

They Died With Their Boots On:
Breaking the Myth of the Categorization of the Gunmen of the
American West

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Abstract

Many people have a very limited view on the gunmen of the American West. By looking at the lives of some of the extraordinary men and women who were western gunmen, new perspective is gained on their lives. This perspective shatters many common western stereotypes and disproves much western mythology. Looking at their lives overthrows popular mythology of the good gunman against the bad gunmen. A person did not have to be an outlaw, a murderer a man or even an evil person to be a western gunman.

All is quiet on the dusty streets. At one end of the street stands a man. He is dressed in black, from the tip of his boots to the top of his hat. He has a sinister grin stretched across his face. His hands are poised, reaching at his side, ready for his guns. On the other end of the street is another man. The only thing to distinguish him from any other cowboy is the gleaming star pinned on his vest. His hands too are ready to reach for his guns. Everything is still and silent. In a flash that is barely discernable, guns are drawn, and the man in black falls. Once again, good has triumphed over evil. This is the typical myth of the gunfighters of the American West. There were the good, the bad, and the innocent civilians caught in the middle. When the facts are presented however, this was not the case; when facts deal with human lives, things are rarely that easy.

It has been common to view the American West through this stereotypical lens. Often times people like to be able to look at the men and women who were gunfighters based simply on what they wore. Someone with a badge was good, someone in black was bad, or so goes the myth. The myth of the good gunman versus the bad gunman lives on. However, the truth is always more complicated. Good and evil are often times ambiguous. Lives are intertwined with other lives, and they cannot and should not be separated. One point of view alone is never enough to tell the whole story. Instead, it is important to look deeper, to see how lives connect and one action can lead to another.

Even the term “Gunfighter” is a part of the mythology and the Hollywood glamorization of the American West.¹ The term itself was not even around a hundred years ago.² Newspapers of the day called them, “gunmen,” or even “shooters,” but not gunfighter or gunslinger.³ A better understanding of the terminology that is used leads to a better understanding of who these gunmen really were. Only digging through the misinformation and the myth will show how the world truly viewed these gunmen in their time.

The gunmen of the American West cannot fit into two clear-cut categories of good and evil. The American people often heroize those who live their lives outside of the law. If a historian were to categorize these men and women, the task would be nothing short of impossible because no two shooters share the exact same story. A broader perspective must be used, because when all of the mythology is stripped away, what is left are people who at some point in their lives struggled with the question of what is right and what is wrong. They lived with this question and its far-reaching consequences their entire lives.

So many of these men and women crossed the line between “right” and “wrong” so many times in their lives that it is far more likely that there was not a line between right and wrong, or good and evil. It becomes increasingly clear that if there was a line, they did not know it, or they did not care. Of course, much is dependent on how their contemporaries measured what was right and what was wrong. Did the law of the land reign supreme or did moral law play a larger part? Perhaps the question negates itself, for was not the law of the land based and dependent on moral law? Are not “thou shalt not kill” and “life for life, eye for eye” moral viewpoints that were and still are the basis for law?⁴ It is also very important to understand that the law varied from town to town, dependent on the city charter that was set down when the city was founded.⁵ The law would change from city to city and from one state to the next.

Yet law, legal or moral, does not help in distinguishing the lives of many gunmen. Many of them lived the majority of their lives on what was considered the right side of the law. In fact, many of those who are looked at today as some of the most notorious gunfighters of the west once “at one time wore the badges of lawmen.”⁶ Even for those who were in law enforcement, there was not always a distinction between what was good and law-abiding, and what was not. To these men and women there was not a clear line between right and wrong, no clear place to choose a side and make a stand. This is not to say that there was not right and wrong, simply that the everyday people were not always sure who the lawbreaker was or what the law was. The gunmen of the American West were ambiguous characters who did not fit into a stereotypical view of either good or evil. There were those who were lawmen who strayed from their path, there were those who were only briefly misled from the path of an otherwise law-abiding life, and there were those who clearly had no respect for the law. Yet, none of their lives were the same and it is impossible to pin the description of good on one or evil on another.

There was not a clear line that placed shooters on one side of the law or the other. Many of those gunmen shaped how they were viewed by bending public opinion towards or away from themselves. Some, such

¹ Leon Claire Metz, *The Shooters* (New York: Berkley Books, 1976), 11.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ The first reference, “Thou shalt not kill,” is found in Exodus 20:13, King James Version; The second, “And if any mischief follow then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,” is from Exodus 21:23-24, King James Version.

⁵ “Earp-Clanton murder case papers,” 1881, Denver Public Library, Colorado, 29.

⁶ Richard W. Etulain and Glenda Riley, eds., *With Badges & Bullets: Lawmen & Outlaws in the Old West* (Golden, Colorado: Furcrum Publishing, 1999), *xii*.

as John Wesley Hardin, wrote their autobiographies to show the public the view of themselves that they wanted people to see. Others, such as Belle Starr, had the stories of their lives written by others with the pieces they left behind, such as letters and diaries. Whether it was with full forethought and intention, like Hardin, or indirectly, like Starr, they shaped their reputations. They influenced how people viewed them. Each one of their lives cannot stand alone; many of them had close connections to at least one other gunman, sometimes many more. Often times gun-fighting seemed to be a family business of sorts, with the James, Younger, and Earp families all becoming gunmen, only these did it together, as a family.

All of these gunmen's lives prove that it was difficult to tell who was on what side, or even what the sides were. Some of them, "such as Wyatt Earp, Wild Bill Hickok, Patrick Floyd Garrett, and Tom Horn," all lived at least part of their lives not only within the law, but upholding it as sheriffs and marshals.⁷ Others like "Doc Holliday, Belle Starr, and Pearl Hart," lived the majority of their lives within the law of the land.⁸ Many others were seen as the epitome of the western outlaw gunman, shooting, robbing and terrorizing as they went. For some, their actions were not seen as breaking the law, and they were even viewed as heroes by those who lived in their towns. Many of these men and women interacted together in such ways that they were and still are hard to sort out.

The group of western gunmen that often times stands apart from the rest is that of sheriffs and marshals whose lives took a turn for the worse. These men had dedicated their lives to fighting against lawlessness and injustice. Their lives show, however, that many times it is those who have sworn to uphold the law that are torn down in a courtroom because of their actions. They accomplished many great things while they upheld the law of the land. All it took was one terrible mistake to erase all of the good that they had accomplished. Many times the choice fell onto the court system, after an arrest had been made, evidence was declared, and each man had to face his destiny.

