

BASED ON A TRUE STORY: JESSE JAMES AND THE REINTERPRETATION OF HISTORY
IN POPULAR MEDIA

A Thesis
by
ALLEN M. SHERRILL

Submitted to the Graduate School
at Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

December 2015
Department of History

Copyright by Allen M. Sherrill 2015
All Rights Reserved

BASED ON A TRUE STORY: JESSE JAMES AND THE REINTERPRETATION OF
HISTORY IN POPULAR MEDIA

A Thesis
by
ALLEN M. SHERRILL
December 2015

APPROVED BY:

Judkin J. Browning, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Thesis Committee

Scott S. Jessee, Ph.D.
Member, Thesis Committee

Bruce E. Stewart, Ph.D.
Member, Thesis Committee

James R. Goff, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Department of History

Max C. Poole, Ph.D.
Dean, Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate Studies

Abstract

BASED ON A TRUE STORY: JESSE JAMES AND THE REINTERPRETATION OF HISTORY IN POPULAR MEDIA

Allen M. Sherrill
B.A., North Carolina State University
M.A., Appalachian State University

Chairperson: Judkin J. Browning, Ph.D.

This thesis examines the ways in which the story of Jesse James continues to be portrayed in both scholarly and popular media. From the time John Newman Edwards and other newspaper writers first began recounting his deeds, the popular depictions of the outlaw remain the basis of the public's general understanding of the bandit's life and legacy. The story of James became one dominated by embellishment and fabrication causing the outlaw's memory to be much more of a legend than history. William A. Settle, Jr. and a number of subsequent James researchers did a great deal to dispel much of this mythology in scholarship, but made few forays into the public sphere. As such, the traditional James legends continued to dominate the popular understanding of James. Further complicating matters, new conspiracy theorists added more layers of fantasy to the already distorted tale. Many of these popular producers also purported their versions of the James story as being historically accurate leading to a state where many Americans know very little of

James's factual history.

To explore this matter, this thesis will analyze a number of popular and scholarly accounts of the life of Jesse James. First, the thesis will demonstrate how the media created the legend of the outlaw. Then, it will look into the efforts of William A. Settle, Jr. and other researchers to piece together the factual history of James. And finally, it will show how modern popular depictions still mostly portray the legend and show little regard for any of the findings of the James scholars as well as the scholars' relative apathy towards transferring their research into such media. Through all the changes to the James story from the 1870s to the present, advertising one's version as historically accurate has always been a selling point to the public. However, with all the popular reinterpretations available many Americans never venture into the scholarship on the outlaw where they could find a much more truthful portrayal. Therefore, James scholars need to explore the possibilities of transferring their research from academia to popular platforms of which the American populace is much more comfortable and more often utilize to find the depictions of the American icon they rely upon.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Judkin Browning, Dr. Bruce Stewart, and Dr. Winfield Jessee for all the help they provided me in writing this thesis and for serving as my thesis committee. I would especially like to thank Dr. Browning, my thesis chair, for all the efforts he made to turn my thesis from the mess it was originally into what it is today. Your patience with me and your unwillingness to accept anything substandard are the primary reasons this thesis ever reached a point of completion and competency. I would also like to thank William A. Settle Jr., Milton F. Perry, Ted P. Yeatman, T.J. Stiles and all of the other researchers who made amazing efforts to separate fact from fiction and establish a true history of Jesse James. I also want to thank the State Historical Society of Missouri for housing the William A. Settle Jr. Papers and for being willing to set up an interlibrary loan with the Catawba County Library to allow me to view them on microfilm.

This thesis also stood no chance of being completed without the love and support of my family, my friends, and my home church, Beth Eden Lutheran Church, Newton, NC. My desire to not fail any of you is why I managed to continue to work on and finish this thesis. Finally, I have to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Without You being the driving force in my life, I know this would never have happened. Your love and Your grace are unceasing and this thesis is full proof of Your power.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Mom, Dad, and Granny as well as to the greater glory of Jesus and his majesty.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Dedication.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 – Jesse James was Framed: The Creation of an American Legend through 1966.....	6
Chapter 2 – Settling the Score: William A. Settle, Modern Literature, and the Reconstruction of the Life and Legend of Jesse James since 1966	29
Chapter 3 – Highway Robbery: Misrepresentations of Jesse James in Popular Media since 1966.....	56
Conclusion – Don’t That Picture Look Dusty: Some Final Thoughts on Jesse James and the Reinterpretation of History in Popular Media	85
Bibliography	90
Vita.....	98

Introduction

On April 3, 1882, in St. Joseph, Missouri, a young man named Robert Ford pulled out a pistol and shot a seemingly unremarkable man named Thomas Howard. The actual name of the man killed was not Thomas Howard, but Jesse Woodson James.¹ While Ford ended the life of one of America's most infamous outlaws, he unintentionally added to that man's already growing legend, making him more popular than ever before. Even before this assassination, the name Jesse James fascinated the masses and the stories of his deeds spread throughout the country. Few presented the man in a fairly accurate manner, but most embellished or fabricated many of the details found in their narratives, and some contained as much political rhetoric as they did factual information. As such, the primary image of Jesse James took on the guise of a legend and strayed far away from reality. Many of these fabrications originated from newspapermen, but soon after became the subject of more popular productions, such as dime novels, where these fanciful depictions firmly established Jesse James as one of America's greatest folklore heroes. This trend continued as motion pictures and other new media emerged perpetuating the James legend to new generations of Americans looking for a hero amidst world wars, the Great Depression, and an ongoing need to redefine the nation's history and identity.

Many biographers also wrote about Jesse James, but most of their works contained about as much factual material as does the average Hollywood blockbuster. However, in 1966, William A. Settle, Jr., published *Jesse James was his Name or, Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri*, and for the first time

¹ T.J. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 376.

gave the world an accurate history of the legendary outlaw. This work became the foundation of the scholarly Jesse James field, and continues to serve as a template for academic research into the true history of the outlaw.² Settle argued that to understand James's life, one must discern how myth and reality affected one another. As Settle described it, "[The James Gang's] efforts were indeed real; their crimes are of public record. The legend, however, is a different matter. In it fact and fiction are so entwined that it is difficult - at times, impossible - to untangle them."³ Many subsequent scholars continued to build upon Settle's positions, and now a library of accurate material exists for one to discover the truths about the legend.

Despite scholars' acknowledgement of the role of the media played in the creation of the James legend, many downplayed its significance to James's place in American history. Instead, they attempted to portray him as an emblematic figure of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Lost Cause. They overlooked the importance of the James story is to demonstrating the ability of the American media to manipulate public perceptions of history and individuals. Since many scholars only saw popular depictions of James as vehicles used to spread fantasy, they developed a certain disdain for the popular media. With this mindset, they avoided publishing their works through popular printers or adapting their research to productions other than literature. As a result, the spread of their findings remained confined to a small group of James enthusiasts, history buffs, and other interested parties.

² Despite some criticisms, T.J. Stiles acknowledges Settle's work as the foundation of James scholarship. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 5. Ted P. Yeatman basically argues that Settle's account was the only reliable text on James to come out prior to the 1990's. Ted P. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James: The Story Behind the Legend* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House Publishing), 11.

³ William A. Settle, Jr., *Jesse James was his Name, or, Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966), 2.

During this same period, filmmakers, amateur historians, and other popular producers continued to perpetuate the old legends, distort the writings of scholars, and even invent new falsehoods, all while promoting these fabrications as the “truth.” This trend only continued as the internet grew to become the world’s most popular medium. On the web, the distribution of misinformation and historical inaccuracies regarding Jesse James and other historical figures continues like never before, to the detriment of an overly susceptible American populace. In the case of Jesse James, this matter is more of an issue than in other historical fields as the history of Jesse James has always been one developed in the minds of most Americans through his representations in the popular media, not than in scholarship or history texts. Moreover, many of the popular producers advertise their stories as being “truthful” which only further distorts public perceptions of James. With such false proclamations and a myriad of embellished material diluting the public understanding of the real James, the need for scholars to become more involved in popular media is as essential to changing the public understanding of James today as separating fact from fiction was essential to establishing the factual history of James when Settle first published his work.

In exploring this matter further, I will discuss all of the angles of this subject in three parts. In the first chapter, I will examine how John Newman Edwards and other newspapermen first introduced Jesse James to the world. Then, I will explain how early biographers originally distorted the life of outlaw and mislead the public with false statements of authenticity. Next, I will demonstrate how the popular media, starting with dime novels and continuing with motion pictures, turned James into an American legend. Finally, I will examine how later James biographers took these fabrications and mixed them with a dose of history to establish the public narrative of Jesse James.

In the second chapter, I will examine the historical literature published on Jesse James starting with William A. Settle in 1966 and following through to the present day. First, I will discuss the obstacles tackled by William A. Settle to separate fact from fiction and the precedents he set for the burgeoning James scholarly field. Then I will explore the ways in which subsequent James scholars built upon the foundation laid by Settle and how a number of inconsistencies grew between scholars in regards to James's historical legacy and some of the factual details of the outlaw's life. I will also explore how many scholars' need to make James a more historically relevant figure than a cultural presence blinded them to the realities of the perpetuation of the James story in the public media of their time. Finally, I will delve into the ways amateur historians continue to only add to many of these problems and even how some attempt to subvert the findings of James scholars by inventing elaborate conspiracy theories.

In the final chapter, I will look at popular representations of Jesse James released since the publication of Settle's work in 1966. I will first examine motion pictures and their almost complete disregard for the contributions made by the James scholars while at the same time advertising many of their films as "true stories." Also, I will look into the pitfalls some of these filmmakers continue to fall into in trying to make historically accurate James movies. Then I will explore James documentaries and how while they are supposed to purport the truth, they often depict a more fanciful retelling of the legend than a factual interpretation of the man. Next, I will delve into the World Wide Web to show how little reliable James information there is online as well as some of the dangers to individuals who attempt to use the internet to learn about James. Throughout the chapter I will explore the unwillingness of scholars to involve themselves in these productions and how their missing

presence only helps to perpetuate the legends they try to denounce. Ultimately, I plan to show that there is a public yearning to learn about the real Jesse James, and that the opportunity for James scholars to use the popular media to meet this demand exists. Moreover, I hope to stress that it is needed since popular producers are never going to give the American people the history they desire.

Chapter 1

Jesse James was Framed: The Creation of an American Legend through 1966

Jesse James was one of only a handful of individuals throughout the course of American history that could truly be called a “legend in his own time.” Well before Robert Ford murdered him, James was an icon to many who dreamed of living a life of excitement and daring. Many Southerners, reeling from their recent defeat in the Civil War, looked to him as an emblem of continued resistance against Northerners intruding on their “Southern Culture.” Working class citizens all over the nation saw him as a “Robin Hood” figure who robbed from the bankers and railroad tycoons who seemed to take advantage of them at every turn. Following James’s assassination he became immortalized as a heroic figure and an indelible part of the fabric of Americana. As the frontier began to disappear and “Wild West” nostalgia flourished in the hearts and minds of many Americans, James’s legend grew. Many popular storytellers played as much or more of a roll in the creation of this American icon, as the man did himself. From exaggerated newspaper accounts to imaginative dime novels to captivating motion pictures, James’s renowned only grew with each passing production causing the James story to stray farther from history and diverge more towards fantasy.

While many authors took part in the creation of the James legend, no single person was more responsible than his ghostwriter and most prolific apologist, John Newman Edwards. Edwards fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War’s western theater under the command of General Joseph Shelby. During the war, he occasionally had dealings with some of the Missouri guerrilla bands led by William Quantrill and “Bloody Bill” Anderson.

As he became more acquainted with these men, he began to develop a deep admiration for their commitment to the “Southern” cause, and the lengths they would go to in order to see their desires furthered. A few years after the war ended, Edwards began working at the *Kansas City Times*, a paper still loyal to the Democratic Party and the conservative South. As a columnist, Edwards wrote a number of pieces on the James-Younger Gang which propelled them to the forefront American folklore.¹

Many argue that had there been no John Newman Edwards there may never have been a Jesse James.² One of Edwards’s most famous writings, “A Terrible Quintette,” first appeared in the *St. Louis Dispatch* in November 1873. In this essay, Edwards told the stories of the James and Younger brothers during the Civil War and what had happened to them afterwards. He made sure to include how Union soldiers nearly murdered Jesse’s stepfather and shot Jesse when he tried to surrender after the war. He also mentioned how Pinkerton detectives blew off his mother’s arm and killed Jesse’s stepbrother, Archie, when they firebombed their house in a search for the outlaw brothers.³ Edwards hoped these tales of abuse by Yankee soldiers and the Pinkertons would create sympathy for the outlaws and turn them into victims of the Civil War. Edwards wanted Southerners to rally behind men like James to become adversarial towards Congress’s Reconstruction policies.

¹ William A. Settle, Jr., *Jesse James was His Name: Or, Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 16, 41.

² In T.J. Stiles mind, had Newman never written all of the accounts he did, and make the claims to all of the James/Younger gang robberies that he did, national papers and other sources would not likely have ever put together that all of these crimes were committed by the same bunch of criminals, or that these malcontents had any agenda (i.e. fighting for Southern/working class rights) other than petty larceny. T.J. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 226.

³ John Newman Edwards, “A Terrible Quintette,” *St. Louis Dispatch*, November 1873 reprinted in Harold Dellinger, ed., *Jesse James: The Best Writings on the Notorious Outlaw* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2007), 27-39.

Edwards also used “A Terrible Quintette” to begin to romanticize the outlaws, which inadvertently began much of the James legend. He began by making Jesse James into the baby-faced poster boy for Edwards’s pro-Southern propaganda:

A face as smooth and innocent as the face of a school girl. The blue eyes, very clear and penetrating, are never at rest. His form is tall, graceful and capable of great endurance and great effort. There is always a smile on his lips, and a graceful word or a compliment with whom he comes in contact.⁴

Edwards then introduced the idea of James as a “Robin Hood” figure who stole from Northern tycoons and gave the proceeds to desperate Southern farmers. He originally expounded upon this angle a short article entitled, “The Chivalry of Crime” (1872). In this piece, he broached the idea of the “social bandit” as a person who steals in order to serve a higher purpose, referencing the James-Younger Gang’s criminal enterprise as a continuation of the “Southern Cause.” He even attempted to imbue the outlaws with qualities reminiscent of King Arthur’s Knights of the Round Table.⁵

Edwards continued this theme in his book, *Noted guerrillas, or, The warfare of the border* (1877), in which he posited that the guerrillas only fought to protect their homes, and did as much good for rural Missourians as they did wrong to others.⁶ However, Edwards did not let the facts get in the way of telling his version of the James story. Some scholars argue that his accounts of the Confederate guerrillas are likely embellished stories he heard after the war. Edwards was not there to see them, and they might not have even been recreations of conversations with actual participants. Some historians speculate as to whether Edwards

⁴ John Newman Edwards, “A Terrible Quintette,” *St. Louis Dispatch*, November 1873 reprinted in Harold Dellinger, ed., *Jesse James: The Best Writings on the Notorious Outlaw* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2007), 27-39.

⁵ Nicholas Jarmuzewski, “Jesse James: The Myth as Perpetuated by John Newman Edwards,” *Nelson Quarterly Journal*, April, 2008, 188.

⁶ Settle notes that there is hardly any evidence to support such claims, and they most likely came from Edward’s imagination. Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 16, 51-56.

even had a personal relationship with the James brothers prior to Jesse's death. However, it was in the aftermath of the murder when Edwards's words found their most receptive audience.⁷

Shortly after Robert Ford killed James in April 1882, Edwards wrote a glowing tribute to his fallen hero. His eulogy began by saying what a dastardly thing it was for James to be shot from behind, that the Ford brothers were cowards, and that Missouri's governor, Thomas Crittenden, conspired with them in the assassination.⁸ The latter half of this ode to James was Edwards's final attempt to make the outlaw a symbol of Southern resistance.⁹ While this article would not be Edwards's final writing on James, it would be one of the last to garner much public attention. By the time of James's murder, Reconstruction had officially ended, and much of the South's hostility began to dissipate. While Edwards continued to condemn the Federal Government, his rants mostly fell on deaf ears. Many saw Edwards's "Lost Cause" rhetoric as the ramblings of a sore loser who would not let the Civil War go. Ultimately, Edwards failed to turn James into a "Lost Cause" icon the rival of Robert E. Lee or "Stonewall" Jackson. However, his portrayals of James as a victim of the Civil War and his noble thief mythologies became the cornerstones for many of the early depictions of the outlaw's life, many of which not only surpassed Edwards in their whimsical prose, but came with even more fabricated proclamations than Edwards ever purported.¹⁰

⁷ Letter from Dan Saults to William A. Settle, November 5, 1963, microfilm roll 2, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

⁸ While this was only a speculative claim at the time, latter research convinced most James historians, including Settle and Stiles, that Governor Crittenden actually did work out some sort of deal to kill the outlaw. Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 110-121. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 363-380.

⁹ John Newman Edwards, *Sedalia Daily Democrat*, April 13, 1882, quoted in William A. Settle, Jr., *Jesse James was his Name*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 121.

¹⁰ Jarmuzewski, "Jesse James: The Myth as Perpetuated by John Newman Edwards," 189-190.

