

During the period of 1903 and 1910, emerging ideas about sex and morality profoundly changed the landscape of the border by cementing the U.S.-Mexico border as a site of sexual exclusions. Grace Delgado argues that at the turn of the twentieth century U.S. immigration control originated out of the sexual policing of the U.S.-Mexico border that created a space of gendered and sexual exclusions.<sup>9</sup> The emergence of sexual exclusion at the border highlights the convergence of social purity and nativist movements in the United States that advocated for a closed border. Competing ideas about a prostitutes right to work elicits the constant movement of clandestine prostitution of both nations. American women moving south to continue working

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215-247. Eric Michael Schantz, "From the Mexicali Rose to the Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965" (Ph.D., diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Christensen, "Mujeres Públicas." 216-218.

<sup>8</sup> Katherine E Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2001). 2-10.

<sup>9</sup> Delgado, "Border Control and Sexual Policing," 159.

after the sex trade was abolished and Mexican women, moving between both nations and challenging the body politic of the United States. This paper adds to emerging scholarship that re-examines the U.S.-Mexico border as a place of sexual exclusion by arguing that the hardening of the U.S.-Mexico border between 1903 and 1915 came through the changing definitions of prostitution in the United States and Mexico that transformed the borderlands as a place to limit and control sex and vice. In addition, this paper will be focused on the development of the vice industry in Tijuana to further elucidate the hardening of the U.S.-Mexico border in the early twentieth century.

The demarcation of the border had been largely uncontested since the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 and up until the first decade of the twentieth century, transnational movement remained relatively fluid across the U.S.-Mexico border. Later, ideas about using the border to stop “undesirables” from entering into the United States became prevalent as a flood of immigrants began populating major cities around the country.<sup>10</sup> Chinese laborers had been the original target for exclusion around the country and the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 drew attention to the U.S.-Mexico border where they had circumvented exclusion by both legal and illegal means of crossing into the United States.<sup>11</sup> The presence of Chinese migration

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<sup>10</sup> Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 57-82. Delgado, “Border Control and Sexual Policing: White Slavery and Prostitution Along the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, 1903-1910,” 159. Catherine Christensen, “Mujeres Publicas: American Prostitutes in Baja California, 1910-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2: 222. Eric Michael Schantz, “From the Mexicali Rose to the Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965” (Ph.D., diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001). Rachel St John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* (Princeton: Princeton:University Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion on the Chinese Exclusion act of 1882, see Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). For a discussion on

north of the border from Mexico remained present throughout the first half of the twentieth century. However, the close monitoring of prostitution at the U.S.-Mexico border kept abreast with the monitoring of the Chinese.

Prostitution can not be simplified as an immoral act nor can it be judged solely upon the actions of women. Prostitutes rightfully participated with their own agency to gain the right to earn wages in the manner they saw fit. What led women to be prostitutes remains in the individual minds of each woman who lived through it, however, as historians we can discern the reasons they picked this line of work. Scholars have attributed prostitution in the early twentieth century to a few factors.<sup>12</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, rapid industrialization led to dramatic changes in the family structure. Families who once had enough economic sustainability, now worked in low-paying menial jobs. The household began to rely on the combined wages of all family members.<sup>13</sup> Changes in the family structure forced unmarried women to work in a male dominated industrial workforce where they faced low wages and unprotected environments. Consequently, the public presence of more women in the workforce increased the sexualization of women.<sup>14</sup> The lack of available jobs for women in the work force left a widening disparity between jobs a women could do and prostitution became a viable

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the Chinese in Mexico see, Grace Pena Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012)

<sup>12</sup> Expansive studies have been done on prostitution and the ways in which social, economic, and cultural ideas molded prostitution, Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Donna J. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of NEbraska Press, 1995). Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900- 1918*. (Baltimore and London: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, 2-4. 147-151.

<sup>14</sup> Bliss. *Compromised Positions*. 41.

choice.<sup>15</sup> Industrialization also brought male workers to isolated areas of the country that created enclaves of single-men willing to use their wages on prostitutes and other vice related entertainment. With the demand of prostitutes, these areas became profitable places in which a prostitute could make a well decent wage.

While economic factors played a big role in the prevalence of prostitution, psychological and familial conditions also led to many women choosing prostitution.<sup>16</sup> Coerced sexual activity on women, and in many cases incestuous relations, challenged their view of gender roles within the society. American Victorian era notions of womanhood held ideals about virginity and honor that were directly tied to the preservation of purity. A deviant sexual encounter, whether forced or consented, led to feelings of guilt or shame because it challenged conceptions of womanhood. In turn, some women regarded themselves as “ruined” and “impure” while others had been shunned from their family upon finding out about their “deviant” behavior. Prostitution could have been a likely profession for someone who held conceptions of “impurity” and felt that prostitution was their place in society. Likewise, in Porfirian Mexico, ideas about purity and sex held similar notions as Victorian era conceptions of womanhood. Young women became susceptible to being ostracized from their homes or communities because sexual mishaps labeled them as deviant.<sup>17</sup> That is not to say that women must have had a sexually charged experience to turn to prostitution. Some regarded the trade as a means to combat the social double standard of sexual experimentation while others saw prostitution as a form to accelerate economic and social

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<sup>15</sup> Schantz, “From the ‘Mexicali rose’ to the Tijuana Brass,” 53. Rosen. *Lost Sisterhood*, xi-xvii. Katherine E. Bliss, “The Science of Redemption: Syphilis, Sexual Promiscuity, and Reformism in Revolutionary Mexico City,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*. 79:1 (February 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, 160-167. Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 42-44.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 42-44.

mobility by occasionally working as prostitutes to buy proper clothes and attract a husband while hiding their profession.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of a person's motive, life as a prostitute was a choice that enabled them to gain their own agency and labor. However, several instances regarding coerced sexual exploitation also existed.

To understand how prostitutes viewed themselves as laborers, an analysis of Mexico City serves to be a good representation on how prostitution functioned in Mexico.<sup>19</sup> Prostitutes in Mexico City highlight the same identity making process as prostitutes at the U.S.-Mexico border. In particular, prostitutes crossing north of the border saw themselves as rightful laborers and not sexual deviants. In Mexico City, prostitution served as an apparatus to regulate morality and hygiene to protect the public sphere from contamination. This complex and often firm understanding of prostitution placed public hygiene and morality within the context of the nation. The convergence of both highlighted the increasing discussions on medical science and its justifications at the turn of the century. Medical experts began examining prostitution in earnest in 1872 when "regulations for practicing prostitution" placed restrictions based on a system the French established to protect their soldiers from venereal diseases during their invasion of Mexico in 1865.<sup>20</sup> Medical examiners and authorities began their surveillance of prostitutes in an

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 158.

