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History 440
Research Paper

The Eris of the West:
The origin and genealogy of a fabricated narrative and how it contaminated a century of
Theodore Roosevelt historiography

The frontier of the nineteenth century has been consistently romanticized over the course of American history. Frequently, tall tales have been accepted as truth and included in works of non-fiction. One example of such history can be found in the pages of Hermann Hagedorn's *Roosevelt in the Badlands*, where Hagedorn contends that Theodore Roosevelt and his neighbor, Antoine-Amédée-Marie-Vincent Manca Amat de Vallombrosa, Marquis de Morés et de Montemaggiore or, more simply, the Marquis de Morés, traveled to Montana in June 1884 in order to serve as vigilantes. Vigilantism is the enforcement of law by people without legal authority. The labeled vigilantes in this paper are those who specifically lynched their prisoners. The reason the Roosevelt and de Morés wanted to become vigilantes, according to the book, was because they wanted to help stop livestock rustlers who made a living by stealing cattle and horses in the frontier.¹ This account has been reiterated in nearly all-major Roosevelt monographs, such as *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* by Edmund Morris and *Mornings on Horseback*, by David McCullough, written since the publication of *Roosevelt in the Badlands*. Furthermore, all of these succeeding works cite Hagedorn's book as their source. Close examination of the facts, however, reveal a history that refutes the conclusion that is presented in *Roosevelt in the Badlands*. Hagedorn's only source for this story was a questionable personal interview. As this paper shall demonstrate, Theodore Roosevelt

and the Marquis de Morés did not travel to Montana in the summer of 1884 to join a vigilance committee and a false rumor has been included into a century worth of Roosevelt historiography. Furthermore, no evidence suggests that either man was ever involved with vigilantism, but Roosevelt, unlike the Marquis, was opposed to vigilantism due to his moral principles, views on human rights, and how a society should deal with criminals.

I will support this thesis by outlining Hermann Hagedorn's narrative as it appears in *Roosevelt in the Badlands* and the important role his work has played in influencing the last century of Theodore Roosevelt historiography. Second, the paper will analyze the flaws of Hagedorn's source for the Roosevelt-Marquis vigilante narrative and the information from that source will be compared to primary sources in order to reveal certain and important inconsistencies. Third, I will establish alibies for Roosevelt and the Marquis with their summer travel schedules and show that the two men could not have been in Glendive, Montana in June 1884, thus further invalidating the vigilante narrative. Finally, the paper will demonstrate how Roosevelt and the Marquis did not respond to crime with vigilantism based on their actual responses to crime on the frontier.

Hermann Hagedorn is known for being an early biographer of Theodore Roosevelt. Born in New York in 1882, he met Roosevelt while Hagedorn was still a student at Harvard. The two men became friends years later in 1916, and Hagedorn became an advisor to the former president on the situation of German-Americans during the First World War.² Hagedorn helped to found the Theodore Roosevelt Association in 1919 following Roosevelt's death.³ Hagedorn would devote much of his writing career to Theodore Roosevelt. He wrote a total of eight books devoted to Roosevelt⁴ and he was

the dominant Roosevelt historian for the first half of the 20th century.⁵ His work on the twenty-sixth president would come to influence the following century of Theodore Roosevelt historiography.⁶ His most notable book, *Roosevelt In The Badlands*, contains the claim that is the focus of this paper.

Hermann Hagedorn wrote *Roosevelt In the Badlands* in order to tell the “cold facts” about Theodore Roosevelt’s time and experience while cattle ranching in the Badlands of modern day North Dakota.⁷ The book describes an encounter between Theodore Roosevelt and Stuart’s Stranglers⁸, which was a group of vigilantes named for the lynchings they committed and their leader Granville Stuart, who was a prominent Montana rancher.⁹ Hagedorn explained that even though there were many law-abiding citizens in the Little Missouri area in the spring of 1884, there had also been a high level of rustling in the region.¹⁰ Among the law-abiding citizens there was also a group of people who were “too interested in the future of the region as a part of the American commonwealth to be willing to temporize with outlaws”.¹¹ Hagedorn wrote that the Stranglers were these men who cared for the future, and he gave credit to them for cleaning up the frontier. Hagedorn also wrote that Roosevelt learned of the vigilantes through his neighbor, the Marquis de Morés. De Morés told Roosevelt that the vigilantes planned to execute their plan in late July and that Granville Stuart desired to keep the plot secret so it would have the element of surprise. According to Hagedorn, Roosevelt hated to see lawbreakers “triumphant” so he decided to travel with the Marquis to meet with Stuart in Glendive at the end of June 1884 in order to join the Stranglers. Stuart refused to allow them to join the Stranglers, according to Hagedorn, because he felt that their local fame would destroy the party’s secrecy. The raid then went on without Roosevelt and the

Marquis.¹² *Roosevelt and the Badlands* was the first published work to feature this story, but many books written afterwards would also include it.¹³

The claim that relates to Roosevelt and the vigilantes occupies five brief pages in *Roosevelt in the Badlands*, but has been transmitted to countless books as historians have commonly referenced Hagedorn's work since its publication in 1921. David McCullough wrote that *Roosevelt In The Badlands* is very useful to modern historians because Hagedorn's sources of information were interviews of people who knew Theodore Roosevelt while he lived in the Dakota Territory. Accordingly, the "standard" reference for authors who have since written about Roosevelt's time in the West is *Roosevelt in the Badlands*.¹⁴ Hagedorn's work has summarily come to influence the work of historians such as Edmund Morris, Carleton Putnam, and David McCullough. All of these subsequent works cite Hagedorn's book as their source for this account.¹⁵ Had Hagedorn not alleged that Roosevelt and the Marquis desired to become a vigilante the narrative would have been absent from Roosevelt historiography entirely. No book published before *Roosevelt in the Badlands* argued that Roosevelt and the Marquis wanted to join the Strangers.¹⁶ Hagedorn's work has come to shape modern interpretation of Theodore Roosevelt's life in the 1880s while he was in the Badlands of the Dakota Territory and the authenticity of Hagedorn's argument and the following century of Roosevelt historiography should be corrected if it cannot be substantiated.

