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Review of *Homicide, Race, and Justice in the American West, 1880-1920* By Clare V. McKanna Jr

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Homicide, Race, and Justice in the American West, 1880-1920. By Clare V. McKanna Jr. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997. Photographs, figures, maps, tables, notes, index. iv + 206 pp. \$40.00.

Clare McKanna concludes in *Homicide, Race, and Justice in the American West* that based

on homicide statistics the West was more violent than the East. As defined by coroners, "homicide" means any killing of one human being by another not clearly identified as accidental. For comparative purposes, McKanna has rigorously and meticulously researched homicide records for what he considers three representative counties: urban Douglas, of which Omaha is the county seat, in Nebraska, and the rural mining counties of Las Animas in Colorado and Gila in Arizona.

Western homicides occurred for a wide variety of reasons, ranging all the way from domestic disputes to lynchings. A frequent cause involved crimes committed by males under the influence of alcohol in saloons. Particularly vulnerable as both perpetrators and victims were African-Americans in Douglas County, immigrants in Las Animas County, and Apaches and Hispanics in Gila County. Not surprisingly, the legal system came down hard on minority perpetrators.

Statistics indicate that the average homicide rate per 100,000 was considerably higher from 1880 to 1920 in two of the western counties than in three large eastern cities: a rate of 70 in Gila County and 34 in Las Animas County against under 5 for Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. The Douglas County rate, an average of 6 for the entire forty years, rose from 2.6 in the early 1880 to 9.7 between 1915 and 1919, reflecting a movement of African Americans into Omaha. The Las Animas rate varied from 21.8 in 1880 to 70.5 in the 1910s as a consequence of labor and management violence, including the 1915 deaths of twenty-one men, women, and children in the so-called Ludlow Massacre. In bi-racial Gila County, the rate during the early years of white settlement reached an appalling 133.5.

Almost all previous scholarly pro and con accounts on western violence have been impressionistic and anecdotal; McKanna's painstaking statistical work breaks new ground. Although it is open to question whether Douglas, Las Animas, and Gila Counties are actually representative, whether it is possible to generalize on over half the country on such a

limited sample, and whether predominately agricultural counties had high homicide rates, McKanna has made a significant, provocative, and major contribution to the debate on the extent of western violence.

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