Western Homicide:  
The Case of Los Angeles,  
1830–1870

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The author was a member of the history department at the University of California, Los Angeles, until his untimely death in May 2005. The editors join the legions of colleagues and friends who mourn Eric's passing. An obituary will appear in a forthcoming issue.

Los Angeles has records that enable the study of the city's and county's homicide rates from the Mexican period onward. This article analyzes the four decades between 1830 and 1870. Although a sparsely populated region and city, the number and rate of homicides demonstrate levels of personal violence usually associated only with mining towns such as those studied by Roger McGrath. No single factor accounts for this violence, but transiency, weak law enforcement, and an elite tolerance for violence are all implicated.

For a century homicidal violence has been a persistent element of novels, movies, and popular histories of the American West. This view of the West even has its own newsletter and association (National Outlaw-Lawman History Association). Historians have
developed a strong and often moderating literature on this mythology, generating continuing research on Western violence. Of necessity, most work focuses on homicide, even though there are obviously other kinds of violence, including assault and battery, rape, and robbery. These latter, however, are less likely to be consistently recorded than homicides, which are most serious and likely to be officially documented. Historians of Western Europe now regularly research homicides and their per capita rates back to the early Middle Ages. The best work on the American West usually focuses on classic cow towns or mining towns. Recently Clare McKanna, Jr., has expanded coverage to include several cities across a broad swath of several California counties. Robert Dykstra’s article in Reviews in American History has brought the debates up to date. It argues that Western violence has been sensationalized and that the quantitative studies, when put in the proper context, reveal a region with high but not extraordinary homicide rates. Most tellingly, Dykstra has shown that the “gunfighter” notion was a late nineteenth-century creation and did not originate in the period of mid-century violence.¹ This research note adds more data and a unique chronology to the existing literature, covering both the late Mexican (1830–1846) and early U.S. (1847–1870) eras of Los Angeles, California.

Los Angeles

In spite of the facts that Wyatt Earp, after his infamous presence in Tombstone, settled in Los Angeles and that most Western films originated there, the city has escaped the net of the Western

violence literature. Nevertheless, it had all the characteristics of both mid-nineteenth-century Western towns and twentieth-century Western cities. Seldom mentioned in violence studies, the city has not attracted the sustained attention it merits. Perhaps it is the city’s very predominance as an iconic twentieth-century metropolis that has caused the eclipse of its earlier life. Or perhaps its earlier life as a Spanish mission town, followed by two decades as a northern Mexican agricultural outpost, has obscured for historians its Western features. True, the Mexican-era city was not pictured as idyllic. One English visitor, Sir George Simpson, observed in 1847 that Los Angeles is “the noted abode of the lowest drunkards and gamblers of the country. This den of thieves is situated . . . in one of the loveliest and most fertile districts of California.”

Today, Los Angeles County is all urban: From the air, the non-urban spaces are mountains. On the ground, it is often difficult to tell whether one is in the City of Los Angeles, or in El Monte, or in non-incorporated county—to the visitor, it is all “LA.” The city holds about 40 percent of the total county population of just under 10 million; about a million people live in the unincorporated county—which includes East LA and Marina del Rey—with Long Beach next at maybe 400,000. To take a long view of the region, I have chosen to use the county as my basic unit of analysis. Not really urban in the mid-nineteenth century, it consisted of one incorporated city, farms, ranches, and villages. Even the city had its rural aspect, with vineyards near the center of town.

Throughout its Mexican period (roughly 1830 to 1846), the town functioned as a ranching center, its port unimproved. Its population was probably around 2,000, with another 1,000 people in the hinterlands that ultimately became Los Angeles, Orange, and parts of Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Hubert Howe Bancroft suggested that the best population count in the later Mexican period was for 1844, an estimate for non-Indians of 627 men, 500 women, and 720 children, plus 650 Indians. Most Indians probably lived on the farms and ranches. His estimate still holds. Theoretically connected to the government in Monterey and Mexico City, Los Angeles largely followed its own course, the city being gov-