The life of Wyatt Earp is tied together forever with what happened at Tombstone; the shootout at the O.K. Corral. His life is shrouded in the great mystery of what happened in Tombstone, Arizona. In fact, many are not sure whether to place him in the category of, "bonafide frontier Paladin," saying that he was a champion, or to label him, "a scoundrel with a clever biographer."⁹ No matter what definition is used, Wyatt Earp most certainly falls into the category of a prototypical American West shooter. What is overlooked, however, is that before that legendary moment, he was known for something else entirely.

Before the shooting that made him famous, Wyatt Earp led a quiet life. He became a police officer in Wichita, Kansas, in 1875, serving "without distinction."¹⁰ He became a deputy sheriff in Tombstone, Arizona, in July of 1880, a year after his brother Virgil had become a U.S. Deputy Marshal.¹¹ However, Earp's life was not to remain quiet for much longer. An incident occurred in October 1880 in which Wyatt attempted to help City Marshal Fred White disarm a man, the gun went off, and White died of complications.¹² Wyatt Earp resigned his post in November, and John Behan replaced him as sheriff of Tombstone.¹³ This is the point in which things began to go downhill for this famed Earp brother.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Metz, *Shooters*, 270.

¹⁰ Leon Claire Metz, *The Encyclopedia of Lawmen, Outlaws, and Gunfighters* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2003), 71.

¹¹ Ibid., 72.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

The accounts of what happened in March of 1881 vary depending on the sources. As one historian said, “Trying to understand exactly what happened at the OK Corral gunfight is like writing obituaries on soap bubbles.”¹⁴ In the famous gunfight that ensued, three men ended up dead. Wyatt, Morgan, and Virgil Earp, along with John, “Doc” Holliday, came to trial for the part that they played. Every source that details the events of the Earp/Clanton murder trial varies from the one before it. As the original records have been lost, it makes it very difficult to know which account, if any, stays closest to what actually happened.

The event that was the direct cause of the shootout was the robbery of the Bisbee Stage. On September 10, 1881, three or four “masked men . . . with pistols” robbed the Wells Fargo stage stealing \$2,500.¹⁵ The next morning “Wyatt and Morgan Earp, Marshal Williams and Deputy Sheriff Breakenridge” all went to Bisbee to arrest the stage robbers.¹⁶ When they came back, however, they had in their custody “Deputy Sheriff T.C. Stillwell and P. Spencer,” because the evidence was strong that they were the robbers.¹⁷ This action enraged the men of Tombstone, and there were threats presented to all three of the Earp brothers that the cowboys “would get even with them” for the part they had played in arresting Stillwell and Spencer.¹⁸ Wyatt, Virgil and Morgan Earp were walking around the streets of Tombstone as marked men.

On October 26, 1881, after Virgil had disarmed Ike Clanton and had him fined for carrying weapons within city limits, at around one in the morning, two parties came to a standstill. The Clantons and McLaurys were in deep conversation when R. F. Coleman went to Sheriff Behan and “told him it was my opinion they meant trouble.”¹⁹ Coleman then went and notified Marshal Earp and then walked back to where he had seen the Clanton’s and McLaurys.²⁰ Virgil, Wyatt and Morgan Earp together with Doc Holliday all appeared “in the center of the street, all armed.” Virgil Earp called out to the other men, but what his exact words were is not known. The Tombstone Epitaph says that he called out simply “Give up your arms or throw up your arms.”²¹ Later testimony says that he called them “sons-of-bitches’ and said that they had been looking for a fight and would get one.”²²

None of the accounts agree on who fired the first shot, or even how many shots were fired. What is known is that by the time the last gunshot rang out, Tom McLaury was dead, and Billy Clanton and Frank McLaury were dying.²³ Doc Holliday had been hit in the hip, Morgan Earp was wounded severely in the shoulder, and Virgil Earp was hit in the leg.²⁴ Wyatt Earp was the only one involved that did not get shot.²⁵ The battle only lasted a matter of minutes, however, with the trial that was to come, and all of the publicity from what had happened, no one would be escaping the whole mess unscathed. According to Ike Clanton, Doc Holliday along with Wyatt, Morgan, and Virgil Earp, “willfully, unlawfully, deliberately, premeditatedly, feloniously and with their malice aforethought,” killed the McLaurys and William

¹⁴ Metz, *Shooters*, 284.

¹⁵ Douglas D. Martin, *The Earps of Tombstone* (Tombstone: Tombstone Epitaph, 1959), 14. Note: This book is a collection of the articles that appeared in The Tombstone Epitaph relating to the shootout and the resulting trial.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

²² Alford E. Turner, ed., *The O.K. Corral Inquest* (Texas: Creative Publishing Company, 1981), 24.

²³ Martin, 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Clanton.²⁶ There was no doubt that Holliday and the Earps had shot and killed the McLaurys and William Clanton. The only question that remained was if they were justified in their actions.

Doc Holliday and the Earp brothers were not the only ones to face this question; many of these gunmen had to come to terms with it. Yes, they had shot and killed, but was it justified? Sheriff John H. Behan did not believe that they were justified in their actions. In his sworn-in statement, he said that just before the shooting began he told all parties involved, “Put up your guns!”²⁷ However, the Tombstone City Charter stated that, “the sheriff was secondary to the city marshal.”²⁸ This gave Virgil Earp authority over Sheriff Behan, and made him the law of the land. If Virgil Earp together with his brothers and Doc Holliday were upholding the law of the city of Tombstone then there was no need for them to stand trial for murder.