<sup>19</sup> See, Katherine E Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2001). Historian Katherine Bliss's focus on prostitution in Mexico City helps elucidate the crossroads between the cultural politics of prostitution, the controversies of morality, and the place of gender roles in Mexico.

<sup>20</sup> A similar form of regulation developed in Paris, France, and become popular in other countries that sought to control venereal diseases. Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 27-29.

attempt to rid diseases that posed danger to the public.<sup>21</sup> The *reglamento* hoped to eradicate syphilis, gonorrhea, and other venereal disease from the local population by requiring prostitutes to receive licenses, attend weekly medical examinations, and seek medical help if they contracted these harmful diseases.<sup>22</sup> Registering prostitutes served as a means of intervention within their personal lives to protect the general population.

In Porfirian Mexico, prostitution had been framed as a necessary evil to protect the family structure from men. Two prevailing circumstances control prostitution in the late nineteenth and at the turn of the twentieth century. First, prostitution became a means to tolerate male sexual promiscuity to deter rape and other immoral acts of men on the family or in the social sphere. Specifically, the Porfiriato brought traditional Catholic views and modernization together and created a complex view on prostitution. One that regarded the need for prostitutes to deter the sexuality of men and the other to chastise moral “sins” that had not been accepted by the public. Cultural mores regarded visiting a brothel as a rite of passage for young men. Men of all classes went to brothels to experiment with their sexuality on “deviant” women as opposed to closely protected moral or “pure” women. The state reasoned that prostitution, and the women involved, served as a sacrifice for the greater good because these deviant women had been “tainted.” Conceptions of a woman’s “deviance” fueled Porfirian notions of prostitution and

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<sup>21</sup>Estrada-Urroz, Rosalina. “¿Público O Privado? El Control de las Enfermedades Venéreas del Porfiriato a la Revolución.” *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México*, N.33. (2007) 38. Marlene Medrano, “Regulating Sexuality on the Mexican Border: Ciudad Juárez, 1900-1960” (Ph.D., diss., Indiana University, 2009). See also, Eric Michael Schantz, “From the Mexicali Rose to the Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965” (Ph.D., diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001). 28-30. Bliss. *Compromised Positions*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Bliss. *Compromised Position*. 26-29. Rivera-Garza, “The Criminalization of the Syphilitic Body,” 150-155.

provided them with the rationale to justify prostitution in society. This notion ignored the economic reality of many prostitutes in the trade. Without fully recognizing economic struggles as a reason for women to work as prostitutes, the Porfirian state placed prostitution as an immoral, yet acceptable, profession brought about a woman's own deviant behavior while not being held accountable for the reasons women become prostitutes.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, the state regulated the bodies of prostitutes to protect public hygiene. If prostitutes had venereal disease they would pose a danger to the public. By 1898, the *reglamentos* efforts to register prostitutes led to poor results because of difficulties in registering prostitutes. The *reglamento* then developed a stronger system of regulation that placed a hierarchy within the sex industry.<sup>24</sup> A “house” based system of prostitution came by limiting prostitution to brothels, *casas de asignacion*, and other places where a prostitute could have *citas*. The state now had the power over places of prostitution to better regulate the trade. Prostitutes who lived in brothels were called *en comunidad* while those who were independent, and registered, are called *aisladas*. Both would be governed under the supervision of *matronas*, or madams. *Matronas* served as mediators between the state and prostitutes many of whom were prostitutes before assuming this role. The state placed *matronas* in charge of enforcing state sanctioned campaigns requiring women to be registered before committing to a client in their brothels or *casas de asignacion*.<sup>25</sup>

Since men could potentially carry these diseases into the home, regulation also guaranteed that the family would be protected. Regulation of prostitution came through the

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 152.

<sup>24</sup> Estrada-Urro. “¿Público O Privado?” 35.

<sup>25</sup> Bliss. *Compromised Positions*. 31-32. For discussion on American madams see Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, 90-91.

registration of prostitutes at the local level of government. In effect, the state surveilled prostitution to limit the spread of venereal diseases and linked nation-building to prostitution. A registered prostitute helped the nation maintain a healthy population while a clandestine prostitute went against the nation.<sup>26</sup> Womanhood and the nation hold a unique relationship because the traditional woman is tasked to preserve, develop, and sustain the family to protect the future of the nation.<sup>27</sup> Ironically, prostitutes were then placed at the center to safeguard the contamination of disease and immoral acts brought by males to the family.<sup>28</sup> This view of prostitution rarely held men accountable for participating as clients because cultural mores allowed for a double standard.

Despite efforts to control prostitution, the *reglamento*'s "house" system faded away with the Porfiriato.<sup>29</sup> Changing ideas about prostitution and the constant shift of power in the city, as well as the country, displaced the Porfirian ideas about prostitution. While prostitutes during the Porfiriato participated in the trade due to economic sustainability, the revolution highlighted prostitution as a means of economic mobility. As the revolution raged around the country, rural and urban families uprooted by the war created a renewed climate for commerce in sex in Mexico. Social and economic change within the country disrupted traditional life for many people especially during volatile periods of revolution. Woman recounted their transition

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<sup>26</sup> Bliss. *Compromised Positions*. 31-32.

<sup>27</sup> Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, "Women and the Nation-State," in *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 312-316. Cristina Rivera-Garza, "The Criminalization of the Syphilitic Body: Prostitutes, Health Crimes, and Society in Mexico City, 1867-1930," in *Crime and Punishment in Latin America: Law and Society Since Late Colonial Times*, ed. Ricardo Salvatore, Carlos Aguirre and Gilbert Joseph (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 156.