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erned by an ayuntamiento (council), with its alcalde acting as mayor, judge, and coroner. Slow infiltration by ambitious European and American men who became Mexican citizens probably went unnoticed in Mexico City. Although the 1846 takeover by the United States did have elements of drama—battles of a sort—the social and economic transition to an American city happened slowly: Los Angeles just was not that important either to its Mexican-era rulers or the U.S. conquerors in the 1840s.3

Americans in early Los Angeles deliberately cultivated a casual attitude toward violence, at least in print. In the post-1846 era, firearm deaths were a part of the public life and excitement in what must have been an otherwise dull small town. It is plausible that men in late Mexican Los Angeles (1830–1846) cultivated a similarly nonchalant and ironic attitude toward firearms violence, although evidence of this is hard to find, and mass-produced handguns were not widely available in the Mexican era.

For example, Boyle Workman recounted the story of a grand party in about 1849 at El Palacio de Don Abel [Stearns], where Dr. James B. Winston, husband of Margarita Bandini, shot and killed two party crashers who had been amusing themselves by “shooting at the heels of the dancers.” Winston resented their “playfulness.” Workman told other stories of casual firearm use: In 1850 travelers staying at the Bella Union Hotel had trouble sleeping due to “pistol shots and other little diversions” in the night. The point of his stories was to establish an ironic distance from a society with very high fatality rates.4

Published stories of “gun play” date mainly from the American era. Only the last few years of Mexican Los Angeles could have had such pistol fire, simply because mass-manufactured pistols did


4. Undated incident in Boyle Workman, The City That Grew, as told to Caroline Walker (Los Angeles, 1936), 29, 56. Workman was born in 1809, so his stories were secondhand at best. If this story is true, it occurred in the American period because the marshall, an American office, came to check out the disturbance but made no arrests.
not become available until the late 1840s. Thus, pistols arrived with the new U.S. government, an accident of timing. Prior to the 1840s early Americans and Europeans who intermarried into Mexican families, such as Abel Stearns, would have been as unfamiliar with the soon to become common handguns as would Mexicans. Probably younger American men brought a flood of these new weapons into town.5

Workman was not alone in painting a picture of casual violence: Horace Bell’s Reminiscences of a Ranger claimed that “The year ’53 showed an average mortality from fights and assassinations of over one per day in Los Angeles. In the year last referred to, police statistics showed a greater number of murders in California than in all the United States besides, and a greater number in Los Angeles than in all of the rest of California.” An infamous event, the “Chinese massacre” of 1871, in which over nineteen Chinese men (and one white police officer) were killed, cements the anecdotal evidence of a place with simmering violence.6

More exact evidence

The stories can be made somewhat more exact. Although there are no official data sources such as annual reports or even formally kept coroner’s records, evidence exists to begin to construct homicide rates for Los Angeles. While not perfect, the rates can be seen as a start to contextualizing these anecdotes about what appears to have been a homicidally violent Western town. In the four decades between 1830 and 1870, at least 332 homicides occurred. These homicides resulted in some concrete public notice and dating, thus meriting inclusion here. A double homicide, like the one by Dr. Winston, is not recorded in the sources I have examined,

5. A rural New York county, with a record that covers much of the nineteenth century, offers some comparative hints. Of all thirty-two homicides that occurred between 1798 and 1884, seven were by gun. The first of four pistol homicides did not occur until 1880, but after that all gun homicides were by pistol. William Henry Tippetts, Herkimer County Murders: This Book Contains an Accurate Account of the Capital Crimes Committed in the County of Herkimer, from the Year 1783 up to the Present Time (Herkimer, N.Y., 1885), available electronically at http://www.sociology.ohiostate.edu/cjrc/hvd/dbfiles/herkimerco/Herkimer%20County%20Murders.pdf

even though it probably happened, because Workman implied only a vague date, 1849. This is the only such imprecise event I have decided to include in the data. Statistically, its removal or inclusion would make little difference.  