The interviews in the 1921 book *Roosevelt In The Badlands* may be a valuable source for historians,¹⁷ but there are a number of flaws that a reader of this book needs to be aware of beforehand. David McCullough notes that the book is "plainly flawed by Hagedorn's almost blind adulation of TR".¹⁸ Another issue with the book is that it reads

like a work of fiction. Names have been changed, Roosevelt is always the good guy, and accounts are greatly exaggerated.¹⁹ Additionally, other assertions that are made in the book have been proven to be false or impossible. It would be no surprise if more fabricated history is discovered in *Roosevelt in the Badlands*. Finally, Hagedorn himself wrote in the preface that although he tried to verify every story and fact in his book, the accuracy of his work depends “inevitably, on the character of the men and women who gave me my data”.²⁰ According to Hagedorn’s notes for *Roosevelt in the Badlands*, the source for Hagedorn’s account of this attempt to join the stranglers was an interview with Granville Stuart’s widow, Belle (Brown) Stuart.²¹ No primary source or person other than Mrs. Stuart ever asserted this version of history.²² One could also reason that if Hagedorn’s source of information for the vigilante story was not reliable, then a fabrication has been inherited and retold by a century’s worth of Roosevelt historians. The question is this: how reliable is Hagedorn’s source, Belle Stuart, who claimed Roosevelt and the Marquis met with Granville Stuart to become vigilantes?

To begin with, it must be noted that Allis Isabelle “Belle” Brown, the second wife of Granville Stuart, would have had little contact with Stuart while he was lynching supposed cattle rustlers in the summer of 1884 because the two were not yet married. Belle Brown, as she was called, was a young schoolteacher at the time and the two did not see each other on a regular basis until the summer of 1889. They did not marry until 1890, a full six years after the Stranglers were active in Montana Territory.²³ Her knowledge of the Stranglers would have come from her husband, Granville Stuart, because she was not directly involved herself and she would have had no personal knowledge of the related events. Also, Stuart was most likely selective about how he

described his vigilante past to her because the work of the Stranglers was quite controversial at the time.²⁴ Historians have frequently pointed to factual weakness of the Hagedorn-Stuart interview. Hagedorn's original notes for *Roosevelt In The Badlands* are housed in the Theodore Roosevelt collection at Harvard University²⁵ and the collection houses the transcript of the interview.²⁶ Carleton Putnam read these notes when he was conducting research for his biography of Roosevelt. He remarked that, "Exact details and dates must be taken with caution as Mrs. Stuart's memory after thirty-five years appears to be inaccurate on certain points".²⁷ Therefore, according to Hagedorn's own notes, she was not a reliable source. Her claim should not be held as factually truthful unless other primary records such as document evidence left by other people who were personally involved with the Marquis de Morés, Granville Stuart, the Stranglers and Theodore Roosevelt in 1884 substantiate its legitimacy. Hagedorn himself said that the accuracy of the details in his book depended upon the reliability of his sources. One could conclude that if his source for the vigilante narrative was inaccurate, then the account is also inaccurate.

Belle Stuart's account is not the only record of who was involved with Stuart's Stranglers. How do her statements compare to those of other people who played a part in the Stuart's Stranglers narrative presented in *Roosevelt In The Badlands*? First, the information in Granville Stuart's journals will be compared to the interview of his wife, Belle Stuart. Second, Theodore Roosevelt's records shall be juxtaposed with Hagedorn's history. Unfortunately, the Marquis de Morés wrote very little about his time in Dakota so his written account will be largely absent from this section of the paper.²⁸

Cattlemen from Montana, the western part of modern day North Dakota, and northern Wyoming founded “the great Montana Stock-growers’ Association” in order to more effectively organize the spring round-up of their cattle that had spread across the vast and fenceless open range.²⁹ The 429 ranchers who belonged to this association met in Miles City, Montana, on April 20, 1884, and both Granville Stuart and Theodore Roosevelt were in attendance.³⁰ The ranchers who were at this meeting discussed several issues and one of the most pressing issues that they considered was how to respond to the widespread problem of livestock rustling.³¹

Granville Stuart wrote about this meeting in his journals. He recalled that after the fall roundup of 1883 ranchers estimated that they had lost approximately three percent of their livestock to rustling. He then attempted to justify vigilantism by explaining that the civil authorities in Montana were not yet able to police the frontier and prevent thieves from rustling cattle. He wrote, “The only way to do it [prevent rustling] was to make the penalty for stealing so severe that it would lose its attractions”.³² Granville Stuart obviously had no objections if a rancher took the law into his own hands to protect his cattle. Even though he had no personal reservations about hanging thieves he did spend the rest of his life attempting to justify his involvement with the Stranglers and the hanging of innocent people.³³

Stuart continues his narrative by noting that some of the ranchers proposed that the ranchers should form a “small army of cowboys” and argued that they should go about “raiding the countryside” to stop the rustlers. Stuart and the “older and more conservative men” were against this proposal because such a fight would be massive and deadly.³⁴ Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Mores had been elected as

representatives for the western part of the Dakota Territory and they attended this meeting.³⁵ According to Stuart, de Morés opposed the older men and recommended a “rustlers’ war” and openly felt that Stuart and the older men were “backing water”, meaning that the Marquis was of the opinion that they did not have the courage to do what was needed to defeat the cattle and horse rustlers.³⁶ Stuart added that, “The Marquis was strongly supported by Theodore Roosevelt”.³⁷ According to Stuart, the older ranchers “carried the day” and the Association voted to “take no action against the rustlers”.³⁸ What Roosevelt and the Marquis desired is not exactly clear in Stuart’s memoir. It seems, however, after reading Stuart’s memoir that Roosevelt and the Marquis were advocating for a public response to criminal activity at this meeting, which was different from Granville Stuart stressing the importance of secrecy. People in Miles City, Montana continue to tell of the confrontation between Roosevelt, Stuart, and de Morés to this day. This oral tradition supports the conclusion that Roosevelt and the Marquis were opposed to forming an undercover group at the stockmen’s meeting.³⁹ This contrast alone does not prove that Roosevelt and de Morés were opposed to vigilantism because vigilante groups can be formed in a public setting. One can suggest, however, that even if Roosevelt and the Marquis were not opposed to public vigilantism, they were opposed to the secret approach of Granville Stuart from the beginning. Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés would eventually take alternative action against criminals and their behavior did not resemble that of the Stranglers. Their actions will be analyzed in subsequent parts of this paper.