<sup>28</sup> Rivera-Garza, "The Criminalization of the Syphilitic Body," 155. Bliss. *Compromised Positions*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 41-44.

towards prostitution because they had no other means of economic sustainability during the war. In addition to economic forces, the revolution brought an influx of male soldiers into the Mexico City and other large metropolitan areas around the country. Many hired women to do domestic work and coerced women into prostitution. Prostitution in the city moved working in “houses” to dance halls, bordellos, and cabarets. Prostitution had a much more public presence around the city compared to the Porfirian period.<sup>30</sup>

Between the Porfiriato and the beginning of the Mexican revolution, prostitutes began seeing themselves as legitimate laborers because of the social and economic opportunities that arose from the trade. Since prostitution had been framed as a necessary evil, the reluctance of subjugating prostitutes to simple immoral deviants played a role in the identity making of these women as legitimate laborers.<sup>31</sup> Working as a prostitute provided women with means to dress appropriate in public and also gave them purchasing power. Part of the *reglamentos* conditions demanded that prostitutes dressed as appropriate public women to maintain a preserved sense of “purity.” This requirement also functioned as a means to hide prostitution from the public. However, the attention paid to wearing appropriate clothing highlights the prostitutes separation of work and personal life that existed within the profession. Many women had sexual partners outside of their clients while some found their partners as clients themselves. Despite conditions set by the *reglamento*, a prostitute held their own agency when choosing what to do with their own wages. Some aging or more frugal prostitutes saved their wages and later became *matronas* by opening their own brothels or *casas de asignacion*.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 63-78.

<sup>31</sup> Bliss, *Compromised Positions*. 73-85.

<sup>32</sup> Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 48-61, 63-65.

Attitudes toward prostitution in the United States began with similar claims as a necessary evil. Victorian era prostitutes were only chastised privately by citizens and not seen as a crime, but as an immoral act. Much like in Mexico, male sexual promiscuity was described as strong and passionate which led prostitution to be a necessary evil in the late nineteenth century. A woman's sexuality had to be dull and uninviting because female sexual promiscuity was considered deviant and, much like Porfirian Mexico, prostitutes became the mediators between the control of male sexual promiscuity and the moral public. Similar economic and social forces led to more women to become public and eventually sexualized. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, the debate about prostitution began shifting towards a social evil due to the emergence of social purity movements that successfully defeated regulation on the basis of morality and religion. For social purist, the presence of prostitution in society was unacceptable and they believed that the government should be in charge of moralizing the nation. Social purist blamed the regulationist movement on the emerging fear of white slavery, the coercion and forceful detention of American women for prostitution by foreign men. White slavery became the talking point for many abolitionist against prostitution and furthered the claim to abolish other vices that seemingly enabled white slavery.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the popularization of abolishment movements, some cities were able to form similar systems of regulation as those seen in Mexico. Cities around the country enacted local regulation that required prostitutes to register and be subjected to medical examinations. For example, between 1913 and 1915, San Francisco regulated prostitution by creating the Municipal Clinic for the Prevention of Venereal Disease.<sup>34</sup> Prostitutes had to be examined every four days

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<sup>33</sup> Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, 3-15.

<sup>34</sup> Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, 16-17.

for disease and if they had them, they would have to be treated for it before going back to work. City officials reasoned that controlling the spread of venereal disease proved to be much safer than abolishing prostitution and causing it to go underground. Furthermore, Physician Julius Rosenstirn, head of the Municipal Clinic, argued that the regulation of prostitution would diminish the harsh realities of prostitution like the contraction of disease and exploitation of women.<sup>35</sup> With similar ideas, San Francisco's Mayor James Rolph argued that the abolishment of prostitution brought to question the displacement of the women who were to be put out of work because of abolishment.<sup>36</sup> These attitudes towards prostitution highlight the contrasting beliefs between abolitionist and the regulationist. While much of the medical community, and the exception of some politicians, believed that the regulation of prostitution protected the nation with the prophylaxis of venereal diseases, abolitionist were not willing to accept the presence of prostitution within the confines of the nation and continued their crusade to end prostitution.

While abolitionist sought to rid the nation of venereal disease by moralizing it citizens, the expanding science of venereal disease called attention to immigrants crossing through the port of entries around the U.S., specifically, at the U.S.-Mexico border. In 1903, the commissioner general of the Bureau of Immigration F.P. Sargent, dispatched letters to numerous railway owners of Mexican and American trains that held lines towards the U.S.-Mexico border from Mexico due to the increased apprehensions of Chinese and Syrians immigrants.<sup>37</sup> He urged

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, 28.

<sup>37</sup> F.P. Sargent to R.M. Brown, 3 February, 1903, Folder Continuance of 51463/A, Accession #001733-001-0199 Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

that the increasing amount of illegal Syrians and Chinese apprehended at the United States-Mexico border came from port of entries in Veracruz, Mexico, and contained dangerous venereal diseases. The Bureau of Immigration had been tasked to keep immigrants out of the country that contained diseases that could potentially contaminate public health. Notions surrounding nativism and xenophobia also fueled negative racial resentments of immigrants coming from “undesirable” areas. While proper channels of migrations existed for some immigrants, the 1903 immigration act drastically limited migration for specific classes of migrants deemed immoral or undesirable especially from China and eastern Europe. Sargent displayed that rhetoric in his attempts to negotiate railway companies to inspect their passengers for venereal diseases. Not only was the migration of foreign peoples a health issue but also an issue of the perceived immorality of immigrants. The migration of foreign peoples from Mexico also posed an issue with American immigration law because it circumvented the Immigration Act of 1903. Sargent lamented that public health would be in danger if the railway companies did not cooperate and they indeed refused to do so. Pablo Martinez del Rio, president of the Mexico Central Railway, refused to go into negotiations because the Mexican government did not allow companies to engage with foreign politics. Del Rio had been more concerned about the logistical and economic shortfalls of inspecting immigrants on the railway system. However, he affirmed that the Mexican authorities would take the responsibility to enforce *sanidad* regulations on incoming immigrants, a task that Sargent was reluctant to believe.<sup>38</sup>

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(NARA). F.P. Sargent to J.G. Metcalfe, 4 February, 1903. (NARA). F.P. Sargent to H.R. Nickerson, 4 February, 1903, (NARA).