In order to understand the full scope of what occurred at Tombstone, it is imperative not to overlook the involvement of Virgil and Morgan Earp. Both of these lesser-known Earp brothers have fallen into their brother Wyatt’s shadow in both the history books and in western mythology. Morgan Earp most likely delivered the shot that killed Billy Clanton, though Morgan did not walk away unscathed from the showdown.²⁹ Wyatt and Morgan Earp, along with Doc Holliday were acting as deputies to Virgil on the day of the showdown, but Morgan Earp “was a special policeman” at the time of the event in question.³⁰ Wyatt Earp had been sworn in in his brother Virgil’s place when Virgil was in Tucson for a trial, and was still sworn in on the day of the shooting.³¹

R.F. Coleman testified that Virgil Earp shouted at the McLaurys and the Clantons to give up their arms, and then shooting broke out at the O.K. Corral.³² After all the shooting had ceased and men were lying dead or injured on the streets of Tombstone, Sheriff Behan tried to arrest Wyatt Earp. Wyatt refused and said, “You told me these men were disarmed.”³³ As Wyatt Earp refused arrest, his brother Morgan laid on the dusty streets severely injured; he had a gunshot wound “horizontally through both shoulders.”³⁴ It is at least clear that of all of the men involved in the shooting, those who would have had the law on their side would have been the Earp brothers. The *San Francisco Daily Report* stated that the events in Tombstone were nothing more than the “killing of three desperadoes by the City Marshal and his assistants.”³⁵

The only thing that is more controversial than what happened at Tombstone is what happened during the trial. Transcriptions and translations of the trial records are all different enough that it is nearly impossible to know which one, if any, is the most accurate account. Doc Holliday along with Wyatt, Virgil and Morgan Earp came to trial for the murder of Billy Clanton and the McLaury brothers. With the sheer volume of eyewitness testimony relating to the shootout, it becomes clear that it was amazing that more than three men did not end up dead, and that more were not wounded. It would have been extremely difficult to understand each testimony separately, especially because no two testimonies were the same.

²⁶ “Earp-Clanton murder case papers,” 20. Note: Most sources list the name spelled “McLaury” though the reports from the *Tombstone Epitaph* list the spelling as “McLowry.”

²⁷ Turner, 24.

²⁸ “Earp-Clanton murder case papers,” 29.

²⁹ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 70.

³⁰ “Earp-Clanton murder case papers,” 142.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Martin, 18-19.

³³ Martin, 19.

³⁴ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 70.

³⁵ Gary L. Roberts, *Doc Holliday; The Life and Legend* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2006), 201.

After much testimony, it was decided that the four men were innocent and despite attempts by Ike Clanton to keep the Earps behind bars, there was “no sufficient cause,” to believe that they were “guilty of the offense.”³⁶ Even though the judge believed that Virgil Earp “acted improperly and without circumspection,” he declared that he could “attach no criminality to his unwise act.”³⁷ The judge ordered the release of the men from the custody of the Sheriff, John H. Behan.³⁸ The release of the Earps and Doc Holliday meant that the whole ordeal was over. However, all those who escaped with their lives felt the repercussions over what had happened at Tombstone. The city of Tombstone itself has never moved past the day when the Earps and Doc Holliday came to the OK Corral and clashed with the Clanton’s and McLaurys. As for historians and the public, the trial was enough to cast a dark shadow over the Earp family and Holliday, for the events of Tombstone changed forever how they were viewed. They were no longer lawmen, but neither were they criminals.

Though the accounts of what happened at Tombstone dominate much of western gunfighter history and myth, what happened there is not the only account of a sheriff or marshal getting into trouble. Wild Bill Hickok was born James Butler Hickok. After running from trouble for a few years, Hickok joined the Union Army. This is when he became known as Wild Bill.³⁹ He was a wagon master, contract scout, government detective, served in the Seventh Cavalry, and for a brief time was a U.S. deputy marshal.⁴⁰ Hickok’s story shows that gunmen did not view themselves the way the general public did.

Hickok killed many men with his famed 1851 ivory-handled Colt Navy revolvers.⁴¹ As someone who lived and worked in the wilderness, this is not shocking. When asked about whether or not he liked killing, he replied that “As ter killing men. . . I never thought much about it.”⁴² His aim was deadly, he said he “allers shot well” and it was said that “He shoots to kill.”⁴³ When asked how many men he had killed he said he would take an oath on the Bible that he had “killed over a hundred, a long ways off.”⁴⁴ When asked if he killed them “without cause or provocation,” he responded “No, by heaven! I never killed one man without good cause.”⁴⁵ Hickok believed that his killings were justified. He believed that the public should see him simply as a man doing his job.

Accounts vary from saying that Wild Bill was a man who would lay down his guns and fight a fair fight if his opponent wished, to saying that he was a “mankiller.”⁴⁶ It seems that his negative reputation came from “colorful and frequently inaccurate press reports.”⁴⁷ If Wild Bill knew what people thought of him, he made it clear that he did not care, and continued to live his life the way that he wished. He told a woman when he was in Cheyenne that he never killed a man “unless in absolute self defense or in the performance of an official duty.”⁴⁸ Hickok clearly believed that the law was on his side every time he killed someone. The public was not sure what to think, as he was praised as a hero, and called a scoundrel.

³⁶ Turner, 226.

³⁷ Martin, 52.

³⁸ Turner, 245.

³⁹ Information about Hickok’s early years from Metz, *Shooters*, 189-191.

⁴⁰ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 115.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² “Wild Bill,” *Harpers New Monthly Magazine*, Feb. 1867 found in Joseph G. Rosa, *Wild Bill Hickok; The Man and His Myth* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 229. Note: Spelling of “ter” in text.

⁴³ Harpers, 215.

⁴⁴ Rosa, 100.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Rosa, 101.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 109. Note: Miss-spelling of “defense” as “defence” is in the text of the book.

Since the moment of Hickok's death during a poker game, a debate has raged among historians and the press about the cards that he was holding in his hand. It has been said that he was holding a "Dead Man's Hand" of aces and eights, others say that his actual hand was never recorded.⁴⁹ Many agree that he held two aces and two eights. Some say that none of the cards in his hand were recorded, while others state that it was only the fifth card that was not recorded.^{50 51} Some reports say that the fifth card was a queen of hearts, and others the nine of diamonds.^{52 53} The only thing that everyone can seem to agree on is that the hand of aces and eights became known as "deadman's hand."⁵⁴ Whether or not those were his true cards does not matter, for the story has passed into frontier legend.