Granville Stuart had no intention of allowing thieves to steal livestock even though he disagreed with the Marquis’ plan. He felt that secrecy was key to defeating the

rustlers. Subsequently, he describes how the vigilance committee, which was more covert than a public effort, was organized by a group of men, some of who belonged to the Stock Growers Association, at the D-S Ranch, after the close of the 1884 roundup.⁴⁰ The “D-S” outfit was a ranching company based near Fort Maginnis, Montana, and Granville Stuart was a partial owner and the president of the company.⁴¹ Stuart claimed that the Stranglers didn’t kill a single person based on suspicion, but rather took action against only those who were known to be career criminals.⁴² This is clearly not true and was part of his attempt to justify his actions. The Stranglers, in reality, killed many innocent people, whose presence on the frontier detracted from the influence of powerful ranchers such as Granville Stuart.⁴³ Stuart did say that there were fourteen members of Stuart’s Stranglers, but he never mentioned that Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés met with him in order to join the vigilantes. This is a significant observation, for if the Marquis and particularly Roosevelt had wanted to join the Stranglers it would have lent great legitimacy to what Stuart did. The inclusion of Theodore Roosevelt would have certainly shifted attention off Stuart and it would have attested to the legitimacy of the group via the simple connection with Roosevelt’s name, a man who clearly had a great amount of authority in America. It is doubtful that Stuart would have forgotten a meeting with Theodore Roosevelt.⁴⁴ Stuart did specifically mention, on the other hand, that de Morés and Roosevelt were at the Montana Stockmen’s Association in April of 1884, probably because the two men were fairly well known in the Dakota and the Montana Territories and their presence at the gathering was significant.⁴⁵ If he remembered meeting Roosevelt and de Morés in April of 1884, one can conclude that he would have recalled meeting them in June 1884. The fact that Granville Stuart never mentioned meeting with

Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés in June of 1884 severely weakens the credibility of Stuart's wife's testimony.⁴⁶

Theodore Roosevelt's writings coincide with Granville Stuart's in several ways. First, Roosevelt affirmed that he was present with Stuart at the April 1884 Stockmen's Association in Miles City. Second, Roosevelt's account also contains no mention of the June 1884 meeting with Stuart.⁴⁷ Furthermore, when Roosevelt wrote about the Stranglers, which he did in several of his published works, he always mentioned them in the third person.⁴⁸ He referred to the vigilantes as "the stockmen" in *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* and as "they" in his *Autobiography*. Also, it was common for him to point out that the Stranglers killed innocent people.⁴⁹ Just because Roosevelt didn't mention the trip to Glendive is not enough to totally reject Hagedorn's narrative, however. Roosevelt did, in cases, re-write history to his own advantage, but several other primary sources cast further doubt on this claim because none of them make any mention that the meeting between Stuart, the Marquis, and Roosevelt ever occurred. For example, Lincoln Lang, who lived in Medora at the time, chronicled Roosevelt's travels in June of 1884 in his *Autobiography Ranching with Roosevelt* and he never mentioned that Roosevelt made a trip to Glendive in June 1884.⁵⁰

Granville Stuart's widow, Belle Stuart, is the only source to ever claim that Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés made the trip to Glendive to meet her husband. Her account is not a primary source because she was not directly involved with the Stranglers and her testimony is in conflict with other major primary sources. As stated before, an examination of Hermann Hagedorn's interview notes reveals that much of the information from Belle Stuart's interview is questionable and certainly inaccurate.⁵¹ This

suggests that her evidence was simply hearsay. Her testimony has only been accepted over the last century because it was never thoroughly analyzed. Belle Stuart's word should not be valued above the accounts of other people who were more involved with Roosevelt, the Marquis, and the vigilantes at the time.⁵² Lastly, Hagedorn's acceptance of this account becomes even more suspect when one examines the actual activities of Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés in June of 1884.

The information presented in *Roosevelt In The Badlands* states that Roosevelt and the Marquis traveled to meet with Granville Stuart in late June of 1884 before the Strangers began their campaign in July. All of the books that cite *Roosevelt in the Badlands* feature the same schedule. However, Roosevelt's and the Marquis' travel schedules of the entire months of June and July 1884 show that their supposed trip to Glendive in late June 1884, as Hermann Hagedorn proposed it, was impossible given the known whereabouts of the two men. Their travel schedules can be reconstructed through the use of several primary sources. It was not uncommon for small frontier town newspapers to report small personal matters, such as the arrivals and departures of prominent people that were traveling in the area.⁵³ The comings and goings of the two men were covered in newspapers in Medora, St. Paul, Bismarck, and several other locations. Also personal letters construct a matching schedule.

First, the Marquis de Morés was rarely in the Badlands of Dakota and Montana in June and July of 1884, presumably due to business related absences. The Marquis was traveling to Medora on June 6th according to the *Black Hills Daily Times*⁵⁴ after a trip from New York⁵⁵, but he stopped in the Bismarck/Mandan area for a few days⁵⁶ and did not return to the Little Missouri area until June 12th 1884. He then left for Saint Paul,

Minnesota, on June 13th.⁵⁷ Carleton Putnam, who recycled Hagedorn's research, wrote in his *Theodore Roosevelt: The Formative Years...* that the Marquis was likely at the D-S Ranch meeting with Granville Stuart about forming a vigilance committee on June 24th.⁵⁸ The Marquis did not return from St. Paul until June 27th and was, therefore, not even in the area at that time.⁵⁹ De Morés again left Medora for the East on the morning of June 28th, 1884.⁶⁰ The next time he was mentioned arriving in Medora from the East was on Friday, August 1st, 1884.⁶¹ There is not a single day in the Marquis' travel schedule where he could have traveled to Glendive.

