

# Female Prostitution in Costa Rica

*Historical Perspectives, 1880–1930*



Anne Hayes

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES  
SOCIAL SCIENCES AND LAW

*Edited by*  
David Mares  
University of California, San Diego

A ROUTLEDGE SERIES

# LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

SOCIAL SCIENCES AND LAW

DAVID MARES, *General Editor*

OBSERVING OUR *HERMANOS DE ARMAS*  
*U.S. Military Attachés in Guatemala,  
Cuba, and Bolivia, 1950–1964*  
Robert O. Kirkland

LAND PRIVATIZATION IN MEXICO  
*Urbanization, Formation of Regions,  
and Globalization in Ejidos*  
María Teresa Vázquez Castillo

THE POLITICS OF THE INTERNET IN  
THIRD WORLD DEVELOPMENT  
*Challenges in Contrasting Regimes with  
Case Studies of Costa Rica and Cuba*  
Bert Hoffmann

CONTESTING THE IRON FIST  
*Advocacy Networks and Police Violence  
in Democratic Argentina and Chile*  
Claudio A. Fuentes

LATIN AMERICA'S NEO-REFORMATION  
*Religion's Influence on Contemporary  
Politics*  
Eric Patterson

INSURGENCY, AUTHORITARIANISM,  
AND DRUG TRAFFICKING IN MEXICO'S  
"DEMOCRATIZATION"  
José Luis Velasco

THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL POLICY  
CHANGE IN CHILE AND URUGUAY  
*Retrenchment Versus Maintenance,  
1973–1998*  
Rossana Castiglioni

AN INDUSTRIAL GEOGRAPHY OF  
COCAINE  
Christian M. Allen

STATE AND BUSINESS GROUPS IN  
MEXICO  
*The Role of Informal Institutions  
in the Process of Industrialization,  
1936–1984*  
Arnulfo Valdivia-Machuca

LEFT IN TRANSFORMATION  
*Uruguayan Exiles and the Latin  
American Human Rights Networks,  
1967–1984*  
Vania Markarian

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN LATIN  
AMERICA  
*Peace and Security in the Southern  
Cone*  
Andrea Oelsner

THE POLITICS OF MORAL SIN  
*Abortion and Divorce in Spain, Chile  
and Argentina*  
Merike Blofield

POLITICAL CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
POLICYMAKING IN MEXICO  
Jordi Díez

FEMALE PROSTITUTION IN COSTA RICA  
*Historical Perspectives, 1880–1930*  
Anne Hayes

FEMALE PROSTITUTION  
IN COSTA RICA  
Historical Perspectives, 1880–1930

Anne Hayes

Routledge  
New York & London

Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group  
270 Madison Avenue  
New York, NY 10016

Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group  
2 Park Square  
Milton Park, Abingdon  
Oxon OX14 4RN

© 2006 by Taylor and Francis Group, LLC  
Routledge is an imprint of Taylor & Francis Group, an Informa business

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

International Standard Book Number-10: 0-415-97937-4 (Hardcover)  
International Standard Book Number-13: 978-0-415-97937-5 (Hardcover)  
Library of Congress Card Number 2006005344

No part of this book may be reprinted, reproduced, transmitted, or utilized in any form by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, micro-filming, and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publishers.

**Trademark Notice:** Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

---

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

---

Hayes, Anne, 1945-

Female prostitution in Costa Rica : historical perspectives, 1880-1930 / Anne Hayes.

p. cm. -- (Latin American studies)

ISBN 0-415-97937-4 (alk. paper)

1. Prostitution--Costa Rica--Puntarenas--History. 2. Puntarenas (Costa Rica)--Social conditions. 3. Prostitutes--Legal status, laws, etc.--Costa Rica. 4. Prostitution--Costa Rica. I. Title. II. Latin American studies (Routledge (Firm))

HQ154.P86H39 2006  
306.74'2097286--dc22

2006005344

---

Visit the Taylor & Francis Web site at  
<http://www.taylorandfrancis.com>

and the Routledge Web site at  
<http://www.routledge-ny.com>

*To Monty*



# Contents

List of Photographs	ix
List of Maps	xi
List of Tables	xiii
Acknowledgments	xv
<i>Chapter One</i>	
Introduction and Theory	1
<i>Chapter Two</i>	
Regional Differentiation of Colony and Nation to 1890	27
<i>Chapter Three</i>	
The Mores of Coffee in the Highlands	55
<i>Chapter Four</i>	
The Economic Demography of Prostitution in Puntarenas before 1910	69
<i>Chapter Five</i>	
Structure and Experience: The Law and <i>La Vida</i>	83
<i>Chapter Six</i>	
The Triumph of Nationalism: The Pacific Railroad	105