Wild Bill, Wyatt and Virgil Earp are not two lone cases of a lawman turning to lawlessness, for the story of Patrick Floyd Garret also shows that a sheriff was not beyond the law. Much the same as Wyatt Earp, Patrick Floyd Garrett's life is defined by the events of a single day, the day he shot and killed Billy the Kid. Before that fateful moment, however, Garrett was nothing more than a "tragic" and "very misunderstood figure."⁵⁵ Before his career as a sheriff and politician, Garrett got into a fight with a man named Joe Briscoe. Garrett had insulted Briscoe, overcame him in the fight that ensued, and then humiliated Briscoe by apologizing for beating him. Briscoe then grabbed an axe and ran after Garrett, who shot and killed him.⁵⁶ In 1880, he was elected sheriff in Roswell, New Mexico with "strong support from the moneyed people," running as a "law and order" candidate, a man who would run the outlaws out of the country or bury them beneath its rocky soil.⁵⁷ The people needed a sheriff that they could believe in, one who would always make a stand for law and order, and so they elected Pat Garrett.

At some point Garrett had become obsessed with capturing Billy the Kid. He finally captured the Kid after seeking him out for quite some time.⁵⁸ The Kid came to trial, and he would have hung, but he managed to escape prison when Garrett was not on the premises.⁵⁹ Garrett knew that there was "no use chasing him" as he had gotten a significant head start.⁶⁰ Instead Garrett did something that showed not only his ingenuity but also his drive to get Billy the Kid back, dead or alive.

In order to catch Billy the Kid, Garrett hid in the room of the Kid's sweetheart's brother, waiting until his mark came through the door, gun ready, and killed the notorious outlaw.⁶¹ Garrett stated in his official report that the bullet "pierced his heart. He never spoke, but died in a minute," and that he had wished he could have taken him alive.⁶² While many would look upon this as heroic, many people called him "snake-bit" because of his actions.⁶³ Pat Garrett had killed the outlaw, but he had snuck up on him and

⁴⁹ "Dead Man's Hand" reference from Leon Claire Metz, *The Shooters*, 196; lack of evidence cited in Leon Claire Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 117.

⁵⁰ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 117.

⁵¹ Robert L. Perkin, "Fifth Card in 'Deadman's Hand' Still Mystery to Museum Aide," *Rocky Mountain News*, April 5, 1952.

⁵² Bob Crosby, "Eye Openers Cartoon," *The Leadville Herald Democrat*, April 18, 1931.

⁵³ Author Unknown, "5th Card in 'Deadman's Hand'? Here's Answer," *Rocky Mountain News*, March 17, 1952.

⁵⁴ "5th Card in 'Deadman's Hand'? Here's Answer."

⁵⁵ Metz, *Shooters*, 133.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Author Unknown, "Plucky Pat Garrett," *The Denver Times*, November 26, 1900, pg 5 c5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Patrick F. Garrett, "Sheriff Garrett's Official Report to the Governor of New Mexico in Reference to the Outlaw's Death." *The Denver Republican*, July 22, 1881, pg. 8.

⁶³ C.L. Sonnichsen, "Pat Garrett's Last Ride," *True West* 6, no. 2 (1958):4.

shot him before the Kid had time to know what was happening. Garrett was “severely condemned” because of the questionable ethics of what happened in that bedroom.⁶⁴ Some thought it was murder to kill someone without warning, and the bad publicity was enough that Garrett was not re-elected as sheriff.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Garrett gained much public sympathy when the Territory of New Mexico refused to pay him the five-hundred dollar reward for killing Billy the Kid, and people began sending him money. He received over a thousand dollars and then later received his reward from the Territory.

With his life as a sheriff behind him, Garrett decided to try to become a New Mexico Councilman. A letter to the Rio Grande Republican signed “X” said that the attention he had gotten over killing Billy the Kid had “upset his brain.”⁶⁶ Garrett went searching for the writer of the letter, but when the man he suspected said he had not written it, they argued and Garrett “bashed” the man in the head and left him in the road.⁶⁷ Garrett’s political dreams died with his actions on that day. One day, his explosive anger would become his end; he had finally angered the wrong person and received a bullet to the back of the head.⁶⁸ Though theories abound, it was never discovered who fired the shot that ended Garrett’s life.⁶⁹

The life of Pat Garrett shows that it was not easy to be a frontier lawman, and it was very difficult as such to always stay within the law. As tragic as the end of Patrick Garrett’s life was, one gunman who was at one point a lawman came to a more public end. Tom Horn was an “occasional lawman as well as a rodeo rider.”⁷⁰ At one time he was under the employment of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, and “signed on as a mule packer with the U.S. Army during the Spanish-American War.”⁷¹ After this he got into a disagreement with a man named Neut Kelley, in which Horn suffered a knife wound to his stomach and was never the same again.⁷² He then set out to kill a man named Kels Nickell, but accidentally shot and killed 13-year-old Willie Nickell instead.⁷³ Tom Horn became front-page news when he stood trial for the murder of Willie Nickell.

The newspaper accounts of Tom Horn’s trial present him as a “Black Life,” and a “master murderer.”⁷⁴ The prosecution made the argument that Horn worked for cattle barons who wanted to drive Kels Nickell out of the country because he was causing problems for them.⁷⁵ When Tom Horn was brought into the courtroom he and the father of the dead boy looked at each other for a moment.⁷⁶ Even after Nickell looked away, Horn continued to look at him with a “confident, contemptuous, half-amused look,” that the newspaper report states was noticeable and irritated the jurors.⁷⁷ Many witnesses testified in the trial. They came from “Chicago, Kansas City and St. Louis,” to Cheyenne, Wyoming for the “most famous case in the history of Wyoming criminal courts.”⁷⁸ The accounts say that Horn’s favorite thing to do was to tell stories of his favorite killings. Never was it mentioned that he used to be a lawman. Tom Horn stood a public trial as the cold-hearted gun for hire that murdered a thirteen-year-old boy.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Metz, *Shooters*, 137.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 152.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 121.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Author Unknown, “A Black Life Awaits A Fair Trial,” *The Denver Post*, October 7, 1902, 16.

⁷⁵ Author Unknown, “Tom Horn Trial Begins at Cheyenne,” *The Denver Post*, October 9, 1902, 5.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

As the trial went on, Horn's defense team tried to present evidence that he did not commit the murder. They showed the jury how "Horn's rifle did not shoot bullets of the caliber" that had killed Willie Nickell.⁷⁹ They also tried to prove that Horn was eight or nine miles away the day Willie was killed, and that another boy had killed Willie Nickell.⁸⁰ The prosecution called in doctors to testify and "No two physicians gave the same testimony."⁸¹ After the evidence and witness testimonies, and the valiant efforts of Horn's defense team, the verdict came back. The jury decided to "find the defendant, Tom Horn, guilty of murder in the first degree as charged by the information."⁸² Horn was sentenced to hang on January 9, 1903 but his execution was postponed to November 20, 1903, where, after a failed escape attempt, Tom Horn was hung. The cases of the Earp brothers, Wild Bill Hickok, Patrick Floyd Garrett and Tom Horn prove that being a lawman did not mean that one could not also be an outlaw. If a line were to be drawn between good and bad, these men would fall squarely on both sides of the line.