One of the first authors to try to make a splash with a book about Jesse James was Frank Triplett who released *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James* only a few weeks after the assassination. Triplett's book was not the first James biography to appear after his death, but it received a great deal of attention mostly due to Triplett's assertion that his book was the most accurate. The "authenticity" of his account supposedly stemmed from interviews he conducted with Jesse's wife and mother. He also claimed to be in possession of letters from James's family that gave him the authority to print their collective accounts.¹¹ However, according to historian Joseph W. Snell, Triplett never interviewed the James family nor had permission from them to write a biography. Before the publication of the book, Jesse's wife and mother sent letters to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* that denied any cooperation with Triplett. Later, they sued Triplett over the matter, but lost. Regardless, many readers never heard about this controversy and believed Triplett's declaration as to his account's factual legitimacy.¹²

Very little else is known about Triplett's life outside of his books. He wrote several other biographies on different popular figures including Grover Cleveland, other famous criminals, and a volume of short narratives on the lives of Western pioneers, such as Daniel Boone.¹³ None of these accounts are known for being very factual, but they certainly speak to why Triplett would have had such an interest in Jesse James. Triplett loved the idea of the western hero as the epitome of the American experience, a fairly popular trend at that time. Arguably from 1876 to 1900, America was in one of the greatest transitional periods in its

¹¹ Frank Triplett, *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*, Joseph W. Snell, ed. (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1970), xxii-xxiv.

¹² Joseph Snell, "Editor's Introduction," Frank Triplett, *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*, Joseph W. Snell, ed. (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1970), xi-xiii.

¹³ *Biblio.com*, "Frank Triplett," <http://www.biblio.com/frank-triplett/author/11660> (accessed October 27, 2015).

history, and many looked for someone that could define the times. Triplett's efforts to praise James, Cleveland, and others were not much different from Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show or Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis in terms of trying to idealize America's westward expansion. Americans wanted heroes, and Triplett thought Jesse James could fill that role.¹⁴

Triplett's biography rehashed many ideas first posited by John Newman Edwards. He also referenced the hanging of James's stepfather and Jesse being beaten by Federal Troops as the inciting incidents that propelled him to war.¹⁵ He then argued that while the war changed James, he still desired peace when it ended, but continued mistreatment by Union troops and restrictions placed on former guerrillas forced Jesse, Frank, and the Youngers into a life of crime. Differently from other James biographers, Triplett tried to create an alibi for the James brothers being at the Liberty, Missouri bank robbery in February, 1866. He claimed that, "Frank James was undoubtedly still in Kentucky and Jesse James at home in bed sick."¹⁶ When Triplett published his work, Frank James had not yet been acquitted of all of the charges against him in Missouri. The last thing Triplett wanted to do was be responsible for putting Frank away by incriminating him of other robberies in his book.¹⁷

¹⁴ Richard White, "When Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill Cody Both Played Chicago in 1893," *Does the Frontier Experience Make America Exceptional?* (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999), 45-58.

¹⁵ Triplett, *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*, 1-6.

¹⁶ Triplett, *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*, 28.

¹⁷ Frank James would not be acquitted of all of the charges ever brought against him in Missouri until 1885. Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 157.

While Triplett did not place the James brothers at the Liberty heist, he did say they robbed banks, trains, and stage coaches from Texas to California to West Virginia.¹⁸ Even though he included more than twenty different heists, Triplett devoted the greatest amount of attention to the botched Northfield, Minnesota robbery, which saw all of the members of the James-Younger Gang either arrested or killed, except the James brothers. Most of Triplett's robbery accounts were only a few pages with few details. However, Triplett spent over thirty pages describing the Northfield job from the planning to what went wrong during the heist to remarkable escape of the James brothers.¹⁹ Scholars argue that most of Triplett's accounts should be viewed as attempts to create a fascinating tales about a man he idolized, not as reliable descriptions. However, for readers in 1882, there was no voice of reason to make them feel skeptical towards Triplett or other authors of his ilk.²⁰

One of Triplett's seemingly farfetched, but later corroborated tales was the involvement of Governor James Crittenden in Jesse's murder.²¹ Triplett posited that Crittenden conspired with the railroads to murder James by using the Ford brothers as his puppets.²² For Triplett, depicting James as a victim of a government conspiracy not only elevated his legend, but capitalized on public sentiment following James's murder. Years later, historian Joseph Snell described Triplett's volume as "one of the most, if not *the most*, pro-James books ever written, even outstripping efforts of John N. Edwards."²³ Ironically, many historians support some of Triplett's claims in regards to a conspiracy, although their

¹⁸ A quick look at his table of contents can give the reader a pretty good idea of where all Triplett places the James brothers. Triplett, *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*, xxv-xxxiv.

¹⁹ Triplett, *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*, 175-208.

²⁰ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 171-179.

²¹ See note 8.

²² Triplett, *The Life, Time and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*, 249-262.

²³ Snell, "Editor's Introduction," Frank Triplett, *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*, xvi.

assertions rest upon years of research whereas Triplett's stemmed mostly from wanting to produce a more compelling narrative.²⁴

Around the same time, another Missouri newspaperman, James W. Buel, released a set of biographies on the James and Younger brothers; *The Border Outlaws* (1881), primarily about the Youngers, and *The Border Bandits* (1892), focused on the James brothers. Dan Linahan & Co, the books' publisher, eventually compiled the two books into one volume simply called *The Border Outlaws*. With these works, Buel became one of the first authors to differentiate between the two sets of brothers. These works helped to bring Cole Younger out of the shadows of Jesse James, and cast him as a more central figure in the gang's direction.²⁵

Much of Buel's work examined of how each group of brothers entered into their lives of crime. Buel agreed with Triplett that while the Younger brothers definitely took part in the Liberty bank robbery, the James brothers did not.²⁶ However, soon after, the James brothers joined up with the Youngers for a heist in Lexington, Kentucky. Differently from other authors though, Buel claimed Cole Younger was the organizer behind the group's activities at that time.²⁷ One example of this can be found in his depictions of the Corydon, Iowa bank robbery in June, 1871. In the James volume, Buel offered only a one page blurb about how the Jameses went into the bank, flashed their pistols around and rode off.²⁸ However, in the Younger volume, Buel stated that Cole Younger was the heist's mastermind. He also asserted that the no one would ever have known the James-Younger Gang

²⁴ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 110-119. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 372-380.

²⁵ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 184-187.

²⁶ J.W. Buel, *The Border Outlaws* (St. Louis: Dan. Linahan & Co., 1891), 111-114.

²⁷ Buel, *The Border Outlaws*, 118.

²⁸ Buel, *The Border Outlaws*, 327-328.

perpetrated the deed had Jesse not made it known to the people being held up that he was the man robbing them.²⁹

Buel also separated the two sets of brothers at the most critical time in their lives, the Northfield Raid. He said that both groups took part, but the differences in the amount of detail provided in each groups' book is quite significant. He only offered a short account of the robbery in the James book, but included a huge description in the Younger volume. Much of the reason behind the difference is that there was so much more material on the Youngers available. They were captured, tried, and imprisoned following the robbery, creating many more reports, witness statements, and other accounts in the public record. The James boys, however, managed to escape, so there was much less material to consult.³⁰

To his credit, Buel tried to be much more historically accurate with his account than many other early James biographers. He even interviewed Cole Younger in prison, but Cole would not divulge much to him.³¹ Buel understood that the more factual people believed his works to be, the better they might sell. To aid in this effort the publisher added a sub-header, "Compiled from reliable sources only and containing the latest facts in regard to these celebrated outlaws," to the title.³² Despite such claims, multiple fictitious tales appear in his works. One such story involved the James brothers nearly being killed in a gunfight down in Mexico with some fellows that did not appreciate the brothers dancing with their

²⁹ Buel, *The Border Outlaws*, 156-158.

³⁰ Buel, *The Border Outlaws*, 214-240.

³¹ Buel, *The Border Outlaws*, 250-258.

³² Buel, *The Border Outlaws*, front cover.

sweethearts.³³ Buel needed to include these outlandish stories in his volume to keep up with some of his most formidable competition, the dime novels.

Much like modern-day comic books, these illustrated stories took their readers to a world they would likely never see. During the later part of the nineteenth century, that fantasy world was the “Wild West,” and Jesse James was one it’s most sought after heroes. There is no way to tell exactly how many dime novels portrayed Jesse James and where all of their varied stories originated. However, their impact on the public perception of Jesse James was profound as any other source. Much of the fictional James material found in motion pictures and other popular media first appeared in these dime novels.

One of the most popular dime novel publications was called *The James Boys Weekly*:

A weekly magazine for boys featuring the legendary adventures of Jesse James and his brother Frank, the leaders of a gang of outlaws who committed numerous bank and train robberies in the central states during the 1860s and 1870s. The stories are written by D.W. Stevens, a popular author who lived in 'James Country' and possessed a detailed knowledge of the historical incidents and geographical territory of which he wrote.³⁴

These books could contained everything from accounts of real life robberies, narratives of elaborate heists, tales of derring-do on the frontier fighting Indians and Mexicans, or stories about the James brothers rescuing children and damsels in distress. Most other dime novel series followed a similar pattern. For example, William Ward published many James stories from “Jesse James' Long Chance; or, The Robbery of the Northfield Bank,” to, “Jesse James' Bluff; or, The Escape from the Chinese Highbinders.”³⁵

³³ Buel, *The Border Outlaws*, 323-327.

³⁴ “James Boys Weekly,” *Dime Novels and Penny Dreadfuls*, Stanford University Libraries/Academic Text Service, http://suloas.stanford.edu/swprd_dp/pnpack.draw?pid=430, (accessed November 2, 2011).

³⁵ “Search for Jesse James Dime Novels,” *Carleton Digital Collections*, <https://contentdm.carleton.edu/cdm4/browse.php?CISOROOT=%2FDimeNovels>, (accessed November 2, 2011).

The more fanciful the tale, the more these books sold, and the more of them the public desired.

Many scholars believe these books to be more responsible for the creation of the Jesse James legend than any other source. Historian William A. Settle argued that, “It is from these dime novels that at least two generations of American youth obtained their image of Jesse James.”³⁶ These heroic depictions of James became the blue print for future filmmakers and other popular producers when it came to portraying the outlaw as an American icon.

One of the first voices to publish any challenge to the James-Younger Gang legend was Cole Younger when he released his autobiography in 1903. In his introduction, Younger stated the reason why he finally decided to tell his version of the story:

On the eve of sixty, I come out into the world to find a hundred or more books...purporting to be a history of “The Lives of the Younger Brothers,”...with which the Younger brothers never had the least association...It is therefore my purpose to give an authentic and absolutely correct history of the lives of the “Younger Brothers,” in order that I may, if possible, counteract in some measure at least, the harm that has been done my brothers and myself, by the blood and thunder accounts of misdeeds,...doubtless they have had everything to do with coloring public opinion.³⁷

Of everything Younger declared in this statement, the most relevant was his acknowledgement of how “sensationalist” accounts were most responsible for “coloring public opinion.” It was not that he did not like what they said about him and his brothers, but it was his outrage towards the way these embellishments created much of the public perception of him, his brothers, and their former comrades. Only by publishing his own

³⁶ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 187.

³⁷ Cole Younger, *The Story of Cole Younger by Himself: Being an Autobiography of the Missouri Guerrilla Captain and Outlaw, His Capture and Prison Life, and the Only Authentic Account of the Northfield Raid Ever Published*, Introduction by Marley Brant (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000), 3.

account could Younger change such misconceptions. His book, however, leaves much to be desired. Cole filled much of the beginning with accounts of some of his early robberies and Civil War deeds in which he was often not entirely truthful, but for good reasons. He wanted to protect himself from being indicted for past crimes. Cole had already spent twenty-five years in jail, and the last thing he wanted was to do any more time. He devoted much of his time to proclaiming his innocence in crimes other authors previously accused him of perpetrating.³⁸

The most detailed section of his book was his recounting of the Northfield heist. The one thing he does not say about the raid is whose idea it was. Cole did verify what many purported went wrong with the botched robbery. One of the bank tellers tricked the outlaws into believing the safe was on a time lock. Then, Bill Chadwell was killed before they made it out of town. Younger confirmed that Chadwell was the only one who had any knowledge of the terrain, and without him, the surviving gang members were flying blind in “enemy territory.” Cole claimed that he probably could have escaped; however, his brother, Bob, was too badly injured, and he would not abandon him. Of course, the one thing missing from Younger’s version was any mention of Frank and Jesse James by name. Instead, he referred to a set of accomplices named Howard and Woods, which were well-known aliases of the James brothers, as being involved in the robbery. Many Minnesota officials and other lawmen believed the James brothers took part in that heist, but they never had enough proof to indict them. Even despite his time in jail, Younger remained too loyal to Frank James to betray him and provide authorities any incriminating testimony.³⁹ The two friends later

³⁸ Marley Brant, “Introduction,” *The Story of Cole Younger by Himself*, ix-xviii.

³⁹ Younger, *The Story of Cole Younger by Himself*, 77-85.

joined a “Wild West Show,” but never claimed to depict any actual crimes in their performances.⁴⁰

Frank’s theatrical exploits aside, the rest of the James family wanted to tell their version of Jesse’s life. However, they rarely found much in the way of success with their efforts. Not long after his murder, Jesse’s wife, Zerelda Mimms James, tried to make money by hosting a lecture series on her outlaw husband. She had to abandon the venture though because it was a financial failure.⁴¹ Jesse’s mother, Zerelda Samuel, opened the family home to tourists for a fee. She also sold rocks off Jesse’s grave for a quarter a piece. She regularly went down to a creek near the home and gathered more stones to sell.⁴² However, these efforts only reached small audiences, and made little impact on the larger perception of James. The family had to go more main-stream with their version of the story, and the person to attempt this feat was Jesse Edwards James, the outlaw’s eldest child.

Jesse Jr. purportedly received his middle name “Edwards” as a sign of appreciation for John Newman Edwards’s efforts on behalf of the James brothers.⁴³ Similar to Edwards, Jesse Jr. first attempted to immortalize his father on the printed page. Jesse Jr. released *Jesse James, My Father* in 1906. He claimed his book as being, “The first and only true story of [Jesse James’s] adventures ever written.”⁴⁴ The authenticity of his works is debatable because of Jr’s age at the time of his father’s murder. Jesse Jr. was only six when his father

⁴⁰ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 164.

⁴¹ Notes on article in *Liberty Tribune*, June 16, 1882, 3-4, located on microfilm, roll 3, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

⁴² *American Experience: Jesse James*, directed by Mark Zwonitzer, (2006; Hollywood, CA: PBS Home Video, 2006) DVD.

⁴³ Jarmuzewski, “Jesse James: The Myth as Perpetuated by John Newman Edwards,” 188.

⁴⁴ Jesse Edwards James, *Jesse James, My Father: The First and Only True Story of His Adventures Ever Written*, originally published (Cleveland, OH: Buckeye Publishing, 1906), republished (Lexington, KY: Forgotten Books, 2006), front cover.

died, and there is no telling how much the outlaw ever told his son about his criminal life. Jesse Jr. likely heard these stories from his mother, but there are questions about how much the outlaw told her as well. The rest of the stories Jesse Jr. learned likely came from his grandmother and other family members who put a favorable spin upon them.⁴⁵

The goal of this book was to change misconceptions of Jesse James as a blood-thirsty killer and a man so despised by others that one of his own gang members betrayed and murdered him.⁴⁶ Jesse Jr. also hoped that the book would sell well and provide him with some much needed money to aid his grandmother and sister.⁴⁷ Similar to many apologists, Jesse Jr. blamed the Civil War and Radical Reconstruction for pushing his father into a life of crime. Much of this sentiment came out of the family's enduring friendship with John Newman Edwards. Both Edwards and the James family sought to make Jesse's story part of the "Lost Cause" narrative of the Northerners being the aggressors and oppressive to Southerners after the war.⁴⁸ He also portrayed his father as a loving family man who did whatever he had to do in order to protect and care for them. While people certainly respected Jesse Jr.'s work, it never became the authoritative work on the outlaw.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Johnny D. Boggs, *Jesse James and the Movies*, (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland and Company, 2011), 32-38.

⁴⁶ Types of these accounts include publications such as Joseph Have Hanson's "The Northfield Tragedy," which tells the story of the Northfield robbery from his experience as a citizen, and numerous articles written by Allan Pinkerton or other James detractors' writings like the one printed in the *Texas Siftings* in April, 1882 which argued the pastor who baptized the outlaw should be held as an accomplice in his crimes as he let baby James live. Joseph Have Hanson, "The Northfield tragedy: or, the robber's raid: a thrilling narrative: a history of the remarkable attempt to rob the bank at Northfield, Minnesota; the cold-blooded murder of the brave cashier and an inoffensive citizen; the slaying of two of the brigands; the wonderful robber hunt and capture graphically described; biographies of the victims, the captors & the notorious Younger and James gang of desperadoes." (St. Paul, MN: John Jay Lemon, 1876). *Texas Siftings*, unknown author, April 29, 1882, quoted in William A. Settle, Jr., *Jesse James was his Name*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 126.

⁴⁷ James, *Jesse James, My Father*, 3-4.

⁴⁸ James, *Jesse James, My Father*, 24-60.

⁴⁹ Jesse Jr. gives a romantic story of how his father met, fell in love with, and then married his mother. James, *Jesse James, My Father*, 64-65.

In 1920, Robertus Love published *The Rise and Fall of Jesse James*. For many Americans, Love's work became the definitive and most beloved narrative on the outlaw's life available. One scholar commented that, "As a simplification and codification of the James legend, *The Rise and Fall of Jesse James* is the most important book ever written. This is the 'authentic version' not of the history but of the story of Jesse James."⁵⁰ William A. Settle also had such an admiration for Love's book that he said it "is still the best account of the James boys and their careers as outlaws."⁵¹

The reason the book is so well loved, even by scholars, is that many of its stories do have a factual basis, but also include a great deal of dramatic flair. One example of this is Love's version of the Rocky Cut train robbery, which occurred on July 6, 1876. He included all the pertinent details, such as the date and time of robbery, names of robbers and victims involved, and a solid narrative of how the heist transpired.⁵² Then Love went into a lot of extra details that made the story much more compelling. One example is a story where one of the train passengers accidentally tripped Jesse while he stalked the car. The man then began pleading for his life and James, "laughed heartily, and marched on with his captives."⁵³ Making his book both realistic and fascinating made Love the reigning authority on Jesse James. However, that crown would soon be taken away from him by a growing medium which portrayed the American legend in way no author could match.