<sup>38</sup> Pablo Martinez del Rio to A.A. Robinson, 16 March, 1903, Folder Continuance of 51463/A, Accession #001733-001-0199 Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration,

Despite efforts made to limit the illegal migration of “undesirable” peoples from Mexico, the discussion had by the commissioner general highlights the imposing and often firm attitudes against immigrants at the port of entries around the country. Specifically, Sargeant's view on protecting the nation from “being made the dumping ground of aliens afflicted with dangerous contagious diseases” represents the change in ideology at the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>39</sup> The border began to symbolize an important structure of the nation to be secured in order to prevent contamination in the United States, a notion that is echoed throughout the first half of the twentieth century. This idea was more rigidly enforced with the passage of the 1907 immigration act. Furthermore, in 1918, similar notions to protect the public from venereal disease passed in Texas. The law relating to venereal disease in 1918 emerged out of the need to regulate venereal disease on the U.S.-Mexico border. The Texas State Board of Health set the regulation of any person who had diseases to be quarantined and registered under the law.<sup>40</sup> Prostitutes had particularly been targeted as carriers of venereal diseases and the law allowed for the medical exam of any “alien” under questionable morality to be subjected for inspection for venereal

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Washington, D.C. (NARA). See also B.N. Brown to F.P. Sargent, 12 April, 1903, Folder Continuance of 51463/A, Accession #001733-001-0199, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA).

<sup>39</sup> F.P. Sargent to The Secretary of Commerce and Labor, 4 May , 1904, Folder Continuance of 51463/A, Accession #001733-001-0199, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA).

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed discussion on the medical subjugation of Mexicans at the U.S.-Mexico border, see Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2005) 57-81.

disease.<sup>41</sup> Later in 1923, drastic measures to limit contagion in the United States allowed medical inspectors to “de-contaminate” incoming immigrants from Mexico by requiring them to take baths and disinfect their luggage upon entering the United States.<sup>42</sup>

In 1904, the Mexican government, too, reacted to the amount of immigrants arriving at port of entries in the country. In partial response to the Bureau of Immigration’s request to inspect foreign immigrants heading north to the U.S., the Mexican government agreed to enact legislature to inspect and limit immigration to Mexico.<sup>43</sup> Inspectors specifically targeted Chinese immigrants landing at port of entries. The immigration law required all passengers from Chinese ports to provide a certification of good health, disinfection of all baggages, and willingness to succumb to any medical examinations.<sup>44</sup> In 1909, the Mexican government passed further immigration laws prohibiting the immigration of women who would be perceived to be

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<sup>41</sup> Law Related to Venereal Diseases, 15 September, 1918, Folder Continuance of 54549/381, Accession #001733-014-0105, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA).

<sup>42</sup>Irving McNeil to J.W. Teppan, 23 December, 1923, Folder Continuance of 52903/29, Accession #001733-003-0516, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA).

<sup>43</sup> Ignacio Mariscal to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 28 June, 1904, Folder Continuance of 51463/A, Accession #001733-001-0199, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA).

<sup>44</sup> Regulations Relating to Chinese Immigration, 21 March, 1904, Folder Continuance of 55609/551, Accession #001733-017-0417, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA).

prostitutes.<sup>45</sup> In similar stride as the U.S. immigration act of 1907, the Mexican government regarded the migration of foreign prostitutes, and those who attempted to procure women in Mexico, as undesirable immigrants. Both the United States and Mexico perceived the contamination of immigration as an issue in their nation-making process, however, with regards to prostitutes, both nations addressed the need to regulate or eradicate the trade differently.

In 1906, the convergence of prostitution and the immigration of Chinese in the U.S. met when Lew Bong and Lue Ark Goon, both Chinese nationals and citizens of the U.S., attempted to smuggle two Chinese women who were presumably their wives into El Paso. Upon arrival to El Paso via the El Paso Electric Railway, two Chinese women under the aliases of Wong Shee and Lee Shee had been apprehended by the inspector in charge in suspicion that they were prostitutes. The inspector contended that “the two women are, by very appearance and mannerism, experienced prostitutes.”<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the inspector in charge linked this case to other immigrant Chinese women crossing at other port of entries around the states. This instance highlights the growing attitudes toward prostitutes at the turn of the twentieth century. The inspector has had experience in discerning immigrant prostitutes and was familiar in the dress and mannerism they had. His description about these women emphasizes the amount prostitution traffic that they had experienced at this port of entry.

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<sup>45</sup> Mexican Immigration Laws, 25 January, 1909, Folder Continuance of 51648/8, Accession #001733-017-0417, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA).

<sup>46</sup>Letter from the Inspector in Charge at El Paso to the Commissioner-General of Immigration, 5 November, 1906, Folder Continuance of 14610/139 & 14610/140, National Archives Identification #23835509. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1787-2004 Series: Chinese General Correspondence, 1894-1911, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA).

Indeed, the experiences of the immigrant inspector views on prostitution was most likely fueled by the prevalence of prostitution in the adjacent border town of Ciudad Juárez. Much like Mexico City, Ciudad Juárez had a system to regulate prostitution.<sup>47</sup> Local Mexican officials regulated prostitution to limit the spread of venereal diseases among the *gente decente*. While the American immigrant officials sought to exclude the prevalence of venereal diseases by deporting prostitutes whom posed a danger to the public, local authorities were worried about the eradication of disease and the social morality that is attached to the profession. The local *reglamento* established it self out of the need to regulate the increasing amounts of clandestine prostitutes brought by the vice industry. Regulation of prostitution was as much tied to the local economy as morality and hygiene was tied to Mexico City.<sup>48</sup> While notions of morality and hygiene popularized the regulation of prostitution in Ciudad Juárez, the underlying predicament outlined the profitability to tax prostitution. Fines and fees pertaining to the regulation of prostitution and the taxation of vice business filled the coffers of the city and this play by the local government happened throughout the border towns. For example, in Mexicali, Baja California, local government taxed the importation, sales, and manufacturing of liquor and tobacco.<sup>49</sup> In addition, a gambling tax of \$.50 pesos per day “To contribute to the vigilance of [gambling] games”<sup>50</sup> and a tax of \$25 peso per month as a “tolerance” fee.<sup>51</sup> Prostitution in

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<sup>47</sup> Medrano. “Regulating Sexuality on the Mexican Border.” 28-30.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 30-35.

<sup>49</sup> Miscellaneous letters and documents re: gambling and taverns in Mexicali, 2 April, 1912, Archival Reference # MSS 772, Collection of Government Documents from Baja California, University of California, San Diego. (UCSD).