Another group of western gunmen that would complicate the division between good and evil and that is particularly fascinating are those who lived the majority of their lives within the law, but chose to step out of it at certain times. Doc Holliday fits squarely into this description, and the others show what the lives of other shooters were like. None of these shooters wore badges of lawmen, though they were involved in many robberies, murders, and shootouts. Not surprisingly, there is one group of western gunmen that has been overlooked to this point, because those who fell into this specific group would never have worn a lawman's badge. They have been overlooked, but they played an essential part; female shooters. Pearl Hart and Belle Starr are perhaps the two most notorious female gunmen, each one leaving a trail of destruction and disorder in their wake.

Doc Holliday's name, much like his friend Wyatt Earp, has always been associated with Tombstone and the fight at the OK Corral. It has even been claimed that Tombstone defined Holliday's life, that taking a stand with the Earp brothers was something that he could do with honor and loyalty; to do "something right and good."⁸³ Before Tombstone, Holliday became a dentist and developed pulmonary tuberculosis that required him to move to a climate much drier than his home in Atlanta.⁸⁴ Holliday gradually gave up his dental practice for something that he found much more fascinating; gambling. He moved around much, meeting the Earps at some point along the way, and was joined by the company of Kate Elder, also known as "Big Nose Kate," who played a lesser-known role in what happened later on.⁸⁵ Holliday received a letter from Wyatt Earp telling him he could do well in Tombstone because they had no dentist.⁸⁶ So Holliday and Kate headed to Tombstone.

The events that happened at Tombstone have already been discussed here, but from the point of view of Kate Elder, new perspective is gained on the role that Doc Holliday played in the shootout. Kate recalled that Holliday fell after the first shot, but still "every shot he fired, counted."⁸⁷ This report was backed up in the Tombstone Epitaph, stating that Doc was calm and "fired rapidly" even after he was down.⁸⁸ Kate's insight into the whole mess was that she could not understand why Doc Holliday was labeled as a

⁷⁹ Author Unknown, "The Horn Trial," *The Denver Post*, October 12, 1902, 1.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Author Unknown, "Tom Horn's Life or Death the Question of the Hour," *The Denver Post*, October 13, 1902, 1.

⁸² Author Unknown, "The Hirer of Horn is Next to Suffer," *The Denver Post*, October 25, 1902, 3.

⁸³ Roberts, 319.

⁸⁴ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 119.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ A.W. Bork and Glenn G. Boyer, "The O.K. Corral Fight at Tombstone: A Footnote by Kate Elder," *Arizona and the West* 19, no.1 (1977): 77.

⁸⁷ Bork, 78.

⁸⁸ Martin, 19.

killer. Kate said, "He never was in any serious trouble," before Tombstone, and that "it was Wyatt Earp who dragged him into it."⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Doc Holliday was as much of a participant at Tombstone as everyone else directly involved in the shooting.

When the charges were filed for the murders of William Clanton, Thomas McLaury and Frank McLaury, J.H. Holliday was listed as a defendant.⁹⁰ He had made his stand with the Earps against the Clantons and McLaurys, and now he would have to stand next to them to battle for their lives once again. Warrants were issued for the four men, however, "only Wyatt and Doc were taken into custody."⁹¹ Doc Holliday and Wyatt Earp were in jail for about 30 days when they were finally released and cleared of all charges.⁹² After his release, Holliday was unable to flee from either the fallout of Tombstone or his tuberculosis; he died in Glenwood Springs, Colorado on November 8, "with his boots off."⁹³

Doc Holliday shows that despite occasional actions apart from the law, a western gunman could live the majority of his life within the confines of the law. Doc Holliday was not the only one who fits into this category. The life of Pearl Hart show many similarities to his life in concept, but many differences in action. Pearl Hart was an amazing woman in many ways. First, she is spectacular in that there is any record of her life. In the Old West, 95 percent of women left no record of their lives other than "faded photographs, birth and death dates, and the number of children."⁹⁴ Pearl Hart left behind many photographs as well as newspaper articles detailing a female stage robber, quite an accomplishment for a woman in the late 1800s. From the facts and myths about Hart's life, a few things are known. First, she was born in Ontario, Canada, around 1871, though the exact year of her birth is unknown.⁹⁵ Second, she was not born with the name Pearl Hart, one source claims she was born Pearl Taylor and married an abusive man named Hart, from whom she later ran.⁹⁶ Nothing else is known about the years before she became a bandit and began heisting stagecoaches.

Pearl Hart claimed that her reason for robbing stages was her "sick, destitute mother, who needed money."⁹⁷ Dressed up in men's clothing, her victims thought they were being robbed by a "squeaky voiced 'boy.'"⁹⁸ However, it became clear that the 'boy' was actually a woman, Pearl Hart, and that she had not only participated in the holdup, she had orchestrated it.⁹⁹ She told the authorities that after the holdup she had intended to take her mother to Canada "and lead a decent life."¹⁰⁰ She broke out of Jail on October 12, 1899, only a few days after declaring that she would not be tried under "laws neither she nor her sex had a voice in making."¹⁰¹ Her freedom was to be short lived, however, as she failed to evade capture once more on October 20.¹⁰² It was said of her that she "has a vicious disposition."¹⁰³

⁸⁹ Bork, 82.

⁹⁰ Turner, 52-53.

⁹¹ Roberts, 203.

⁹² Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 120.

⁹³ *Denver Evening Times* quoted in Roberts, *Doc Holliday*, 372.

⁹⁴ Metz, *Shooters*, 247.

⁹⁵ Author Unknown, "Pearl Hart; Arizona Woman Bandit," *Frontier Times* 27, no. 4(1950): 91.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Author Unknown, "Chalk up the last stagecoach heist to a woman," *The Denver Post*, May 29, 1988, 2.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Author Unknown, "The woman planned the stage holdup in Arizona," *The Denver Times*, June 5, 1899, p1 c4.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Author Unknown, "Female stage robber broke jail this morning," *The Denver Times*, October 12, 1899, pg2 c3.