Second, Theodore Roosevelt also did a fair amount of traveling in June and July of 1884. Roosevelt had just participated in the Chicago 1884 Republican National Convention as a delegate in late May.⁶² He left Saint Paul on his return to Dakota on June 8th, 1884 according to the *Saint Paul Sunday Globe*.⁶³ He also wrote a letter to his sister, Anna, on June 8th from Saint Paul that confirms the travel information in the newspaper report.⁶⁴ Roosevelt arrived in Medora on June 9th.⁶⁵ Roosevelt purchased a large number of cattle on June 12th at his Maltese Cross Ranch⁶⁶ and that evening the *Saint Paul Daily Globe* interviewed him in Medora over the telegraph wire and the interview was featured in the June 13th paper.⁶⁷ Roosevelt remained within twenty-five miles of Medora for the next few days⁶⁸ and he later mentioned the interview with the *Saint Paul Daily Globe* in a letter written to Henry Cabot Lodge on June 18th from Medora.⁶⁹ Lincoln Lang wrote in his *Autobiography, Ranching With Roosevelt*, that Roosevelt was at his Maltese Cross Ranch, which is five miles from Medora, until he went hunting around June 17th near Medora.⁷⁰ Lang's account matches articles in the *Badlands Cowboy*, which state that Roosevelt was still in the Medora area on June 19th⁷¹ and June 26th.⁷² According to letters

that he sent to his sister, Anna, and Henry Cabot Lodge he was hunting at the Ferris and Merrifield Ranch. He wrote on June 17th, 1884 to his sister that he was planning on returning home to New York in one week, therefore he intended to leave the West on route to the East in the week between Sunday, June 22 and Saturday, June 28th. He made no mention of a trip to Glendive, Montana.⁷³ Roosevelt kept a record of the game he killed in his diary. According to Roosevelt's journal, he was still hunting on June 27th. The page for June 28th is empty and his brief hunting trip must have ended.⁷⁴ Lincoln Lang mentions that Roosevelt was in Medora for a few days in late June before he returned to New York. Presumably, these days are June 28th, 29th, and perhaps part of the 30th ⁷⁵ because Roosevelt arrived in Saint Paul on July 1st, 1884.⁷⁶ The latest he could have left Medora was June 30 because it took a traveler approximately a day to go from Medora to Saint Paul by railroad in 1884.⁷⁷ He continued East from Saint Paul in the evening of the first of July.⁷⁸ Roosevelt was back in New York four days later and he wrote his acquaintance, Bill Sewall, a letter asking him to come out to Dakota and work on his cattle ranch.⁷⁹ He remained in the East for the remainder of the month until he passed through Saint Paul on July 31 on his way from New York.⁸⁰ He did not return to Medora until August 4th, 1884.⁸¹

These travel schedules suggest that it is highly unlikely that both Theodore Roosevelt and Marquis de Morés met with Granville Stuart in order to join the Stranglers. The two men were in Medora for only two nights at the same time in June or July of 1884. These nights were June 12th and June 27th. The Marquis could not have physically gone to Glendive and he could not have had any intention of going out to meet Stuart given the short time he was in Medora. Furthermore, no evidence has been found to

suggest that Roosevelt and the Marquis even met on the night of the 12th or the 27th. Both men were out East for nearly all of July 1884. Also, no mention was made in the *Saint Paul Sunday Globe*, *Badlands Cowboy*, or any surviving newspaper article from the Little Missouri area that Roosevelt or the Marquis ever made a trip west to Glendive, Montana, in late June or July 1884, as asserted by Hermann Hagedorn.

Additionally, Roosevelt's letters never mention a trip to Glendive. This paper appears to be the first work to use some of Roosevelt's letters to dispute Hermann Hagedorn's contention. First, if one reads his June and July 1884 letters to Henry Cabot Lodge, or to his sister, Anna Roosevelt, one can see that he is very specific about where he has gone, what he has done, where he was while writing the letters, and where he was planning to go.⁸² Roosevelt never mentioned to his friends or family through letters that he was going out to Montana in June 1884.⁸³ Second, one can also read that he had other things on his mind at the time that the vigilantes were active and when Hagedorn suggested that he had traveled to meet with Stuart. The Stranglers were planning to go into action in July 1884 as previously stated. Roosevelt, on the other hand, had been planning as early as June 17th, 1884, to be back in New York from the beginning of July to the beginning of August.⁸⁴

Furthermore, Roosevelt also planned to go on a two month long hunting trip as soon as he returned to Dakota in August. He wrote to his sister Anna on June 17th, "I intend to take a two months trip in the Fall, for hunting... as politics look now, stay away over Election day".⁸⁵ Election Day 1884 was on November 4th.⁸⁶ The vigilantes were still hanging people as late as August 28th, 1884.⁸⁷ If on June 17th Roosevelt was intending to

be hunting from August until Election Day, then it is logical to conclude that he had no intention of riding with the Stranglers in the late summer and fall of 1884.