<sup>50</sup> Most likely referring to the policing of Mexicali’s red light district along the *Avenida Porfirio* Díaz as it created often troublesome encounters with drunken men.

Mexicali also generated about a quarter amount of all vice taxed revenue between 1910 and 1914.<sup>52</sup>

In Baja California, regulation came with similarities to that of Mexico City. In 1912, *jefe politico* Escudero Gordillo brought regulation to the expanding prostitution market in Mexicali that came by the large influx of single men working at the Colorado River Delta in Calexico.<sup>53</sup> Escudero knew that a hefty tax would generate profits for the city since these men would be willing to pay top prices for women of different classes and the lack of women in this area created an increased demand for prostitutes. First class prostitutes were expected to pay a \$35 monthly tax and second class prostitutes had to pay \$20 monthly tax, a stark difference compared to the \$10 and \$5 tax for first and second class prostitutes in Mexico City. This strategy to tax prostitution was also a ploy to limit the amount of prostitutes in the city especially after the moral outcries from Mexicali's *gente decente* influenced the regulation of prostitution in the city that pushed the trade to *Avenida Porfirio Diaz*.<sup>54</sup>

By 1913, changing attitudes around the United States led to the emergence of abolitionist legislation on the vice and sex industry that forced prostitution south of the border and into the border towns. That same year, California legislators followed most of the country by passing their own versions of the Red Light Abatement act that held landowners accountable for renting

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<sup>51</sup> Jefatura Política y de las Armas del Distrito Norte de la Baja California to C.E. Gale, 1 January, 1909, Archival Reference #MSS 772, Collection of Government Documents from Baja California, University of California, San Diego. (UCSD). Jefatura Política y de las Armas del Distrito Norte de la Baja California to Nichols & Davis, 1 January, 1909, Archival Reference #MSS 772, Collection of Government Documents from Baja California, University of California, San Diego. (UCSD).

<sup>52</sup> Schantz, "From the 'Mexicali Rose' to the Tijuana Brass," 114.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 103-104. Christensen, "Mujeres Publicas," 226.

<sup>54</sup> Schantz, "From the 'Mexicali Rose' to the Tijuana Brass," 104-1107.

properties to the vice and prostitution industry.<sup>55</sup> The act targeted those who profited the most in these industries, however, the act only dispersed vice and prostitution to the periphery around the country.<sup>56</sup> Prostitution became a transient profession as they moved between cities that had not yet abolished prostitution. Procurers and businessmen interested in vice commerce moved around the country but progressive era politics continued to shut down the vice industry. Legislation did not stop Americans from finding a means to continue participating in these industries as American business interest found that Mexican cities across the the U.S. border were well suited for the vice business.

The passage of the 1913 Red Light Abatement act in California displaced prostitutes around the state. Many American prostitutes in California relocated to the border towns of Tijuana and Mexicali to continue their trade.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, American prostitutes formed a dual-citizenship identity within the context of the borderlands.<sup>58</sup> As American women, they leveraged their citizenship to protect themselves under the law when the Mexican government posed a threat to their livelihood. American women circumvented the 1909 Mexican immigration law that prohibited immigrant women from becoming prostitutes in Mexico in two ways.<sup>59</sup> First, they blamed their lack of knowledge on immigration policy on the basis that they did not know

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<sup>55</sup> “Gambling and White Slaves Laws Are Passed,” *Sacramento Union*, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1913. Catherine Christensen, “Mujeres Publicas: American Prostitutes in Baja California, 1910-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2: 219-221.

<sup>56</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 28-31.

<sup>57</sup> Schantz, “From the ‘Mexicali Rose’ to the Tijuana Brass,” 53.

<sup>58</sup> Christensen, “Mujeres Públicas,” 226-228.

<sup>59</sup> Mexican Immigration Laws, 25 January, 1909, Folder Continuance of 51648/8, Accession #001733-017-0417. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA). Christensen, “Mujeres Públicas,” 227-231.

Spanish and were not aware of the such laws. However, many American prostitutes were well aware of the conditions set in place by the Mexican government but it was easier for them not recognize them. Secondly, some American women were well informed of the Mexican immigration laws that, similar to American immigration laws, allowed an immigrant to enter prostitution after three years of residing in the country. These women fought back against the Mexican courts by proving that they had been residents of the border towns for a long time.<sup>60</sup>

By 1915, Tijuana became the heart of the vice industry in California by providing tourist the pleasures of California's banned activities. Businessmen, known as the "border barons," turned to Tijuana, Mexico, and invested in casinos, bordellos, and bars. Before vice interest heavily invested in Tijuana, it had been a small quiet pueblo. By 1910, Tijuana boasted a small population of 969 persons.<sup>61</sup> The citizens most likely lived near Olvera Street, later to become Avenida Revolución, Tijuana's red light district, in about one hundred houses clustered along the main street and throughout the once planned pueblo of Zaragoza.<sup>62</sup> Tijuanaenses relied on a few markets for their goods. First, a small market owned by Julian Rodriguez provided the town with Mexican goods but they were often expired or became old during its long sea voyage from central Mexico. Secondly, goods north of the border in San Ysidro traveled smaller distances and in many cases fresh produce was picked in the Tijuana River Valley or locally picked in San

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<sup>60</sup> Christensen, "Mujeres Públicas," 230-232.

<sup>61</sup> Manuel G. Santillan, "Estadísticas De Tijuana" in *Historia De Tijuana: 1889-1989: Edición Conmemorativa Del Centenario De Su Fundación*. ed. David Pinera-Ramirez et al.(Baja California:Universidad Autónoma De Baja California, 1989) 334.

<sup>62</sup> The state officially named modern Tijuana "Zaragoza" after a land claim dispute settled boundaries between the original rancho and pueblo. However, the pueblo of Zaragoza never caught on because Americans called it "Tia Juana" and Mexican residents called it by its modern name.