Motion pictures remain a beloved medium for many Americans. Starting in 1908, filmmakers began transferring the life and adventures of Jesse James from the pages of dime

⁵⁰ Michael Fellman, Introduction to reprint of Robertus Love, *The Rise and Fall of Jesse James*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), xvi.

⁵¹ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 198.

⁵² Love, *The Rise and Fall of Jesse James*, 176-188.

⁵³ Love, *The Rise and Fall of Jesse James*, 186.

novels and biographies to the silver screen.⁵⁴ One of the earliest of these films came from a movie studio started by Jesse Jr. He first released the silent picture *Jesse James Under the Black Flag* in 1921 and followed it up *Jesse James as the Outlaw* months later. While the films managed some success, Jesse Jr.'s company ran into financial troubles, and the venture had to be abandoned.⁵⁵ The James family understood how much sway the popular media held on the public's imagination. Even though Jesse Jr. was not very successful with his movies, he felt it important that he made them in order to properly tell the story of his father.

As motion pictures changed from silent films to "talkies," other filmmakers found great success with Jesse James pictures. Of all these early movies, none rivaled the achievement of *Jesse James* (1939), starring Tyrone Powers as the outlaw. The film became an instant classic which led the filmmakers to produce a completely fictitious sequel, *The Return of Frank James* (1940). The popularity of these movies sparked a new trend within the motion picture industry as studios began producing waves of biopics on Wyatt Earp, Billy the Kid, and other "Wild West" figures.⁵⁶ The films created a whole new generation of Jesse James fans, but one group was not pleased with what they saw. James R. Ross, great-grandson of Jesse James and an amateur James historian, claimed that the original screenplay for *Jesse James* (1939) came from the James family. However, the film's producers thought it was not exciting enough to be a hit. The filmmakers took what they liked from the James

⁵⁴ Ted P. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James: The Story Behind the Legend* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House Publishing, 2000), 368-369.

⁵⁵ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 177.

⁵⁶ John Mack Faragher & Robert V. Hine, *The American West: A New Interpretative History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 509.

family's script, embellished it, and then added a number of dime novel fabrications to complete their version of Jesse James.⁵⁷

One of the filmmakers' most significant rewrites was the removal of any mentions of the Civil War from the picture. Instead, the film argued that the greed of the railroads turned James into an outlaw. The picture also depicted James as not being much of a father or husband, having a strained relationship with his wife and a lack of concern for his son throughout much of the film. On top of that, the movie does not include the Younger brothers or the Pinkertons. It also begins with the James brothers' mother being killed as the inciting incident. Adding insult to the family was the filmmakers' listing of Jo Frances James, the outlaw's granddaughter and child of Jesse Edwards James, as one of the film's historical data assemblers. While picture made no direct claim to being factual, adding the name of a James family member as a consultant certainly helped to create a sense of legitimacy with the public.⁵⁸ And, in terms of its reception, Johnny D. Boggs, a James film researcher, declared this film to be, "The movie that defined Jesse James."⁵⁹

This statement might be more accurate than Boggs realized as *Jesse James* (1939) epitomized some very important truths about the outlaw's remembrance in popular media, not only at that time, but going forward. First, an African-American man-servant, named Pinky, attended James throughout the film. While the picture made no reference to the Civil War, or the James family's affinity towards the institution of slavery, the appearance of the Pinky character at least hinted at a connection between James and slavery. Also, one of the film's primary characters was Major Rufus Cobb, a retired military man who ran a

⁵⁷ James R. Ross, commentary in, *Legends of the American West: Jesse James*, directed by Marino Amoruso, part of DVD set, *The Real Jesse James Collection* (1992; Santa Monica, CA: Genius Products, LLC, 2007) DVD.

⁵⁸ *Jesse James*, directed by Henry King (1939; Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 2006) DVD.

⁵⁹ Boggs, *Jesse James and the Movies*, 45.

newspaper out of Liberty, Missouri. It is not hard for anyone familiar with the historical James story to see a connection between the fictitious Cobb and the factual John Newman Edwards. This picture did “define” James in that it portrayed reality, but only subtly. Those that knew what to look for could see glimpses of the real Jesse James, however, those that did not became lost in the minutia of popular reinterpretations, which at the time, had only begun to take hold of an ever anticipatory American audience.⁶⁰

Dozens of other Jesse James pictures followed in the footsteps *Jesse James* (1939), telling their romanticized narratives of the outlaw, and all hinting at their stories being truthful. One movie that outright declared such an authenticity was *The True Story of Jesse James* (1957). Unlike *Jesse James* (1939), the picture does include the Younger brothers and the Civil War in its narrative, but much of what else appears in the film does not rest upon the facts. The movie does blame the Civil War for starting the James brothers down a violent path, but it claimed that the James family never owned slaves. The movie also showed Robert Ford killing Jesse James only a couple of weeks after the Northfield Raid. In addition to this, the picture recreates James’s “Robin Hood” mythology by depicting a famous scene where the James-Younger Gang robs a banker trying to foreclose on a Confederate widow’s farm.⁶¹ While many of these events were untrue or exaggerated, they did not necessarily come from the imaginations of the filmmakers. They were part of the popular narrative on James which matched much of what could be found in the most recent James biographies, published during that time.

⁶⁰ *Jesse James*, directed by Henry King (1939; Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 2006) DVD.

⁶¹ *The True Story of Jesse James*, directed by Nicholas Ray (1957; Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013) DVD.

One of the more popular James biographers was Homer Croy, who released his most famous work in 1949, *Jesse James was my Neighbor*. His title came from a claim to having grown up in Clay County, Missouri, and hearing many of his tales from people who knew Jesse and other family members.⁶² Even though much of his source material came from oral accounts, Croy also utilized more traditional sources such as letters and newspapers. He did not footnote his narrative, but he did include a “Sources” section at the end of his book. His notes do not follow the standards practiced by most scholars but they do mark the first attempt by a James biographer to formally denote his or her research.⁶³ Croy also offered a short James historiography, attempting to pin down where the myths about James began. These sections on source material and historiography are the primary reasons William A. Settle was kind to Croy in his examination of earlier James literature.⁶⁴

In his book, Croy described James as being a fun loving boy who wanted to one day run the family farm. However, that soon changed with the outbreak of the Civil War. Croy pointed to the atrocities James suffered as being the impetus behind his outlaw career.⁶⁵ Croy tried hard to humanize James with a familiar story of the James brothers coming to the aid of a poor widow being harassed by a bank agent.⁶⁶ There has never been any reliable piece of evidence to substantiate this or any of the traditional “Robin Hood” style stories often found in James literature. However, Croy claimed that his version came from local oral traditions, but also acknowledged the popularity of this story as a reason for its inclusion in

⁶² Homer Croy, *Jesse James was my Neighbor*, introduction by Richard E. Meyer, originally published (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949) republished (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 3-16.

⁶³ Croy, *Jesse James was my Neighbor*, 265-300.

⁶⁴ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 198.

⁶⁵ Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 17-38.

⁶⁶ Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 100-103.

his work.⁶⁷ Movies audiences and producers loved these types of heroic tales. Croy's version of the widow's rescue became the archetype for film adaptations of the story, including *The True Story of Jesse James* (1957) and *Frank and Jesse* (1995).⁶⁸ Thanks to some of these theatrical allusions, Croy established himself as the authority on the James brothers. However, he soon became embroiled in a rivalry with another author, for that position.

Carl W. Breihan was a former sheriff's deputy in St. Louis who had a passion for James-Younger Gang and other "Wild West" figures. These larger than life characters fascinated him, and much like Frank Triplet, he decided to write biographies of the men and women he admired. He eventually penned multiple volumes about the James brothers, Robert Ford, and more.⁶⁹ Croy actually aided Breihan in some of his early efforts. In Breihan's first book, *The Complete and Authentic Life of Jesse James*, Croy offered some high praise, claiming that this volume was one of only three Jesse James books worth reading. Croy also questioned some of Breihan's research, saying, "Carl W. Breihan has fetched to light an immense amount of new material. It was unknown to me and I have been sleeping with Jesse James for years. Where he got all of this information from is beyond me."⁷⁰ From that point on, Croy and Breihan began a competition to surpass the other in popular renown.

⁶⁷ Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 277.

⁶⁸ *The True Story of Jesse James*, directed by Nicholas Ray (1957; Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013) DVD. *Frank and Jesse*, directed by Robert Boris (1995; Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Entertainment, 1999) DVD.

⁶⁹ "Carl W. Breihan," Pelican Publishing Company, <http://pelicanpub.com/products.asp?cat=82>, (accessed November 2, 2011.)

⁷⁰ Croy, "Introduction," Carl W. Breihan, *The Complete and Authentic Life of Jesse James* (New York: Frederick Fells Inc., 1953), 47.

For a while, they shared information, but they eventually the flow of shared research dried up between the two. Of Croy, Breihan once told a colleague:

I suppose you have heard of Homer Croy. I have never agreed with his theories about Jesse James, but I will say that he has a way of making money from his works. Recently he wanted me to send him some of my notes, but I would not do so. He stated that he was interested in my authentic history of all the bank and train robberies of the James' era.⁷¹

These professional rivalries existed well before Breihan and Croy, and only help to reveal the lack of concern for historical accuracy amongst many of the early James storytellers. Eventually, Breihan surpassed Croy as the authority on James by publishing more material and by making his works as transferrable to other media as possible.

No book might demonstrate this better than Breihan's *The Day Jesse James was Killed*, which reads like a movie. It opened with James on the morning of his death looking back on his early life. He first explored his formative years up through when he joined the Missouri guerrillas. Then he reexamined his criminal career before returning to a contemplative and melancholy Jesse on the morning of his death. The book concluded with a graphic description of James's assassination and the aftermath that followed. While no movie ever came from this piece, Breihan's narrative flare won over many readers. Yet it was another of his pieces that eventually became the most respected piece of material related to one of the subjects surrounding the James story.⁷²

Breihan's *The Man Who Shot Jesse James*, remains the only major work to ever focus solely on Robert Ford. In the book, he told a number of fanciful tales that have no historical basis, and most likely came from either family legend or Breihan's own imagination. One

⁷¹ Letter from Carl W. Breihan to Richard S. Brownlee, December 15, 1949, microfilm roll 1, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

⁷² Carl W. Breihan, *The Day Jesse James was Killed*, (New York: Frederick Fells Inc., 1961).

such story involved Robert Ford's first accidental encounter with Jesse James in 1879. Ford tried to steal a horse from a nearby barn when he heard some men approaching, and scurried into the rafters. James and some of his gang members then came into the barn following a heist. They eventually discovered Ford, and James threatened to kill Ford. However, one of his men recognized the young man as Charlie Ford's little brother and advised James of such. Following this identification, Ford told James of his admiration for the outlaw and his hopes to one day join his gang. James then took a liking to Ford and granted his request to join the James Gang.⁷³ No later historian ever found any reliable material to verify such a tale. Only T.J. Stiles even offered an account of the first meeting between the Ford and James claiming that it was Ed Miller who introduced the Ford brothers to Jesse in the spring of 1880.⁷⁴ However, until more material comes to light or a more qualified researcher publishes a work on Robert Ford, Breihan's version will remain the best available option.

This is the primary issue with the creation of the James legend. Reliable voices that could contradict the fantasy did not come into being until decades after the half truths first emerged. Even when authors like Love or Croy published their more historically accurate pieces, they had to embellish elements of their narratives in order to compete with the popular depictions. To change the public's perception, these authors had to give into people's desires for a Jesse James that straddled the line between hero and villain. Having a

⁷³ Carl W. Breihan, *The Man Who Shot Jesse James* (Cranbury, NJ: A.S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1979), 64-69.

⁷⁴ T.J. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 357. Settle never accounts for when James first met the Ford brothers, and only introduces them into his narrative when Robert aids Dick Liddil in the fight with and subsequent killing of Jesse's cousin, Wood Hite in September of 1881. Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 116. Marley Brant too references the Wood Hite murder as the first known involvement of the Ford brothers with the James gang. Marley Brant, *Jesse James: The Man and the Myth*, (New York: Berkley Books, 1998), 219. Yeatman also does not say when Jesse first met Robert, but references that Jesse knew the Fords by 1880 when he left a horse with Charlie Ford following the "disappearance" of Ed Miller. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James*, 227.

truthful story did not matter; selling the idea that one's tale was the most accurate did. The public admired authenticity, but craved a hero more, allowing legend to trump history.

However times change and so do the ways people envision their history. By the mid 1960s, racial tensions throughout the nation, escalating troubles in Vietnam, and a counterculture protesting traditional American attitudes created an atmosphere where new scholars could present American history in a different light. One of these researchers was William A. Settle, who released *Jesse James was his Name* in 1966. This book would be a revolutionary piece in the Jesse James lexicon, but to publish the work, Settle had to diverge from many of the standard practices and motifs used by his predecessors.

Chapter 2

Settling the Score: William A. Settle, Modern Literature, and the Reconstruction of the Life of and Legend of Jesse James since 1966

With the 1966 release of *Jesse James was his Name: Or, Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri*, William A. Settle, Jr. presented the first scholarly accounting of the events surrounding the life and times of one of America's most legendary figures. This book became the seminal work on the outlaw, and turned Settle into one of the most respected authorities on the James Gang. Through his research and writing, he managed to set new precedents for how scholars and others wrote about Jesse James. Their efforts created a new library of material on the outlaw and provided the public with a much different image of James. As more scholarship emerged, many questions regarding some of the factual details of the outlaw's life and place in American history lingered. Making matters more complicated, a number of amateur historians also published pieces which at times aided scholars, but also perpetuated long standing legends or created new ones. Regardless of the author, all of these works tried to turn James into an important historical figure and overlooked his place in America's cultural history. They all acknowledged the role the media played in the creation of his renown, but chose to focus their works on his deeds themselves, not the ways other manipulated his life in order to construct his legend.

For Settle, the 1966 release of his book marked the end to a journey he began as a graduate student in the 1940s. Like other James biographers, Settle grew up in Missouri. He studied education as an undergraduate and then moved to history as a graduate student,

earning his Ph.D. from the University of Missouri in 1945. In his master's thesis, he examined the effects of the James brothers' crimes on Reconstruction era politics in Missouri. With his dissertation, he attempted to separate the legends from the reality of the James brothers' lives. Settle eventually merged these two writings together, along with twenty more years of research, to form his groundbreaking biography. However, it was not just his research, but also the struggle Settle went through to publish his history in an academic manner which made his work the foundation of all James scholarship.¹

The most notable difference between Settle and previous James authors was that Settle wrote his accounts without any dramatic flair and only reported facts he could substantiate. For example, in his retelling of the Northfield heist in September, 1876, he devoted less than a page and a half to the actual robbery. He spent the rest of his chapter focusing on the apprehension of the Younger brothers and their arraignment as scores of public records existed to document those events. Since the James brothers managed to escape Minnesota, there was not the same amount of material available to tell their story. For Settle, if he could not find reliable sources to validate a factual event, he would not embellish a story. He mentioned the circumstances and alluded to some of the legends, but he refused to pen an elaborate narrative on the matter.²

The set of truths Settle mostly discussed did not involve the James brothers' activities, but instead the effect their crimes had on others, especially in regards to politics in the state of Missouri. Following the Civil War, Missouri fell under the control of the Republican Party. However, many former Confederates remained loyal to the Democratic

¹ Biographical Sketch of William A. Settle, Jr., William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

² Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 92-97.

Party and subscribed to many of the “Lost Cause” ideologies beginning to surface at that time. These Democrats often found themselves to have similar platforms as those purported to belonging to the scores of former Confederate guerrillas turned bandits, such as the James-Younger Gang. By 1874, outside politicians began calling Missouri “The Robber State,” and the Missouri Republican Party blamed their Democratic counterparts for such a pejorative moniker. They claimed their competitors were either in league with the bandits or purposely allowed the robbers to evade pursuit. The matter became such an issue that one’s supposed stance on banditry was an actual political platform within state politics. Eventually the Republicans’ “anti-criminal” message began to sway many Missourians against the Democrats.³

During the election of 1884, the *St. Joseph Herald* (a Republican paper) accused Democratic gubernatorial candidate, John S. Marmaduke, of being “a crystallization of the old rebel spirit – the spirit which created and made possible the existence of the James and Younger boys.”⁴ Even two years after Jesse’s assassination, one’s connections to the outlaws and one’s approval of their purported “Lost Cause” campaign tarnished public officials. Opponents regularly accused many former Confederate soldiers or Southern sympathizers of being “pro-banditry.” As such, many politicians began disassociating themselves from the robbers. By the time Frank James went on trial, many Democrats began calling for his head instead of pleading for his release.⁵

Much of Settle’s evidence came from newspaper articles, although he admitted that they were only partially reliable as politics, competition, and a myriad of other factors

³ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 66-67.

⁴ *St. Joseph Herald*, August 14, 1884, quoted in William A. Settle, Jr., *Jesse James was his Name*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966), 155.

⁵ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 147-148.

contributed to news articles stretching the truth in order to have a more profound impact on their readers. As such, printed opinions ranged the full gamut in terms of praise or outrage towards the James-Younger Gang, their families, political allies, and law enforcement groups.⁶

Outside of politics and Settle's facts-only survey of the James Gang's activities, the rest of Settle's work focused on assessing how the many legends and misconceptions of the James-Younger Gang originated. While he denounced most as pure fantasy, Settle assessed others as mere exaggerations of actual events. One example came with the Hot Springs stage coach robbery in January, 1874. One of the robbers, presumably Cole Younger, told the passengers that the gang did not rob Southerners. Such a statement was false as the gang robbed numbers of Southerners, but that in this one instance, they claimed not to do so. The reports of this heist and that boast are why many first began to believe the gang's crimes carried a pro-Southern agenda.⁷ However, Settle accredited John Newman Edwards as being primarily responsible for imbuing the James-Younger Gang with a "Lost Cause" mystique through some of his rhetorical pieces.⁸

Settle's discussion of John Newman Edwards and other writers became the true point of divergence between his work and that of his predecessors. Settle accredited the bulk of the James legend to Edwards, other early biographers, and dime novelists. The last chapter of his book is a fairly complete historiography tracking all the different spins each writer placed on the James story and how they were ultimately more responsible for making James into an American icon than the robber himself. The primary thesis of this section was not

⁶ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 99.