Third, if the above isn't enough, Roosevelt was greatly occupied with politics in June 1884 because he was a former New York Assemblyman⁸⁸ and because he had just served as a delegate to the GOP National Convention.⁸⁹ He was interviewed in Saint Paul about politics and he kept himself busy corresponding with Henry Cabot Lodge and other political figures over the latest political news while he was hunting. He wrote on June 18 to Lodge, "I shall be east about one week after you get this letter... I wish to see you at once; I am very anxious you should take no steps hastily".⁹⁰ The information regarding Roosevelt's whereabouts in June and July 1884 in area newspaper reports, Roosevelt's personal letters, and the recollections of Lincoln Lang coincide. One can see from these sources that Roosevelt was no where near Granville Stuart in June 1884, and never planned to join the Stranglers according to Roosevelt's summer 1884 schedule or his priority list. While Stuart's vigilantes were chasing after outlaws, the future president was chasing his political dragons in the East and was starting a cattle business in the West. Documented evidence reveals it was highly unlikely that Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés met with Granville Stuart in June or July of 1884. Hagedorn's claim is highly dubious in light of this evidence.

This paper has discussed the assertion made by Hermann Hagedorn that Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés had a desire to become vigilantes. Additionally, this paper has demonstrated how Hagedorn's claim was based on hearsay and how the account conflicts with what we know of the two men's travel schedules. Yet, part of the story remains untold. Hermann Hagedorn remained the dominant Roosevelt historian

from Roosevelt's death until the mid 20th century.⁹¹ As stated previously, a vast majority of the major Roosevelt monographs written in the last century have included Hagedorn's vigilante assertion due to Hagedorn's preeminence.⁹² One can conclude that, with the acceptance of Hagedorn's assertion, historians who study Theodore Roosevelt's life, the Marquis de Morés, and general frontier history have largely accepted that Roosevelt and the Marquis agreed with the morality of vigilantism. This work has raised reasonable doubts that Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés ever attempted to join Stuart's Stranglers. Historians have largely assumed that Roosevelt agreed with vigilantism due to the blind acceptance of Hagedorn's account. This faulty assumption of facts has led to a second deviation in historical interpretation. This deviation relates to the underlying views of Roosevelt and de Morés because the two men were actually opposed to vigilantism. The next section of the paper will briefly contextualize the history of western vigilantism, the actions of the Stranglers, and how Roosevelt's and the Marquis' worldviews were not compatible with vigilante justice.

Cattle ranching in North America can trace its roots to Spanish conquistadores who brought old world-livestock with them over the ocean in the 16th century.⁹³ The trade remained solely in the southeastern part of the United States until the 19th century. Ranching began to spread in the 1820s from the region of its origin to less developed country in the southern part of the U.S.⁹⁴ due to overcrowding.⁹⁵ Stockmen steadily expanded their operation northwards as the 19th century continued. The vast grasslands to the north of cattle territory that fed herds of bison were very appealing to cattle ranchers in the mid 19th century as a grazing source for their cattle.⁹⁶ Cattle owners began to drive

their cattle northward after the end of the American Civil War towards these unsettled prairies.⁹⁷ Six hundred thousand cattle would graze the range in Montana by 1883.⁹⁸

Cattle ranchers who were active on the western frontier of the mid to late 19th century rarely owned the land that their cattle grazed.⁹⁹ They would allow their cattle to scatter and graze on public lands known as “open range” instead of fencing in their cattle as ranchers do today.¹⁰⁰ Granville Stuart wrote that Montana cattlemen collectively had \$35,000,000.00 worth of livestock scattered across 75,000 square miles of vacant prairies.¹⁰¹ Organized ranchers would come together every spring to separate their cattle that had mingled together as they wandered the open range.¹⁰² Yet, the race for control over the rangelands often caused friction between competing groups. Another problem was that the vast open spaces and the general mixing of livestock left cattle quite unprotected. As a consequence, cattle were frequently stolen on the open grazing land. Rustling was, in fact, so simple and frequent that organized bands of rustlers were able to make great profit from their thefts.¹⁰³

Ranchers, on the other hand, had very few external resources to protect their cattle and respond to the theft of their livestock.¹⁰⁴ Aid from local government and law enforcement was generally inadequate at this time to respond to the ongoing cattle rustling on the frontier.¹⁰⁵ Bob Kennon, a deputy sheriff in Montana at the end of the 19th century, recalled that the vast landscape and a lack of resources made it very hard for law enforcement to track down cattle and horse rustlers.¹⁰⁶ This absence of law enforcement left ranchers on their own to deal with the problem of livestock rustling and the clashes between rustlers and ranchers were often violent and lacked due process.¹⁰⁷ Ranchers often responded to the theft of their cattle along vast open range, which lacked social

structure and law enforcement, with vigilantism.¹⁰⁸ However, vigilantism was also a means by which certain groups could gain control over the open range.¹⁰⁹ Citizens of the area and even some government officials, including John Schuyler Crosby, the territorial governor of Montana in 1884, supported this violence.¹¹⁰ The same men who were in the process of organizing the western frontier through special legislation, stock growers' associations, and mass roundups also took the law into their own hands and led secret lives of vigilantism. "Stuart's Stranglers" would become one of the most notorious of these vigilante groups.¹¹¹

"Stuart's Stranglers", who rode through Montana territory in the spring and summer of 1884, became famous to the people of the West through newspaper reports and tales that were often greatly exaggerated with each telling.¹¹² In reality, the bloodshed that can be attributed to this group is comparably small to many other western conflicts.¹¹³ The number of people killed by the Stranglers has been estimated to be as low as eighteen, but a study conducted in 1960 found that the vigilantes killed sixty-three people.¹¹⁴ However many were killed, none of the victims were given a trial and the actions of these vigilantes revealed that they didn't care who they killed. Granville Stuart claimed that their sole mission was to eradicate crime and establish "a form of public order".¹¹⁵ However, there were other incentives for vigilante violence.¹¹⁶ The most powerful ranchers financially supported the vigilantes and it was clearly the intention of the Stranglers to increase the power and influence of these well to do ranchers. Theodore Roosevelt was conscious of this reality because he wrote in his *Autobiography* that the Stranglers were supported by "the big cattle-growers".¹¹⁷ Stuart's Stranglers often targeted lower class citizens of the Montana frontier, who were of mixed race, "lived

near criminals...” or who were actually criminals. The difference between a criminal and a noncriminal didn’t matter to the stranglers.¹¹⁸ The authors of Granville Stuart’s biography, Clyde A. Milner and Carol A. Connor, argue that the main purpose of the vigilantes was to gain control of the cattle range in Montana, rather than to stop cattle rustling.¹¹⁹ Stuart would attempt to justify the actions of the Stranglers for the rest of his life, but the fact that many innocent people were killed can never be justified.¹²⁰ The main goal of Stuart’s Stranglers was to stop rustling and to gain control over the open range in Montana.