Diego. Fresher and more widely available goods incentivized Tijuana's reliance on San Ysidro. Many report crossing through "the white gate" into San Ysidro or anywhere in between to enter the United States. Finally, self-sustaining farms and plots of vegetables provided most of the Tijuana's diet and some small farms sold milk and cream in San Diego.<sup>63</sup> For the Tijuana's that did not own large plots of land, sustenance came from working north of the border on farms owned by Americans. Homesteading laws made much of San Ysidro and the Tijuana River Valley available for American land claims. Many of San Ysidro's northwest lands became dairy farms and the Tijuana River Valley saw the rise of wheat, apricot, figs, peaches, and many other products.<sup>64</sup>

Tijuana's isolated position on the Baja California peninsula created issues in the population of the city. Baja California's geographical location consists of a peninsula wedged under California to the north and Mexico's other northern state of Sonora to the east. Migrating from the interior of Mexico proved difficult. Exacerbating the seclusion of Baja California comes a mountainous region called *La Rumorosa*, a 30-mile stretch of winding and dangerous road between Tijuana and Mexicali. Passing *La Rumorosa* is one of the few ways to enter the peninsula by land through Mexico's national boundaries. Past *La Rumorosa* then comes Sonora's large and dry deserts followed by Mexico's vertical changes in climates. South of Tijuana lies a 1,000-mile trek through Baja California Sur reaching the lowest point of the peninsula at Cabo San Lucas. Because of geographical isolation, the population of Tijuana consisted of mainly

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<sup>63</sup> Testimonio of Andres Ramos Castillo, "Testimonios De Tijuana en Los Incios de Este Siglo" in *Historia De Tijuana: 1889-1989: Edición Conmemorativa Del Centenario De Su Fundación*. ed. David Pinera-Ramirez et al. (Baja California: Universidad Autónoma De Baja California, 1989) 69.

<sup>64</sup> Barbara Zaragoza, *San Ysidro and the Tijuana River Valley* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2014) 28.

migrants from Baja California Sur that came to the region by boat sometime prior to 1900. By 1910, the population of Baja California totaled 9,760 with only about ten percent of the population residing in Tijuana.<sup>65</sup>

Small migrations of Mexicans came through the United States via railway along the border. The construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad crossed through El Paso, Texas, and other cities near the border at Arizona but a path to Tijuana did not come until 1886 with the construction of the National City & Otay railroad.<sup>66</sup> The NC&O connected the Southern Pacific Railroad that was once 90 miles north of San Diego. However, the railroad did not encourage Mexicans to migrate to Tijuana because of the sophisticated process of transnational movement. Plans for a more efficient method of travel came in 1907 once John D. Spreckels secured a deal with Southern Pacific to plan the San Diego and Arizona Railway (SD&A). Spreckels, son of sugar magnate Claus Spreckels and brother of racetrack enthusiast Adolph Spreckles, proposed to connect a railway to the larger Southern Pacific system in Arizona. Consequently, the SD&A secured rights to build the railroad through Mexico's territory to avoid construction on a mountainous region east of San Diego. The SD&A railroad, completed in 1919, passed through Yuma, Arizona, traveling west and upon passing Campo in California headed south into Tecate, Mexico, traveling 45 winding miles eventually heading north into Tijuana. The train then passed through San Ysidro reaching its destination in downtown San Diego. This train also provided

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<sup>65</sup> Manuel G. Santillán, "Estadísticas De Tijuana," 334. Testimonio of Benjamin Serrano Gonzalez,, "Testimonios De Personas Que Trabajaron En Agua Caliente" in *Historia De Tijuana* 127.

<sup>66</sup> Zaragoza, *San Ysidro and the Tijuana River Valley*, 28. Testimonio of Enrique Silvestre de Porta "Testimonios De Antiguos Residentes De Tijuana," in *Historia De Tijuana: 1889-1989: Edición Conmemorativa Del Centenario De Su Fundación*. ed. David Pinera-Ramirez et al.(Baja California:Universidad Autónoma De Baja California, 1989) 106.

Americans a means of transportation along Tijuana with stops in certain vice related establishments.<sup>67</sup>

For Mexicans, the railroad meant new opportunities to travel to Mexico's most isolated state. A typical journey began in Nogales, Mexico, where travelers would be granted permission to travel to Tijuana by the American immigration office. Reports state that American officers interrogated travelers as if "Tijuana was an American city."<sup>68</sup> Mexicans had to provide documentation or reasonable cause for traveling to Tijuana in order to board the train. By the completion of the railway, machinations along the U.S.-Mexico border revolved around limiting the migration of Mexicans into the United States. Specifically, the border became a form of gatekeeping to stop immigrants with diseases from contaminating the body politic of the United States. Immigration officers made it difficult for Mexican travelers to board a train for Tijuana.

Interest in Tijuana and Baja California solidified 1911 when the Magonista Party, also known as the *Partido Liberal Mexicano*, invaded the city and established a vice industry in Tijuana.<sup>69</sup> Ricardo and Enrique Flores-Magon led the Magonistas, a party that competed against the Porfirian government. Their ideology closely resembled the anarchism of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) rather than the other notable ideologies of the revolution. On May 9th, 1911, the Magonistas invaded Tijuana with forces made up of mainly members in the I.W.W. many of which were expatriates from the United States living in northern Mexico. Upon

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<sup>67</sup> Testimonio of Manuel Bravo Gonzales, "Testimonios De Personas Que Trabajaron En Agua Caliente" in *Historia De Tijuana: 1889-1989: Edición Conmemorativa Del Centenario De Su Fundación*. ed. David Pinera-Ramirez et al.(Baja California:Universidad Autónoma De Baja California, 1989) 127.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 127.

<sup>69</sup> Christensen, *Mujeres Publicas*, 228. Lawrence D Taylor, "The Magonista Revolt in Baja California: Capitalist Conspiracy or Rebellion de los Pobres?" *Journal of San Diego History* 45 (Winter 1999) 2-31

taking control of the city, the Magonistas opened the border to vice interest. While not fully banned in California, Tijuana served as a concentrated place with multiple places of vice.

