

Iowa and the Death Penalty: A Troubled Relationship, 1834–1965

Michael J. Pfeifer

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

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the Union army, at least, really was the “melting pot” of our cultural mythology, and research here would be most welcome.

In all, though, Marten has done a commendable job of outlining the major themes of Civil War veterans’ studies. His scholarship is wide ranging, and his prose is excellent. He has a particularly good eye for the telling detail. For anyone interested in the postwar lives of Civil War soldiers, *Sing Not War* is highly recommended.

Iowa and the Death Penalty: A Troubled Relationship, 1834–1965, by Dick Haws. Ames: Dick Haws, 2010. vi, 316 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$25.00 cloth; \$9.99 e-book (from lulu.com).

Reviewer Michael J. Pfeifer is associate professor of history at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, The City University of New York. He is the author of *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874–1947* (2004) and *The Roots of Rough Justice: Origins of American Lynching* (2011).

Iowa has had a complex relationship with the death penalty. Capital punishment was on the books from early territorial days — and Iowa’s first execution (that of Patrick O’Conner in the Dubuque lead mines in June 1834) actually predated territorial status and formal legal jurisdiction and institutions. Yet the Hawkeye State abolished the death penalty in 1872 only to restore it in 1878 after several well-publicized lynchings. Nearly a century later, in February 1965, at the urging of Governor Harold Hughes, the state legislature (dominated at the time by Democrats) abolished capital punishment.

Iowa’s ambivalence about the death penalty may have stemmed from the mixed origins of its settlers. Many, particularly in the northern portion of the state, were Yankees who tended to oppose the death penalty (Yankees had successfully ended the death penalty in the upper midwestern states of Michigan in 1846 and Wisconsin in 1853); they would be joined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Scandinavians who were similarly skeptical of capital punishment. Others, especially in southern counties, had their cultural origins in the lower Midwest or the upper South, where traditions of communally based honor tended to back the death penalty. In total, state and federal authorities executed 45 men in Iowa from territorial days through abolition in 1965. In this well-researched and well-written book, Dick Haws narrates each of those legal executions (plus the 1834 extralegal execution of Patrick O’Conner).

After a short but insightful introduction surveying the history of the death penalty in Iowa, the book is organized in the form of brief chapters describing key aspects of each execution day in Iowa history

(some occasions involved multiple executions). Drawing on sources such as governors' correspondence on criminal matters (gubernatorial papers often include complete trial transcripts when those sentenced to death petitioned the governor), newspapers, and county histories, Haws interestingly charts the circumstances of the crimes that led to capital convictions, the efforts made at legal defense and appealing convictions, and the last moments of the condemned. A final, brief chapter describes abolition in 1965, noting that the Democratic wave in the previous year's election of Lyndon Johnson over Barry Goldwater offered Governor Harold Hughes (an ardent opponent of the death penalty) a decisive margin in the legislature for abolition.

The book merits a wide readership among those interested in the history of capital punishment and criminal justice in Iowa. It does have one weakness, however. Only the introduction bridges the individual case studies to offer a broader analysis of the history of the death penalty in Iowa; the introduction's comparison of legal executions over time is well considered and intriguing but invites a higher level of comparative analysis within the case studies of particular execution days. For instance, the introduction notes that 7 of the 46 men executed in Iowa were African Americans, including three men — Fred Allen, Robert Johnson, and Stanley Tramble — convicted of rape by a military court and hanged at Camp Dodge in 1918. All seven African Americans were convicted and executed between 1906 and 1925. Their case studies reveal rampant racism in press coverage and in prosecutorial tactics; analysis of broader regional and national trends in racialized criminal justice during the nadir of Jim Crow would have helped to fill out the picture here. Regardless of Haws's tendency to emphasize the particular detail over the larger pattern, lay and academic readers will find the book a valuable resource for understanding the historical contours of the death penalty in Iowa.

Women Writers of the American West, 1833–1927, by Nina Baym. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011. 384 pp. Bibliography, index. \$40.00 cloth.

Reviewer Annamaria Formichella Elsdon is professor of English at Buena Vista University. She is the author of *Roman Fever: Domesticity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing* (2004).

As the title suggests, this book is a comprehensive review of women's writing about the American West. Baym chooses as her starting point the first western book she could find, published by Mary Austin Holley about Texas in 1833, and concludes with Willa Cather's *Death*