A list of men who were likely members of the Stranglers can be found in the journals of Granville Stuart.¹²¹ The men of the list have largely been forgotten to history. The names of Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés are not on this list. It seems that neither man was ever involved with the lynching of criminals on the frontier.

The Marquis de Morés certainly had no qualms about killing people. He once implied that he was willing to have a duel with Theodore Roosevelt to settle a dispute,¹²² but the duel never occurred because Roosevelt made it clear that the dispute was a single misunderstanding.¹²³ De Morés did, however, fight in a series of duels in June 1892 related to his anti-Semitic activities¹²⁴ and he killed a Jewish military officer named Captain Joseph Mayer with a sword.¹²⁵ The Marquis later defended his entrance into the duel by stating that his opponent was skilled with weapons and he was defending himself.¹²⁶ It seems that the Marquis fought the duels in order to defend his honor. The Marquis was also involved in a gunfight near the Little Missouri River on June 26th, 1883, where a well-liked young hunter, Riley Luffsey, was killed.¹²⁷ The fight was the result of a land dispute between the Marquis and Luffsey’s companions¹²⁸, who were

hunters. Both sides claimed that the other was to blame for starting the fight.¹²⁹ It is possible that one of the hunters had threatened to kill de Morés prior to the shooting.¹³⁰ Two years later the Marquis was put on trial in Bismarck for the murder of Riley Luffsey and acquitted¹³¹, but many contemporary historians feel that the Marquis and his men had indeed ambushed Luffsey's group.¹³² It seems that the Marquis was more than willing to kill his enemies, especially if they had threatened him, but he fought rustling with a structured approach.

The memoir of Granville Stuart makes it sound as though Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés were willing to stop at nothing to put an end to livestock rustling. Stuart wrote that the Marquis argued at the Montana Stockmen's Association meeting in Miles City that the solution to cattle and horse rustling was to start an all out "range war" and that he was strongly supported by Theodore Roosevelt.¹³³ If one reads Stuart's memoir it sounds as though the Marquis was advocating for a massive crackdown on the frontier that would result in a bloody catastrophe.¹³⁴ It is important to ask, however, what the Marquis really meant when he said, "range war", if he said it at all. Granville Stuart was not all that specific about describing the position of de Morés. He recounted two small quotes from the Marquis from a long discussion. One must also remember that Stuart was trying to justify the Strangler's actions after the fact, and the account of the meeting could have been written to sway history to his side.

A better way to gauge the Marquis' solution to rustling is by looking at his actions. Where Granville Stuart's men hanged anyone who was suspicious, the Marquis, in comparison, had a different solution regarding livestock rustling. He did not simply organize a gang of "questionable characters" to address the thieves, but he took a more

structured approach. He was always in favor of taking care of cattle rustlers publicly, and was opposed to Stuart's solution that involved secrecy.¹³⁵ De Morés, on the other hand, commissioned the Pinkerton National Detective Agency to gather information about the area criminals. He developed a plan with a Pinkerton agent in St. Paul. First, the agent would penetrate the rustler horde of western Dakota Territory. Second, the agent would find out who its leaders were, and third, report back to the Marquis. This history is preserved in a letter between the Marquis and the Pinkertons.¹³⁶ When the Marquis obtained the proper information he formed a posse and captured the ringleaders of the thieves. Technically citizen's arrest is a form of vigilantism, but the Marquis' methods were very different than Stuart's. He made an attempt at a structured investigation and he did not go around hanging random people.¹³⁷ A.T. Packard, who was the editor of the *Badlands Cowboy* and was against vigilantism, was initially opposed to the activity of the Marquis' posse. D. Jerome Tweton of the University of North Dakota wrote in his biography of the Marquis de Morés that Packard later came to understand that the Marquis' approach was different and far more civilized than Stuart's.¹³⁸ Packard wrote, "the result of their work has been very wholesome".¹³⁹ The Marquis may not have lynched anyone and he may have used a civil procedure to stop cattle rustling, but this does not necessarily mean that he was concerned for the humanity of the rustlers, nor is there any evidence to suggest that he was opposed to vigilantism. Rather, he may have preferred this style simply because it was more practical and accurate. Also, the controversial killing of Riley Luffsey had occurred exactly a year prior to the supposed meeting with Stuart and the shooting was still fresh in people's memories. In fact, there was a faction that desired to lynch the Marquis himself in response to the death.¹⁴⁰ De

Morés would have wanted to maintain a low profile, rather than become connected to more killing on the frontier especially near this anniversary.¹⁴¹ His fear of backlash perhaps prevented him from resorting to vigilantism. Nevertheless, the Marquis' solution to rustling was not the bloody war that Stuart implied, but rather it utilized a structured investigation, which was in stark contrast to the methods preferred by the Stranglers.

An individual who subscribed to vigilantism would have had no moral opposition to the lynching of criminals on the frontier without trial.¹⁴² Theodore Roosevelt believed, on the contrary, that the importance of human rights exceeded those of property rights.¹⁴³ Years after his time in the Badlands he wrote that the only way to honor God is by “loving our neighbor, treating him justly and mercifully, and in all ways endeavoring to protect him from injustice and cruelty”.¹⁴⁴ Theodore Roosevelt did not feel that the work of Stuart's Stranglers was just and merciful because vigilantism did not coincide with Theodore Roosevelt's moral code. Historical interpretation of these topics has been greatly influenced by Belle Stuart's interview with Hermann Hagedorn. Now, this interview shall be contrasted with Roosevelt's moral code and how he actually treated criminals of the frontier.