*Chapter Seven*

Society in Puntarenas after Completion of the Pacific Railroad 117

*Chapter Eight*

Conclusion: Prostitution in Puntarenas and the State 151

Notes 167

Bibliography 205

Index 223

# List of Photographs

- Photo 4-1: *In the Imagination of a Prisoner*: Mural Painting from San Lucas Island Prison, c. mid-twentieth century 79
- Photo 6-1: Postcard of Río Grande Bridge, 1905 112



# List of Maps

Map 1-1:	Costa Rica: Provinces of Center and Periphery	2
Map 2-1:	Shifting Topography of Puntarenas: 1860, 1885, 1931	29
Map 2-2:	Puerto Puntarenas, c. 1905	29
Map 2-3:	Nicoya Region	30
Map 2-4:	Commerce from Puntarenas, 1821–1850	40



# List of Tables

Table 4-1: Age, Origin, and Mobility of Registered Prostitutes, 1894–1897	78
Table 5-1: Convictions for Drunkenness per 1000 Inhabitants for Selected Counties ( <i>Cantones</i> ), 1904–1910	101
Table 7-1: Convictions for Drunkenness in the Cities of Puntarenas, San José and Limón, 1913–1919	136
Table 7-2: Criminal Cases by Province, 1904–1919	139
Table 7-3: Rates of Legitimate Births by Major Cities, 1911–1927	146
Table 7-4: Rates of Legitimate Births by Provinces, 1911–1927	147
Table 8-1: National Income in <i>Pesos</i> from Liquor and Tobacco, 1838–1859	155
Table 8-2: National Income from Liquor Monopoly, Selected Years: 1879–1929	156



# Acknowledgments

One of the most rewarding aspects of this project has been the opportunity to interact with so many interesting people whose generosity of spirit and intellect has been extraordinary. My advisor, Margaret Crahan, has contributed her sharp and fine-tuned criticisms in draft after draft of the chapters of this study and, in the process, shown me the way to improve my critical thinking through writing. I have become a better teacher for it, as well as been enriched by her friendship.

The course work that prepared me for this project has come from a diverse pool of academic talent in the relatively new Ph.D. Program in Latin American History of the Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York, for which I am grateful. Professor Laird Bergad gave me the tools to collect and analyze demographic data, as well as an appreciation of history as a social science; Professor Alfonso Quiroz's course on nationalism was a catalyst for much of the analysis of Costa Rican liberalism employed in this study; many of my conclusions follow his insights. Professor Susan Besse's knowledge of issues concerned with gender in Latin American history has given me an appreciation of the rich theoretical tradition unfolding in this area; and Professor Hobart Spalding, through his lively example as a labor historian, has shown me that passion is more asset than hindrance for historians. Thanks go to defense committee members Professor Mary Gibson and Professor Héctor Lindo-Fuentes whose close readings and valuable suggestions improved the project. Professors Steven Stearns, Sandi Cooper, Frederick Binder, and David Troublay—mentors at the College of Staten Island during my undergraduate years—made me want to become a historian and a teacher by virtue of their knowledge and great enthusiasm.

Research for this project has been amply supported by the Graduate Center of The City University of New York, the Jewish Foundation for the

Education of Women, the Center for the Study of Women and Society of the Graduate Center, and the Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies. I must acknowledge the help of the staff of the New York Public Research Library, an institution that I have grown to respect more and more; thanks also to the staffs of the Archivo Nacional de Costa Rica, the Archivo Metropolitano de la Curia, the Biblioteca Nacional, the Biblioteca Pública de Puntarenas, and the wonderful technical staff of the CELT center of the College of Staten Island. Special thanks go to Lara Elizabeth Putnam who gave me the confidence to take on this project through her kind words and through the example of her inspired scholarship. I am grateful for the gentle support of my editor at Routledge, Ben Holtzman. The following people guided aspects of the research through readings, translations and conversations: John Dennie, Marc Edelman, Richard Houk, Meg Macaya Nelson, Juan José Marín, Martha Moss, Steven Palmer, Alejandro Quintana, Steve Stearns, Sam Stone, and Ronny Viales. (I take responsibility for all of the content of this study.)

Through this long process, I have watched my son mature and my mother age gracefully; I have been nourished by my extended family in Staten Island, particularly John Gateley and Annie O'Hara. For this, I am proud, grateful and blessed.

