

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

2006

Book Review: The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916

Alwyn Barr
Texas Tech University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Barr, Alwyn, "Book Review: The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916" (2006). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 136.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/136>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

After a brief account of the infamous Jesse Washington lynching at Waco in 1916, Carrigan explores pre-Civil War events that began an Anglo-dominated culture of violence. Conflict in the Texas Revolution, followed by formation of the Texas Rangers for frontier defense, created heroic images that made violence against Mexicans acceptable, even in an area of little Hispanic population. Quickly organized Indian fighters on the frontier also became Anglo heroes. They foreshadowed later vigilantes when they killed women and children or made no distinction between peaceful and hostile Native Americans. Numerous slave escapes and white fears of revolts blamed on abolitionists led to slave patrols and lynching.

The Civil War and Reconstruction added historical memories as Confederates used violence to oppose white Unionists as well as persons accused of murder and theft. Once Democrats returned to power in the 1870s, white violence against Anglos declined as the legal system received support from more former Confederates. White mobs also employed violence against African Americans during Reconstruction to gain political, economic, and social control. After Reconstruction lynchings of blacks continued with little opposition from law enforcement, but accompanied by larger crowds, frequent charges of rape, and more burning and mutilation of victims. Mobs seemed to act in part because of African American resistance through political efforts and self defense. After a decline in lynching from 1897 to 1905, a new wave swept Central Texas until the 1920s. Postcards of lynchings stirred emotions while improved automobiles allowed mobs to form more easily.

National and state reaction against the Jesse Washington lynching pressured Central Texas civic leaders to oppose extralegal violence, which declined as a result. White Central Texans often omitted the violence from their written history in following years. African Americans viewed the Waco tornado of 1953 as God's justice.

This study is generally well written and researched. While some points may stimulate

The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916. By William D. Carrigan. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004. xi + 308 pp. Map, photographs, tables, notes, appendixes, index. \$35.00.

This volume focuses on extralegal violence and its causes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The author is especially interested in the role of historical memory in sustaining the use of violence for a seven-county region in Central Texas on the edge of the Great Plains.

discussion, the author, emphasizing historical memory, offers a thoughtful explanation for a Central Texas culture that sustained mob violence over an extended period. The volume is an important contribution to new analyses of lynching in Texas and across the nation.

ALWYN BARR
Department of History
Texas Tech University