In June 1911, Esteban Cantú, military commander and later *jefe politico*, arrived in Mexicali along with 150 men to relive Celso Vega, active military commander, after a series of failed battles with the Magonistas left Vega wounded. Cantú and his forces drove the Magonistas north to the border in order for American troops to arrest the insurgents for breaking “neutrality laws.” Part of the Magonista agenda required to tear down the Díaz regime and return the lands to the Mexican people. Cantú’s support of Vega came in response to the fear of the Magonista filibuster. Cantú always remained neutral and took orders from Victoriano Huerta, a long time Porfiriato general which later renounced Díaz to join the Madero government. Cantú pacified the region and remained military commander of Baja California.<sup>70</sup> The Mexican revolution brought great uncertainty to the region's leadership between 1911 and 1914 because of the constant political battles between factions. Baja California saw the governorship change six times each one passing by with a different faction. Part of the instability revolved around the perceived value of the region.<sup>71</sup> Many factions left the governorship position because they did not find any social or economic use in the region. Consequently, the issue most likely revolved around the differences, or lack of Baja California's development, between the regions interior of Mexico to that of Baja California’s isolation. Meanwhile, Cantú served as a proxy governor for much of that time strengthening his military power in Mexicali. He headed much of the Mexicali Valley fending off encroaching factions in Baja California under the guidance of Victoriano Huerta. By

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<sup>70</sup> Jose Alfredo Gómez Estrada, *Gobierno y Casinos: El Origen de la Riqueza de Abelardo L. Rodriguez* (Baja California: Universidad Autónoma De Baja California, 2002) 38-41. Oscar Sanchez Ramirez, *Formación del Estado de Baja California* (Mexicali: Algibe Editorial, 2013) 26-28.

<sup>71</sup> Estrada, *Gobierno y Casinos*, 39.

1913, Huerta overthrew the government of Madero with military force causing another surge of militancy between Mexico's factions. In response, anti-Huerta factions organized to overthrow the coup and won in 1914. The *Soberana Convención Revolucionaria*, also known as the Convention of Aguascalientes, in 1914 brought the factions together to re-establish a working government after Huerta had dismantled it. The convention recognized Cantú as military commander of Baja California Norte.<sup>72</sup>

While the convention recognized the official government of Baja California, the agreements set by the convention began to fade away just months after its conception. Cantú therefore ousted the current *jefe politico* Baltazar Aviles and seized the governor position in Baja California. Turmoil between Mexico's two new alliances, Villa's and Zapata's conventionist versus Obregon and Carranza's constitutionalist, once again dismantled ties to Baja California. The conventionist briefly held the office in Mexico when Villa himself confirmed the governorship of Cantú by recognizing him as the governor of *Distrito Norte de la Baja California*. By the time the constitutionalist deposed Villa and Zapata, Cantú renounced any affiliation with the factions of Mexico remaining neutral to the revolution. Cantú insisted that the state of Baja California remain part of Mexico, in faith, while the interior finalizes the central government. While Cantú did remain neutral, he later agreed to recognize the constitutionalist government in December of 1915. However, the act signified only political symbolism since Cantú used Baja California's isolated location to his advantage by having complete control over all aspects of the region.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 38-41. Ramirez, *Formacion*, 26-28.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*.

Cantú's disregard for politics outside of Baja California enabled Tijuana and Mexicali to prosper in the vice industry. As governor, Cantú moved the capital of Baja California from Ensenada to Mexicali. The move most likely resembled the attitude of Cantú's acceptance of the border regions feasible economy. For much of Baja California Norte, the economy remained stagnant without the help from the central government. Moreover, the state of Mexico's revolution and the Porfiriato regime failed to incorporate Baja California Norte into the grander economic sphere. Cantú then headed the economy by taxing the region's big export economies, vice and cotton. While the vice industry is not necessarily an export, the industry relies on American tourist to travel over the border to participate in it. The money that is produced by the vice industry then goes into the pockets of the American businessman essentially moving back over the border. Cantú established a ten percent tax on all vice business including casinos, bordellos, opium dens, and horse races. In the same way, the cotton industry boomed in exports at the beginning of the first world war in 1914 and essentially went untaxed until Cantú imposed a similar tax.<sup>74</sup>

Cantú welcomed all business into Baja California Norte as long as he saw proper tribute. Aside from the taxes, Cantú also required fees from the various businesses around Mexicali and Tijuana. The opium trade proved to be a major factor in the establishment of such taxes and fees because the use of opium required Cantú to be "tolerant" of immoral behavior by the Chinese. Tolerance, however, contradicts Cantú's move to legalize opium in the district. Cantú understood the contribution of the opium market in Baja California and knowingly continued the market to receive a share of the profit. Opium dens proceed to pay a ten percent tax on the business, a 250

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<sup>74</sup> Estrada, *Gobierno y Casinos*, 40.

peso fee every month for running a “recreational business,” and taxes on the importation of materials needed to make opium.<sup>75</sup>

In 1915, Carl “Carlie” Withington opened a lucrative bordello and casino in Mexicali after local Bakersfield judges restricted prostitution. Withington felt the pressures of closing his sex businesses after the Red Light Abatement Act reached him in Bakersfield. Since Withington’s brothels drew in most of his revenue, he headed south to replicate his business without the legal obligations in California. Cantú granted Withington special tax exemptions to build The Tecolote, or The Owl, casino. Withington agreed to pay Cantú eight-thousand pesos a month and in return, he exempt the importation of building materials for the casino. The Tecolote opened with renowned notoriety that attracted Southern Californian tourist. Withington saw great success and enlisted the help of Marcus Allen, liquor specialist and Withington’s associate from Bakersfield, and Frank “Booze” Beyer, a venture capitalist, to expand their gambling business. Together they formed the Allen, Beyer, and Withington syndicate (A.B.W.) establishing casinos, cabarets, and brothels in Tijuana and Mexicali. The A.B.W.’s influence reached Tijuana’s early entertainment industry as they opened the Monte Carlo casino. Later, Withington and Beyer opened the Tivoli bar. Cantú continued to tolerate the A.B.W. syndicate with these exemptions as long as he received a monthly payment.

