

The State of Nevada v. Eugene Austin: A Tragic Story of Homicide and Incarceration in the American Southwest [Abstract]

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Eugene Austin (1923-1980) was a member of the Lovelock Paiute Tribe of Nevada. The product of an impoverished and dysfunctional family and a former pupil of an off-reservation boarding school, Austin was a troubled and unhappy youth who yearned to escape the sparse opportunities and lack of mobility available to Native peoples of rural Nevada. In 1941, he was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison. He spent the next thirty-three years at the Nevada State Prison in Carson City, longer than any other inmate in the institution's history. He endured inhumane treatment during his incarceration, was lobotomized, and in 1974 was eventually paroled to a convalescent home in California. His arrest, trial, and incarceration reveal a number of tragic missteps in a criminal justice system that often failed to understand or accommodate the unique needs and circumstances posed by Native American offenders in the Southwest.

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