



The Top 5 Most Notorious Outlaws: Jesse James, Billy the Kid, John Dillinger, an

Charles River Editors

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*Covers the lives, crimes, and deaths of the outlaws.

*Explains the legends and myths surrounding all of the outlaws in an attempt to separate fact from fiction.

*Includes pictures of important people, places, and events.

*Includes Bibliographies for further reading.

America has always preferred heroes who weren't clean cut, an informal ode to the rugged individualism and pioneering spirit that defined the nation in previous centuries. The early 19th century saw the glorification of frontier folk heroes like Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone. After the Civil War, the outlaws of the West were more popular than the marshals, with Jesse James and Billy the Kid finding their way into dime novels. And at the height of the Great Depression in the 1930s, there were the "public enemies", common criminals and cold blooded murderers elevated to the level of folk heroes by a public frustrated with their own inability to make a living honestly.

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 robber, Jesse was famously shot in the back of the head by Bob Ford as he stood on a chair fixing a painting. 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.

Two months after Franklin D. Roosevelt's inauguration in 1933, a petty thief who had spent almost a decade behind bars for attempted theft and aggravated assault was released from jail. By the end of the year, that man, John Dillinger, would be America's most famous outlaw: Public Enemy Number One. From the time of his first documented heist in early July 1933, until his dramatic death in late July of the following year, he would capture the nation's attention and imagination as had no other outlaw since Jesse James.

There was no shortage of well known public enemies like John Dillinger and Baby Face Nelson, but none fascinated the American public as much as Bonnie and Clyde. While the duo and their Barrow Gang were no more murderous than other outlaws of the era, the duo's romantic relationship and the discovery of photographs at one of their hideouts added a more human dimension to Bonnie and Clyde, even as they were gunning down civilians and cops alike. When Bonnie and Clyde were finally cornered and killed in a controversial encounter with police, a fate they shared with many other outlaws of the period, their reputations were cemented.

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