



Soiled Doves: Prostitution in the Early West

Anne Seagraves

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Soiled Doves tells the story of the grey world of prostitution and the women who participated in the oldest profession within the early West. Illustrated with rare photos. Bibliography; sources, included.

Soiled Doves: Prostitution in the Early West Details

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From Reader Review Soiled Doves: Prostitution in the Early West for online ebook

Meagan says

Such an interesting read. However, there were moments in the book where prostitution seemed glorified, other times degraded and other times justified. This was an era where women had no voice and few options, so really our opinion isn't fair.

Not being American, one big hurdle for me was not knowing American events that were lightly touched on, I could have used more descriptions or historical context of what the author was referring to.

However, an interesting book with great photos and stories that I was excited to read and would enjoy researching more.

Peacefully Evyl says

This book was very disappointing. The premise could have been a very good story, but the author is a very poor writer. Sadly, this is not her first book. The sentence structure was bad. The subjects were jumpy and the transitions poor. In several cases the author used a quote to support one idea, and then later used the same or a very similar quote to support the very opposite idea. I could not even determine the thesis of this book.

Jimmy Lee says

Anne Seagraves has written some seven books about the lives of women during the western expansion. Her books are generally not in depth, and I didn't find this one particularly deep either. But each offers an interesting introduction to the subject matter, and she always provides sources should you decide the topic is worth plunging into a deeper trough of detail.

Soiled Doves provides an overview of prostitution in the old west. For those raised on television westerns and *Gone With the Wind*, this gives you a more realistic view of Miss Kitty and Belle Watling. There are some call outs and interesting stories about the more notable - Julia Bulette, for example, of Virginia City - and the piquantly named - Squirrel Tooth Alice, for example - as well as a number of photos. There's detail on how the role of prostitution evolved as local civilization evolved, and how maturing women in that role were impacted. And interestingly enough, a list of vocabulary words, should you not know what a "hog ranch" really is.

As usual with Seagraves, the organization of the book is all her own. In this particular book, although she doesn't specify, it turns out she provided information based (primarily) on physical location of topic. You just go with the flow and enjoy the details as they come. So although at times she might not seem like the easiest author to read, don't dismiss her. She gives you a taste of a topic, to whet your appetite; she gathers quite a bit of physical information for you, so it's all in one place; and she's got a huge list of sources for you to consult if you want more.

Toastkat says

Picked this up off of the library sale cart for some research into a fanfiction I was writing. Very informative about the history of prostitution through the mid 1800's to early 1900's. I was hoping to get more of the history of the early west, and most of the information is geared towards the 1850's and further on. Still, an interesting read for anyone interested in history.

Julie says

To be frank, Soiled Doves is not the best written book I've ever read...But it's fascinating!

To read Soiled Doves is to step back in time to the Old West...Some prostitutes were content in their profession, some hated it, some were forced into prostitution and others happily chose thier lifestyle. Others chose the life of a madam and made plenty of money off their "sisters".

The subject matter is jarring but at times humorous...some of these ladies REALLY loved their work. If Seagraves were a better writer, with a better editor, it would be a much better book...But it's short, it's interesting, and like an accident, hard to stop looking at.

Melissa says

This was pretty good. It had a lot of photos of the prostitutes and other photos of the time. I was drawn to this book because I find it interesting how overlooked prostitution is when considering the development of the West, or in civilizations in general. The book tells different life stories of various soiled doves, but keeps them short and to the point where you don't lose interest. I did learn about why hippies are called hippies and why virtuous women of the time didn't own poodles!

Melodie says

This is really more of a 3.5 star read, but the author isn't the greatest writer - very basic prose - so leaving it at 3 rather than 4. I did actually enjoy the book and I liked the fact that the author didn't look down her nose at the women she wrote about. I've never seen a reason to treat prostitutes the way some people do. If you've no education and no skills, you work with what you have of value to make a living. End of story as far as I'm concerned. Anyway, off my soapbox. Some of the stories were sad, others somewhat humorous and I particularly enjoyed the chapter that dealt with famous madams in Denver. I read about many people whose names I'm familiar with, Mattie Silks who was THE madam in Denver, as well as women from other parts of the West like Molly b'Dam. If you find this subject as interesting as I do, this book is definitely worth a read and it goes fast, too. Recommend!

J.M. says

Picked this up to learn more about prostitution in the Old West. Despite the plethora of commas, I found the text engaging and easy to read. The pictures throughout the book really brought the stories of these women to life.

One thing I thought quite telling was the author's obvious admiration for these women and their spunk. Often I felt they were defended a bit too much, their profession downplayed to make the "sinfulness" of it less an issue than the women themselves. I liked this non-judgmental approach because it really let the women themselves shine through, instead of concentrating on their vices or the aspects of their lives that led them to a life between the sheets.