⁷ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 49-50.

⁸ Settle believed most of the ideas regarding the James-Younger Gang fighting on behalf of the South came from Edwards. Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 51-56.

that James did not lead a remarkable life, but that what can be verified from it is quite limited since he was an outlaw and reliable records of his actions likely do not exist. However, what can be substantiated are the numerous ways others depicted his deeds. Settle concluded that these imaginative narratives are why Americans still remember his name.⁹

Ironically, while Settle acknowledged the importance of the popular media in establishing Jesse James as an American hero, he never tried to sell that as the most significant facet of the outlaw. Instead he attempted to make the James story part of the conversation regarding the Civil War and Reconstruction. In his introduction, Settle posited:

While there is no simple explanation into the making of the James legend, the James band's career of lawlessness and growth of the legend around it are deeply rooted and inextricably bound to the events of the Civil War and its aftermath...the James legend is a significant part of American political and social history, produced and sustained by powerful forces that have left their marks in countless other ways on the course of American development."¹⁰

Settle's conversations about the James brothers' role in Missouri politics as well as his forays into John Newman Edwards's efforts to make him a "Lost Cause" icon were as much about being truthful to history as they were a desire to see his boyhood idol be more of a presence in American history. Much of Settle's work was a cathartic exercise to reconcile the icon he loved as a child with the factual history he now adhered to as a scholar. He wanted the truth about the outlaw to come out through his writing while portraying his hero as more than a common criminal whose only notoriety came through publicized manipulations of real life deeds. Herein lies the problem; Settle dismissed mass media as the source of the creation of

⁹ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 180-201.

¹⁰ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 3.

the legend in the past, not as a vehicle for changing the public narrative in the present or future.¹¹

Most of Settle's research was ready for publication by 1945, but he could not find a respected, scholarly publisher willing to release his work. When asked about the delay, Settle told one inquirer, "I have intended to try to publish a book on the development of the Jesse James legend as a phase of American social history and have been primarily interested in enhancing my reputation as a scholar and historian rather than publishing a popular book."¹² While he made his desires clear, that did not prevent others from trying to steal some of his new findings out from under him.

Throughout his research, Settle became acquainted with many James writers, including Carl W. Breihan, who exchanged numerous notes with him. Breihan hoped to see Settle produce a work that could match some of his own, making Breihan the foremost authority on the James brothers. Settle understood these motives and rebuked Breihan saying, "As a member of the academic community I am judged by a different standard than you are. Primarily you have only to satisfy your readers...But I am judged by my peers, academiissions [*sic*] in the historical profession. Knowing that may explain why I haven't been a more productive writer...To do otherwise would get me crucified by my

¹¹ One of the ways Settle showed his love for the outlaw was in the ways he described some of his research to others. In 1945, he conducted an interview with Frank James's son, Robert. Later, a fellow researcher asked for his notes from that conversation and Settle replied, "My notes are about as personal as my toothbrush and hence I hesitate to loan them or make copies for anyone. They are meaningful to me in the context in which I made them." Letter from William A. Settle, Jr. to Gary L. Dean, December 14, 1977, microfilm roll 2, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

¹² Letter from William A. Settle, Jr. to Edgar M. Eagan, March 21, 1950, microfilm roll 1, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

colleagues.”¹³ Without any regard for such sentiment, Breihan, and his rival, Homer Croy, continued to hound Settle for his new information on the James brothers. The harassment became so intolerable that one of Settle’s colleagues, Richard S. Brownlee, urged Settle to go ahead and publish his work before Breihan and Croy somehow corrupted his findings.¹⁴

Making matter worse, popular publishers also continued to approach Settle about his work, but he always rejected them as his mind was set on producing the first historically accurate work on the outlaw.¹⁵ Eventually, Settle convinced the University of Nebraska Press to release his biography in 1966. This publication turned Settle into one of the most renowned experts on the James Gang, a title he was not completely comfortable owning.¹⁶ However, some of Settle’s views on how the true James would be remembered compared to the legend opened the door for others to undermine his findings.

In the closing paragraph of his work, Settle remarked:

Although there have been a few attempts...to destroy the Robin Hood aspect of the James legend, it is apparent that it is too well rooted in American folklore to suffer serious damage. The forces that sustain it are far greater than any that would destroy it. Hence, the Jesse James legend will live on and continue to excite Americans with the exploits of their native Robin Hood.¹⁷

Such an admission now validated the existence of two James stories; one that was truthful and one that was iconic. Even though Settle noted that nothing within his research

¹³ Letter from William A. Settle, Jr. to Carl W. Breihan, August 24, 1954, microfilm roll 1, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

¹⁴ Letter from Richard S. Brownlee to William A. Settle, November 2, 1960, microfilm roll 1, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

¹⁵ One such came a magazine called “The Westerners,” wanted to print Settle’s work as a series of articles. However, Settle refused because most of the magazines articles read like John Wayne movies, not as legitimate historical discussions of the times. Letter from William A. Settle, Jr. to Ray O. Lavery, July 26, 1960, microfilm roll 2, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

¹⁶ He even told James’s great-grandson such acclaim was never his goal, only a marketing ploy used by his publishers. Letter from William A. Settle, Jr. to James R. Ross, August 25, 1982, microfilm roll 2, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

¹⁷ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 201.

ever supported these “Robin Hood” stories, he believed they were simply too popular with so many American that they could never fade; even if negated by factual research.¹⁸ Settle simply believed the “Robin Hood” legend’s presence was something James scholars and truth seekers would simply have to live with as a nuisance, not as a force to be overcome. He did not think any legitimate researcher would ever try to substantiate it, but one did make such an effort.

Eric J. Hobsbawm’s *Bandits* was one of the first scholarly James books to appear around the same time as Settle’s work, but it was not specifically about Jesse James. Hobsbawm wrote from a Marxist viewpoint and championed the notion of the “noble robber” through James.¹⁹ This concept depicted a charismatic young man, from a peasant background, taking to thievery to right the wrongs done to him and his people by the ruling classes. This virtuous bandit went on to become a symbol for a proletariat revolution against the ruling classes of a society.²⁰

In regards to James, Hobsbawm overlooked many of the facts. First, Jesse was not a peasant as his family owned slaves.²¹ Secondly, there are no verifiable records of the James-Younger Gang ever doing anything charitable with their loot.²² Hobsbawm fell into the same trap as so many other James authors of buying into the mythos created by John Newman Edwards, Frank Triplett, and other apologists. Since Hobsbawm’s work was not available when Settle published his biography, Settle did not have opportunity to refute such claims

¹⁸ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 16, 51-56.

¹⁹ This book was originally published as *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries* by W.W. Norton in 1965. It was later revised and reedited into *Bandits* in 1981. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, Rev. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

²⁰ Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, Rev. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 17, 40-56.

²¹ Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 37-79.

²² Settle, *Jesse James Was His Name*, 171-172.

directly. However, with Hobsbawm's version of James, admirers and popular producers had two different scholars to choose from in regards to their preferred description of the outlaw, and more importantly, a version that matched their own desires to portray James a hero.

One resource that could have aided both Settle and Hobsbawm was a comprehensive Jesse James archive, and the man who undertook the creation of such was Milton F. Perry. While serving as the curator of the James Family Farm, Perry assembled a James-Younger Gang research archive with the help of James family members, fans, and James scholars alike. He eventually aided Phillip W. Steele in forming the National James-Younger Gang and became a central figure in putting together the first James-Younger family reunion in over 100 years. Ultimately though, what Perry will be remembered for is the archive he built and the findings he and other James researchers discovered within.²³ Many of the leading James scholars and amateur historians came to rely heavily on Perry's advice and knowledge on the James family. Ted P. Yeatman noted that a great deal of the primary source material he eventually published came from hours he spent toiling in the archive with Perry.²⁴ Through similar study, many of the facts now known about Jesse James were discovered; although, some of information derived from Perry remains a bit suspicious.

Amateur historian Marley Brant demonstrated her debt to Perry, saying, "I also want to thank Milton F. Perry and Dr. Bill Settle, Jr., for their special friendship and for always

²³ Clay County Missouri. "Milton F. Perry Research Library."

https://www.claycountymo.gov/Historic_Sites/Jesse_James_Farm/Related_Information/Milton_F._Perry_Research_Library (accessed October 29, 2013).

²⁴ One example Yeatman gives is a story discussing how Perry worked with him to find material that could verify a story from two soldiers who might have known of some of Frank James's actions during the Civil War, using newspapers, a history of Clay County, MO, and other materials. Ted P. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James: The Story Behind the Legend*, (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2001), 383.

being available to speculate, share, and confirm Jesse stories with me.”²⁵ While there is nothing wrong with gratitude, such a statement acknowledges that there are a number of issues within the field which scholars have not yet been able to solve. Brant admitted that a portion of the work of many James scholars depended as much on speculation as it did on any type of confirmation. For example, Settle once commented to Yeatman that as curator of the James Family Farm, Milton Perry “switched the location of the tree that Dr. Samuel was hanged from to a place close to the house.”²⁶ Neither Perry, nor anyone else, likely knew which tree that event occurred from or even if that tree was still standing. However, for his tours Perry needed to be able to point to a tree and say that it was the one involved in that incident. The same is true for the way many James authors need to piece together some sort of narrative in order to recreate the events of the outlaw’s life. In the world of Jesse James, embellishment sometimes must be used when the undeniable facts are not there.

Here again, the acknowledgment of a need to speculate by scholars provides popular James storytellers the ability to do so as well. While these scholars worked together and utilized a great deal of primary source material to develop their descriptions, they cannot fully substantiate them. Settle even once commented to a colleague that he could not completely verify that the James brothers took part in the Northfield robbery. He said, “I believe Frank and Jesse James were at Northfield, but I did not try to prove it in my book. I am not sure that anyone can prove that they were or that they were not.”²⁷ Despite twenty years of research, cross-referencing newspaper and other public accounts of the heist, Settle

²⁵ Marley Brant, *Jesse James: The Man and the Myth* (New York: Berkley Books, 1998), v.

²⁶ Letter from William A. Settle, Jr. to Ted P. Yeatman, March 8, 1983, microfilm roll 2, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

²⁷ Letter from William A. Settle, Jr. to L.L. Kane, September 13, 1973, microfilm roll 2, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

could not fully confirm one of the most well-known James stories. All he could do was take the most reliable portions of this primary source material and piece it together into the most accurate narrative he could pen.²⁸ Some later James scholars would not even go that far in their efforts.

Robert J. Wybrow wrote several articles in 1969 attacking Hobsbawm's theory of the "noble bandit." In one of his pieces, "Jesse's Juveniles," Wybrow used a series of firsthand accounts to demonstrate the lack of experience and rowdiness of some of the latter James Gang members. These accounts spoke of them as ruffians who acted with no subtlety, breaking down doors with axes and yanking rings off the fingers of frightened women.²⁹ These anecdotes presented the James Gang as hoods stealing whatever they could from whomever they could with no grand agenda. This certainly contradicts Hobsbawm's "Noble Robber," but Wybrow did not provide that type of analysis to explain such a position. He only gave his readers a story which they likely would not be able to place into any historical context, unless they were also a fellow James researcher. A number of subsequent James scholars later relied upon Wybrow's articles to gather primary source material, but not as a base to enhance any new historical arguments concerning the outlaw.

One such author was Ted P. Yeatman. With his collection of personal letters, census data, marriage certificates, deeds, and a plethora of other sources, Yeatman provided more documented material on the James brothers than any author before or since. Yeatman's research into Jesse James began in the 1970s and culminated in his book, *Frank and Jesse James: The Story Behind the Legend*, published in 2000. His biography served as a glimpse

²⁸ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 92-97.

²⁹ Robert J. Wybrow, "Jesse's Juveniles," *Brand Books* 12, no. 1, (October, 1969), 3.

into his collaborative efforts with Settle and Perry. In many regards, Yeatman's book is as much of an homage to his scholarly heroes as it is an addition to the catalog of Jesse James information. He even admits to such in his introduction claiming, "This book is intended as a supplement to Settle's impressive and pioneering volume. Settle encouraged my work on the Tennessee years of the James brothers, and...was to have written an introduction to the present book."³⁰ While the volume followed Settle's arguments closely, it also provided the world some insight into the mind of Jesse James with its immense amount of new primary source material.

One of these new documents was a letter from Jesse James, written to Henry Warren under the alias John Davis Howard. In the letter, Howard (James) tells Warren that he is broke; but that he will find a way to pay the debts he owes not only to Warren, but to others in the community. This letter is one of only a handful of pieces that anyone has ever verified as originating from the outlaw's hand. As such, an exploration into what this letter represented in regards to the robber's character, lifestyle, or desire to continue his thieving ways could have added significant value to this overall work. Yeatman, though, did not provide any thoughts on what he believed. Instead, Yeatman finished the tale saying Jesse paid his debts and fought off other legal troubles under his assumed persona of John Davis Howard.³¹

Many of Yeatman's findings appear in the same manner as great material with little to no analysis. Such lack of thorough examination into new evidence regarding the historical nature of Jesse James opens the door for popular producers to manipulate such tales.

³⁰ Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James*, 11.

³¹ Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James*, 205-206.

Moreover, it validates the grand old notion that any James story is a good James story. For Yeatman, just getting this new material into the public's hand was important as it allowed them to see a side of James not yet shown, and it helped to solidify the image of James put forth by his mentor. But that is simply not enough from a James researcher. New James material must be accompanied by a solid historical reinterpretation and contextualization if one hopes to avoid its mistreatment by popular storytellers. Until T.J. Stiles released his work in 2002, Settle's book remained the only James biography to offer any such analysis into the actual nature of the outlaw or his place in American history.

Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War by T.J. Stiles is arguably the second most significant work in the scholarly Jesse James field behind Settle's book. The use of the phrase "Last Rebel" in the title was not only revealing as to how Stiles saw the legendary outlaw, but also telling in regards to how Stiles's work related to that of other James scholars. Stiles confessed in his "Acknowledgements" section that he wanted to approach James in a different manner from his predecessors, saying, "I have taken Jesse James very seriously; rather than debunking him, I have found him to be more significant than perhaps even his admirers realize."³² While this statement may appear to be taking a shot at other James researchers, it was actually directed at the historical community at large. One of the many desires Stiles had for his work was to force other historians to treat Jesse James as an essential thread in the tapestry of American history.

Stiles saw the story of Jesse James as being incredibly symbolic of the Southern struggle during the Civil War and the Lost Cause ideology that followed it. Many of Stiles's arguments deviate from those originally posited by Settle, but Stiles goes into much greater

³² T.J. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 397-398.

detail.³³ The one element of the James story most important to Stiles was the outlaw's connection to slavery, focusing especially upon Jesse's mother, Zerelda Samuels. Her devotion to the institution was as ardent as any other person's in Missouri. As the war broke out, Zerelda's pro-slavery politics pushed Frank James into joining the Confederate Missouri Regulars. While with this unit, Frank first met Cole Younger, and after its early defeat, the two joined William Quantrill as guerrillas. Their connection to Quantrill led to their families becoming targets of federal troops and coming under attack. After being beaten and watching his stepfather be hung nearly to death, a young, angry Jesse James took up his brother and mother's crusade, and joined "Bloody" Bill Anderson. Under the leadership of Quantrill and Anderson the James and Younger brothers learned how to be outlaws. Since the James brothers served as guerrillas, they were not accorded the same treatment as Confederate regulars. Moreover, with their family's livelihood in shambles, the brothers used their war-learned skills to subsidize their lost income. Without Zerelda's passion for the institution of slavery, Frank and Jesse may never have become outlaws, a fact Stiles could not focus on enough in his analysis.³⁴

Stiles related the ways many writers overlooked the James's slave connection to the manner in which many "Lost Cause" narratives downplay the institution's overall importance as the Southern cause for starting the Civil War. In the last sections of Stiles's work, he attacked a number of James works not only for their lack of attention to slavery, but for their failings in regards to contextualizing the James narrative into larger events and trends of the

³³ Settle believed the James's story to be a microcosm of Missouri's experience during the Civil War and the Reconstruction Era. However, Stiles tried to make a case for the James narrative as an overlooked anecdote that actually serves to epitomize the nature of Southern, and in some ways, American, remembrance of that war. Settle, *Jesse James Was His Name*, 1-3.

³⁴ Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 37-55.

times. Stiles took particular issue with Hobsbawm's "noble bandit" theory as it incorrectly depicted James as a peasant and a robber using crime to right past wrongs, a notion that completely falls apart once the slavery angle becomes part of the narrative.³⁵

Stiles also noted that James's crimes took place during a period when politically charged violence was rampant throughout the South. However, Missouri was different in a couple of ways. First, many of its citizens were Unionists. And second, it had a fairly small African-American population compared to the rest of the South. As such, when apologists, like John Newman Edwards, imbued the James-Younger Gang's robberies with Lost Cause grandeur, the racial elements to the story vanished since they were not major issues in Missouri. Instead they took on the guise of battles against Northern and industrial oppression thus creating the "Robin Hood" mythos within the James story. Stiles posited that instead of viewing James in such a heroic manner, he should be seen as "a transitional figure, standing between the agrarian slaveholding past and the industrial, violent, media-savvy future, representing the worst aspects of both."³⁶

This need to make James a symbolic figure of the Civil War and Reconstruction is present in the writings of many scholars who desire to see their subject's historical profile raised from popular figure to significant presence. They feel it is imperative to his real life actions as part of the narratives on the Civil War and Reconstruction, which make his story a historically significant one, and no scholar seems more ardent about this than Stiles. Even with a scholar who seems to despise James and what he represents the desire to make the outlaw something more comes through. In Stiles's case, the hope to make James's story

³⁵ Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 382-385.

