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Death Comes for the Chief Justice: The Slough-Rynerson Quarrel and Political Violence in New Mexico. By Gary L. Roberts. Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990. Photograph, notes, bibliography, index. xviii + 204 pp. \$24.95.

On 15 December 1867, William Logan Rynerson, a member of the Legislative Council of the territory of New Mexico, fired a bullet from a revolver and killed the opinionated, fiery, and sharp-tongued chief justice of the supreme court—John Potts Slough. Before the shot, Slough exclaimed, “Shoot and be damned!” (p. 70). Mortally wounded, he pulled a derringer

from his vest pocket and let it fall to the floor. So ended the career of Chief Justice Slough.

This well-written work by Gary Roberts, an academic whose writings appeal to history buffs, can be viewed from several vantage points: as a violent act, as part of a pattern of political violence in New Mexico Territory in the last half of the nineteenth century, and as an assassination that mirrored the nation at large. Most important for the reader is the author's ability to analyze this homicide in terms of the political strife between New Mexicans. Through the maze of interest politics between Republican leaders and Hispanic voters, the machinations of Jose Francisco Chaves and Herman H. Heath, and Slough's verbal tirades against Governor Robert B. Mitchell, Rynerson, and others, this book tries to see Slough's death, as did Richard Maxwell Brown in his writings years ago, as part of an assassination phenomenon in the political system of the territory of New Mexico. In one sense Rynerson's acquittal by the courts helped to make violence in the political arena more legitimate in the eyes of territorial residents. In addition, the author analyzes such events as the Colfax County War and the death of Albert Jennings Fountain and tries to relate the Slough-Rynerson troubles to the changing culture of the Gilded Age and the concepts of honor and the judicial doctrine of no retreat that justified self-defense throughout the nation. "Violence in New Mexico," Roberts concludes, "was an outward manifestation of deepseated social, economic, and political tensions, rather than an exercise in *machismo* or an expression of a Wild West syndrome" (p. xiii).

Any criticisms that this reviewer has of this balanced study are, for the most part, minor shortcomings. A map of the New Mexico area and a chronological chart of major events in the period under study would help the uninformed reader. In addition, a more extensive discussion of political violence in the American Southwest would give the book a better perspective. And one lingering question remains: How does the violence in the political arena in territorial New Mexico compare with political

strife in other countries throughout the world? One hopes that future publications by Roberts will include a definitive study of political violence in New Mexico Territory.

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