



Official State Historical Center of the Texas  
Rangers law enforcement agency.

**The Following Article was Originally Published in the  
*Texas Ranger Dispatch Magazine***

The *Texas Ranger Dispatch* was published by the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum from 2000 to 2011. It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

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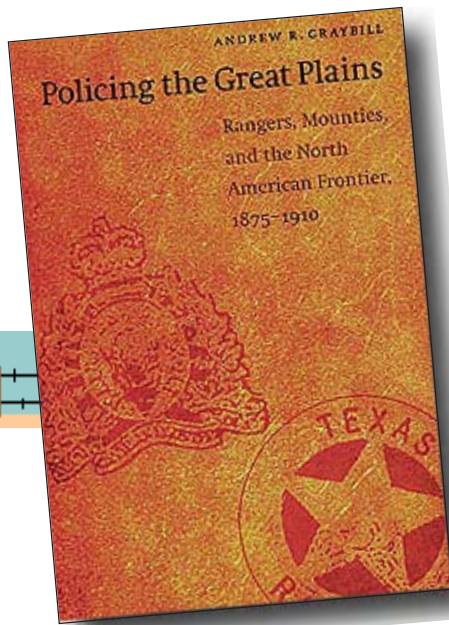
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Funded in part by grants from  
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

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## Book Reviews



# Policing the Great Plains

## *Rangers, Mounties, and the North American Frontier, 1875-1910*

by Andrew Graybill

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007.  
Soft cover only. xiv + 277 pages. Endnotes.  
Bibliography. Index. 25 photographs. 3 maps.  
ISBN 978-0-8032-6002-3

The theme of this book could easily be described as a negative treatment of the Texas Ranger organization and a positive portrayal of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (“Mounties”). Although author Graybill draws many parallels between the two most famous policing groups in the world, it is quite apparent that his presentation is definitely intended to diminish the reputation of the Texas Rangers and elevate the status of the Mounties. A novice might come away with the understanding that the history of the Rangers is one of state-sanctioned murders of minorities (Indians and Mexicans). As for the Mounties during the same period, Graybill depicts them as virtual angels in their dealings with the Canadian minority group, which consisted of indigenous peoples—full-blooded Indians and the Métis, offspring of Indians and Europeans.

There are some interesting aspects in comparing the two organizations. The Mounties took their orders ultimately from Ottawa, the Canadian capitol; the Rangers obeyed commands from Austin, the capitol of Texas. The frontier area for the Mounties was western Canada, an area considerably larger than Central and Western Texas.

Both organizations were created at virtually the same time. The Frontier Battalion was created in mid-1874 by Texas Governor Richard Coke, although there had been various organizations for many decades before. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police force also was created in 1874 and originally named the North-West Mounted Police.



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According to Graybill, the purpose of each group was similar: dealing with indigenous peoples. The Rangers “were driven by decades of brutal native-white conflict within the region . . . using force to kill and destroying their basic food source.” Their aim was to remove Comanches and Kiowas from Texas into what is today Oklahoma. In contrast, the Mounties in Western Canada accomplished the same basic goal of confining the Blackfoot and Crees to reservations, but they did so “employing far less violence.”

The Anglo conquest of Texas was only part of the Manifest Destiny concept that ruled America in its westward expansion. The Rangers were certainly guilty of excessive violence at times in their treatment of minorities. Nevertheless, how Anglos treated the Indians and Mexicans was hardly less violent than the treatment of those same two groups toward people they considered invaders. For instance, the Comanche and Kiowa dealt harshly with weaker tribes while conquering the Great Plains.

Graybill’s theme continues with detailing how the invading Europeans dispossessed the inhabitants of their respective regions. In Canada, the Mounties enforced the Ottawa law of dividing the new lands into square tracts, essentially redefining their land. The Rangers, in contrast, used “terrorism and lethal force” to protect the interests of settlers and cattlemen. In other words, both Mounties and Rangers obtained similar results while enforcing laws decreed by their respective governments. However, the Rangers utilized violence, slaughter, and terror to accomplish the goal.

Graybill does not ignore how Hollywood helped create the Mounties and the Rangers as paragons of virtue and manliness. During the 20th century, he states that more than 250 movies featured a Northwest Mounted Policeman as either a central character or one of lesser importance. He uses the term “classic” to describe the MGM production *Rose Marie*, starring Nelson Eddy as a Mounted Policeman. The Rangers appeared in more than 100 films between 1910 and 1995. These productions portrayed the Rangers as “brave and indefatigable in their efforts to clear the Lone Star State of miscreants, by violence if necessary.” Both a Mountie and a Ranger were brought together in one film, Cecil B. DeMille’s 1940 production entitled *North West Mounted Police*. This movie stars film icon Gary Cooper as a Texas Ranger who arrives in Canada in the nick of time (of course) to help the North-West Mounted Police put down the 1884 North-West Rebellion.

Author Graybill is an assistant professor of history at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He has written a thoroughly researched book that certainly attempts to provide a picture of the two police organizations, how they faced difficult responsibilities, and how they dealt with them. However, this reviewer feels that he has not presented a fair picture of the Texas Rangers.

Although this book portrays both organizations in a less than favorable light, it is a worthwhile work that anyone with even a slight interest in Texas or Canadian history will find interesting. At times, the reader may be tempted to argue with historian Graybill, but his interpretation of source material is thought provoking.