Research has largely assumed that Roosevelt morally accepted vigilantism due to the last century of Hagedorn-influenced Roosevelt historiography. A work on this topic must thoroughly analyze Roosevelt's moral views on vigilantism. Theodore Roosevelt was always opposed to a private vigilante movement and the lynching of criminals.

Roosevelt wrote about Stuart's Stranglers as well as general frontier vigilante activity a number of times. Historians over the last one hundred years have simply assumed that Roosevelt desired to join the Stranglers and that these words were written

by a man who supported vigilantism. Roosevelt's statements regarding vigilantism can seem supportive of vigilantes if read out of context, particularly if that context indicates the narrative that has descended from Hermann Hagedorn's *Roosevelt in the Badlands*. Readers can come to a different and more accurate understanding of what Roosevelt was trying to express if they read his writing in its entirety and in the proper context.

Roosevelt wrote for example, "the vigilantes, by a series of summary executions, do really good work; but they [more often than not] kill one or two by mistake or to gratify private malice"¹⁴⁵ Cited in Clay Jenkinson's book, *A Free and Hardy Life*, the author argued that while Roosevelt was against the lynching of African Americans, "he had a kind of romantic sympathy for frontier vigilantism".¹⁴⁶ The origin of this quote is unknown because Jenkinson offers no citation, because the purpose of his book is not academic in nature. This argument was, of course, in light of Belle Stuart's testimony. It is hard to notice a "kind of romantic sympathy", however, if one focuses on the last part of the excerpt in the context of this paper's evidence. One can see that Roosevelt was simply communicating that the Stranglers effectively defeated cattle rustling but at the expense of the lives of innocent people. There is no romance here.

This quote is not unique, however. Whenever Roosevelt wrote about the Stranglers, he would usually point out, just as he did in the previous excerpt, that they were effective in stopping cattle rustling, but then he would almost always mention that they killed innocent people. For example, "a committee of vigilantes had been organized to take action against the rustlers... [The] stranglers... did their work thoroughly; but as always...toward the end they grew reckless... paid off private grudges, and hung men at the slightest provocation".¹⁴⁷ He is really holding them accountable for their excessive

actions, rather than giving them credit for stopping crime on the frontier. Furthermore, Theodore Roosevelt's actual response to crime greatly differed from that of the Stranglers.

Roosevelt frequently wrote that criminal activity should not be tolerated and that people have the right to defend themselves. For example, he wrote in *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* that the first step to introducing "decent government" to the frontier was by "putting down" such criminals.¹⁴⁸ He also wrote in his *Autobiography* that crimes, with a "revolting baseness of cruelty... {could} never be forgiven".¹⁴⁹ He hated to see criminals go unpunished and he believed that sometimes "ruthless severity" was necessary.¹⁵⁰ Theodore Roosevelt's idea of putting down such criminals did not include vigilantism, however. It is clear from his writing, and especially his actions that he believed that the only circumstance where an individual could take a life was to defend another¹⁵¹ and that he was more than willing to defend himself, but he left it to the legal system to determine the reparations for a particular crime.¹⁵² The actions Roosevelt took to defend himself and his property will demonstrate that he did not subscribe to vigilantism.

Roosevelt encountered a band of criminals in the spring of 1886. Massive ice jams called ox-bow jams had filled the banks of the Little Missouri River for miles making travel across the river very difficult. Roosevelt owned a "clinker-built boat" so he and his ranch hands could ferry themselves across the river. One of Roosevelt's employees discovered on a March morning that the boat was missing and the rope that had secured it had been cut.¹⁵³ Roosevelt knew that a small band of thieves, who lived twenty miles away from Roosevelt on the river, had stolen his boat. A group of vigilantes was pursuing these thieves. The thieves were on the move because the vigilantes intended

to lynch them. The river was swollen at the time and it was impossible for horses to cross it, therefore, travel by boat was the only option for the thieves. The thieves had their own boat, but stole Roosevelt's when they came across it because it was superior to their own.¹⁵⁴ Bill Sewall, who was one of Roosevelt's hired men, recalled that the odds of them catching the thieves were very low if they made chase¹⁵⁵, but Roosevelt hated to see criminals escape from justice. Therefore, he wanted to try and venture into the wilderness to pursue the thieves even though the odds were against him. Roosevelt wrote, "In any wild country where the power of the law is little felt...every one has to rely upon himself for protection... {Many feel} that it is unwise to submit to any wrong without making an immediate and resolute effort to avenge upon it".¹⁵⁶ Roosevelt also wrote that the only way to introduce a "decent government" into the frontier was to "put down" the members of this criminal "class".¹⁵⁷ Many, including the ranchers who were already trying to lynch the criminals would have said vigilantism was the means by which this class should be "put down". Roosevelt's actions, on the other hand, will show that his retaliation against outlaws came in a different form.

Roosevelt's employees built a boat out of boards, which took three days to complete, and then they set out on the dangerous river after the boat thieves.¹⁵⁸ Roosevelt's party continued down the river through a fierce blizzard for three days until they came across their stolen boat tied on the shore of the river. There they captured the three thieves who stole their boat, but their capture left Roosevelt a problem. He realized that if they tied them up the lack of blood flow to their extremities would cause their hands and feet to freeze during the night, so the captors had to keep careful guard over the prisoners.¹⁵⁹ This problem would never have troubled a man of a vigilante's