The 332 homicides I discuss here make up the initial part of a larger data project: collecting all of the homicides in Los Angeles since 1830. The homicide counts have to be considered estimates, probably lower-bounds ones. My rule has been that each source has to be reliable, specific (not “thirty homicides occurred over the weekend”), and convincing. The incident I noted above, although lacking a precise date, included the offender’s name and the location of the shooting. If the report does not specify the name of the victim or the offender, the context must be convincing; for example, “an unknown body was found by the corral last evening.” The homicides here come from a variety of sources: alcalde records, some court records, newspapers, and memoirs. Most cases have names, although in the case of Indian homicides, these are often missing. It is possible that some homicides occurred elsewhere in Southern California, for the definition of the Los Angeles region in the mid-nineteenth century was rather open.
Even the population figures required to change the homicide counts into rates are inexact. Indians were not precisely enumerated by the Americans, and the Mexican government did not depend on censuses to determine political representation as did the U.S. government. Thus, both numerator (homicide counts) and denominator (population) should be considered best estimates. Nevertheless, some information is better than no information. Using Bancroft’s population estimate of 2,497 for the mid-1840s, I have rounded up to calculate rates for the Mexican era, using a population base of 3,000. For the American era, population had grown to 15,000 by 1870; I have used a mean annual population of 8,270 for the period.

The homicide counts varied considerably year to year. Therefore, I have taken the step of aggregating years and creating two initial sets of rates—1830–1846 and 1847–1870, corresponding to the Mexican and early American eras and avoiding the lurch in rates caused by the Chinese massacre in 1871. The estimated homicide rates for both periods are extraordinarily high, 66 and 158 per 100,000, far higher than the very high rate in 1991 of 22 per 100,000.9

These rates tell us that the risk of being murdered every year per 100,000 population (a standard figure for homicide reporting). But Los Angeles was much smaller than 100,000; Los Angeles County reached about 15,000 and the city only about 6,000 by 1870. In the Mexican period, the number of victims averaged about 1.9 a year and, in the American period, 13.0 a year. No matter how one calculates, however, whether by rates or annual counts, this was a lot of homicides for a small city and its hinterland. Fearsome New York City had rates one-tenth to one-twentieth of these.

Table 1 makes three important points: First, different as they were, in both Los Angeles and New York City the homicide rates increased in the mid-nineteenth century. Second, Los Angeles was much more violent than New York. And third, whether Mexican or

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9. The rates are calculated as follows: mean homicides per year, divided by mean population per year, times 100,000: hence, 1.9/3,000 x 100,000 for the Mexican period; 13/8,270 x 100,000 for the U.S. period. See Dykstra, “Body Counts,” 559–560, for similar estimates. In contrast to most studies, I deliberately take several years on which to base my estimates, in essence increasing the population base to avoid high variation due to a few years of high or low violence.
Table 1. Average Annual Homicides Rates and Counts, Los Angeles and New York, 1830–1870

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1830–1846</th>
<th>1847–1870</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>66 (32)</td>
<td>158 (300)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>4 (204)</td>
<td>8 (1,029)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: For Los Angeles, see text; for a more detailed list from the Mexican period, see note 10. For New York City, see Eric Monkkonen, *Murder in New York City* (Berkeley, 2000).

American, Los Angeles had extraordinarily high homicide rates, by any way of counting.10

During the Mexican period in Los Angeles, only two of the known murder weapons were guns, although it must be acknowledged that only fourteen of the murders had recorded weapons in this period, while in thirteen other cases weapons were not mentioned.11 The use of guns in murders leapt to 73 percent of the total in the American period. Did the new availability and interest in mass-produced handguns account for the more than doubling of the Los Angeles homicide rates? Or did the social and political turmoil of the U.S. conquest, ensuring social conflict, weak legal institutions, and rapid population growth underlie the increase? Comparable data from other U.S. cities can help untangle this question.

