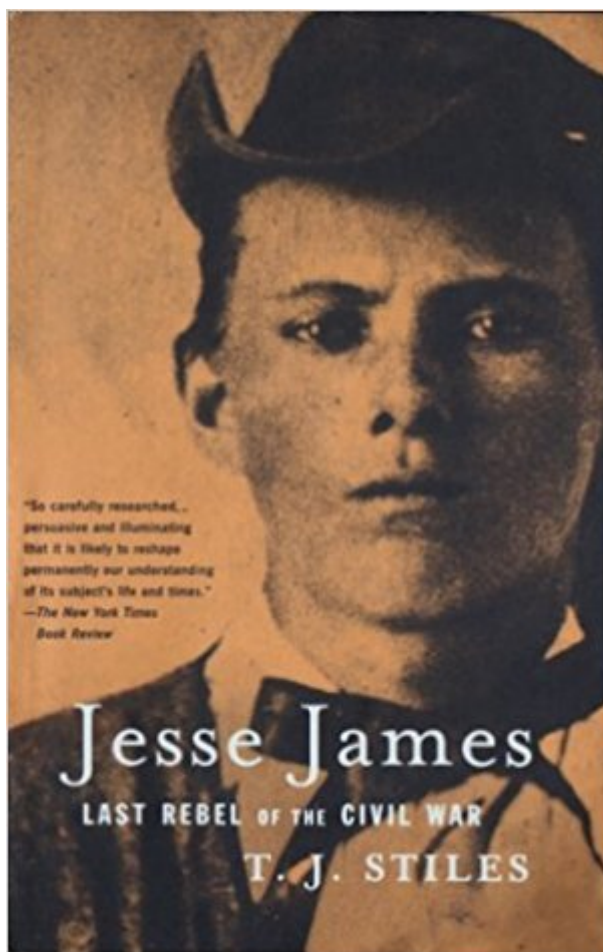


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Jesse James: Last Rebel Of The Civil War



Synopsis

In this brilliant biography T. J. Stiles offers a new understanding of the legendary outlaw Jesse James. Although he has often been portrayed as a Robin Hood of the old west, in this ground-breaking work Stiles places James within the context of the bloody conflicts of the Civil War to reveal a much more complicated and significant figure. Raised in a fiercely pro-slavery household in bitterly divided Missouri, at age sixteen James became a bushwhacker, one of the savage Confederate guerrillas that terrorized the border states. After the end of the war, James continued his campaign of robbery and murder into the brutal era of reconstruction, when his reckless daring, his partisan pronouncements, and his alliance with the sympathetic editor John Newman Edwards placed him squarely at the forefront of the former Confederates' bid to recapture political power. With meticulous research and vivid accounts of the dramatic adventures of the famous gunman, T. J. Stiles shows how he resembles not the apolitical hero of legend, but rather a figure ready to use violence to command attention for a political cause—in many ways, a forerunner of the modern terrorist.

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Customer Reviews

Probably no American outlaw has attracted more attention--much of it flattering--than Jesse James. This revisionist biography by T.J. Stiles delves into the exciting life James led--"a tale of ambushes, gun battles, and daring raids, of narrow escapes, betrayals, and revenge." Yet it also places James within a specific political context, showing why it was possible for this murderous bandit to emerge

as a folk hero among Southern sympathizers following the Civil War (in which he fought as a teenager). James is often grouped with famous frontier criminals like Billy the Kidd and Butch Cassidy, but he's best understood as a Southerner who forged partisan alliances in postwar Missouri and promoted himself as a latter-day Robin Hood. Stiles describes James as "a foul-mouthed killer who hated as fiercely as anyone on the planet" and places his life in the context of "the struggle for--or rather, against--black freedom." Stiles's fundamental point about James is as startling as it is convincing: "In his political consciousness and close alliance with a propagandist and power broker, in his efforts to win media attention with his crimes ... Jesse James was a forerunner of the modern terrorist." Tough words, but also deserved. --John J. Miller --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In a lucid reexamination of one of the nation's most notorious outlaws, independent historian Stiles argues that Jesse James (1847-1882), like his fellow "bushwhackers," had a political agenda and that this made him more terrorist than bandit, and more significant than we credit. "He was," Stiles says, "a political partisan [wh0] eagerly offered himself up as a polarizing symbol of the Confederate project for postwar Missouri." By the age of 16, James was engaged in guerilla warfare against Union forces; when the war was over he remained a staunch and outspoken ex-Confederate. His letters to friend and newspaper editor John Newman Edwards, in which he described himself as "the target of unjustified, vindictive persecution," and exonerative articles published about him after the war, show that James used and was used by the newspapers to further Missouri's opposition to Reconstruction. White-supremacist bushwhackers targeted Unionists as well as institutions that benefited the Union. Political posturing aside, though, James and his ilk used the booty to line their own pockets and if James mirrored the bigger picture of a society that pushed him into a life of crime, he also embraced that life without remorse. That said, Stiles's painstaking research has produced a compelling book that recreates, sometimes graphically, the ruthlessness that prevailed in Missouri, where neighbor fought neighbor and nobody was safe. He also offers a critical understanding of how deep-seated hatred breeds self-righteous fanatics, who can justify violence against anyone deemed an enemy. 16 pages of illus. and six maps. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a thoroughly researched book that puts Jesse James in historical context and tries to separate the myth from the man. Stiles also explained why there was a myth to begin with. Why out of all the outlaws that were around during that time did Jesse James get so much attention? The

