

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



R. Michael Wilson. *Legal Executions in the Western Territories, 1847-1911: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming*. Jefferson: Mcfarland, 2010. 228 pp. \$95.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-4825-8.

Reviewed by Gordon Bakken (California State University, Fullerton)

Published on H-Law (July, 2010)

Commissioned by Christopher R. Waldrep

## Exterminating Enemy Deviants in the American West

This book is a substantial contribution to the history of the death penalty in the territories of the American West. The author has mined the many newspapers of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. He has consulted other primary sources to construct a narrative of the crime, the arrest, the trial, the appeal if any, and the execution of the enemy deviant. The author's greatest service to the scholars interested in the field is his use of multiple newspaper sources fully cited at the end of each entry. Further, he provides a general introduction to the work and chapter introductions.

Specialists will find some of the chapters wanting in detail. For example, Montana Territory recorded more executions than offered and Ellen Baumler, the interpretive historian at the Montana Historical Society and author of *Dark Spaces: Montana's Historic Penitentiary at Deer Lodge* (2008), found nine additional executions between 1863 and 1871 by mining Tom Donovan's *Hang-*

*ing Around The Big Sky: The Unofficial Guide to Lynching, Strangling and Legal Hangings* (2007) and Robert O.Raffety's unpublished thesis, *The History and Theory of Capital Punishment in Montana* (1968). Baumler's chapter on Montana's death penalty is in Gordon Morris Bakken, *Invitation to an Execution: A History of the Death Penalty in United States History* (2010). Further, the author does not explain the blood atonement doctrine behind the firing squad in territorial Utah. The narrative of the trial and execution of John D. Lee on March 23, 1877 should be read with Will Bagley's *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (2002). Bagley's chapter 17, "He Died Game': The Execution of John D. Lee," is far more nuanced and detailed because Bagley depended upon manuscript collections, many in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California.

Clearly, this volume advances our understanding of executions in the American West and reminds us of the need for continuing research in the field.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

**Citation:** Gordon Bakken. Review of Wilson, R. Michael, *Legal Executions in the Western Territories, 1847-1911: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming*. H-Law, H-Net Reviews. July, 2010.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=30431>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.