temperament because such a person would have just killed the criminals on the spot, rather than worrying about their general well-being. The journey was only half over at this point, however, because Roosevelt still had to march them across the cold prairie to the authorities. They were nearly out of food eight days later by the time they reached the C Diamond ranch. There, the owner of the ranch couldn't understand "why I took so much bother with the thieves instead of hanging them off-hand".¹⁶⁰ Roosevelt was not inclined to such justice. His companions continued on a different path from there leaving Roosevelt to escort the criminals on a thirty-six sleepless hour journey across the prairie to the nearest town, Dickinson. Roosevelt remarked that the journey was very cold and sleepless. The group arrived in Dickinson where Roosevelt turned the men over to the local sheriff.¹⁶¹ Vigilante tales do not usually end in a sheriff's office. The journey had been very arduous and Roosevelt, being completely exhausted and in need of medical aid visited Dr. Victor Hugo Stickney, who was the only doctor in the western Dakota Territory. Dr. Stickney wrote, "[H]e was all teeth and eyes. His clothes were in rags from forcing his way through the rosebushes that covered the river bottoms. He was scratched, bruised, and hungry, but gritty and determined as a bulldog". Stickney's account is important because it suggests that the accounts of Roosevelt and Sewall are generally accurate. The doctor's point of view matches with Roosevelt's narrative and it illustrates how difficult Roosevelt's journey with the boat thieves was. Dr. Stickney told his wife an hour after he treated Roosevelt that he had just met the most remarkable person.¹⁶² The ranchers of the area, on the other hand, such as the owner of the C Diamond ranch, were confused after hearing about Roosevelt's journey, rather than impressed. Several cattlemen, who lived near Medora, told Roosevelt that he was a "fool for bothering so

much with those fellows” and were confused why he didn’t just kill the criminals when he captured them. Theodore Roosevelt said to them that he had no intention of killing anyone, but he only desired to defend himself .¹⁶³

Many people who lived in the West in the 19th century would have executed the boat thieves, who had apparently committed multiple crimes, upon capture rather than going through the trouble of marching them to Dickinson as Roosevelt did. Roosevelt captured the boat thieves because his understanding of justice was very different from the majority of people who lived in the western part of the Dakota Territory at the end of the 19th century. Roosevelt’s moral beliefs were not compatible with vigilantism as his actions demonstrate. Theodore Roosevelt wrote the following in *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*. “Be it remarked, ...while the outcome of their [the Stranglers] efforts had been in the main wholesome, several of... [their victims] had been perfectly innocent”.¹⁶⁴ This quote again follows the same critique that Roosevelt used when he would talk about the Stranglers, but another point can be made. This excerpt was written in the opening pages of the boat thieves narrative. Roosevelt was contrasting his own actions with those of the vigilantes. He made note of what the vigilantes did, and he offers an alternative solution, which allows individuals to defend themselves by turning criminals over to the law instead of taking the law into their own hands. The narrative, in its entirety, makes the assertion that people should not assume that they are the source of justice just because a crime has been committed against them and it actually critiques vigilantism.

Given all of the foregoing, it seems highly unlikely that Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés met with Granville Stuart in late June 1884, that they ever desired to become members of the Stranglers, or that either man resorted to simply-minded and

bloody vigilantism to put an end to crime on the frontier. But two questions remain: why did Belle Stuart tell Hermann Hagedorn a fabricated story, and why did Hagedorn include Belle Stuart's account into *Roosevelt in the Badlands* if there was reason to question the accuracy of her statements?

Logically speaking, Belle Stuart either downright lied, was not cognizant of what she was saying, her memory was faulty and she misconstrued details, or she retold the story as it was told to her by her husband Granville Stuart. Perhaps her account was the result of a combination of the above possibilities. Granville Stuart would have told her about meeting Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés at the Stockmen's Association Meetings in Miles City in April of 1884. He also may have mentioned that Roosevelt and the Marquis desired to take action against livestock rustlers on the frontier. A careful reading of the notes from Hagedorn's interview reveals that Belle Stuart's account was erroneous because of a faulty memory.¹⁶⁵ Belle Stuart most likely told Hagedorn that Roosevelt and de Morés met with Stuart to become vigilantes because she was told about the April 1884 Stockmen's meeting years before the interview, but simply got the details wrong. She is the only person to tell this story in any case.¹⁶⁶

Hermann Hagedorn wrote in the preface, "I have made every effort to verify my narrative", yet his own notes taken during his interview with Belle Stuart suggest that her claim was not reliable.¹⁶⁷ Why did Hagedorn include Belle Stuart's testimony if he had reason to doubt her accuracy and memory? First, Hagedorn based much of *Roosevelt in the Badlands*, which is nearly 500 pages long, on personal interviews. Belle Stuart's account occupies a mere five pages. It is a thread in a tapestry and Hagedorn, along with all succeeding historians, likely spent little time verifying its accuracy. Second, it is

possible that Hagedorn was motivated to include the story because it was simply interesting. He desired to portray Theodore Roosevelt as a captivating western hero and perhaps he included Belle Stuart's account because it was intriguing. Hagedorn was willing to adjust history in an attempt to make Roosevelt look more virtuous and interesting throughout the course of his entire book. The fact that he included such a doubtful story makes sense under this circumstance.

Hagedorn's argument that Roosevelt and the Marquis desired to become vigilantes was derived from a faulty source and historians since have included the account into their works. This hearsay, as a result, has spread to all the major Roosevelt monographs of the 20th century and has changed a century of historical interpretation. This paper has compared Hagedorn's narrative to primary sources in order to correct this erroneous telling of history. The conclusion of this research is that Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morés never desired to join Stuart's Stranglers, and that Theodore Roosevelt was morally opposed to vigilantism.

End Notes

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The *Bismarck Weekly Tribune* reported on July 4th, 1884 that Theodore Roosevelt was still in Medora. However, according to Roosevelt's letter to Bill Sewall, Roosevelt was in New York on July 6th. It took five days to travel from Medora to New York in 1884 (Di Silvestro, page 35), therefore, the report in the *Bismarck Weekly Tribune* is incorrect. Furthermore, it conflicts with the July 2nd report in the *Saint Paul Daily Globe*, which states that Roosevelt arrived in Saint Paul on July 1st, 1884.

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148. Roosevelt, *Ranch Life*, 114-115.
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158. William Wingate Sewall, 63.
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160. Ibid., 121-126.
161. Ibid., 126-128.
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