



Shadows at Dawn: A Borderlands Massacre and the Violence of History

By Karl Jacoby

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A groundbreaking exploration of one of the worst Indian massacres in American history illuminates the clash of American, Mexican, and tribal cultures in the southwestern borderlands.

In the predawn hours of April 30, 1871, a combined party of Americans, Mexicans, and Tohono O'odham Indians gathered just outside an Apache camp in the Arizona borderlands. At the first light of day they struck, murdering nearly 150 Apaches, mostly women and children, in their sleep. In its day, the atrocity, which came to be known as the Camp Grant Massacre, generated unparalleled national attention—federal investigations, heated debate in the press, and a tense criminal trial. This was the era of the United States' “peace policy” toward Indians, and the Apaches had been living on a would-be reservation, under the supposed protection of the U.S. Army. President Ulysses Grant decried the act as “purely murder,” but American settlers countered that the distant U.S. government had failed to protect them from Apache attacks, and they were forced to take justice into their own hands.

In the past century, the massacre has largely faded from memory. Now, drawing on oral histories, newspaper reports, and the participants' own accounts, prizewinning author Karl Jacoby brings this horrific incident and tumultuous era to life. What brought this party together on that fateful April morning, and what led them to commit such a stunning act of violence? *Shadows at Dawn* traces the escalating conflicts, as well as the alliances, that transpired among the Americans, Mexicans, Apache, and Tohono O'odham living in the borderlands over the course of several hundred years, beginning with the seventeenth-century arrival of the first Spanish missionaries. The American presence brought further transformations, especially after the Gadsden Purchase transferred a large swath of Mexican territory to the United States, leaving many Mexicans feeling like foreigners in their own land. By recounting the events from the perspective of each of the four parties involved, Jacoby challenges the dominance of the American version of the western story and also reveals the way each group has remembered, or forgotten, the massacre.

Prodigiously researched and powerfully written, *Shadows at Dawn* examines a forgotten atrocity and in doing so paints a sweeping panorama of the southwestern border lands—a world far more complex, culturally diverse, and morally ambiguous than the traditional portrayals of the Old West.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

On April 30, 1871, a posse of Americans, Mexicans and Tohono O'odham Indians descended upon an Apache camp in Arizona and massacred some 150 of its sleeping inhabitants, mostly women and children. Jacoby (*Crimes Against Nature*), an associate professor of history at Brown University, re-examines what happened in the notorious Camp Grant Massacre and its aftermath in an original way. An unusual wealth of documents about this raid allow him to narrate from four different angles, each centering on a community involved in the massacre, thereby offering a view of the histories, fears and motivations of each group. Some readers might prefer a more conventional and chronological narrative, but Jacoby's structure succeeds in leading readers toward a deeper revisioning of the American past. Jacoby wants readers to consider the West not just as the seat of America's Manifest Destiny, but as an extension of the Mexican north and... the homeland of a complex array of Indian communities. For buffs more accustomed to traditional tales of Custer and Wounded Knee, this telling might prove an unexpected delight. Illus. (Nov. 24)

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From [Booklist](#)

Historian Jacoby makes an important contribution to the scholarship of the American West with this balanced portrait of the brutal Camp Grant massacre in Arizona. On April 30, 1871, more than 50 Apache Indians—mostly women and children—were massacred by a group of vigilantes made up of Americans, Mexicans, and Tohono O'odham Indians. What made the atrocity even more unbelievable to the general public was the fact that the Apaches were living under the protection of the U.S. Army on a government-sponsored tract of land. Recounting the story from four divergent points of view, Jacoby sheds insight into the social, political, and economic complexities that characterized the nineteenth-century frontier. In addition, he also places the massacre and the federal investigation that followed firmly into historical context by providing a concise history of the highly charged cultural conflicts that plagued the territory for several preceding centuries. --Margaret Flanagan

Review

“*Shadows at Dawn* is an absorbing, brilliant study of the Camp Grant Massacre in 1871. Karl Jacoby sees this terrible event in its full complexity. His is one of the best studies ever of the long conflict between tribes and races, soldiers, citizens, killers and victims, in the wild unregulated Southwest.”

—Larry McMurtry

“In this landmark book about a tragic collision of multiple cultures, Karl Jacoby subverts a thousand Westerns by showing us that the West was not a sepia-toned world of cowboy or Indian, villain or hero, white hat or black. The West so carefully re-imagined in *Shadows at Dawn* was a far more complicated place—a place that lived and died in a surprising gamut of hues.”

—Hampton Sides, author of *Blood and Thunder*

“*Shadows at Dawn* is the fascinating story—actually four stories, a Southwestern *Rashomon*—of the massacre of Apaches near Tucson on April 30, 1871, by Anglos, Mexicans, and other Indians. Extending over four hundred years, centering on that awful event, this book is impressively researched and a major contribution to the history of clashing cultures and memories of the desert frontier.”

—Walter Nugent, author of *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion*

“A brilliant narrative writer and gifted historian, Karl Jacoby rescues the Camp Grant massacre not simply from the forgetfulness of the past but from the all- too-human urge to simplify the tangled complexity of our motivations, interactions, histories, and memories. This book should be required reading for polemicists and apologists alike, and for anyone wanting to think deeply and well about the meanings of that curious thing we call ‘history.’”

—Philip J. Deloria, author of *Indians in Unexpected Places*

“*Shadows at Dawn* is western history at its best! Karl Jacoby has judiciously uncovered the many hidden layers as well as legacies behind one of the darkest moments in America’s past—the ethnic cleansing of its indigenous peoples. In the process, he restores the Camp Grant Massacre to its rightful place at the center of Arizona’s traumatic 19th century past. A wonderful and moving achievement.”

—Ned Blackhawk, author of *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West*

“Jacoby’s story-teller’s ear listens to the tales that have swirled around the Camp Grant Massacre since the spring of 1871 and draws them into a conversation that—like it or not—is long overdue. Studied with a cool eye and open heart, the perspectives merge into a kaleidoscopic vision of the American West that remind us that we may be done with the past, but it is seldom done with us.”

—James F. Brooks, author of *Captives & Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Holly Silva:

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