³⁶ Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 391-392.

emblematic of Southern and even American disregard for the role slavery played in the history of our nation takes precedence over anything else, such as the simple need for popular storytellers to sell James as a hero instead of a former slaveholder continuing to fight on behalf of an inexcusable institution. Moreover, when the facts of James's life are put up against the major trends running through the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Lost Cause scholarly fields, his story just does not match up, and most leading researchers in the those areas make no mention of him.³⁷

Even historians who specialize in the American West tend to downplay the significance James and other famous outlaws and lawmen in the overall history of that region. In John Mack Faracher and Robert V. Hine's masterful survey, *The American West: A New Interpretive History*, Jesse James, the outlaw, does not receive any mention. The only note they have on James is that the 1939 Tyrone Powers biopic of the outlaw was so successful that it began a wave of such movies on other prominent Western figures in the decade that followed.³⁸ Similarly, other scholarly works on the period make little to no

³⁷ Most major works on Reconstruction do not spend much time on Missouri and even despite Settle's foray into how the James brothers affected politics in that state, their situation does not match what happened in the rest of the South. Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1988). Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007). Similarly, while apologists like John Newman Edwards tried to make James into a "Lost Cause" figure, his prowess as such never matched that of Robert E. Lee or "Stonewall" Jackson. Rollin G. Osterweir, *The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865-1900*, (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1973). James W. Loewen & Edward H. Sebesta, eds., *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader: The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause,"* (Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 2010). And in regards to the Civil War, the James and Younger brothers did participate, but they only acted as guerrilla fighters, not officially commissioned by the Confederacy. Also, the impact of their actions only affected Missouri and Kansas, they played no real significance in the outcome of the war. Harry Hansen, *The Civil War: A History*, (New York: New American Library, 2001), 486-493. Moreover, most Confederate officers looked down on these guerrillas as being too barbarous and as being a disgrace to their "noble" efforts. Adam I.P. Smith, *The American Civil War*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 78, 119-120, 207.

³⁸ John Mack Faracher and Robert V. Hine, *The American West: A New Interpretive History*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 509.

mention of him either.³⁹ The only Western surveys that include James and other famous figures are the popular histories that continue to spend entire chapters recounting their “legendary feats.”⁴⁰

While James’s actual place in American history remains a contested issue, scholars also remain divided over certain facts of the outlaw’s life. As discussed in chapter 1, many early James biographers argued over the James brothers’ involvement in the Liberty bank heist in February, 1866. While one might think such an issue would be resolved by today’s experts, the latter-day James scholars have not fared much better. Both Settle and Yeatman believed the James brothers did not participate in the robbery, but became accredited with such as their fame grew. Marley Brant agreed with Yeatman on this point, but then claimed that Jesse along with Frank and Cole Younger masterminded the robbery. Stiles differed from all of them saying that both James brothers likely took part in the heist as they were still following Arch Clements and other former guerrillas in their post-war efforts to disrupt Unionist activities.⁴¹

Such discrepancies appear multiple times throughout the scholarly James literature with no researcher making enough of a case to ever define his or her version as the definitive narrative on the matter.⁴² These inconsistencies only help to provide even more license for

³⁹ For example, Patricia Limerick does not include any of the great western outlaws or lawmen in her landmark deconstruction of Western history. Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), 385-396.

⁴⁰ For example, Jon E. Lewis devotes an entire section to the James-Younger Gang in his popular survey. Jon E. Lewis, *The Mammoth Book of The West: The Making of the American West*, (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2001), 251-335.

⁴¹ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 33-36. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James*, 85-86. Brant, *Jesse James: The Man and the Myth*, 46-54. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 173.

⁴² Another such instance is with Frank James’s involvement in the Centralia massacre during the Civil War. Settle and Stiles state that both James brothers took part in the slaughter. Although Stiles goes into much greater detail as to what each James brother actually did during the butchery. Yeatman and Brant

non-scholars to depict the outlaw's story in whatever manner they so choose. This issue only becomes more complicated by the numbers of amateur historians who also published books during this period. These writings not only contain many of the same inconsistencies as the scholars, but occasionally posit wild theories that only perpetuate the James legend further.

One of the most prolific and historically accurate writers in this group was Marley Brant. She published two volumes on the James-Younger Gang; *The Outlaw Youngers: A Confederate Brotherhood* in 1995 and then *Jesse James: The Man and the Myth* in 1998. Both works serve as well-researched narratives on the bandits, but provide little in the way of new historical perspective on the outlaws. Brant worked with a number of James historians to help with her projects, including Settle, Perry, and Yeatman.⁴³ While her writings on the James-Younger Gang are not her only published works, they are the pieces for which she is most well-known. She continues to remain active in the James scholarly community and recently won an award from the National James-Younger Gang for her 2012 release *In the Shadow*, a fictional biography of Bob Younger.⁴⁴

Despite her lack in training as a historian, her works contain an enormous amount of historically accurate narratives written in entertaining prose. Of all the modern James writings, Brant's serve as the best "beach" read and would be some of the easiest volumes for

acknowledge that Jesse definitely was there, but Yeatman is unsure of Frank's involvement and Brant makes no mention of him at all in the massacre. She only mentions Frank and Jesse together after the travesty. Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 27-28. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 119-127. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James*, 55-58. Brant, *Jesse James: The Man and the Myth*, 34-37.

⁴³ Brant, *Jesse James: The Man and the Myth*, 299-300. Also, see note 1.

⁴⁴ Marley Brant, "About Marley," "The Outlaws," and "In the Shadow." <http://marleybrant.com/page1.php> (accessed November 11, 2013).

one to turn into a screenplay that could be both historically accurate and live up to the legend.⁴⁵ To accomplish this, she opened her narrative by saying:

Jesse James is the most famous outlaw in American history. His fearless exploits and glamorous rebellion continue to arrest the imagination...The name itself has a poetic ring...Society has a deep seated need for heroes and villains. Outlaws sometime serve that need as their complexities and conduct reflect the frustration of those less adventurous but supportive of the cause they claim to serve.⁴⁶

Brant was not the first Jesse James author to be an admirer of the bandit, but her blatant stance is easily discernible whereas Settle's was much more veiled. This love of Jesse James and cathartic need to reconcile the hero from the outlaw characterizes much of the prose found in both scholarly and popular James literature. However, none of her writings ever put a positive spin on the outlaw the way the works of James's great-grandson did.⁴⁷

No modern James family members ever tried to do as much to change the way people saw their beloved ancestor as James R. Ross. Like his grandfather, Jesse Edwards James, Ross sought to see the name Jesse James given its proper treatment and respect by historians and the general public alike. This desire articulated itself in a book entitled, *I, Jesse James*. This "biography" offered James researchers some valuable perspective as it serves as a great source for understanding how the James family views their place in American history. In fact, Ross claims that all of the material in this volume came directly from stories passed

⁴⁵ According to Yeatman, Brant tried to sell a screenplay based her James narrative, but no studio picked it up. Letter from Ted P. Yeatman to William A. Settle, March 4, 1985, microfilm roll 1, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

⁴⁶ Brant, *Jesse James: The Man and the Myth*, 1-2.

⁴⁷ Brant apparently tried to write a James related screenplay during the 1980s, but nothing came of it. Letter from Ted P. Yeatman to William A. Settle, March 4, 1985, microfilm roll 1, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

down by his grandfather, mother, and an adopted uncle, Billy Judson, who supposedly rode with the James brothers for eight years.⁴⁸

Unlike most other biographies, Ross wrote his piece as a first person account. Following his Introduction, Ross presented a Foreword where he took on the guise of his great-grandfather saying, “My name is Jesse Woodson James...Much has been written about me and my outfit the James-Younger gang. This is my own story in my own words that I wrote. I hope it sets the record straight.”⁴⁹ While such a claim is certainly pretentious, Ross believed that he not only had the authority, but an obligation to write his work in this manner. When questioned as to why he wrote in the first person Ross responded, “I don't know what [Jesse] actually said or thought, of course, but I feel I know so much about him that I can capture the way it might have been.”⁵⁰ While being historically accurate with his book was his stated goal, the inclusion of several stories scholars denounced as fantasy might make one wonder.

For example, Ross provided an elaborate depiction of the famous myth of the James brothers aiding a poor Southern widow being harassed by a Northern banker.⁵¹ As Ross used a first person accounting of this tale, he provides no reference to its source. Twenty years prior, William A. Settle said that, “In all of the voluminous material that pertains to Jesse James and the James band, evidence of specific acts of generosity toward the poor even with

⁴⁸ James R. Ross, *I, Jesse James* (CA: Dragon Publishing Corp., 1988), i.

⁴⁹ Ross, *I, Jesse James*, xi.

⁵⁰ James R. Ross, quoted by Dennis McLellan, “James Ross, 80, was Great-Grandson of Jesse James,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 2007, *The Boston Globe*, http://www.boston.com/news/globe/obituaries/articles/2007/03/10/james_ross_80_judge_was_great_grandson_of_jesse_james/ (accessed March 9, 2015).

⁵¹ Ross, *I, Jesse James*, 106-109.

stolen funds... is practically nonexistent.”⁵² A simple note as to where Ross found or heard his contradicting story would completely nullify Settle’s statement, and give validation to Ross’s writing. However, since this story came from a James family member, Ross likely did not think he needed to note anything. Whether it was Frank Triplett back in 1882 or Tyrone Powers in 1939, claiming a James story came from the James family has always been a powerful selling point for many casual observers. Even to this day, gaining the seal of approval from the James family remains a desire for many authors, scholarly and popular.⁵³

Very few writers have fared as well in receiving such family praise as Phillip W. Steele, a lifelong James and western history enthusiast. He received degrees from UCLA and the University of Arkansas and used his education to write multiple volumes on a variety of subjects from the James-Younger Gang to Bonnie and Clyde. He also served on various historic preservation boards, including the National Association for Outlaw and Lawman History (NOLA) from which he founded a subsidiary group called the National James-Younger Gang.⁵⁴ Much of his research into the outlaw’s life occurred under the tutelage of Milton F. Perry. In fact, Perry seemed to develop a special fondness for Steele. He even endorsed Steele’s involvement with the restoration of the James Family Home and other James related projects, much to the chagrin of some other James researchers.⁵⁵

⁵² Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 172.

⁵³ Even William A. Settle sought such acclaim as worked closely with the family to produce his volume. Later, Lawrence H. Barr, one of Jesse’s grandsons, told Settle that he believed Settle’s biography to be, “the only complete, authentic book on Jesse and Frank James.” Letter from Lawrence H. Barr to William A. Settle, August 21, 1975, microfilm roll 1, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

⁵⁴ “About the Author,” Phillip W. Steele, <http://www.phillipwsteele.com/about.html> (accessed February 20, 2015).

⁵⁵ In 1984, Ted P. Yeatman complained to William A. Settle in a letter that both Yeatman and Marley Brant felt that Steele should not be serving on the board of the James Family Estate, and that it was only because of Perry’s approval that he was allowed on. Yeatman felt that Steele had a bad habit of confusing history with

Steele wrote two James-related books: *Jesse and Frank James: The Family History* (1987) and *The Many Faces of Jesse James* (1995). Both books provided some interesting information to scholarly James works, but both have their faults as well. The former is a genealogy of the James and Ford families. It is mostly a companion book for any James collection, but it does include additional family information not found in scholarly biographies.⁵⁶

Most of the material from this book came from information found in James family records. While not surprising in the case of a genealogy, Steele's reliance on the James family for his material can be seen through both of his works. In much the same way John Newman Edwards became the ghostwriter for Jesse James, Steele assumed a similar role for the James family. One of the family's greatest desires was for the James brothers to appear as either heroes of the common man or casualties of the Civil War. Much of Steele's writing reflects those themes, as illustrated by the following quote from the introduction of his second book:

The simple fact that the name Jesse James is perhaps the most recognized of any individual in American history is in itself phenomenal. Numerous reasons for his popularity as an American folk hero exist, but the main reason seems to be that he stood for a cause and resisted tyranny and injustices that were brought to bear against those who had supported the South during the Civil War...A victim of the social environment in which he lived, Jesse James fought back and became a national celebrity. Had Jesse James never existed, Americans would have created him out of a need for a rebellious hero...Medieval societies demanded a Robin Hood, and at that point in our nation's history, we required a Jesse James.⁵⁷

folklore. Letter from Ted P. Yeatman to William A. Settle, April 15, 1984, microfilm roll 2, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

⁵⁶ The most valuable of which is information about Jesse's grandfather who was of Welsh descent, and bringing the James family to Pennsylvania in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Steele then indicates that he believes John to be the patriarch of the Tennessee branch of the James family. Phillip W. Steele, *Jesse and Frank James: The Family History* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1987), 23-27.

⁵⁷ Phillip W. Steele and George Warfel, *The Many Faces of Jesse James* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1998), 11-12.

Despite the cloying nature of the quote, *The Many Faces of Jesse James* remains one of the most useful works written by an amateur James historian. The text is an examination into which photos of the outlaw are legitimate, debatable, or fraudulent. Like his previous work, most of the pictures he claimed to be of the bandit are ones that belonged to the James family.⁵⁸ Steele never directly stated that the family is the only reliable source for authentic pictures, but the volume of images he used from their collections seemed to suggest such a notion. Steele understood the value of keeping the James family happy and sought to do so in his works by including their memorabilia and also making certain arguments on their behalf.

For example, in regards to one of the photos Steele claimed to be a fake, he also managed to take a shot at the Pinkerton Detective Agency. According to Steele, the photo on page 81 was one the agency used in their efforts to track down the James brothers. However, Steele said the two men in the picture were falsely identified as Frank and Jesse and he commented, “It is small wonder that the Pinkerton Agency never could find the James brothers because there is no resemblance whatsoever of these men to the real Jesse and Frank James.”⁵⁹ While the quote is somewhat amusing, it also points to the greatest trend amongst amateur James historians. They want to use the facts to substantiate James as something of an icon. Whether it is Brant’s elaborate prose or Steele’s demonstrations of the James brothers fooling the Pinkertons, they all hope to show James as a man worthy of his elevated reputation. While these enthusiasts attempt to do this with their presentation of the facts, a

⁵⁸ Thirteen of the nineteen images Steele offers between the Introduction and the first chapter came courtesy of the James Family, a James family member, or from the author’s personal collection. Steele and Warfel, *The Many Faces of Jesse James*, 6, 16, 21, 29-31, 34, 36, 41, 44-47.

⁵⁹ Steele and Warfel, *The Many Faces of Jesse James*, 81.

new breed of amateur historian is trying to supersede all others with their conspiracy theories.⁶⁰

Ralph P. Ganis published two books on the outlaw. One suggested that James was a member of a pro-Confederate secret society, The Knights of the Golden Circle, and the other claimed that he was involved with the Ku Klux Klan. Despite these propositions, much of his work stems from research originally undertaken by Yeatman and other legitimate James scholars. With such connections to legitimate history, Ganis's theories seem plausible to many within the general public who enjoy the idea of great historical conspiracies.

Ganis's first book, *Uncommon Men: A Secret Network of Jesse James Revealed* (2000), examined Jesse's life during his years in Tennessee following the Northfield disaster. It focused primarily on relationships James developed with two North Carolina bootleggers, Andrew Moorman Diggs, "Mome," and Lorenzo Merriman Little. The James brothers met these two while all four worked at a barrel factory in Nashville, Tennessee.⁶¹ Jesse, in particular, befriended the bootleggers and carried out several operations with them that took the Missouriian as far into North Carolina as Stanly and Anson counties.⁶² Much of this information is a great addition to the research of scholars like Yeatman. However, Ganis

⁶⁰ On an interesting note, despite the warning and jest made by Steele regarding this photo, some popular producers have not taken notice of his work. In the companion book to Bill O'Reilly's documentary series *Legends & Lies: The Real West* (2015), the photo is used with a caption reading, "Brothers, Frank and Jesse James in about 1870, just after they had become infamous bank robbers." It seems that even with new historical data, popular producers only hold a minimal regard for the facts. David Fisher, *Bill O'Reilly's Legends & Lies: The Real West, The Companion Volume to the Fox News Series* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2015), 190.

⁶¹ Ralph P. Ganis, *Uncommon Men: A Secret Network of Jesse James Revealed* (St. Petersburg, FL: Southern Heritage Press, 2000), xiv-2

⁶² Ganis, *Uncommon Men*, 54-62.

ruins much of it by then trying to connect the James brothers and Merriman Little to the Knights of the Golden Circle, with little evidence to support such claims.⁶³

For his works, Ganis relied mostly on oral histories as his primary source material. In his Preface, Ganis noted that oral history accounts are seen by most historians as unreliable, but yet he chose to depend on them. On top of that, he gathered many of these accounts at a family reunion to which he provide no documentation or transcriptions as to what he actually heard. These oral histories connected with other skeptical material may work for Ganis, but they do not do much substantiate his arguments to any trained scholar. Yet, they may seem highly plausible to the average person, and therefore his conspiracies become appealing.⁶⁴

Ganis's other book, *Desperate Measures: Jesse James and the Klan Battle of Reconstruction* (2007), does not do a much better job. He again relied on oral history evidence to attempt to substantiate a connection between James and KKK members in North Carolina. For an ex-Confederate guerrilla, such as Jesse James, to have friends in the KKK is no surprise, but Ganis does not provide enough legitimate documentation to ultimately make James's relationship with the Klansmen as probable.⁶⁵ Of this work, a reviewer argued

⁶³ Ganis basically claims that the James-Younger Gang became involved with the KGC through Cole Younger and some of the connections he made while fighting for the Confederacy. Ganis then claims that Merriman Little actually joined the KGC before the war while he spent time in California. Ganis, *Uncommon Men*, 18-37.

⁶⁴ Ganis, *Uncommon Men*, viii-xi.

