

*An exploration of the historical record to find the man who became a mythic borderlands terror*

## Son of Vengeance

*Searching for the Legendary Apache Rafael*

By Bradley Folsom

Since the early 1800s, the violent exploits of “El Indio” Rafael through the settlements of northern New Spain have become the stuff of myth and legend. For some, the fabled Apache was a hero, an indigenous Robin Hood who fought oppressive Spaniards to help the dispossessed and downtrodden. For others, he was little more than a merciless killer. In *Son of Vengeance*, Bradley Folsom sets out to find the real Rafael—to extract the true story from the scant historical record and superabundance of speculation. What he uncovers is that many of the legends about Rafael were true: he was both daring and one of the most prolific serial killers in North American history.

Rafael was born into an Apache family, but from a young age he was raised by Spanish chaplain Rafael Nevares, who took his indigenous prodigy out on patrol with local soldiers and taught him to speak Spanish and practice Catholicism. Rafael’s forced assimilation heightened the tension between his ancestry and the Hispanic environment and spurred him to violence. Sifting Spanish military and government documents, church records, contemporary newspapers, and eyewitness accounts, Folsom reveals a three-dimensional historical figure whose brutality was matched and abetted by great ingenuity—and by a deep, long-standing hostility between the Spanish and the Apaches of New Spain. The early years of tutelage under Nevares also, perversely, contributed to Rafael’s brutal success. Rather than leading to a life of Christian piety and Spanish loyalty, the knowledge Rafael gained from his mentor served instead to help him evade his pursuers and the law, at least for a time.

In *Son of Vengeance*, we see the real El Indio Rafael for the first time—the man behind the cultural myth, and the historical forces and circumstances that framed and propelled his feats of violence.

**Bradley Folsom** is Professor of History at Grayson College in Denison, Texas, and is the author of *Arredondo: Last Spanish Ruler of Texas and Northeastern New Spain*.

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