¹⁰² Author Unknown, "Female stage robber caught," *The Denver Times*, October 21, 1899 pg1 c4.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

Hart's jail cell was not to hold her for long, for on January 21, 1900, she once again broke out of jail.¹⁰⁴ She was captured again, and stayed confined until 1902, when she was released from the Yuma Territorial Prison early because of a pregnancy scandal; she had become pregnant while imprisoned.¹⁰⁵ This was common in the Old West; there were not separate penitentiaries for women. For this reason, her partner in the heist, Joe Boot, received a sentence of thirty-five years in prison, while Hart received only five, and had only served about half of it at the time of her release.¹⁰⁶ From what little evidence that is seen of her life after prison, she cleaned up, "briefly toured the theater circuit and wrote some remarkably good poetry."¹⁰⁷ No more articles detail the female bandit; Pearl Hart dropped out of the public eye, living within the law once again, or at least staying out of view of the public and the law.

Pearl Hart was not alone in being a female gunman in a male-dominated West. Belle Starr rose to fame for her unlawful actions as well. Belle was known as "the Bandit Queen," and as Belle or Bella Starr, though she was born Myra Sherley.¹⁰⁸ She married Jim Read, who fled arrest, leaving Belle in her father's house.¹⁰⁹ Soon after this, Belle's brother Edward was killed while resisting officers.¹¹⁰ Belle swore "an oath of vengeance" over her brother's dead body.¹¹¹ She became disillusioned with society, telling all around her that "civilization was not only a failure, but an outrage on human happiness."¹¹² One morning she went missing, she had run away and rejoined her husband. Reports began to come in of a woman leading a gang in stage robberies, of which she says in her journal that when "the idea first struck us . . . it was purely accidental."¹¹³ She said that she was wearing men's clothing, and was not at first recognizable as a woman until a young man said, "I'll be durned if I throw up my hands for any woman!"¹¹⁴ Belle's response to this was to hit him on the head with her pistol, and "down he went like a woodcock."¹¹⁵ She had proven herself as violent as any man in the same position.

The stage that they had robbed was carrying the mail, and Belle, curious, looked through the letters and found one pertaining to herself.¹¹⁶ Addressed to the sheriff of Bastrop County, one of the sentences struck her, "Get this woman out of the way and you have Read, Younger, Roberts and the others under your thumb. I believe she will take a bribe if you make it big enough."¹¹⁷ However, Belle was not to be persuaded to leave her husband yet, travelling with him day and night, until they reached Fort Worth.¹¹⁸ While in Fort Worth, Belle heard that there were search parties looking for her, and she went to a physician and bribed him with \$100 to telegram her relatives and say that she had been sick and in his care for weeks, and could not have committed the heists that were being attributed to her.¹¹⁹ After the very public murder of Sheriff Nicols, it became clear that Bella Read was an alias for Myra Sherley, and a

¹⁰⁴ Anne M. Bulter, *Gendered Justice in the American West* (Illinois: University of Illinois, 1997), 211-212.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ "Pearl Hart; Arizona Woman Bandit," 94.

¹⁰⁷ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 112.

¹⁰⁸ Author Unknown, *Bella Starr, the Bandit Queen, or, The Female Jesse James; A Full and Authentic History of the Dashing Female Highwayman, with Copious Extracts from her Journal* (New York: R.K. Fox, 1889), 5.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 7.

¹¹² Ibid., 10.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 13.

warrant was issued for her arrest.¹²⁰ Belle heard John Morris plotting to kill her husband and decided to kill Morris first.¹²¹ She was unable to stop the murder of her husband, and her “rage and agony knew no bounds,” she was not seen or heard from for six months.¹²² When she surfaced again, she showed off a bloody dagger and said that it had “robbed him of that which he stole from another.”¹²³ Belle had gotten her revenge.

At this point in her outlaw career, Belle traveled with Bruce Younger. When Bruce tried to run off, Belle made him get on his knees and beg for her pardon, and then had a minister force him to marry her, though she left and “they never met afterwards.”¹²⁴ Belle settled for a while, raising her children Pearl and Eddie as well as an orphan named May. When calamity struck May, Belle set out to right the wrong because May was like a daughter to her.¹²⁵ She tried to convince the man to marry May, and when he laughed and refused, she laid in wait for him, and killed him.¹²⁶ While she was away plotting vengeance, May killed herself.¹²⁷ This ended the quiet portion of time in Belle’s life. She married a Cherokee man named Sam Starr, finally becoming Belle Starr.¹²⁸

One night a desperate woman was sobbing over her baby, saying, “He won’t live the night through.”¹²⁹ A group of men on horses approached her cabin, led by a woman, whom she begged for help in saving her child’s life.¹³⁰ The stranger helped the woman all through the night, until dawn broke and the baby was sleeping peacefully.¹³¹ When the stranger went to leave, the woman asked for her name, to which she replied, “My name . . . is Belle Starr.”¹³² This account cannot be verified, but its existence, whether fact or fiction, shows that there was more to Belle Starr than simply being a bandit. There was a side of her that had compassion for people in need.

The final years of Belle’s life went by quickly. On her 43rd birthday, February 3, 1889, she was in an argument with her neighbor, Ed Watson.¹³³ While Watson confessed his innocence, he most likely waited for her, and killed her. Her headstone had no name, only a bell and a star, her dates and said “Shed not for me one bitter tear, nor give the heart to vain regret, ‘tis but the casket that lies here, the gem that filled it sparkles yet.”¹³⁴ Watson was arrested and held in jail until he could stand trial for the murder of Belle Starr.¹³⁵ Her mother took over the raising of her children in the hopes that her daughter Pearl “will not follow in the footsteps of her unfortunate mother.”¹³⁶ Belle was a wonderful gunman, and as such was not fit to be a role-model to her daughter, even after death.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹²¹ Ibid., 21.

¹²² Ibid., 24.

¹²³ Ibid., 26.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 27-28.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 31.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 33.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹²⁸ Article titled only “Belle Starr” was found in the clippings file at the Denver Public Library under Belle Starr, copy in Authors Possession, publishing information unknown.

¹²⁹ Ella A. Duncan, “Tender Outlaw,” *Rocky Mountain Empire Magazine*, Feb 27, 1949, 3.