⁶⁵ The idea that the James brothers had friends who were in the KKK seems likely. They James's owned slaves and fought for the Confederacy, so they likely held some common beliefs with the Klan. However, their direct involvement in aiding the efforts of Klansmen has never been proven, and certainly was not substantiated by this book, especially considering the KKK members they would have helped in the book were from North Carolina. If the James brothers had been willing to aid any Klansmen, they likely would have been from Missouri, like the James brothers, or from Kentucky where their cousins, the Hites, lived.

that the book began well in tracing its roots in history, but ultimately morphed its story into a fantasy.⁶⁶

Another James conspiracy theorist, Ron Pastore, took a lot of the ideas posited by Ganis and mixed them with his own regarding the outlaw faking his death.⁶⁷ While Pastore wrote a book on the matter, *Jesse James' Secret: Codes, Cover-ups, and Treasure* (2010), he would not stop there. He worked with the History Channel to produce a documentary on his theories, publicizing his version of the James story in a way no other James researcher dared.⁶⁸

Separating the fact from the fiction regarding Jesse James was essential to understanding the man's true history. However, historians took this information and tried to turn him into something more than what the facts really held. Settle wanted him to be a part of story of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Stiles tried to show his connection to slavery as a reflection of the disregard we as a nation sometimes hold when considering full involvement of the institution in our history. Yeatman, Brant, and others simply wanted to tell fascinating stories about the man they admired. Hobsbawm tried to officially make him a true "Robin Hood." And the conspiracy theorists purported fabrications more elaborate than any dreamed up by John Newman Edwards and other early writers. On top of that, these researchers could not agree on some of the basic aspects of the James, such as exactly in which robberies he participated.

⁶⁶ Nancy B. Samuelson, "Review: *Desperate Measures: Jesse James and the Klan Battles of Reconstruction* by Ralph P. Ganis with Julie Hampton Ganis, Jerry D. Shouse, Jr. And Matthew C. Bumgartner. Tarheel Press, Hickory, North Carolina 2007 ISBN#: NONE," *Stray Leaves*, <http://ericjames.org/wordpress/category/corrections/> (accessed June 28, 2015).

⁶⁷ No James scholar gives any credence to this notion, and in fact, Yeatman devoted the entire last chapter of his book to negating such false claims. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James*, 323-340.

⁶⁸ *Jesse James' Hidden Treasure* written by Jodi Flynn, Mike Kelly, and Christina Ruddy (2009; New York, NY: A&E Home Video, 2010) DVD.

All of these inconsistencies only aided popular producers with no interest in telling the James story correctly. If the experts could not agree on all the essential details, these producers had no obligation to be bound by anything within these histories. Moreover, as these historians only focused on the perception of Jesse James within their small sphere, they neglected to keep an eye on how the public at large saw him. They blamed popular media for spreading the legend in the past, but failed to understand that these entertainment platforms remain the primary devices relied upon by the general public in the present. However, the conspiracy theorists saw things differently. They understood potential of using popular media to tell the James story, and how it could be utilized to spread their version of the James story. They could see that the battle for the public understanding of Jesse James was not one waged on the printed page, but one fought on television and computer screens.

Chapter 3:

Highway Robbery: Misrepresentations of Jesse James in the Popular Media since 1966

Jesse James was one of few men who could claim to truly be a legend during his own lifetime, as dime novels and other works found their way into the hands of an adoring public. This trend continued well after his death and still does to this day through movies, documentaries, and the internet. As scholars began to piece together the factual history of the outlaw, no one debated the role the media played in creating his legend, but few analyzed how popular productions continue to perpetuate many of the James legends. Many advertised their portrayals as being truthful and others pointed to inconsistencies in scholarship or a public desire for the legends as rationale for making their works historically inaccurate. Moreover, most James scholars seemed unwilling to involve themselves in such productions in any roles other than consultants for films or commentators for documentaries. Similarly, as the internet increased James's accessibility, many scholars only viewed the web as an advertising vehicle, not an opportunity to present their factual histories in a more publicly accessible platform. Conversely, some amateur historians made their own films and web pages as an attempt to spread their conspiracy theories. With all of these different versions of the James story floating around and the unwillingness of scholars to become more active in the public sphere, the historical James is as unknown to the modern American populace as he was unidentifiable to most law enforcement officers of his day.

James film researcher, Johnny D. Boggs once noted, “Movies aren’t made to be historically accurate, but to entertain.”¹ Indeed, historians have always had a poor relationship with the motion picture industry. Scholars analyze and preserve the past, while filmmakers often depict famous persons and events from history in a purely entertaining manner. Within the Jesse James field, there exists an extra element of hostility between researchers and movie producers. Many scholars devoted a great deal of effort towards sorting out the fact from the fiction in regards to the life of the outlaw, a task which the movie industry made more difficult as it promoted a more legendary version of the bandit. Thus, many James historians view movies as productions that only undermine their work.

William A. Settle received many inquiries from filmmakers about including some of his research into their movies, but never participated as he feared what they might do with his information. He told one inquirer that he felt the producers of the movie, *The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid* (1972), showed “no reverence for the truth.”² Many of his scholarly disciples followed Settle’s lead. One such adherent, Ted P. Yeatman, offered advice and some notes to Johnny Cash as he began filming *The Last Days of Frank & Jesse James* (1986), but never became a full consultant on the project. Such a limited relationship

¹ Boggs is one of the few researchers to explore the development of James films past the 1950s, but his book mostly analyzes these movies individually; not as an examination of overriding trends. He also only looks at movies, not any documentaries. Johnny D. Boggs, *Jesse James and the Movies*, (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland & Company, 2011), 4.

² Letter from William A. Settle, Jr. to L.L. Kane, November 7, 1973, microfilm roll 1, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO. He told another inquiring that he felt only fictionalized material worked in the movies, and that he was afraid of how they might manipulate his findings. Letter from William A. Settle, Jr. to Tom Watson, August 13, 1980, microfilm roll 1, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

became the norm leading to most modern James movies presenting a more fictionalized version of the outlaw.³

While many James films were not very accurate, that did not prevent studios from advertising these movies as being factual. Both *The Last Days of Frank & Jesse James* and *Frank and Jesse* (1995) directly claim in their official trailers to be telling “The True Story” of Jesse James.⁴ The producers of *The Long Riders* (1980) gave themselves a little more leeway by saying their film was the James-Younger Gang’s story, “And it’s as close to the truth as legends can ever be.”⁵ The filmmakers of *The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid* also never directly said that their movie was a factual account in the trailer, but Universal Studios employed a different tact for the DVD release years later. On the cover, they added the tagline, “The Real Story of Legendary Outlaw Jesse James’ Most Daring Bank Robbery.”⁶

Trying to present one’s film as being a factual has always been a selling point for James movies. While movies released before 1966 did not have reliable scholarly material to use in developing their screenplays; the same cannot be said for their modern counterparts. While none of these newer films are totally accurate, three are noteworthy as their depictions reveal some truths about James not yet seen on screen and some of the major difficulties in making historically accurate James movies.

³ Letter from Ted P. Yeatman to William A. Settle, March 4, 1985, microfilm roll 1, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

⁴ YouTube, “The Last Days of Frank & Jesse James 1986 Trailer,” posted by Craig Anderson, June 29, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9T7-EkbaJg> (accessed September 24, 2015). YouTube, “Frank And Jesse Trailer 1994,” posted by Video Detective, December 27, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weif8XXjoi> (accessed September 24, 2015).

⁵ “Theatrical Trailer,” *The Long Riders*, directed by Walter Hill (1980; Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2001) DVD.

⁶ “Trailer,” *The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid*, directed by Philip Kaufman (1972; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2007) DVD.

The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid was one of the first James movies ever to portray the outlaw completely in a non-heroic manner. In the film Robert Duvall played James as villainous sociopath willing to rob and kill from anyone, especially if that meant continuing to fight on behalf his lost Confederacy against the Union.⁷ This darker depiction of the outlaw began to find its way into many subsequent James movies, and while it may resemble scholarship, that was mostly coincidental. As the twentieth century progressed, American films and the comic book industry became more infused with the idea of the anti-hero, a “good guy” who has a dark past and is willing to do a little “wrong” in order to serve some greater good. The legendary Jesse James is the perfect kind of character to develop into an anti-hero. He can easily be depicted as a wronged man-turned-vandal carrying out a vendetta against some sort of oppressive foe, such as the Union, the Pinkertons, or the railroad tycoons. While a filmmaker’s decision to accurately depict James’s nature often follows public trends, correctly telling the James story sometimes depends on exactly how much of the tale one wants to address.⁸

The Last Days of Frank & Jesse James demonstrates how the scope of the film can make a huge difference in terms of the picture’s historical accuracy. The movie begins with the James brothers trying to live normal lives in Tennessee before falling back into a life of crime. The film then shows Jesse’s death and Frank’s trial, and finishes with Frank James being in Creede, Colorado on the day Edward O’Kelley killed Robert Ford, planning to take a similar action himself. As a result of this smaller scope, the filmmakers were able to tell a

⁷ *The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid*, directed by Philip Kaufman (1972; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2007) DVD.

⁸ Jonathan Michael, “The Rise of the Anti-Hero: Why the Characters in TV and Movies We Love Most are the Ones with Fatal Flaws,” *Relevant*, <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/culture/tv/rise-anti-hero> (accessed July 13, 2015).

much more historically accurate story than most of their predecessors who attempted to tell the entire story of the brothers from the Civil War to Jesse's murder.⁹

It is nearly impossible for a filmmaker to introduce and develop all of the characters and storylines from James's life properly and then accurately piece them together over the course of a single feature. Most of the members of the James-Younger Gang only rode with the James brothers until the gang's demise at Northfield in 1876. Afterwards, men such as Dick Liddil, Ed Miller, and the Ford brothers rode with Jesse once he return to crime around 1879. To solve this problem, many movie producers inaccurately introduce the Ford brothers as members of the gang or associates of the James brothers well before Northfield because they need Charlie and Robert for Jesse's assassination at the end of the movie.¹⁰

One picture that employed this tact was *Frank and Jesse*, but despite this shortcoming, it remains an important James film to examine. The movie is mostly inaccurate, but it included an element of the James story overlooked by many other films: the importance of the media to the James story. In one scene between Allan Pinkerton and a railroad CEO, the two men discuss the idiocy of dime novels that hail James as "The Robin Hood of the West." Pinkerton scoffs at it, but the tycoon rebukes him saying that people believe this kind of press which only encourages them to aid the James-Younger Gang. The movie also featured the development of a relationship between the James brothers and a newspaperman, Zach Murphy, who later becomes an advocate for their defense. While the character was not named John Newman Edwards, his presence in the factual James story was clearly the basis for the addition of the Murphy character to this fictional tale. And while

⁹ *The Last Days of Frank & Jesse James*, directed by William A. Graham (1986; Santa Monica, CA: Artisan Home Entertainment, 2003) DVD.

¹⁰ Such a tact can be found in *Jesse James* (1939), *The True Story of Jesse James* (1957), *The Long Riders* (1980), and *Frank & Jesse* (1995).

Frank and Jesse acknowledged the importance the media had in creating the legend of the James brothers, it downplayed its overall significance.¹¹

This is a common trait of many modern popular James productions. They display certain elements of James's popularity by referencing newspapers, dime novels, and other forms of entertainment of his day, but they never give them much credit for creating the legend or his recognition. They want to protect the heroic nature of his story. James would be much less gallant if his fame came from the ways others portrayed him, not as a result of his actual deeds. Similarly, many films keep his family connection to slavery out of their stories. A modern film producer would be less likely to sell a movie about a former slaveholder or a man whose fame came only through media publicity. To sell James to the public, some notion of the outlaw as a hero needs to be a part of his characterization, otherwise he is only a murderer and thief. Despite many studios' claims to be presenting the real outlaw, their films are far from factual, but the public still responds well to the legendary James story. Therefore, many filmmakers have no qualms about playing up the fantasy.¹²

In 2001, Les Mayfield released *American Outlaws* which provided viewers with one of the most historically inaccurate versions of Jesse James to ever grace the silver screen. The picture was so bad, James historian T.J. Stiles thoroughly rebuked it saying, "A serious evaluation of the historical accuracy of *American Outlaws* is about as pointless as a discussion of the differences between bumper cars and highway driving...I have the

¹¹ *Frank and Jesse*, directed by Robert Boris (1995; Santa Monica, CA: Trimark Home Video, Lions Gate Entertainment, 1999) DVD.

¹² James's connection to slavery has yet to be an element added to any movie.

impression that the screenwriters and director would be surprised to learn that Jesse James was an actual historical figure.¹³ Aware of his critics, director Les Mayfield commented:

As far as I'm concerned, Jesse James is a myth. We don't even know exactly what happened to Jesse James. So who's to tell us what exactly happened...So, we took that inspiration...and made this film. I mean just recently they're still digging up Jesse James in Texas...Everyone has their own story on how he ended, and how he ended his life or who he was. It's a great mystery. And I think we are adding to that. We are adding to the myth of Jesse James.¹⁴

Mayfield demonstrated the lack of concern some popular producers have for the work of historians and how certain holes in James scholarship provide these storytellers the excuses they need to depict James however they please. When Settle published his work separating fact from fiction, he consequently split the James story into halves; one historically accurate and one mythologized. As such, future popular producers had a choice. They could be truer to history or stick to the legend. Either way, they would be representing a particular element of the total James story. On top of this, historians have yet to come to full agreement on not only the exact historical nature of James, but also a full assessment of what crimes he perpetrated. Some filmmakers like Mayfield take great liberties with this flaw, while others try to be more respectful to scholars and to history.

In 2007, Andrew Dominik released *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. The film stands as one of the more historically accurate James movies ever produced. It begins with the Blue Cut Train Robbery in October, 1881 and follows the relationship between James and Robert Ford through Jesse's death in April, 1882. The film

¹³ T.J. Stiles, "Movie Review: American Outlaws," *T.J. Stiles.net*, <http://www.tjstiles.net/bio.htm> (accessed June 17, 2015).

¹⁴ Les Mayfield, quoted in "American Outlaws – Making Of," *YouTube*, posted by *_Knöwîng Nöthîng Îs Bëttër Th@n Knöwîng @t @ll_* [*sic*, actual username], September 24, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPGn1TWzrcc> (accessed September 24, 2015).

ends with a short portrayal of Robert Ford's life after he murdered James.¹⁵ One of the most accurate aspects of the film is that it made direct references to John Newman Edwards. For example, at the beginning of the movie, Robert Ford reads a newspaper description of the outlaw written by Edwards.¹⁶ Adding to this, most of film's timeline holds up quite well to scholarship, and what does not has more to do with issues regarding storytelling than a lack of concern for the facts.¹⁷

Dominik developed the screenplay from Ron Hansen's book of the same name, originally published in 1983. While Hansen wrote the book as a piece of historical fiction, he engaged in a great deal of research so that his work was much more historical than fictional. He relied upon newspaper accounts and Settle's biography as his chief sources and then used Carl W. Brehman and some other less reputable authors to finish his work.¹⁸ He also noted

¹⁵ *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, directed by Andrew Dominik (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2008) DVD.

¹⁶ The piece read came from "A Terrible Quintette" written by Edwards in 1873. John Newman Edwards, "A Terrible Quintette," found in *Jesse James: The Best Writing on the Notorious Outlaw and His Gang*, edited by Harold Dellinger, (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2007), 27.

¹⁷ One of the biggest errors is when James first met Robert Ford. The movie has it at the Blue Cut Robbery, but no scholar supports Robert being at that heist. William A. Settle used Dick Liddil's confession as part of description listing, "Frank James, Jesse James, Wood Hite, Clarence Hite, Charlie Ford, and [Dick Liddil]," as the men involved. Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 148. Settle also said that by the time Robert Ford killed Jesse James he had not actually participated in a robbery with the gang. William A. Settle, Jr., *Jesse James was His Name*, (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 117. T.J. Stiles gave the same list at Settle in his work, although he acknowledged that Robert Ford did perpetrate a stagecoach robbery with his brother Charley, Wood Hite, and Dick Liddil not long before Blue Cut, but makes no mention of Robert Ford being involved in Blue Cut. T.J. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 367-368. However, in the case of this film, Ford had to be a part of this robbery in order to introduce him to Jesse there and help develop the relationship the two shared in the movie. *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, directed by Andrew Dominik (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2008) DVD.

¹⁸ Ron Hansen, Acknowledgments to, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2007), 305.

that he stayed away from family sources as, “those ‘memories’ are the most tinged by flattering interpretation.”¹⁹

Ironically, Hansen’s work and Dominik’s subsequent movie both show a great deal of reverence for James as Hansen’s prose and Brad Pitt’s portrayal add layers of mystique, grandeur, and eloquence to what one normally finds in any larger-than-life depiction of the outlaw.²⁰ One noticeable feature in the film is that James appears to give himself up to die. In that scene, James appears to know something is amiss with Ford, but he still takes off his guns, hops on the chair, and almost waits for Ford to kill him. He even hears the gun click and does nothing but watch the events through Ford’s reflection in the picture glass.²¹ This is becoming a trend within James movies as similar scenes can be found in films like *Frank and Jesse* where Jesse allows the Fords to kill him, mainly in order to protect Frank and because he knows he can neither go on living as an outlaw nor give up his life of crime.²² Filmmakers employ this style of death to enhance James’s heroic qualities. The idea of Robert Ford getting the best of James and killing him from behind diminishes the outlaw’s prowess. However, giving himself up adds a certain nobility to his end. Regardless of which way filmmakers go with Jesse in these death scenes, they always make Robert Ford out to be a villain and a coward.²³

¹⁹ Ron Hansen, “About the Book,” found in the P.S. of, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2007), 11.

²⁰ For example, read some of Hansen’s opening chapter which is filled with alliterative prose to match that of any nineteenth century novelist. Hansen, *The Assassination of Jesse James*, 3-6.

