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Review of *Charlie Siringo's West: An Interpretive Biography* By Howard R. Lamar

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Charlie Siringo's West: An Interpretive Biography. By Howard R. Lamar. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005. xiii + 370 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.

Although he was born near the beach on Texas's Matagorda Peninsula in 1855 and died in a suburb of Los Angeles in 1928, Charlie Siringo spent most of his adventurous life on the Great Plains. He became a cowboy as a teenager, drove herds on the Chisholm Trail and helped establish the LX Ranch in the Panhandle while in his twenties, and married and opened a store in Caldwell, Kansas, before he turned thirty. Somewhat ironically, given that he left the cowboy life at an early age, Siringo then published an autobiography that gave future authors and movie makers everything necessary to create the heroic saga of open range ranching and the cowboy. *A Texas Cowboy, or Fifteen Years on the Hurricane Deck of a Spanish Pony* (1885) was the first of seven books written by Siringo, but it remained unsurpassed in range literature.

Siringo moved to Chicago in 1886, hoping to further his career as a writer, but firsthand observation of the violent Haymarket Riot that year led him to become an "operative" for the Pinkerton Detective Agency. He spent the next twenty-two years dealing with criminals and strikers in cases that took him all over the West and from Alaska to Mexico City. He pursued Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and aided in the prosecution of "Big Bill" Haywood. Retiring from the Pinkerton Agency in 1907, Siringo lived for a while on a ranch near Santa Fe, New Mexico, before moving to Los Angeles in 1922. There, as a poor but minor celebrity, he associated with such famous figures as Will Rogers and William S. Hart until his death.

My only quibble with this biography is the matter of bringing Siringo to life. In my biography class, I ask students at the end of the lecture on each subject: If you were to meet this person for coffee after class, would you have a clear idea of his or her personality and character? Siringo should be easy to know, given that he wrote so much; perhaps, however, too many of his writings were intended for publication and not enough were written in less guarded moments. It puzzles me that he tended to behave in ways I associate with undergraduate fraternity brothers, and yet important men regularly gave him positions of great responsibility. Perhaps the problem is simply mine, but I honestly cannot say that after completing this biography I "know" Charlie Siringo.

In any case, Siringo would have been flattered to know that someday a historian of Howard R. Lamar's stature would think him worthy of a "life and times" biography. Luck was a theme in Siringo's life, and this work indicates that good fortune is still on his side.

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