I have used New York City as a benchmark: New York resembled Los Angeles in very few ways, having reached over a million people by 1870, but it was the largest American city, and whatever happened there mattered to the rest of the nation. Furthermore, while the New York homicide records I found did not note gun type, they did indicate whether the death was by firearm; they also have the ad-

10. Robert Dykstra, e-mail, March 20, 2004, estimating an overall homicide rate of 14.4 per 100,000 for the West. Victims in the Mexican Era include: Fernando (Indian), Ylario (Indian), Jorge (Indian), Juan Jenkins (English), Domingo Felix, Cirico (Indian), unknown, Isabel, Bautista, “Unknown,” Rafael, John Ruiz, Gaspar Crispin, Nicolas Fink, Benito (Indian), Victor (Indian), Dolores (Indian), Claudio (Indian), Camilo (Indian), an Indian, Dionisio (Indian), Thomas Nil, “2 Cahuilla Indians,” Baltasar (Indian), Martin (Indian), Jose Ma Montalvan, Lino (Indian), Rafael (Indian), “unnamed Frenchman,” Jose Abrego, “Indian girl,” Theodora Penrose, and Antonio Aguila. The data on New York City appear in Eric Monkkonen, *Murder in New York City* (Berkeley, 2000).

11. One beating, one rape, two unknown, and nine bladed weapons, including a sword.
Table 2. Murders Involving Guns, Los Angeles and New York, 1830–1870.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1830–1846</th>
<th>1847–1870</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>2 of 16 with known weapon</td>
<td>81 of 151 with known weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>10 of 204 with known weapon</td>
<td>225 of 1,026 with known weapon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: For Los Angeles, see text; for New York, see Eric Monkkonen, *Murder in New York City* (Berkeley, 2000) and as archived at the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The two very different cities had the same upward trends in gun murders, while at the same time maintaining very different homicide levels (see Tables 1 and 2). Something more powerful was going on in Los Angeles.

Other Western cities can be used for further and probably more relevant comparisons, but, unfortunately, little information on the pre-1850, pre-revolver era is available. (The recording of gun type in homicide cases was uncommon, in part because often the victim died of gunshot injuries from a gun of an unknown type. It could be, for example, that New York had more handgun injuries than I recorded but that the gun type went unknown and unnoted.) No doubt, new studies of the West will help clarify this picture and fill in the gaps. Other cities that match chronologically both the Mexican and American eras of Los Angeles will surely yield more detailed records as well, enabling us to understand better the spread of the handgun.

For a group of Western towns stretching from Omaha to San Luis Obispo, McKanna has found and recorded data on 2,228 homicides between 1850 and 1900. Included in the details he obtained are distinctions among gun types, long and short—valuable information I could not obtain for Los Angeles. Of the homicides McKanna recorded, 63 percent (1,408) were by gun. Over two-thirds of the firearms (1,010) were handguns. The mass-produced revolver had quickly eclipsed all other homicide weapons in the West. The old joke referring to the South as the region below the Smith & Wesson line will need revising. While I have no information on Los Angeles...
gun types, the McKanna data suggest that handguns quickly became prominent throughout the urban West. Add to this quantitative context the anecdotal evidence about handguns, and one might well conclude that the more than doubling of Los Angeles’s homicide rates in the post-Mexican era was in part due to new weapons.

In part. Very high murder rates matching those found in Los Angeles, 1830–1870, are rare. No matter how we count the murders, in raw numbers or per capita, Los Angeles was unusually violent over a forty-year period, even if we ignore the handguns. Figure 1 displays the counts annually; it is important to remember that these are raw counts, not rates, as they were in Table 1. The counts suggest bursts of violence in this small town in 1839, 1847, the mid-1850s, and 1870 (leading into the Chinese massacre the following year). Not only did the city have an unusually high number of murders; it also had lulls followed by explosive violence. These bursts alert us to the probability that the gradual increase of revolvers alone did not account for the violence.

Impressionistically, the number-one fuel to violence was drinking in bars, with men at night boasting, challenging each other’s manliness, fighting, and then stabbing, kicking, or shooting each other. Such disputes usually stayed within class and racial groups. Of the thirty-two victims in the Mexican period whose race was identified, almost two-thirds were Indian. It is possible that these were all of the Indian victims—a very high proportion. Six of the known offenders, or 37 percent, in the Mexican era were Indian. In other words, most of the pre-1846 murder victims I have been able to identify were Indians, and at the least one-third of the killings were committed by Indians. Similar murders attracted only passing mention in the American-era news and diaries. The occasional assertion in the newspapers in the American period that the Indian victims were ranch hands coming to town on Saturday night makes it

12. Source: Homicide in the Trans-Mississippi West: Data from the Studies of Clare V. McKenna, Jr., at http://www.sociology.ohio-state.edu/cjrc/hvd/homicide-transmississippi-west.html. Note: Evidence for New Orleans and St. Louis in the 1890s shows a similar distribution; see Coroner’s reports of individual homicides.