²¹ *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, directed by Andrew Dominik (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2008) DVD.

²² *Frank and Jesse*, directed by Robert Boris (1995; Santa Monica, CA: Trimark Home Video, Lions Gate Entertainment, 1999) DVD.

²³ Although, Hansen and Dominik give Ford the warmest treatment of any James storytellers. They show Ford as sycophantic young man caught up in a situation he could not handle. As such he makes a decision that haunts him the rest of his short life. When O’Kelley kills him, Ford does not flinch; he almost welcomes the

Filmmakers have no problem employing any fact that will make their movies more popular. Any desire to make their pictures accurate always comes second to the need to turn a profit from their productions. In the case of Jesse James, this mostly means making him some type of hero and reflecting more of his legend than his factual history. This would not be such an issue if the public did not take so much of what they see in these films as being truthful. And since James is not a historical figure whose story appears in text books, many see these movies as the best way to learn about the outlaw, a trend becoming more popular throughout American history.²⁴ While there is more of scholarship making its way into movies, much of it is veiled by the fantasies surrounding it. As such there is no Jesse James movie one can consider to be truly historically accurate, despite many filmmakers selling their pictures as such.

One would hope the same would be true of James documentaries since the whole purpose of these films is to “tell the facts about actual people and events.”²⁵ However, many of these documentaries follow a similar format to their motion picture counterparts. They

shotgun blast as retribution for his sins. In the case of Robert Ford, it is hard to argue that they are wrong since there is so little scholarly material on him. The only biography written about him was by Carl W. Breihan, a well known exaggerator, and the only productions that focus on Ford are a movie, *I Shot Jesse James* (1949) and a documentary, *The Plot to Kill Jesse James* (2006). Without any better material than this, who is to say their version is really wrong? Such a matter again only aids the positions held by popular storytellers like Les Mayfield. *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, directed by Andrew Dominik (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2008) DVD. Carl W. Breihan, *The Man Who Shot Jesse James* (Cranbury, NJ: A.S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1979). *I Shot Jesse James*, directed by Samuel Fuller, found in Eclipse Series 5: The First Films of Samuel Fuller (The Baron of Arizona / I Shot Jesse James / The Steel Helmet) (The Criterion Collection), (1949; New York: Eclipse, 2007) DVD. *The Plot to Kill Jesse James*, directed by Mike Loades, boxed in DVD set *The History Channel Presents: Jesse James: American Outlaw* (2006; New York: New Video, 2007) DVD.

²⁴ The authors of one study on this issue argue that, “Most Americans learn more history from films and television than from books—a fact of modern cultural life that history teachers are gradually learning to accept.” William L. Barney, Lloyd Kramer, and Donald Reid, eds., introduction to *Learning History in America: Schools, Culture, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 15.

²⁵ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, “Documentary,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/documentary> (accessed May 5, 2015).

address a number of facts, but also present some of the legends and even new fantasies to viewers as “truths.” As such, watching many of these James documentaries is nearly the same as reading an early James biography in regards to factual content and historical learning.

Not all documentaries are poorly done. PBS’s *Jesse James*, released in 2006 as part of its *American Experience* series is one of the most historically accurate James films of any kind. The picture argued that the Civil War taught the James-Younger Gang how to be expert robbers and then the early conditions of Reconstruction created an environment in which they could apply their knowledge. It also discredited any “Robin Hood” or other heroic myths as fabrications. Ultimately, the documentary claimed the romanticized legend, begun by Edwards and proliferated by dime novels, is what has kept the memory of Jesse James alive. It also noted that the narrative could be changed as needed from a story of Lost Cause rebellion into one of working class resistance to please multiple audiences. The picture closes by positing that what we celebrate today is the myth of Jesse James, not the man himself.²⁶

One element of the film that helps to make it so historically accurate is that many of its commentators are recognized scholars. T.J. Stiles made several remarks on the role slavery played in turning the James brothers into outlaws. Another researcher, Cathy M. Jackson, offered a great exploration into John Newman Edwards and the media’s role in creating and supporting the gang and its memory. She also furthered some of Stiles’s

²⁶ *Jesse James*, part of *American Experience* series by PBS, directed by Mark Zwonitzer (2006; Hollywood, CA: PBS Home Video, 2006) DVD.

positions regarding how racism fueled some of the gang's actions.²⁷ And yet another researcher, Michael Gooch asserted a damning argument, stating, "The James boys were not forced into anything."²⁸

Hearing from all of these scholars is great for one hoping to learn about the factual James, but it is also a rarity. William A. Settle never appeared in any documentary. Ted P. Yeatman also was not in documentaries, but instead sat down for an hour long interview on his book for C-SPAN.²⁹ And Milton F. Perry only provided brief commentary for one film, *Legends of the American West: Jesse James* (1992).³⁰ T.J. Stiles is the one of the few James scholar to appear in multiple documentaries including the PBS one and Ron Pastore's *Jesse James' Hidden Treasure* (2009).³¹ Acclaimed amateur James historian, Marley Brant, also found her way into a couple of documentaries including, *The James Gang* (1993).³² Recently, Johnny D. Boggs joined in and provided some commentary for "Jesse James: The

²⁷ Cathy M. Jackson, commentary from, *Jesse James*, part of *American Experience* series by PBS, directed by Mark Zwonitzer (2006; Hollywood, CA: PBS Home Video, 2006) DVD.

²⁸ Michael Gooch, commentary from, *Jesse James*, part of *American Experience* series by PBS, directed by Mark Zwonitzer (2006; Hollywood, CA: PBS Home Video, 2006) DVD.

²⁹ *YouTube*, "The Story Behind the Legend of Frank & Jesse James: Biography, History (2001)," posted by The Film Archives, June 11, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoKNByqJ61l> (accessed September 29, 2015).

³⁰ *Legends of the American West: Jesse James*, directed by Marino Amoruso, part of DVD set, *The Real Jesse James Collection* (1992; Santa Monica, CA: Genius Products, LLC, 2007) DVD.

³¹ *Jesse James' Hidden Treasure*, written by Jodi Flynn, Mike Kelly, and Christina Ruddy (2009; New York, NY: A&E Home Video, 2010) DVD.

³² This film was edited some with a new introduction to create another piece for A&E's *Biography* series. *The James Gang*, part of the series *Biography*, produced by A&E, directed by Donna E. Lusitana, boxed as part of the DVD set *The History Channel Presents: Jesse James: American Outlaw* (1993; New York: New Video, 2007) DVD.

South's Last Rebel" (2014), part of the *Gunslingers* series on the American Heroes Channel.³³

However, many of the other "experts" in James documentaries are mostly amateur historians of various levels of reliability. One mostly does not even need to delve into James literature to be able to tell the scholars from the sycophants. If one sees a picture's commentators dressed in suits or other "professional attire" and speaking with an academic vernacular, then those commentators are likely more trustworthy.³⁴ However, if there are speakers wearing cowboy hats, bolo ties, or even brandishing firearms while employing a bit of a "backwoods" accent, then one ought to be wary of the opinions they express.³⁵

One way in which documentaries manage to match scholarship is that there is contention between different films and experts as to exactly which events were parts of the James's life. For example, one such event is the Centralia massacre in September 1864. Both the PBS's *Jesse James* and *The James Gang* (1993) say he was there and that it was such a traumatic experience that it helped mold him into a killer.³⁶ Conversely, *Legends of*

³³ "Jesse James: The South's Last Rebel," *Gunslingers*, directed by Christopher Cassel, network, American Heroes Channel, original air date, August 3, 2014, <http://www.ahctv.com/tv-shows/gunslingers/gunslingers-video/jesse-james-comes-of-age-amid-blood-and-death/> (accessed September 29, 2015).

³⁴ The best example of this would be the PBS documentary, *Jesse James*, where all of the experts appear in clothing one normally donned by professionals in business and collegiate settings. *Jesse James*, part of *American Experience* series by PBS, directed by Mark Zwonitzer (2006; Hollywood, CA: PBS Home Video, 2006) DVD.

³⁵ Many of the "experts" in the History Channel's *The Plot to Kill Jesse James* look like they just came off the set of a Western or just finished taking part in a reenactment. *The Plot to Kill Jesse James*, directed by Mike Loades, boxed in DVD set *The History Channel Presents: Jesse James: American Outlaw* (2006; New York: New Video, 2007) DVD.

³⁶ *Jesse James*, part of *American Experience* series by PBS, directed by Mark Zwonitzer (2006; Hollywood, CA: PBS Home Video, 2006) DVD. *James Gang*, part of the series *The Real West: Cowboys & Outlaws*, produced by the History Channel, directed by Donna E. Lusitana, boxed as part of the DVD set, *Legends of the Old West* (1993; Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate under license from A&E Networks, 2013) DVD.

the American West: Jesse James (1992) does not place him at the massacre.³⁷ In scholarship, both Settle and Stiles place the James brothers at the massacre, but they differ on how much of a role Frank played in the killing.³⁸ On the other hand, Ted P. Yeatman claims to be unsure as to whether Frank was even there. However, all three believe Jesse definitely participated and likely killed Major A.V.E. Johnson, a deed of which he was quite boastful.³⁹ Again, all of these inconsistencies between documentaries and scholars only aid the opinion of popular producers like Les Mayfield regarding James as more legend than man. So too do some overall assessments of James's place in history found in certain documentaries.

In *Legends of the American West: Jesse James*, the narrator closes the picture with the remark, "The truth of [the James brothers'] lives no longer matters; nor do Jesse and Frank James themselves. All people want to know is the legend, and all the legend needs to grow is an audience, and that is something it will always have."⁴⁰ Such a statement holds some validity, but it also discredits any attempts by scholars or others to depict the historical Jesse James as a waste of time since the public does not want it.⁴¹ The irony here is that like so many movies and popular biographies, James documentaries purport themselves as being "truthful" in the stories they tell simply by presenting them in the documentary format. However, many of their depictions and reports are highly exaggerated accounts or even

³⁷ *Legends of the American West: Jesse James*, directed by Marino Amoruso, part of DVD set, *The Real Jesse James Collection* (1992; Santa Monica, CA: Genius Products, LLC, 2007) DVD.

³⁸ Stiles has Frank as an active participant while Settle says he was mostly at the rear manning the horses. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 119-127. Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 27-28.

³⁹ Ted P. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse: The Story Behind the Legend*, (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2001), 55-56.

⁴⁰ *Legends of the American West: Jesse James*, directed by Marino Amoruso, part of DVD set, *The Real Jesse James Collection* (1992; Santa Monica, CA: Genius Products, LLC, 2007) DVD.

⁴¹ Moreover, it is a bit of a slap in the to one of the film's commentators, Milton F. Perry, who spent his entire professional life building a comprehensive James archive, preserving the James Family Farm, and working with countless researchers to discover the truth about James.

outright fabrications.⁴² True accountings are mixed with fanciful embellishments leaving the public with a distorted view of the historical James. With such a limited knowledge, conspiracy theorists, like amateur James historian Ron Pastore, can present their fantasies in the form of a documentary and sway some of the more naïve in the populace into believing that these fabrications have historical merit.

Pastore's film, *Jesse James' Hidden Treasure* (2009) is a roughly two hour long documentary in which he expounds on all of his different James conspiracy theories. In the film, Pastore claims that he believes himself to have a "PhD in Jesse James," which most learned people would immediately know to be nonsense, but could be seen as valid to the uneducated.⁴³ This film posited a number of different theories involving James faking his death, being connected to a Confederate underground society known as the Knights of the Golden Circle (KGC), and burying loot throughout Missouri and Kansas; none of which have any support from James scholars.⁴⁴ While the filmmakers mentioned that these are beliefs

⁴² In two recent examples of James documentaries, such elements can be seen. In the American Heroes Channel's documentary series, *Gunslingers* (2014), the episode on James tells a version of the story of the James brothers aiding the Southern widow as if it really happened. This, of course completely disregards the work of Settle and other researchers who say Osuch events never took place. "Jesse James: The South's Last Rebel," *Gunslingers*, directed by Christopher Cassel, network, American Heroes Channel, original air date, August 3, 2014, <http://www.ahctv.com/tv-shows/gunslingers/gunslingers-video/jesse-james-comes-of-age-amid-blood-and-death/> (accessed September 29, 2015). Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 172. In the series, *Legends & Lies: The Real West*, Bill O'Reilly referenced a number of issues brought up by scholars, but in an exaggerated fashion. He references T.J. Stiles's arguments about Jesse's mother's zealotry for slavery, but then takes it a step farther by saying she Zerelda Samuel trained the James brothers from an early age to be warriors on behalf of the institution. "The Story of Jesse James," *Legends & Lies*, produced by Bill O'Reilly, network, Fox News, original air date, April 12, 2015, <http://www.billoreilly.com/video?chartID=762&vid=763954452301062789> (accessed June 30, 2015). Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 37-55, 392-395.

⁴³ Ron Pastore, commentary in, *Jesse James' Hidden Treasure*, written by Jodi Flynn, Mike Kelly, and Christina Ruddy (2009; New York, NY: A&E Home Video, 2010) DVD.

⁴⁴ In regards to James not dying at the hands of Robert Ford, no legitimate scholars supports the idea, and both Settle and Yeatman devote portions of their works to establishing all the men who claimed to be James in the twentieth century as imposters. Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 169-171. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James*, 323-340.

only held by Pastore, they presented these ideas as if they were completely credible and included no real voices of opposition in the picture.⁴⁵

This documentary is actually a follow-up to a book Pastore published a year earlier entitled, *Jesse James' Secret: Codes, Cover-ups, and Hidden Treasure*. The ideas in both productions are practically identical, but they are not what make Pastore's works significant in regards to the James field. This was only the second instance where a James author of any kind, managed to turn his or her writing into a production in another medium. The other time this happened was with Ron Hansen's *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, but Hansen wrote it as a piece of historical fiction. Pastore, on the other hand, wrote his book as an exposé into a historical cover-up no historian had yet to fully examine. He also used a co-author on the book, John O'Melveny Woods, who was a film student at the University of Southern California. It was through this partnership that this book became a documentary. Thanks to Woods's connections, the two persuaded the History Channel to air their film.⁴⁶

While the film presented every theory as being meritorious, flaws are easily discernible to those not reeled in by the conspiracy angle. In an attempt to validate his arguments, Pastore and an excavation crew went to sites where he believed James had money

⁴⁵ The only entirely reliable information in the film is the commentary provided by T.J. Stiles, which serves a little more than an attempt to garner some much needed scholarly legitimacy for the film. Here again is an example of a scholar's passive presence, allowing his name to be used by Pastore to validate arguments he does not support. Moreover, even if Stiles participated in an attempt to contradict Pastore, any comments he made of that nature did not make it into the film. Without being involved in the production of these films, one's commentary is open to reinterpretation or removal by an editor, producer, or director, not the historian. *Jesse James' Hidden Treasure*, written by Jodi Flynn, Mike Kelly, and Christina Ruddy (2009; New York, NY: A&E Home Video, 2010) DVD.

⁴⁶ One of the reasons the two managed to convince the History Channel to make a documentary about their work was that their publisher, Intellect Publishing, has a partnership with the University of Chicago Press. Ronald J. Pastore, *Jesse James' Secret: Codes, Cover-ups, and Hidden Treasure*, (Wilmington, NC: Intellect Publishing, 2010).

hidden. A reason Pastore gave for choosing one of these sites were rocks carvings he claimed the James brothers used to mark their spots, one of which looked like an anchor with two Js placed back to back.⁴⁷ In using such evidence, Pastore overlooked several facts. First, carvings in rock formations do not prove a thing, especially in the West. Travelers on wagon routes routinely carved their names in rocks and other landmarks.⁴⁸ To compound that problem, none of the excavators provided any data as to the exact age of these carvings. Most importantly though, Pastore disregarded how the James brothers famously used fake names to remain anonymous.⁴⁹

Also, in their attempts to locate another cache of James loot, Pastore's crew ran into difficulties retrieving it. They believed it was buried nearly 20 feet underground. The excavators brought in a backhoe and other construction equipment to unearth the store. However, they could not reach it because of underground rock deposits their equipment could not break through. Again, Pastore ignored the fact that if modern equipment could not make it down that far, there was no way a man with only shovels, pickaxes, and dynamite could manage to bury his loot that deep or retrieve it using the same instruments later.⁵⁰

In trying to substantiate his theories regarding James's connection to the KGC, Pastore brought in amateur historian, Ralph P. Ganis who originally proposed some of these

⁴⁷ *Jesse James' Hidden Treasure* (2009), DVD, written by Jodi Flynn, Mike Kelly, and Christina Ruddy (New York, NY: A&E Home Video, 2010).

⁴⁸ One such example is Independence Rock in Wyoming. Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, "National Register of Historic Places: Independence Rock National Historical Landmark," *Arts. Parks. History.: Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office*, <http://wyoshpo.state.wy.us/NationalRegister/Site.aspx?ID=281> (accessed May 30, 2015).

⁴⁹ For example at the time of his assassination, Jesse went by the moniker Thomas Howard, and purchased the house he would be murdered in under that alias. Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 117. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 373.

⁵⁰ *Jesse James' Hidden Treasure*, written by Jodi Flynn, Mike Kelly, and Christina Ruddy (2009; New York, NY: A&E Home Video, 2010) DVD.

ideas in his books.⁵¹ In the film, Ganis claimed that John Newman Edwards was one of the leading KGC officials in Missouri, and that his newspaper articles were efforts to shield his agents.⁵² This theory does not hold with any scholarly research. T.J. Stiles is the only James researcher to even mention the KGC in his work, but he makes no connection between that group and the James-Younger Gang.⁵³ While this KGC notion is a relatively new one, Pastore's theory about James faking his death is one that goes back to the early part of the twentieth century.⁵⁴

In the film, Pastore promoted this conspiracy heavily and tried to offer a great deal of forensic evidence as support by employing the efforts of Bob Schmitt, a technician at the software firm, Biometrica. Schmitt compared a well known photo of a young Jesse James to the famous picture of the outlaw lying dead in his casket, and claimed that they were not a complete match as the eyes of the corpse were closed, which made comparing pupil placement and other ocular characteristics impossible. Next, Pastore argued that the body was actually that of an imposter and that following his staged assassination, James moved in with a set of cousins becoming Jeremiah James. He then lived in Kansas until 1935. To validate this, Pastore used the software to compare a photo of one of Jeremiah's great-

⁵¹ Ganis's two books, *Uncommon Men: A Secret Network of Jesse James Revealed* and *Desperate Measures: Jesse James and the Klan, Battles of Reconstruction*, are discussed in chapter 2.

