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## **Review of A Crooked River: Rustlers, Rangers, and Regulars on the Lower Rio Grande**

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regulations and management practices to control overgrazing and predators on public lands. Here, Gulliford adds an important ground layer to conservation history. He also illustrates connections to Aldo Leopold's conservation ethic. Leopold, who started his career in national forests in northern Arizona and New Mexico (relatively close to southwestern Colorado), dealt first hand with overgrazing and other conservation issues (and, interestingly enough, married into a wealthy New Mexican sheepherding family). With Leopold's influence, ecology and multiple use (such as recreation or timber harvesting alongside grazing) became integral to management and outdoor recreation values, particularly during the post-World War II era. The sheep industry contended with these changes, and at Colorado's lower elevations, struggled with the Bureau of Land Management over its management of grazing lands. In response, frustrated sheepherders tried to privatize the public domain. Gulliford calls this postwar backlash the "Great Land Grab" (209). These early attempts only presaged later conflicts.

As a whole, Gulliford provides an even-handed assessment of public grazing, which in recent years has been criticized for both continued environmental problems and for high costs. Federal agencies only receive a small fraction of their management costs back from grazing fees. Despite the lack of benefit to taxpayers, Gulliford remains supportive: "public lands ranching sustains historical custom and culture" (248), he says, with the qualification that many ranchers need to do more to help improve public range conditions.

Given the timely nature of this debate, *The Woolly West* should find a wide readership among both Southwest historians and regional residents. This book is essential reading to anyone interested in public land issues in the West.

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JEN CORRINNE BROWN

*A Crooked River: Rustlers, Rangers, and Regulars on the Lower Rio Grande, 1861–1877.* By Michael L. Collins. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018. Pp. 360. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.)

Michael L. Collins's *A Crooked River* is a continuation of his book *Texas Devils: Rangers and Regulars on the Lower Rio Grande* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2010). Where his earlier book examined conflict on the lower Rio Grande from the U.S. invasion in 1846 to 1861, *Crooked River* considers the region from the U.S. Civil War through the end of Reconstruction. Collins provides a history of the region in the midst of upheaval and focuses particularly on "lawlessness" and violent policing (5). The book's self-stated goal is to provide "the story Walter Prescott Webb never told"

(12), meaning Collins seeks to examine Texas Rangers' and the Anglo-controlled Texas government's efforts to subjugate the borderlands in a more critical light.

Collins examines the Civil War and Reconstruction along the Rio Grande in the book's first three chapters, putting well-known incidents such as the Battle of Palmito Ranch and individuals such as Juan Cortina in a broader context of conflict in the region. His look at the Rio Grande borderlands following the Civil War and its subjugation through violent policing proves the freshest part of the book. Between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande existed a mesquite-filled scrubland dubbed the "wild horse desert" (75) for its rugged nature and plentitude of livestock, only some of which was branded. Ripe for opportunists seeking outlaw fortunes and far from state authority in Austin and Monterrey, the region was a haven for rustlers. The "skinning wars," or the rendering of animals for leather and tallow to deny their recapture, followed.

Collins puts readers in the saddles of the men he writes about. For instance, using his knowledge of Texas Ranger Captain Leander H. McNelly, Collins speculates creatively that the officer's decision to enter Mexico stemmed in part from his reading of the Bible. Collins does not spend too much time hypothesizing about the unrecorded notions that prompted the attack on Rancho Las Cuevas in 1875, but his effort to consider the character and the personal thoughts of his subjects makes for an engrossing read. The swift narrative at times, however, leaves a few questions in need of examination. In recounting McNelly's creeping approach to the reputed rustlers' camp, Collins informs readers that the Rangers rode into a Mexican ranch killing five vaqueros by "mistake" (225). Rather than consider the implications of armed Americans killing innocent Mexicans on Mexican soil, he passes over this opportunity to critique state power and border policing and instead uses this tragedy to create tension, saying McNelly's attack on the wrong camp shattered Rangers' element of surprise.

Collins succeeds in his goal of updating Webb's examination of border conflict in the late nineteenth century, but in seeking to emulate Webb's approach, Collins's book has the same limitations. Although Collins is more inclusive in considering border conflict from the perspective of the policed than Webb, Collins also relies almost exclusively on English language sources and does not consider Mexican archival material, which could shed light on the conflicts he discusses. Still, the book is well written and composed with care. *A Crooked River* will make a fine addition for readers interested in an update of a classic Texas story.