

Colorado City: The Polygamous Town in the American Southwest



Colorado City is a small town located on the border between Arizona and Utah, known for its connection to polygamy and religious fundamentalism. The town has drawn public attention due to its unique history and its association with the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS), a dissident offshoot of the mainstream Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS, commonly known as the "Mormon Church"). This article explores the history, social dynamics, current situation, and controversies surrounding Colorado City.

1. The History of Colorado City and Polygamy

The history of Colorado City is intricately tied to the issue of polygamy in the United States. In the 1930s, some fundamentalist Mormons decided to continue the practice of polygamy despite its official prohibition by the LDS Church in 1890. Rejecting the decision of their church and feeling persecuted, these groups began to gather in remote areas where they could practice their beliefs and customs away from the authorities.

Colorado City, previously known as Short Creek, became a haven for the FLDS, who viewed polygamy as a divine commandment. Since the 1940s, this small town has been the center of the FLDS community, which grew in isolation until it began to attract media and legal attention over time.

2. The FLDS and Its Influence on Colorado City

The FLDS exerted immense control over Colorado City until recently. Led by charismatic and authoritarian leaders, the community imposed strict rules on its members, regulating everything from dress codes to personal life choices, including polygamous marriages. Leaders like Warren Jeffs became controversial figures. Jeffs wielded enormous power over the community until his arrest in 2006 on charges of sexual assault against minors. His arrest and subsequent life sentence in 2011 marked a turning point for both the FLDS and Colorado City.

Jeffs controlled every aspect of life in the town, including who could marry whom and how community members should behave. Under his influence, the FLDS enforced strict modest dress codes, banned television, radio, and much of mainstream culture, isolating its members from the outside world.

3. Daily Life and Social Structure

In Colorado City, daily life was deeply influenced by the FLDS's religious principles. The town was organized to foster community solidarity, with most property held in a trust managed by religious leaders. This trust, known as the "United Effort Plan" (UEP), is a collective ownership structure that allowed the church to control where and how members could live.

Polygamous families are the norm, with men married to multiple women and having numerous children. This creates a complex family structure where parental and domestic responsibilities are shared among multiple adults. Women and children in this community grow up in strict adherence to FLDS norms, often educated in private schools run by the sect and with limited contact with the outside world.

4. Controversies and Legal Conflicts

Polygamy remains illegal in most U.S. states, including Arizona and Utah, and Colorado City's lifestyle has frequently attracted attention from law enforcement. Several police raids have taken place over the decades, notably in 1953, when authorities attempted to dismantle the community by arresting many members and placing children in foster homes. This operation ultimately failed, sparking public outrage and resulting in families returning to the town.

The situation took a different turn with the indictment of Warren Jeffs, which exposed abuses within the FLDS, including forced marriages and sexual abuse. This led to increased federal and local scrutiny of the FLDS's activities. Since then, Colorado City and the FLDS have seen their influence wane, with many members leaving the community or questioning their allegiance to the church.

5. The Current Situation in Colorado City

Since Jeffs's conviction, the FLDS community in Colorado City has changed. Many members have left the FLDS, and local authorities have taken steps to regain control of the town. In 2017, courts ordered the dismantling of the United Effort Plan trust, which held most of the town's real estate, to redistribute it among former FLDS members. Today, the town is striving to diversify and reintegrate into broader American society.

However, the transition has been challenging, as some residents remain loyal to FLDS teachings. Additionally, tensions persist between former and current FLDS members over access to resources and property. Though FLDS control over Colorado City has lessened, its influence remains, and the town is still marked by its history of polygamy and isolation.

6. Colorado City Facing the Future

Today, Colorado City is undergoing transformation. The town is working to rebuild and change its image, though traces of the FLDS are still visible. Many residents are attempting to adapt to modern life by entering the workforce, sending their children to public schools, and reconnecting with the outside world. New investments and an influx of outside residents are gradually helping the town evolve.

Yet the scars of polygamy and past abuses remain, and it will likely take time for the town to fully move on. Colorado City has also become a site of curiosity for researchers and visitors eager to understand how such an isolated community thrived for so long in modern America.

Sources

- fr.wikipedia.org

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