¹³⁰ Duncan, 3.

¹³¹ Duncan, 3.

¹³² Duncan, 3.

¹³³ Belle Starr.

¹³⁴ Belle Starr.

¹³⁵ *The Bandit Queen*, 64.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

There are many different types of American West gunmen and women who fit neither into the category of good or bad. They are ambiguous when it comes to the law, enforcing and keeping it at some points, and bending and breaking it at others. However, there is one group of western gunmen who most historians do not have a problem in classifying. They were the worst of the bunch; the bad boys of the bad boys. Their names are well known even if their deeds are not. Billy the Kid is perhaps the most notorious of all western gunmen; his encounter with Pat Garrett was not the only fact about his life worth mentioning. John Wesley Hardin joined the Kid in receiving notoriety in his day, though he is mostly unknown today. Joining in with the Earps in making the whole thing a family affair are Frank and Jesse James and the Younger brothers. Yet, even in the quiet facts that show lives of murder and robbery, the lives of these men prove that Western gunmen are impossible to categorize.

Billy the Kid met his demise at the hands of Pat Garrett, but much more happened in his life before that day. The most popular name for the Kid today is William Bonney, though sources list his name as William Bonny, Henry McCarty, and Henry Antrium.¹³⁷ It is a guess by historians that he was born with the name Henry McCarty, though the day and place of his birth has been debated.¹³⁸ Patrick Garrett claimed that the Kid was “born in the city of New York, November 23, 1859.”¹³⁹ It has been said of his childhood that he was “open-handed, generous-hearted, frank and manly,” never failing to take off his hat in the presence of a lady, or help someone in need.¹⁴⁰ It is claimed that Billy first embarked into his career as a murderer at the age of 12 “when he deftly thrust a pocket knife three times” into a man.¹⁴¹ Garrett’s account of this incident was that the man had made an insulting remark about Billy’s mother.¹⁴² No matter the reason, this killing marked “the turning point in his life.”¹⁴³ After this, he left his home and then began the spree of robberies and killing for which he is notorious.

The Kid wandered through the West, leaving many people looking to capture or kill him everywhere he went. He made sure that “all knew and feared Billy the Kid.”¹⁴⁴ When Patrick Garrett became sheriff of Lincoln County, New Mexico, he made it his goal to capture the Kid.¹⁴⁵ The Kid knew that there were a lot of people after him, and wrote a letter to the governor asking for amnesty.¹⁴⁶ Governor Wallace’s response was to offer “a \$500 reward for Billy the Kid,” clearly not extending the pardon that the Kid wanted.¹⁴⁷

On a cold December day, Pat Garrett and his companions circled a house and waited.¹⁴⁸ After Garrett accidentally shot and killed the wrong man, the Kid and the rest of his gang held out inside the house.¹⁴⁹ Garrett and the Kid conversed back and forth for the better part of the day until the Kid and the rest of his gang surrendered.¹⁵⁰ As he was led away to face his destiny, he gifted one of Garrett’s men with his horse,

¹³⁷ Pat Garrett’s official report names him as William Bonny, Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 21 lists other names and alternative spelling, William Bonney.

¹³⁸ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 21.

¹³⁹ Patrick F. Garrett, *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 1.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁴¹ Willis Thornton, *Rocky Mountain News*, article was found in the Jesse James biography clipping file at the Denver Public Library, title is missing as well as date and page. Copy in authors’ possession.

¹⁴² Garrett, 5.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴⁵ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 23.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Garrett, 176.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 178-179.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 179, 182.

joking that “he expected his business would be so confining for the next few months that he would hardly find time for horseback exercise.”¹⁵¹ The Kid was sentenced “to be hanged on the 13th of May, 1881, at Lincoln.” In the days that followed, Garrett and the Kid had several conversations in which the Kid “appeared to have a plausible excuse for every crime charged against him.”¹⁵² The Kid remained in jail to ponder his terrible fate until April 28, 1881.¹⁵³

It is not surprising that this famed outlaw managed to escape from prison weeks before his execution was to be carried out. What is surprising, however, is that he managed to get a hold of a gun, free himself from leg shackles and wrist cuffs and he rode off.¹⁵⁴ It was June 13th before Garrett was finally able to catch up with the Kid. Garrett concealed himself inside the house where the Kid was hiding out.¹⁵⁵ He laid in wait for the Kid, and as soon as he knew who was at the door, he shot him.¹⁵⁶ It was dark in the room, the Kid did not know who was there and “it is doubtful that he ever heard the roar of Garrett’s six-shooter.”¹⁵⁷ It was an abrupt end to a life that had allegedly caused the end of many other lives.

Lesser known than Billy the Kid, John Wesley Hardin was “the deadliest gunfighter of them all . . . more destructive than the Kid, Hickok, Masterson and Earp combined.”¹⁵⁸ He wrote “without any purpose of self-justification,” an account of his life and his deeds in his own words.¹⁵⁹ Born in Bonham, Texas, May 26, 1853, Hardin claimed to have killed his first man at the age of 15, which “nearly distracted” his mother and his father, who was a “Methodist preacher.”¹⁶⁰ Things seemed to spiral out of control for Hardin at that point. He had killed four men by the end of that year.¹⁶¹

Hardin’s reputation preceded him, and he said people “all treated me with a good deal of respect” after they knew who he was.¹⁶² A newspaper details a man saying that he hated John Wesley Hardin because his father was a preacher and he did not have “any redeeming features.”¹⁶³ This man found himself struck with terror, face to face with Hardin, who had recently killed a sheriff thinking “no more of a human life than he did of brushing away a fly.”¹⁶⁴ The only thing the man could think of was not to move at all, for if he attempted to draw his weapon he would be dead before he could even move his hand in the direction of his gun.¹⁶⁵ He begged forgiveness, and in a rare moment of forgiveness, Hardin let him live.¹⁶⁶

In July 1877, Hardin was ambushed and arrested.¹⁶⁷ Remembering how his brother and relatives had been “hung by a mob,” he wished that he could die, feeling “as if a similar death waited for him.”¹⁶⁸ He was in

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 183.

¹⁵² Ibid., 191.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 200.

¹⁵⁴ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 24.

¹⁵⁵ Garrett, 214.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 215-216.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Mike Flanagan, “Out West: 40 were felled by West’s Deadliest Gunslinger,” *The Denver Post*, August 14, 1988, 2F.

