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## Review of *Lynching in Colorado, 1859-1919* By Stephen J. Leonard

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*Lynching in Colorado, 1859-1919.* By Stephen J. Leonard. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002. xiii + 246 pp. Photographs, maps, tables, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95.

The term lynching likely conjures up in the minds of most Americans images of robed and hooded white men in the states of the Old Confederacy taking the law into their own hands to punish black males accused of violating white womanhood. Groups known as Regulators "enforced the law" in South Carolina as early as 1790. Lynching remained a form of punishment in Southern states until well into the twentieth century, despite the fact that most residents of the region frowned upon it.

Judge Lynch's powerful ghost prowled Colorado for more than half a century, "in part because he could claim that from 1859 to 1861 he was an angel of civilization, often operating through the People's Courts, bringing order from chaos." The lynching of William Van Horn on December 21, 1863, for the murder of Josiah Copeland, his rival in love, was a milestone that "marked the advance of civilization just as schools churches and newspapers did." Troops from the First Cavalry and thousands of other onlookers witnessed this entertaining event.

Territorial judges first arrived in Colorado in 1861, their presence signaling that law with government backing had arrived, a fact pleasing to most Colorado residents. Leading citizens in the large towns believed that lynching discouraged much needed laborers from moving to the territory and frightened away prospective investors. Its hardcore advocates were convinced that the deadly ritual was a signal to would-be miscreants that their crimes would not be tolerated. Other supporters maintained that it was preferred to legal execution: it saved money, frightened felons away, and extracted confessions. Race sometimes played a role in determining who was sentenced to eternity. After 1870 a majority of those lynched were men identified by Anglo Americans as "Mexicans."

*Lynching in Colorado* is a social and political history of considerable impact. Thorough, scholarly, thoughtful, and well written, it is an

engrossing account of lynching as a form of punishment and social control by a keen-eyed observer of the nineteenth-century West.

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