



# The Great American Outlaw: A Legacy of Fact and Fiction

*Frank Richard Prassel*

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## **The Great American Outlaw: A Legacy of Fact and Fiction** Frank Richard Prassel

This book explores in depth the origins, development, and prospects of outlawry and of the relationship of outlaws to the social conditions of changing times.

Throughout American history you will find larger-than-life brigands in every period and every region. Often, because we hunger for simple justice, we romanticize them to the point of being unable to separate fact from fiction. Frank Richard Prassel brings this home in a thorough and fascinating examination of the concept of outlawry from Robin Hood, Dick Turpin, and Blackbeard through Jean Lafitte, Pancho Villa, and Billy the Kid to more modern personalities such as John Dillinger, Claude Dallas, and D. B. Cooper. A separate chapter on molls, plus equal treatment in the histories of gangs, traces women's involvement in outlaw activities.

Prassel covers the folklore as well as the facts, even including an appendix of ballads by and about outlaws. He makes clear how this motley group of bandits, pirates, highwaymen, desperadoes, rebels, hoodlums, renegades, gangsters, and fugitives—who stand tall in myth—wither in the light of truth, but flourish in the movies. As he tells the stories, there is little to confirm that Jesse and Frank James, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, the Daltons, Pretty Boy Floyd, Ma Barker, Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker, Belle Starr, the Apache Kid, or any of the so-called good badmen, did anything that did not enrich or otherwise benefit themselves. But there is plenty of evidence, in the form of slain victims and ruined lives, to show how many ways they caused harm.

*The Great American Outlaw* is as much an excellent survey on the phenomenon as it is a brilliant exposition of the larger than-life figures who created it. Above all, it is a tribute to that aspect of humanity that Americans admire most and that Prassel describes as a willingness "to fight, however hopelessly, against exhibitions of privilege."

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