Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies

Vol. 15, n°2 | 2011
Varia

Paul J. Vanderwood, *Satan's Playground: Mobsters and Movie Stars at America's Greatest Gaming Resort*

Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2010, 408 pp., 82 b & w illustrations, cloth ISBN 978-0-8223-4691-3, trade paperback ISBN 978-0-8223-4702-6.

Vivien Miller

Édition électronique

URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/chs/1307>
DOI : 10.4000/chs.1307
ISSN : 1663-4837

Éditeur

Librairie Droz

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 1 décembre 2011
Pagination : 162
ISSN : 1422-0857

Référence électronique

Vivien Miller, « Paul J. Vanderwood, *Satan's Playground: Mobsters and Movie Stars at America's Greatest Gaming Resort* », *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* [En ligne], Vol. 15, n°2 | 2011, mis en ligne le 08 mars 2013, consulté le 23 mars 2022. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chs/1307> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/chs.1307>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 23 mars 2022.

© Droz

Paul J. Vanderwood, *Satan's Playground: Mobsters and Movie Stars at America's Greatest Gaming Resort*

Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2010, 408 pp., 82 b & w illustrations, cloth ISBN 978-0-8223-4691-3, trade paperback ISBN 978-0-8223-4702-6.

Vivien Miller

RÉFÉRENCE

Paul J. Vanderwood, *Satan's Playground: Mobsters and Movie Stars at America's Greatest Gaming Resort*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2010, 408 pp., 82 b & w illustrations, cloth ISBN 978-0-8223-4691-3, trade paperback ISBN 978-0-8223-4702-6.

- 1 Agua Caliente, an opulent and stylish gaming resort with racetrack, casino, and hotel, opened in Tijuana, just south of the United States-Mexican border in June 1928. Patronised by Hollywood movie moguls, glamorous film star celebrities, aristocrats, and diplomats as well as the *hoi poloi*, it quickly established itself as the "Playground of the Hemisphere" (p1). Sports, vice, commercialised leisure, and numerous entertainments had boomed in Tijuana in the years after the 1910 Mexican Revolution and as national prohibition in the United States encouraged many Americans to venture southward in search of drink, drugs, and jazz. Eleven million U.S. tourists crossed the border at Tijuana and Calexico in 1929, or 30,000 per day, and significant numbers visited Agua Caliente to earn its proprietors \$5 million in the first year of operation. The rise and fall of Agua Caliente is one of several stories that converge in Vanderwood's fascinating and highly readable *Satan's Playground* (although several additional diversions, for example, into the invention of Caesar salad or the history of oil strikes in California might have worked better as footnotes).

- 2 The study opens with the May 1929 armed robbery of the resort's money car en route to a bank in San Diego (18 miles from Tijuana and across the U.S. border) and murder of the guard and driver. The story of the arrest, prosecution, and conviction of the perpetrators weaves its way through the length of the study. The possibility of collusion between Agua Caliente Company officials, the San Diego police, and a crime syndicate is evaluated but the surviving evidence precludes a definite conclusion. Nevertheless, Vanderwood has mined a range of newspaper and magazine sources as well as official reports in the U.S. and Mexico, oral histories, and personal memoirs to recreate these events but also to provide a rich and multi-layered context. The study examines early twentieth century entrepreneurial capitalism, and specifically the rise of the "Border Barons" or Agua Caliente's major investors. These canny self-made men were driven by greed, ambition, and a ruthless desire to succeed, but were also financially astute risk takers. The Tijuana investments of the three American Barons benefitted significantly from the largesse of governors of northern Baja California, and indeed one former governor was the fourth Baron. The Barons' wealth and their lucrative resort attracted the attention of organised criminals, including armed robbers and kidnappers.
 - 3 Vanderwood's expertise in Mexican history and politics ensures that his study profiles also the experiences of Mexican workers at the resort, the ways in which Agua Caliente's operations are affected by demands that foreign-owned businesses employ significant numbers of locals, the resort's relationship to northern Mexican labour disputes in the 1930s, and the national political context for its closure. Consequently, this is a valuable study for those interested in U.S. social and cultural history and cross-border economic and political history but also holds great appeal for more general readers.
-

AUTEURS

VIVIEN MILLER

University of Nottingham

Vivien.Miller@nottingham.ac.uk