



Notorious Outlaws of the Wild West: The Lives and Legacies of Jesse James, Billy the Kid, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures of the outlaws and important people, places, and events in their lives.

*Discusses the myths and legends surrounding the lives and deaths of each outlaw.

*Includes a Bibliography for further reading.

“There is a hell of excitement in this part of the country.” – Jesse James

"I'm not afraid to die like a man fighting, but I would not like to be killed like a dog unarmed." – Billy the Kid

The Wild West has made legends out of many men after their deaths, but like Wild Bill Hickok, Jesse James was a celebrity during his life. However, while Hickok was (mostly) a lawman, Jesse James was and remains the most famous outlaw of the Wild West, with both his life of crime and his death remaining pop culture fixtures. Eventually James, his brother and their infamous gang became the most hunted outlaws in the country, but Jesse would famously be done in by the brother of his most trusted gang members. After Jesse moved in with the Ford brothers, Bob Ford began secretly negotiating turning in the famous outlaw to Missouri Governor Thomas Crittenden. On April 3, 1882, as the gang prepared for another robbery, Jesse was famously shot in the back of the head by Bob Ford as he stood on a chair fixing a painting. While conspiracy theories have continued to linger that somehow James was not killed on that day, the Ford brothers would celebrate their participation in his murder, Bob himself would be murdered a few years later, and Jesse James's legacy had been ensured.


Alongside Jesse James, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid were two of the most notorious outlaws of the west. The duo had a full-fledged gang known as the Wild Bunch conducting robberies in the Southwest, and they became legendary for their shootouts and their escapes from the law. Eventually, Butch Cassidy and his most famous acquaintance fled as far east as New York City and as far south as Argentina. In fact, it was in South America that Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid are believed to have met their ultimate fate, in yet another shootout with Bolivian soldiers. The mystery and controversy surrounding that shootout (and whether the two bandits were actually them) have helped ensure their place in Western lore, and as with so many other legends of the West, people continue to speculate that Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid survived and lived out the rest of their lives.

In many ways, the narrative of the Wild West has endured more as legend than reality, and a perfect example of that can be found in the legend of William Henry McCarty Jr., better known as William H. Bonney or “Billy the Kid”. Indeed, separating fact from fiction when it comes to the life of the West's most famous outlaw is nearly impossible, due in great measure to the fact that the young man himself cultivated the image of a deadly outlaw and legendary gunman himself. Though Billy the Kid may have killed anywhere from 4-9 men in his short life, he was often credited for killing more than 20.

With a wit as quick as his trigger, Billy the Kid had a bullet and a wisecrack for every man he killed, and his notoriety only grew when exaggerated accounts of his actions in Lincoln County eventually earned The Kid a bounty on his head. There was plenty of gunplay in the outlaw's life to help him become a well known if not celebrated figure in the West, but the legendary and controversial nature of his death has also helped him endure.

Notorious Outlaws of the Wild West chronicles the lives and careers of the West's most famous outlaws, discusses the myths and legends surrounding their crimes and deaths, and analyzes their enduring legacies.

Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Jesse James, Billy the Kid and Butch Cassidy like you never have before.

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