¹⁵⁹ John Wesley Hardin, *The Life of John Wesley Hardin as Written by Himself* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 3.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 5, 13.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁶² Ibid., 28.

¹⁶³ Author Unknown, “A Texas Terror,” *Rocky Mountain News*, July 9, 1881.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Hardin, 116-118.

jail under heavy guard so that the mob who had hung his relatives could not get to him.¹⁶⁹ Hardin was found guilty of second-degree murder and sentenced to twenty-five years in prison, “with hard labor.”¹⁷⁰ In 1894, Governor Jim Hogg pardoned him; he opened his own law practice “and wrote his wild memoirs.”¹⁷¹ Only a year into his newly found freedom, Hardin argued with two peace officers in El Paso, Texas. One of them came up behind him later that night and killed him with a shot to the back of the head.¹⁷² He did not even have time to see it coming, and it has been said that he “must have crashed to the floor thinking he was only going to sleep with another monumental hangover.”¹⁷³ John Wesley Hardin was “a man who ignored the code of the West but still managed to die with his boots on.”¹⁷⁴ He lived and died as a notorious gunman of the American West.

John Hardin was a lone gunman; however, many others preferred to shoot and ride with not just any partner, but with their brother. Frank and Jesse James were “train, stage, and bank robbers; terrorists, guerrillas, and night riders; and national heroes.”¹⁷⁵ Before they were train, stage and bank robbers the James brothers fought in the Civil war “under guerrilla leaders.”¹⁷⁶ They were involved in “some of the bloodiest, most brutal, and fiercest guerrilla conflicts along the Missouri/Kansas border.”¹⁷⁷ It was these guerrilla skills that helped them become such successful bandits later on. Their guerrilla training taught them “the tactics of surprise, take no prisoners, swoop and shoot, get in and get out, and careful planning combined with the element of terror and surprise.”¹⁷⁸ Their training made them the infamous gunmen that they are famous for being.

Frank and Jesse James certainly formed the most infamous gang of gunmen in the west; however, their story would not be complete if it were not for the involvement of the Younger brothers. The four Youngers that became the most notorious were Bob, Cole, Jim and John Younger. The Youngers and the James brothers got together after the Civil War in order to rob banks and trains “using their training from their years as guerrilla warriors.”¹⁷⁹ They were quite successful at what they did up until the day in 1874 that John and Jim got into a shootout with “police officers and Pinkerton agents”; John Younger died from a bullet through his throat.¹⁸⁰

The gang robbed successfully for a few more years, until September 7, 1876, when the remaining Youngers and the James brothers together with Bill Chadwell, Clell Miller and Charley Pitts tried to rob a bank in Northfield, Minnesota.¹⁸¹ Bill Chadwell and Charley Pitts were shot right away, the rest “fled and were pursued for six days by hundreds of men.”¹⁸² Miller was later killed, and the three Youngers “were all wounded before they surrendered.”¹⁸³ All three of them were given life in prison, and served their time

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 120.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 122.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 125.

¹⁷¹ Flanagan.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Metz, *Shooters*, 254.

¹⁷⁴ Flanagan.

¹⁷⁵ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 131.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 132.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 269.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 270.

¹⁸¹ Author Unknown, “Younger Brothers’ Raids; Crimes of the Outlaws Whom Minnesota Is About to Set Free,” *The Denver Times*, March 5, 1901.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

as “model prisoners.”¹⁸⁴ Newspaper accounts state that Jim died in prison and that Bob and Cole were later released.¹⁸⁵ Other sources state that Bob died and Jim and Cole were released.¹⁸⁶ No matter which Younger brother died in prison, Frank and Jesse James managed to escape that fate after the bank robbery went bad.

Jesse James changed his name to Thomas Howard and was later killed by a new member of his gang, Robert Ford.¹⁸⁷ There truly was no one that an outlaw could trust, with the exception of family. Ford expected he would be received as a hero, as the man who killed Jesse James; however, he was instead “branded as the most infamous of traitors.”¹⁸⁸ The public, along with the James family, was outraged that a man had walked up and shot him in the back. Half a year after his brother’s death, Frank James turned himself in, and “over time, he was acquitted of all his crimes.”¹⁸⁹ Frank later ran for public office, as he had not been convicted of any wrongdoing. He also ran a “James-Younger Wild West Show” with Cole Younger after Cole’s release from prison.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, despite his attempts to create a better life, Frank James could never escape the evil deeds of his past.

If it were necessary to judge a man as good or evil, in which way would the scale tip? It cannot and should not be possible for the evil things he did to outweigh the good, but neither can the good completely overshadow the bad. In a time where the deeds of evil men were heroized, and the men who killed them hunted, it is very clear that there was no line between right and wrong, or good and evil. Even if a line were to be drawn today, stating this is good, and that is evil, the lives of these gunmen would fit into both, and therefore into neither.

Wyatt and Virgil Earp, Wild Bill Hickok, Patrick Floyd Garrett and Tom Horn were all lawmen at one point in their lives. One moment, one action, one shot of a gun, and they fell. J.H. “Doc” Holliday, Pearl Hart and Belle Starr’s lives all proved that it was possible to be an upstanding citizen most of the time and an outlaw or bandit for the rest of it. The lives of Billy the Kid, Frank and Jesse James and the four Younger brothers show a great many things. One can die while doing evil deeds, can be shot in the back years later for previous evil deeds, or reform and attempt to create a new life. All of these men and women have some things in common. First, they were all western gunmen or shooters. Second, they committed a great many evil deeds. Third and finally, each one of them had unique failures and triumphs.

When looking at these gunmen of the American West, it becomes clear that it is acceptable that they do not fall into a category of good or evil. What life does fall into a clear-cut category? People’s lives, like history, are messy and they are full of choices both good and bad. The lives of the gunmen of the American West are no different from the lives of corporate executives in modern New York, or stay at home moms in mid-century America. Every life must stand alone as a monument to who the person was and what they did. In order to fully understand the gunmen of the American West, it is imperative to let each one of them reach out of the pages of old newspapers and history books and tell their story, the true story of the gunmen of the American West.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ “Younger Brother’s Raids.”

¹⁸⁶ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 133.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 133.

¹⁸⁸ Metz, *Shooters*, 63.

¹⁸⁹ Metz, *Encyclopedia*, 133.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

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