13. McGrath, Gunfighters, Highwaymen, & Vigilantes, gives annual homicide rates in the 1860s–1880s of 116 and 64 for Bodie and Aurora, which, like Los Angeles, were small towns, with the raw number of homicides 29 and 16. Ibid., 254. Miners leaving these towns would encounter even higher homicide rates in Los Angeles.

14. The Scottish immigrant Hugo Reid stands apart here, his articles for the Los Angeles Star/Estrella proving to be an invaluable anthropological treasure trove.
Western Homicide

Figure 1. Los Angeles Annual Homicides, 1830–1870. Source: see text.

seem that many murder victims may not have been from the city. Unfortunately, the place of residence of victims is almost impossible to ascertain from the existing records.

In the American period, of the 225 victims with race identified, 29 percent were Indian; again, if all Indian victims were identified (as seems likely), then they comprised 22 percent of all 300 victims. In the context of the more than doubling murder rate after 1846, victimization of Indians probably did not diminish so much as non-Indian victimization increased. As in the Mexican period, finding the offender’s race is more difficult, if not impossible. (This is still the situation: Only about 65 percent of all murders cases are cleared by arrest.) The murders of Indians, by all races, must constitute one of the sorriest aspects of nineteenth-century Los Angeles history, comparable to the Chinese massacre.

The average age of the handful of victims (six) whose age was recorded was thirty-two in the American period; only one age was recorded (forty) in the Mexican era. Most victims were men in both eras (90 percent in the American period, 88 percent in the Mexican period). In the American era, 97 percent of the offenders were men (among the 77 percent of offenders whose sex was recorded), with only one offender recorded by sex in the Mexican era. Throughout
Table 3. Race of Victims and Offenders, Los Angeles, 1830–1870.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total Homicides</th>
<th>Total Identified by Race</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Mexican</th>
<th>Anglo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victims 32</td>
<td>30 (94%)*</td>
<td>20 (67%)**</td>
<td>6 (29%)</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offenders 32</td>
<td>16 (50%)</td>
<td>6 (38%)</td>
<td>9 (56%)</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848–1870</td>
<td>Victims 300</td>
<td>225 (75%)</td>
<td>65 (29%)</td>
<td>77 (34%)</td>
<td>83 (37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offenders 300</td>
<td>217 (72%)</td>
<td>33 (15%)</td>
<td>99 (46%)</td>
<td>85 (39%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentage of total identified by race.
**Group percentage of those identified by race.

Source: See text. Note: This table has an expanded definition of race instead of a restrictive view. When individuals had Spanish names, I labeled them Mexican. If they had Anglo names, I labeled them Anglo. If they had only a given Spanish name, then I classified them as Indian. If someone had an ambiguous name like Pancho Johnson, that person got no code. This method is open to error, but ignoring names would introduce errors of omission.

the mid-nineteenth century, offenders were also young men. In other parts of the United States, 15 to 20 percent of victims were women. The large male majority of homicide victims in Los Angeles is likely the result of a rowdy, bar-hopping male culture rather than of any specific conditions that shielded women from violence. Twenty years later, by the 1890s, 18 percent of homicide victims in Los Angeles were women, signaling that the city was beginning to have “normal” levels of homicides. (According to the U.S. censuses, the male population hovered at 57, 62, and 58 percent between 1850 and 1870. By 1890 the proportion had shifted to 52 percent male.)

Los Angeles law enforcement certainly had its hands full with so many murders. The city always had law enforcement of a sort: In the Mexican period, it had a police commissioner, and in the American period there was a county sheriff, a city marshall, and, after 1869, a formal police force. The homicide record makes it clear that law enforcement was inadequate for the task, and law officers were gravely at risk. Several lynchings and the Chinese massacre (not included here) suggest that, given the town’s record, a much larger and more disciplined police force would have been required. I have

Table 4. Law Enforcement Officers Killed in Los Angeles, 1830–1870.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Officer Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>City Marshall Jack Whaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>Sheriff James Barton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>Sheriff William C. Getman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Frederick Morris (late Provost Marshall, killed by Marshall Warren)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>City Marshall William C. Warren (killed by the Deputy Marshall John Dye)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: See text.

records of five law enforcement personnel being killed in the period from 1853 to 1870. For a small town, this count is astounding and not at all ameliorated by the fact that two of the shooters were also in law enforcement—and friends.

