

us, above all else, legal history is a deeply political enterprise.

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The History of the Death Penalty in Colorado. By Michael L. Radelet. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2017. xxii, 283 pp. \$45.00.)

Scholars in recent years have increasingly turned to regions, states, and even counties to understand the uneven practice of capital punishment in the United States. Into this wave of local studies comes the distinguished sociologist Michael L. Radelet's *The History of the Death Penalty in Colorado*. Drawing on newspaper archives and legal databases, Radelet impressively pieces together a comprehensive account of the death penalty in Colorado, from quasi-judicial hangings in territorial Denver to the 2014 capital trial of James Holmes, who fatally shot twelve people in an Aurora movie theater in 2012.

Radelet has done yeoman's work here, finding executions not listed in M. Watt Espy's database, the go-to national registry of historical executions for death penalty scholars. Even more impressively, he recovered hard-to-find knowledge about people the state tried, but failed, to put to death. Extensive appendices offer detailed, paragraph-long stories of the 202 capital defendants in Colorado's history, including the 103 whom it executed.

As a general historical survey of the state's use of the death penalty, the work is excellent. Left underexplored, though, is the scholarly significance of the history it charts. Deep dives into local histories offer the opportunity to assess the explanatory power of the rich cultural, political, and historical theories about the American death penalty that abound in the scholarly literature. New ways of thinking about the practice of capital punishment can emerge when bold theories meet granular knowledge. Radelet, though, takes a more modest approach, mapping national trends onto Colorado instead of using Colorado to think about the death penalty in new ways.

That is a shame, as Colorado does not fit neatly into certain theories about the practice of capital punishment in the United States. For instance, in his influential *The Contradictions of American Capital Punishment* (2003), Franklin E. Zimring argued that states with high numbers of lynchings in their histories were the most likely to retain capital punishment during the late twentieth-century age of western abolition. Despite 175 lynchings in its early history (Stephen J. Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado, 1859–1919*, 2002), Colorado's attachment to capital punishment was never particularly strong. The state has executed just one person in the last sixty years, a man who voluntarily abandoned his appeals.

Why, we might ask, has the vigilante tradition that seems to buttress the use of capital punishment in states such as Texas and Oklahoma failed to have a similar effect in Colorado? Why did the "hang 'em high" voices in the state's history fail to make it more punitive? Answers to these questions might have emerged, for instance, from more sustained attention to the state's history of race relations—or to the political economic divide between its more cosmopolitan Front Range and its rural Western Slope.

Radelet's study may not answer the "so what?" questions as well as it could, but it makes them possible. That alone makes it a valuable contribution, one that should inspire him or other scholars to offer a more robust longitudinal explanation of how the particulars of Colorado's history shaped the use and meaning of capital punishment within its borders.

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The Bible in American Life. Ed. by Philip Goff, Arthur E. Farnsley II, and Peter J. Thuesen. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. xxii, 432 pp. Cloth, \$99.00. Paper, \$34.95.)

A product of a four-year research project conducted by the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, *The Bible in American*