## Chapter One

# Introduction and Theory

Travelers traversing the small country of Costa Rica are often struck by its topographical diversity. One may drive from Atlantic to Pacific coasts and, in the course of a few hours, experience rain forests, cool highlands, mountains, deserts and beaches—each spawning distinct economic realities and cultures. Yet Costa Rica’s historiographical tradition has not, on the whole, reflected its regional diversity. Historical works have focused on the four inland provinces of the *Meseta Central*—the Central Plateau, nestled within the Central Valley—where cool highland temperatures and rich volcanic soil nurtured the cultivation of coffee, Costa Rica’s main export crop from 1840 until quite recently. As in other countries of Latin America in the nineteenth century, the development of an export economy, generating valuable revenue in import-export duties, was a prerequisite for state-building, as well as for attaining the trappings of modernity. Consequently, Costa Rican nationalism, as well as explanations for Costa Rica’s peaceful, democratic traditions, have focused on coffee production and the prevalence of white yeomen farmers and small family farms in the Central Plateau—a pattern distinct from some of Costa Rica’s Central American neighbors, whose exploited indigenous and *mestizo* populations and large concentrations of land have allegedly given rise to inequality and dictatorship.

A mythology of whiteness and small family farms—variously termed the “white legend,” the “rural democracy thesis,” the “white settler myth,” the “small yeoman farmer myth,” and “la buena sociedad cafetalera” (“the good coffee producing society”)—was first systematically expounded during the Liberal Reform era of the 1880s by Costa Rica’s coffee producing elites as a vehicle for consolidating a popular base in support of and cooperation with the coffee exporting project.<sup>1</sup> As such, it directed its message exclusively to populations of the highlands. Focusing on whiteness, family values and small farms in areas that produced coffee, this mythology—part truth, part



Map 1-1. Costa Rica: Provinces of Center and Periphery.

Courtesy of Fabrice Lehoucq and Iván Molina.

fiction—has had remarkable staying power, resurfacing in various forms throughout the twentieth century to explain Costa Rican exceptionalism and embedding itself in the scholarship and culture of the country.

The creation of a body of “liberal historiography,” “liberal mythology,” or “liberal nationalism” in the late nineteenth century was not unique to Costa Rica.<sup>2</sup> Throughout Latin America at this time, “liberalism” developed as a distinct development strategy, aided by ideology, designed and implemented by elites to help create efficient export economies. Not to be confused with the classical *laissez-faire* liberalism of Adam Smith, many of Latin America’s late nineteenth century ruling liberal elites borrowed heavily from French positivism, emphasizing the need to centralize states through the adoption of more authoritarian and interventionist policies. Costa Rican liberals followed suit but in a slightly different way. Lacking the authoritarian legacy of neighboring regions, Costa Rica’s governing

elites opted for ideologies of social control, avoiding the coercive policies, particularly with respect to labor, which existed elsewhere in Central America and the greater region. The Costa Rican strategy of privileging persuasion over coercion was dictated by necessity as much as by choice.

During the colonial period, Costa Rica had been a backwater of the Spanish empire producing little of value for the mother country and thus remaining relatively devoid of people, colonial institutions, and the systems of forced labor so prevalent in other parts of the Central American isthmus. With independence and nationhood in the early nineteenth century came the attraction of the European market for high quality coffee. The early Costa Rican state, dependent on the revenues from coffee, encouraged the commercialization of coffee employing the existent system of family labor on the small and medium-sized farms of the *Meseta Central*. By century's end, the reliability of the nation's labor force was threatened by social dislocations caused by the volatility of coffee monoculture, which resulted in property foreclosures, greater concentration of wealth and increased urbanization.

Addressing these problems and the general need to centralize the state, a new modernizing bourgeoisie, often referred to as the "generation of '89," launched the Liberal Reform. Central to this process was not only the adoption of common Latin American liberal strategies for modernization such as secularization, educational reform and privatization of land, but also specific plans to deal with the nation's labor supply in the context of a society which since colonial times had been under-populated, which had fostered the evolution of a free labor system, and during the national period had failed to attract European immigrants. In the absence of options to coerce the nation's labor force, Costa Rica's liberal elites turned to ideologies of social order and racial homogeneity, and hence cultural and national identity, as well as a mythology of class cooperation, in order to mold the population to the exigencies of export capitalism based on the cultivation of coffee.

The new liberal oligarchy formulated the myth of the white yeoman farmer as part of a campaign to create a nationalism of consensus amongst classes. Liberal ideology defined the good Costa Rican citizen as one who was relatively docile, who aided the process of reproducing Costa Rica's more "European" stock of human capital, and who ensured the stability of family units, as well as the legal transference of property, through legal church marriages. By extension, those who were "less white" or "less married" did not meet the liberal standard for good citizens. Through such mediums as public school texts, state-subsidized newspapers, civic ceremonies and official histories, the idea that Costa Rica had always been a