Commenting on the high murder rates for its citizens, the Los Angeles News wrote in 1865, “We are reminded of former days when it was usual to find from one to three, and as often, a half dozen dead bodies in the streets who had been murdered the night previous.” And a few months later, after the provost marshall had been shot and killed by his best friend, the city marshall: “There is a class who indulge in shooting out of mere wantonness—every evening one hears the reports of pistols and the ‘ping’ of bullets.” I have found no newspaper comments on shootings by law enforcement officers, but in these brief quotations, one sees both the exaggerated violence (the highest annual murder count in the mid-century period was twenty-five, not the 300 or more implied by the Los Angeles News) and the more authentic-sounding impression of nightly gunshots.16

Transiency

The United States as a whole had very high residential mobility rates, in both urban and rural places, throughout the nineteenth century. This social river was unexpectedly uncovered by the “new urban historians” in the 1970s, yet the analysis of the impact of these transiency rates on communities has not yet been fully developed. Nor has a clear linkage of transiency, neighborhood, and social control been shown either to cause or control disorder or violence. Nev-

16. Los Angeles News, April 25, 1865; ibid., March 10, 1865.
ertheless, it is plausible to infer that communities where neighborhood residents changed rapidly could rely far less on any social commitment or responsibility. What Robert Putnam has called “social capital” would be less likely to develop or to remain in place.17

In order to find hints of mid-century transiency in Los Angeles, I selected a small systematic sample list of 300 Angelenos over ten years old from the 1860 manuscript census (about a 2 percent sample) and searched for them in the complete 1850 census.18 Stunningly, few were to be found—only eighteen, or about 6 percent. In other words, although a small town, Los Angeles was a city of strangers.

Conclusion

The typical mid-nineteenth-century Angeleno lived in a place rife with homicides in both the Mexican and American eras. Sometimes the victims were limited to particular social groups, and most of the time they were men. But whether or not one was at risk, one had to know that violence was common and tolerated. The city, its surrounding hamlets, and the rural countryside were all places with little government, weak law enforcement, high transiency, anonymity, and, apparently, elite tolerance of violence.19 The four decades from 1830 to 1870 set a record for homicides and a tem-

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18. The complete 1850 census is transcribed and published as Census of the City and County of Los Angeles, California, for the Year 1850; together with an analysis and an appendix by Maurice H. Newmark and Marco R. Newmark (Los Angeles, 1929). The manuscript of the 1860 census is U.S. Census Office, Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860 (Washington, D.C.), reel 59: California, Fresno, Humboldt, Klamath and Los Angeles counties, 1–542. The National Archives microfilm of this census used in this study was published in 1967. The 1860 sample of 300 was drawn as follows: All individuals over ten years old were completely selected from six pages evenly distributed through the microfilm. These then were searched in an alphabetized list of all families present in the 1850 census.

19. David A. Johnson, “Vigilance and the Law: The Moral Authority of Popular Justice in the Far West,” American Quarterly, 33 (1981), 558–586 [Special Issue: American Culture and the American Frontier]; page 561 shows about 320 lynchings for 1849–1859, or about 34 lynchings per 100,000. This was a huge rate of mob killings, a sure sign of a weak state, as are any lynchings.
plate for tolerating violence that persisted through the twentieth century. Recently, there have been some changes, but the city and its surrounding urban region still invest far less in homicide suppression than do other places. Violence rates moderated downward but still remained high in the 1880s. By the turn of the century the rate had dropped to about 10 per 100,000, near the current rate.

Was the West homicidally violent? Certainly Los Angeles was. This research note fills in a part of the puzzling landscape of Western violence. Much more work needs to be done: The legacy is troubling.