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Review of *Myth of the Hanging Tree: Stories of Crime and Punishment in Territorial New Mexico* By Robert J. Torrez

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Myth of the Hanging Tree: Stories of Crime and Punishment in Territorial New Mexico. By Robert J. Tórréz. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008. x + 186 pp. Map, illustrations, appendices, notes, index. \$19.95 paper.

New Mexico is a state where regions and cultures collide. Partly situated in the western Great Plains, the lynchings and legal executions that have taken place in the former territory and current state illustrate tensions between the cultures residing therein. Robert J. Tórréz, former New Mexico State Historian, ably captures the influence of the Anglos' "Judge Lynch" in the region formerly inhabited by Native Americans and later settled first by the Spanish and then the Anglo-Americans.

In the opening third of the book, Tórréz provides an overview of hangings and capital punishment in the area. Concentrating on the territorial days, he succinctly updates the topic to New Mexico's most recent execution in the year 2000. In doing so, he provides the cultural, political, and historical context in which executions occurred.

The following several chapters are primarily accounts of hangings that took place within the region as well as items of associated interest. The executions of two of Billy the Kid's comrades are recounted, though their story has faded while "the Kid's" escape and subsequent shooting achieved notoriety. Criminal offenses and the legal retribution for the deaths of a cross section of society are examined, including the murders of a miner, spouses, a sheepman (by cowboys), and an account of the death of the "only woman ever hanged in New Mexico," an attribution which the author finds to be in error. Possible miscarriages of justice as well as instances of law enforcement leniency are presented; and chapters are included regarding judicial sentencing, an original letter describing the circumstances of a hanging, and the imprisonment of the territory's offenders and the building of the Penitentiary of New Mexico. Interestingly enough, prior to the penitentiary's construction the Territory's convicts were housed in Nebraska and Colorado facilities for a fee.

The book's colorful and scholarly subject matter will be of interest to a wide readership. Researchers and aficionados of the history of the Great Plains—not to mention the history of the Old West, the Southwest, border studies, criminal justice, and capital punishment—will find this a valuable work. Libraries with collections in these subject areas will also want to make the book available.

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