author argues that James's public personas was a combination of the publicity that he got from a sympathetic newspaper editor John Edwards and his own efforts to publicize his exploits and justify what he did. James was symbolic of the larger political struggle in Missouri and other border states during the Civil War and his notoriety was in part due to his usefulness as a symbol and rallying point for pro Confederate and anti Reconstruction forces in the state at the time. Stile implies that as the forces that originally supported him got what they want, James became less useful as a political rallying point and the very people that at one time supported him or looked the other way from his crimes turned against him. James at the end of his life became a man out of time. After reading this book I had mixed feelings I found myself very unsympathetic to Jesse James's cause and political ideas and the chapters about his time with "Bloody Bill" Anderson made me look forward to his and his brother's death. But I also felt after having finished the book that this was the story of a person that had been one of the surviving casualties of the Civil War. His formative years were spent with a terrorist group committing atrocities against fellow citizens and when the war was over he James did not seem to be able to move on like his older brother Frank. This well written book portrays Jesse James as the living embodiment of the Civil War in the border states and the destructive effect it had on the people that were a part of it.

An excellent work! Mr. Stiles sets the scene in Missouri in a thorough, clear and interesting way. By the time you get to Jesse, you know the history of the culture and the specific family that created him. You know his mentors in the vicious bushwhacker gangs and how he was shaped from a young age in what was, essentially, what we would call "death squads" today. A superb job of giving you an understanding of why Jesse, of all the ex-guerillas turned outlaw, became so famous. Why his support with Missourians grew, reached an apogee, then declined. Interestingly written. I highly recommend this book.

I chose to read this book because I've been singing and playing on my banjo for years The Ballad of Jesse James. I wanted to know more. After reading this fabulous book I can no longer sing the line "he robbed from the rich and gave to the poor" with the same passion as I did before. I also find that he shared some of the same disagreeable qualities as our president: megalomania and the habit of Tweeting compulsively!

This book by T.J. Stiles is an amazing recounting of the life of Jesse James. Dominated by a strong and pro-slavery mother who was widowed when her minister husband died when Jesse was just

two years old, the James brothers were active in guerrilla activities during and after the civil war. J. T. Stiles is a meticulous writer. I enjoyed the book tremendously and recommend J. T. Stiles as a great historian and author.

The book seemed to ponder what it wanted to be. It walked a line for this reader between being a sociological analysis of the context of the times that produced and sustained Jesse or a detailed biography of the man. There were some wonderful details that linger after reading.

So much information presented that I had never before heard or considered. The implications of the Civil War and slavery in the makeup of Jesse James and his family; the divide in Missouri over the same issues - Civil War and slavery; the ruthlessness and blood-thirsty ways of this particular rebel is well written and presented.

This book is a masterpiece! It changed the way I viewed Jesse James. He was an outlaw, no doubt about it. But, I always thought he was just a legend of the wild west. Instead, the author meticulously proves that James was a by product of his passionate Confederate views. I also appreciated that the author presented his material without much personal opinion interjected. In other words, he doesn't spend a lot of time bashing the Confederates. Let's face it, there are still states to this day, that are passionate in their pro Confederate views. The author stays above the fray for the most part, and sticks to the facts as they played out. I also enjoyed his portrayal of Zerelda James-Samuels, the hard-as-nails mother of Jesse James. When a bomb was planted in her farmhouse kitchen, it blew up, killing her young son Archie, and nearly severing her arm. That same day, she had the arm amputated, without anesthesia of course, and by that evening managed to still host a political meeting. The attending Dr. said "I aint never seen a woman with such steel nerves as Mrs. Samuels". The author also does a great job of portraying the terror that was felt by others as they awaited the revenge that Jesse James would take for the attack on his mother's farmhouse.and he did take revenge...swiftly. This book has it all! Action, suspense, gunfights, train robberies, bank robberies, memorable characters, and last of all, a shrewd criminal genius who was a master at evading every attempt to bring him to justice. To the end, he was untouchable by any outsider. It turned him into a legend. I give this author five fat stars for a bang up, entertaining read!

This is a very interesting, well written account of the life and career of Jessie James. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the James and Younger gang and the Civil War in

Missouri.

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