Cantú also granted similar deals to Mexicans as well. During the California-Panama exposition in San Diego, Antonio Elozua opened the *Feria Tipica Mexicana*, or the Typical Mexican Fair. Tourist traveling to Tijuana attended boxing matches, cockfights, bullfights, and

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<sup>75</sup> Estrada, *Gobierno y Casinos*, 47.

casinos all of which had been banned in California.<sup>76</sup> The fair also follows a trend of representing California under a form of romanization and representation of a Spanish and Mexican past. The construction of Balboa Park's Basque and Spanish inspired architecture for the California-Panama exposition positioned the *Feria Tipica Mexicana* alongside the trend. Additionally, the El Camino Real (Highway 101), that also followed the trend, connected most of California with San Diego resulting in a surge of automobile traffic entering Tijuana.<sup>77</sup> While most of Tijuana remained unpaved, traffic heading down south increased because automobiles provided a faster mode of transportation than horse pulled taxis and restricting train rides. Prohibition later brought other Mexican owned establishments like the "Blue Fox."<sup>78</sup>

The A.B.W. syndicate was only the first wave of border barons in Tijuana. James Coffroth, San Francisco's premier boxing promoter, greatly influenced the construction of the Tijuana Jockey Club. After California banned all forms of betting, including boxing, Coffroth looked for other outlets to continue his career. New Orleans and Milwaukee surfaced as possible locations for Coffroth because of his contribution and success in the boxing industry. But Coffroth interest in Tijuana "offered better opportunities for him than New Orleans and it was

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<sup>76</sup> David Pinera, et al. "Semblanza De Tijuana 1915-1930," in *Historia De Tijuana: 1889-1989: Edición Conmemorativa Del Centenario De Su Fundación*. ed. David Pinera-Ramirez et al.(Baja California:Universidad Autónoma De Baja California, 1989) 96.

<sup>77</sup>See Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and memory in a Modern American Place* (University of California press, 2006).

<sup>78</sup> Testimonio of Miguel Calette Anaya, "Testimonios De Antiguos Residentes De Tijuana," in *Historia De Tijuana* 108.

probable that he will enter the game there.”<sup>79</sup> At the same time that the *Feria* attracted tourist to Tijuana, Coffroth did indeed found himself in Tijuana. This time backed by financial groups that held interest in Tijuana’s emerging vice economy. Among the financial backers was H.J. Moore and H.A. Houser who had already secured deals with governor Cantú to begin building the Tijuana Jockey Club.<sup>80</sup> The deal granted the club free importation of building materials as long as they paid the government 400 pesos for each race day of the season. Before building the track, Coffroth and Baron Long, a specialist in the Los Angeles vice scene, bought most shares of the Club. Coffroth then became the president of the Club and begun the construction of a \$175,000 racetrack. Later, Coffroth took over Antonio Elozua’s fair and partnered up with Withington to open the Sunset Inn and ballroom.<sup>81</sup>

On New Year's Day 1916, the racetrack opened after only 16 days of construction. The opening proved to be a very symbolic feat in California. Coffroth aimed to “make Tijuana the winter resort of America.”<sup>82</sup> The racetrack sold out its capacity of 3,000 seats with a few other thousand frolicking around Tijuana. Tourist also participated in adjoining gambling halls and saloons opened as part of the racetrack. Among the tourist, prostitutes and procurers roamed the venue to find clients. Cantú and many other notable politicians, celebrities, and business elite attended the event that day. Tijuana's vice industry propelled into the mainstage because of the

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<sup>79</sup> “Milwaukee Club After Coffroth,” *San Francisco Call*, October 15th, 1913. “Coffroth May Handle Club in Milwaukee,” *Los Angeles Herald*, October 15th, 1913. “Coffroth to Pass Up New Orleans,” *Los Angeles Herald*, January 23rd, 1915.

<sup>80</sup> Estrada, *Gobierno y Casinos*, 47.

<sup>81</sup> Proffitt, *Tijuana*, 189-91.

<sup>82</sup> “New Racetrack Completed Despite Hard Fight for Jockey Club,” *Sacramento Union*, December 30, 1915.

opening of the racetrack. Newspapers from 1916 to 1920 repeatedly praise the racetrack for its vitality and purpose.

Political tensions continued by 1920 when the constitutionalist government sought to regain control of Mexico's decentralized political bosses. They sent General Abelardo Rodriguez on a staged mission to map the topography of the region, but the mission only served to spy on Cantú's political agenda. Rodriguez reported back to constitutionalist President Carranza that Cantú's ties to the region focused on his retention of full control and isolation of Baja California. Carranza proceeded to dispatch a small military force from Sonora to depose Cantú, but the governor, fully aware of the plan, fled to the United States. Baja California once again saw instability in the region. Between 1920 to 1923, the governorship changed five times while Rodriguez remained the general of the area. The central government enforcement several edicts to moralize Tijuana beginning with the red-light district. But money continued to flow because the prohibition of alcohol in the United States sent a surge of tourists back into the city. Meanwhile, Baja California governor's lined their pockets with bribes from several bars to remain open. The governors also argued that the taxes of the vice industry provided much of the revenue for the city and abolishing it would be disastrous.<sup>83</sup>

As the Governor, Rodriguez surged a new wave of vice investment in the city. Rodriguez favored the industry because of the profit generated in taxes and fees. He later defended the industry of tourism by comparing it to South Florida and Paris which thrives on tourism as its main industry. In addition, Rodriguez had the connections to avoid the legalities of the industry

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<sup>83</sup> Paul J. Vanderwood, *Satan's Playground: Mobsters and Movie Stars at America's Greatest Gaming Resort* (Duke University Press, 2010) 111-113. Estrada, *Gobierno y Casinos*, 90-91.

in Baja California because of his relationship to Obregon and later president Plutarco Elias Calles. The A.B.W.'s dominance in Tijuana began to fade once Cantú fled and the death of Carlie Withington in 1925 gave Bowman most of the A.B.W.s major assets. New border barons began to plan a larger and much grander enterprise in Tijuana by proposing the construction of the Agua Caliente Casino and Spa. Along with Bowman, Baron Long and Jim Crofton, Rodriguez began the construction of the \$1.5 million dollar project in Tijuana rejuvenating the vice industry in the roaring twenties.<sup>84</sup>

The growing presence and acceptance of the vice industry in Tijuana highlights the impeded hardening of the U.S.-Mexico border. Specifically, the border becomes a site to limit the immorality of immigrants moving north and the containment of Americans moving south to participate in vice. Among those, the American purist chose to limit are prostitutes. By means of excluding “immoral” immigrants at the border, social purist reform was able to make the U.S.-Mexico border a site of gendered and sexual exclusion. The scrutiny of prostitution at the border also became a means to limit the spread of venereal disease. Vice along the border also became a concern on the moral contamination moving into the United States. As the definitions of morality and prostitution changed in the United States, the national attention towards limiting the trade pointed towards the border where the flourishing vice centers allowed commerce in sex and the vice industry to continue after the nation abolished them.

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<sup>84</sup> Vanderwood, *Satan's Playground*, 119-122, 135, 140, 148.

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