



## NMSU Library News Release

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### **Program on Local Cricket Coogler Murder Mystery Sponsored by University Library**

Santa Fe filmmakers Charlie Cullin and Richard Startzman will give a presentation on the making of the documentary film, *The Silence of Cricket Coogler: A Political Murder and Cover-up*, at the New Mexico State University Library on Friday, March 22, 2002. The free public program, sponsored by the Library, will take place at 3:30 p.m. on Branson Library's second floor east.

There will be two showings of the film *The Silence of Cricket Coogler* at the Fountain Theater in Mesilla on Saturday, March 23, at 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. The feature-length documentary covers all aspects of Ovida (Cricket) Coogler's unsolved murder that changed history in Las Cruces and New Mexico. On Thursday, March 31, 1949, Coogler was last seen alive when she entered an official state car on Main Street in downtown Las Cruces at 3:00 a.m. Her body was found seventeen days later in a shallow grave south of Las Cruces. Jerry Nuzum, a professional football player and former Aggie, was arrested for the murder and then released for lack of evidence.

Students at the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, now New Mexico State University, were so enraged by Nuzum's arrest that they submitted a petition to the governor requesting a grand jury be appointed to investigate the Coogler murder case. The district grand jury was convened but it was unable to indict anyone for Coogler's murder. However, the murder investigation resulted in the removal of the sheriff from office and the shutdown of local gambling joints. According to Cullin, a former journalist and public relations specialist who once headed the New Mexico Film Commission, the grand jury would not give up. It handed down fifty-eight indictments brought against twenty-five people.

Nuzum, a Clovis native and star running back for the Pittsburgh Steelers, was interviewed for the documentary before his death in 1997. Walt Finley, who covered the story as a reporter for the El Paso Herald Post, and several grand jurors also tell their stories. The documentary produced by Cullin and Startzman, an award-winning cinematographer, is narrated in part by the late John Ehrlichman with commentary by Tony Hillerman. In the documentary, Hillerman says "this strange little murder, and the incredible effort to cover it up, caused a kind of outrage that cleaned up New Mexico."

This program is a Special Collections Event of the University Library. For more information please call Cheryl Wilson at 646-3279 or email [chwilson@lib.nmsu.edu](mailto:chwilson@lib.nmsu.edu). The program is made possible by an American Library Association Reference and User Services Facts on File Grant for current events programming.