I enjoyed this book a lot and would recommend it for readers interested in learning more about particular women who dominated the Old West. Though they were prostitutes, their profession was addressed in high-level terms that could easily be processed by a younger reader.

Ryan says

This was another of the random books on the shelf at the Mountain View, Arkansas cabin we escaped to for Thanksgiving this year. I'd already set aside my current book, "Let's Go (So We Can Get Back)" to read Michael Lewis's "The Big Short," and was intrigued enough by the title of this small volume to again put Jeff Tweedy's new autobiography on the back burner.

I don't know anything about Anne Seagraves, and the book's jacket offers only that she lives in northern Idaho, that she's working on her seventh book, and has previously authored, among others, "High-Spirited Women of the West," "Women Who Charmed the West," and "Women of the Sierra" going back to the mid-eighties. There is also a black-and-white photo of her, and she appears to be a grandmotherly woman. The book's publisher, Wesanne Publications, is also located in Idaho, and because there is no cell service or internet at our cabin (precisely the point) I can't know for certain, but I suspect these books are self-published.

That "Soiled Doves" is probably self-published is a pretty solid clue as to the quality to be expected within its pages. Seagraves isn't a great writer, and the book would have benefited both from an editor, who could have helped shape what's here into something more compelling, and a copyeditor, who would have made what is here more readable. What works in the book's favor is its length (only 165 pages), ample photographs of the characters and places involved (many rare), and, of course, the subject matter itself, about which I knew little to nothing. The women — referred to throughout as fair but frail, girls, ladies of easy virtue, ladies of the evening, ladies of the night, painted ladies, prostitutes, but, above all, soiled doves — are, of course, the heart of this book.

Covering the gamut, from high-profile madams and their lavish parlor houses to end-of-the-line hog ranches and, saddest of all, the Chinese slave girls, Seagraves tells their stories with a minimum of flourish, a welcome bent of affection, and nary a whiff of judgement. Think of "Soiled Doves" less a definitive text on its subject and as more an eager telling of an interesting story — the free taste the dealer gives you so you'll

come back hooked for more. And maybe that was Seagraves' intent all along, to give readers just enough to wet their whistle. It worked for me, and will, no doubt, work for you, too.

Jessie says

I picked this book up at the Tucson desert museum, along with various books about Wild West women. This book will make modern women appreciate living now and not being trapped in the 1800's with limited options. When history teaches kids about people heading west in search of gold and opportunity, that is the male narrative. This book gave a glimpse into what life was like for women. Heartbreaking.

There are historical images and snap shots into the lives of famous prostitutes. It's a well researched book by an author who has a passion for sharing their stories.

Mick Meyers says

A good book on a controversial subject.the bibliography also gives more ideas on similar subjects.the photos reproduced are of good quality.most of the subjects mentioned in the book seem to be of tarts with hearts variety,but what about the many who slipped through the net and are not even footnotes in history.

Adrianna says

I read this book some years ago and have an autographed copy on my shelf. I picked it up when I lived in Montana, along with several other, similar, books about women in the west, including "High-Spirited Women of the West," also by Anne Seagraves. Both books were published by Wesanne Publications. I found this book to be interesting, loved the old photographs. It's been a keeper on my research shelf.

Rather than dry, scholarly recitation, I thought each of the stories surrounding specific women felt personal and the writing captured the essence of the hard times for women of this era, especially in the west.

I've had the occasion to visit Virginia City, where Julia Bulette lived and died--or rather was murdered. Have also had the occasion to visit the site of what is now a ghost town in Montana, a mining town by the name of Gilt Edge, in the mountains outside of Lewistown. The remains of two buildings still stood at the time I visited - the jail and the house of ill repute. It's said the rather infamous Calamity Jane once stayed in Gilt Edge. Both these women are portrayed in "Soiled Doves." History always means just that little bit more, I think, when one has an opportunity to visit a place where these people walked.

This book is a good overview of the times and conditions under which these women had to survive and it is written in an engaging and informative manner.

emma pawz clawz says

No idea why I read this, but now I'm an expert in western frontier prostitution. The chapter on Chinese child

sex slavery was the most upsetting horrible thing I've read in a while.

Teri Reck says

Absolutely fascinating topic. And heartrending. But a very real part of the history of the early American West---where men drastically outnumbered women. Women became a valuable commodity. It addresses all classes of prostitutes--from fancy, educated, genteel--and expensive-- call girls to street walkers. It also addresses the slave trade in young Chinese girls that occurred at that time. Very interesting stories about Denver, as well as the rest of the west.

Rosamund Merrill says

I read this, then scanned the reviews by other readers. I am in agreement with several; the writing is somewhat amateur, but the content does include well-researched facts and historical information. There is humor, as well as an effort to be non-judgemental. There is also a chapter on the abuse of Oriental women, and a focus on those who worked to free them from a literal slave-like existence. If you have any interest in this time period and issues around this topic, this book is a quick read and has good information.