⁵² Ralph P. Ganis, commentary in, *Jesse James' Hidden Treasure*, written by Jodi Flynn, Mike Kelly, and Christina Ruddy (2009; New York, NY: A&E Home Video, 2010) DVD.

⁵³ Stiles mentions that there was a belief in Clay County, Missouri during 1864 that the Knights of the Golden Circle wanted to insight another rebellion to "liberate" the already Union-controlled state. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 99.

⁵⁴ From the 1930s through the 1950s, a series of elderly men began publicly claiming to be the legendary outlaw. Whether it was John James in 1931 or J. Frank Dalton in the late 40s and early 50s, all of these imposters only helped to further the legend of Jesse James by alleging that he faked his death in 1882. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James*, 323-325, 328-333.

grandsons with a picture of Jesse, and the software revealed the two to be a near match.⁵⁵

While the film presented all of this in a persuasive manner, the evidence is mostly circumstantial, but plausible enough to pique the interest of a number of gullible individuals.⁵⁶

Though met with plenty of criticism, the documentary did well enough that the History Channel released the program on DVD in 2010.⁵⁷ The network also continued to air the documentary for several years.⁵⁸ The program's success inspired the Travel Channel to follow another treasure hunter, Josh Gates, on a similar journey in Oklahoma as part of his *Expedition Unknown* series in 2015.⁵⁹ Much of the attention received by these films came from their treasure hunting angles as scores of fortune seekers hoped to find the lost treasure of Jesse James. Although, this fascination dissipated after Pastore failed to produce any

⁵⁵ *Jesse James' Hidden Treasure*, written by Jodi Flynn, Mike Kelly, and Christina Ruddy (2009; New York, NY: A&E Home Video, 2010) DVD.

⁵⁶ Just simply looking alike is nice, but it is not proof. For example, CBS Sports published two articles on athletes and some of their famous doppelgangers. John Breech, "Look: Drew Brees Looks Eerie Like 19th President Rutherford B. Hayes," *CBS Sports* <http://www.cbssports.com/nfl/eye-on-football/25070746/look-drew-brees-looks-eerily-like-19th-president-rutherford-b-hayes>, (accessed June 2, 2015). David Brown, "Switch-Pitcher Pat Vendetti Looks like Soccer Luminary Lionel Messi," *CBS Sports*, <http://www.cbssports.com/mlb/eye-on-baseball/25207622/h-pitcher-pat-venditte-looks-like-soccer-luminary-lionel-messi> (accessed June 7, 2015).

⁵⁷ Many of the negative reviews came from professional critics and James experts. One of these critics commented, "If you're really curious to learn about Jesse James you'd do better to pick up a biography rather than sit through this mess." Judge Victor Valdiva, "Review: Jesse James' Hidden Treasure," *DVD Verdict*, <http://www.dvdverdict.com/reviews/jhiddentreasure.php> (accessed October 16, 2015).

⁵⁸ A TV listing for the *LA Times* shows it airing on the *History Channel* at 3 PM on October 5, 2014. "TV Listings, 10/5/14-10/11/14," *LATIMES.COM/TV Times*, pdf, <http://media.trb.com/media/acrobat/2014-10/23927447936420-03123523.pdf> (accessed October 17, 2015), 2.

⁵⁹ This program similarly produced few tangible results and relied upon sketchy evidence to substantiate its claims. "The Legend of Jesse James," part of the series *Expedition Unknown*, produced by Brea Tisdale, network, *Travel Channel*, original air date, January 29, 2015, <http://www.travelchannel.com/shows/expedition-unknown/video/the-legend-of-jesse-james?PageSpeed=noscript> (accessed October 17, 2015).

further findings, a number of other Pastore fans continued to defend his conspiracy theories.⁶⁰

Web pages devoted to similar stories of James faking his death and a relationship with the KGC are all over the internet. One such site argues that both Jesse James and John Wilkes Booth faked their deaths to become secret agents for the KGC. The two apparently worked for the KGC for several decades after their supposed deaths. However, Booth failed to keep his identity a secret and the KGC ordered James to kill him in 1903.⁶¹ In a number of blogs users try to posit notions of James's ties to the KGC and the Illuminati using Pastore's book as evidence.⁶² This is one of the major problems presented by the conspiracy theorists like Pastore. Their fabrications expand exponentially online creating further confusion to the public understanding of the historical James.

The World Wide Web is now the most popular public medium as billions use it for research, sharing ideas and opinions, and advertising scores of products and events. While many understand that much of the information online must be viewed scrupulously, others take what they see on the web to be mostly truthful. In regards to James, there are very few quality sites available online. Many conspiracy sites exist that have no connection to Pastore or Ganis, and purport even more fanciful delusions. Along with this, many James scholars

⁶⁰ One such website is called *TreasureNet.com*, a forum site where treasure hunters exchange information. In a search for the name "Ron Pastore," at least 21 forums exist where individuals discuss him and the program. Many are critical of his methods, but were at least initially excited to see his presentation. However, the reviews became mostly negative as users realized most of Pastore's arguments held no merit, and he showed no further results online or elsewhere. "Search, Keyword: Pastore," *TreasureNet.com*, <http://www.treasurenet.com/forums/search.php?searchid=10490886> (accessed October 17, 2015).

⁶¹ Mark Owen, "What You Didn't Know About John Wilkes Booth & Jesse James," *Illuminati Conspiracy Archive*, <http://www.conspiracyarchive.com/Articles/Booth-Jesse-James.htm> (accessed June 27, 2015).

⁶² One such page is by a blogger called Ersjdamoo, who writes about how the KGC was part of the Illuminati and how Jesse James worked within it. Ersjdamoo, "Jesse James and the Secret Society," *Ersjdamoo's Blog*, on WordPress, posted, July 12, 2012, <https://ersjdamoo.wordpress.com/2012/07/12/jesse-james-and-the-secret-society/> (accessed October 17, 2015).

and historical preservation groups only use the web to promote themselves, instead of providing users a chance to learn more about James. As such, anyone using the internet to research Jesse James is not likely much in the way of the history they hope to see.

One of the first sites one might examine is the *Wikipedia* page on Jesse James. Despite the site's sometimes questionable reputation, the page provides some of the best information available online.⁶³ One of the encouraging characteristics of the page is the number of the citations referencing Settle, Stiles, and Yeatman.⁶⁴ With such references, the page acknowledges many of their historical arguments and findings, especially those against the outlaw's "Robin Hood" mythology. The page also denounces any claims to a James murder cover-up, providing some rebuttal to Pastore's theories. It also discusses the media's role in the creation of the legend of Jesse James, mainly referring to the contributions of John Newman Edwards. Finally, it provides readers with one of the more comprehensive lists of movies, television programs, and songs which feature the bandit available anywhere online or in print.⁶⁵

For all of the page's merits, it has several shortcomings. The main weakness is that the site simply states the most basic of facts and does not delve into any of the deeper subtext or historical discussions.⁶⁶ For example, William A. Settle went into great lengths to explore the relationship between the gang and the political scene in Missouri from the beginning of Reconstruction to Jesse's murder and even after. In contrast, the webpage only

⁶³ For some examples of how the site's information can be corrupted, read the following article. Alan White, "12 Spectacular Acts of Wikipedia Vandalism," *BuzzFeed*, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/alanwhite/spectacular-acts-of-wikipedia-vandalism#.vpJDEzVWQ> (accessed June 11, 2015).

⁶⁴ Wikipedia, "References," *Jesse James*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesse_James#References (accessed June 11, 2015).

⁶⁵ Wikipedia, *Jesse James*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesse_James (accessed June 11, 2015). Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 66-159. Wikipedia, *Jesse James*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesse_James (accessed June 11, 2015).

acknowledges the very basics of this story saying that as ex-Confederates came into power they tried to shield the gang, and that governor Crittenden conspired to have the outlaw killed. *Wikipedia* is a nice starting point, but no one should rely on it as a main source for Jesse James research. In truth, there is no webpage that could serve as such a reference, but there are a couple that do offer some decent information on the outlaw.

One of the more useful sites is *Legends of America.com*, a travel site designed and operated by Kathy Wiser-Alexander. Though Wiser-Alexander is not a trained historian, she provides some of the most well-written material on James one can find on the internet.⁶⁷ The quality of her work even earned her an appearance as an expert in the documentary “Jesse James: The South’s Last Rebel,” alongside Johnny D. Boggs.⁶⁸ This website offers a six page biography on the outlaw and links to nine other articles written by Wiser-Alexander regarding the James-Younger Gang. While many scholars would endorse much of her information, Wiser-Alexander does not provide any citations or other reference notations to support her claims, a fairly common trend throughout the internet.⁶⁹ Beyond this, her “Timeline of the James Gang” covers many of the bandit’s robberies as well as significant

⁶⁷ Kathy Wiser-Alexander, “Traveling Through History since 2003,” *Legends of America*, <http://www.legendsofamerica.com/aboutus.html> (accessed June 22, 2015).

⁶⁸ While it is hard to tell exactly how many people visit this page, it does have a “Guest Book” section which has over 4000 entries. This is one of the few James related sites that offers any kind of viewership information. This occurrence marks the only instance of a web based James scholar becoming an advertised expert in another medium. Kathy Wiser-Alexander, “Guest Book,” *Legends of America*, <http://legends.signourguestbook.com/> (accessed October 16, 2015). “Jesse James: The South’s Last Rebel,” *Gunslingers*, directed by Christopher Cassel, network, American Heroes Channel, original air date, August 3, 2014, <http://www.ahctv.com/tv-shows/gunslingers/gunslingers-video/jesse-james-comes-of-age-amid-blood-and-death/> (accessed September 29, 2015).

⁶⁹ One example of her questionable material is a claim that Frank and Jesse’s father died from a fever that came from drinking contaminated water. However, neither Settle nor Stiles account for tainted water as the Reverend’s cause of death. Kathy Wiser-Alexander, “Jesse James: Folklore Hero of Cold-Blooded Killer?,” *Legends of America*, <http://www.legendsofamerica.com/we-jessejames.html> (accessed June 22, 2015), 1. Settle simply says that Reverend James became ill and died. Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 8. Stiles only remarked that he “lingered in illness for some two weeks,” before he perished. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 26.

events, but omits several major events.⁷⁰ Despite its problems, her timeline includes a link to a page entitled, “Victims of the James-Younger Gang.” This page is an annotated listing of those killed and wounded by members of the gang during some of their robberies. User-friendly tools like these timelines and victims lists are some of the few things web designers provide that no scholars have yet to offer in their books.⁷¹

An item some other webmasters provide that scholars do not is searchable primary source archives. One such page is the PBS accompaniment page to its *American Experience: Jesse James* documentary. The timeline on the page includes more James information than other online timelines, and is contextualized with other major events in U.S. History that correlate with the James story. Along with this, the number of links to articles, videos, and other useful research tools set this page apart from what is commonly found online.⁷² One of the few sites with a better list is the James page on *HistoryNet*. While the page only offers a short summation of James’s life, it presents two lengthy articles by Ted P. Yeatman and Roland H. Beights, another James researcher. Along with these fine writings, the page provides links to numbers of recent James book reviews and scholarly articles on the

⁷⁰ One example of the questionable nature of the timeline are the comments made about the James brothers’ involvement in the Lawrence Massacre. The timeline states that there is some debate as to whether Jesse was there. Kathy Wiser-Alexander, “Timeline of the James Game,” *Legends of America*, <http://www.legendsofamerica.com/we-jessejamestimeline.html> (accessed June 22, 2015). Amongst scholars there is no such controversy; they do not believe Jesse was there. Settle claims that Frank was there, but Jesse had not joined the guerrillas at that time. Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 25-26. Stiles also notes that Jesse was still living with his mother in Missouri during Quantrill’s raids into Kansas in 1863. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, 99-100.

⁷¹ Kathy Wiser-Alexander, “James-Younger Gang” *Legends of America* <http://www.legendsofamerica.com/we-jamesyounger3.html> (accessed June 22, 2015), 2.

⁷² PBS, “Timeline: The Life and Death of Jesse James,” *American Experience*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/james/> (accessed June 23, 2015).

outlaw.⁷³ In fact, it provides as much access to online research material as any other James site, including the web pages of James scholars and James historical preservation groups.⁷⁴

One such page is that of the Friends of the James Farm. This group can trace its roots back to Milton F. Perry and it remains one of the most dedicated groups to the preservation of the history of the James family. Despite the group's many efforts to promote an accurate James history, their site does not provide a lot of information about James or his family. One can find a few of the organization's newsletter articles and other documents, but there is not much research material on the page.⁷⁵ Conversely, it does offer much in the way of contact and tourist information for enthusiasts who would like to come and visit the James Family Farm where the Milton F. Perry Research Library is located.⁷⁶ Mostly, the site shows links to pages for other James historical groups, researchers, and an assortment of various news and travel sites.⁷⁷

One of these links is to the site of the National James-Younger Gang. Founded by Phillip W. Steele in 1993, this organization is an offshoot of the National Outlaw and Lawmen Association. The group's mission is to allow for "Serious historians, authors, family members and history buffs to get together in an effort to preserve the James-Younger

⁷³ This is very important as so much of the better scholarship on James was written in the form of journal articles instead of books. As such, it is much more difficult for the average person to find these writings since usually cannot be found in public libraries or appear on book searches for sites like *Amazon*. One can see Sties, Yeatman, and Triplett's works in the results of such a search. "Search Results for Jesse James in Books," *Amazon*, http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_c_0_10?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=jesse+james&srefix=Jesse+Jame%2Caps%2C384 (accessed October 19, 2015).

⁷⁴ "Jesse James," *HistoryNet.com*, <http://www.historynet.com/jesse-james> (accessed October 17, 2015).

⁷⁵ Friends of the James Farm, "Article Archive," http://www.jessejames.org/article_archive (accessed June 18, 2015).

⁷⁶ Friends of the James Farm, "Visitors Center," http://www.jessejames.org/visitors_center (accessed June 18, 2015).

⁷⁷ Friends of the James Farm, "Links," <http://www.jessejames.org/links> (accessed June 18, 2015).

gang history and the history of the era they lived in.”⁷⁸ However, this mission is mostly carried out at the group’s conferences and through its newsletters, not its website. The one page of historical data on the site references some of the gang’s most famous robberies with a collection of short summaries written by Steele. This page also offers links to some other James related sites, but one can find more navigation points on the James Family Farm site than on this one.⁷⁹

Much like these preservation groups, James scholars also tend to see the internet only as an advertising vehicle, not a platform from which to change the way the general public views James. Instead of writing web articles, putting together primary source archives, or even providing commentary on other James projects, these James scholars only use the internet to promote their publications and other endeavors. For example, Marley Brant’s website only offers information on her books.⁸⁰ T.J. Stiles does a little more with his site. He makes note of some mistakes he made in the book as well as displays a brief work on guerrilla warfare and how the James-Younger Gang utilized it during their criminal careers. Different from other James historians, Stiles does offer a few links to primary source materials, but they do not work. He also posted a memorial to Ted P. Yeatman and a movie review of *American Outlaws*. The page’s most interesting feature is an article about how the lawless situations in Iraq and Afghanistan somewhat resemble those in Reconstruction Era

⁷⁸ National James-Younger Gang, “About Us,” <http://www.nationaljamesyoungergang.org/about-us/> (accessed June 18, 2015).

⁷⁹ National James-Younger Gang, “Robberies,” <http://www.nationaljamesyoungergang.org/robberies/> (accessed June 18, 2015).

⁸⁰ Marley Brant, marleybrant.com, <http://www.marleybrant.com/> (accessed September 30, 2015).

Missouri. The rest of his web page though only functions as an advertisement for his books.⁸¹

Adding to the problem of their lack of information, the pages for these scholars do not appear as first results in *Google* searches. When one types “Jesse Woodson James” into the search bar, one will see links to the sites for *Wikipedia*, *Legends of America.com*, *HistoryNet*, and the State Historical Society of Missouri web page, but not any of the scholars’ pages. To find one of those sites, one must go to the top of page 3 to find T.J. Stiles’s website.⁸² While these scholars may want to use the web to advertise their works, it takes some extra searching to find them, which again creates an issue. While exploring the links before Stiles’s page, users will hit the pages of a number of mediocre sites which are as misleading as they are informative, and also the norm for James web pages.⁸³

Most of what one finds is little more than a blurb written by those with seemingly little knowledge on the outlaw. These summations consist mostly of a paragraph or three’s worth of story that usually include several key facts. Jesse James fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War. Afterwards, he, his brother, and other guerrillas became outlaws in the confusion of the Reconstruction. They gained such notoriety for their exploits that business leaders and politicians called in the Pinkerton Detective Agency to stop them. Eventually,

⁸¹ T.J. Stiles, “Jesse James,” *TJ Stiles.net*, <http://www.tjstiles.net/bio.htm> (accessed June 20, 2015).

⁸² Searching for “Jesse Woodson James” turns up much better results as there are a number of other famous people with some form of the name “Jesse James.” Google, “Search Results for Jesse Woodson James,” <https://www.google.com/search?q=Jesse+James+Hidden+Treasure&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8#q=Jesse+Woodson+James&tbas=0> (accessed October 17, 2015) pages 1-3.

⁸³ In this case two of the sites in that search are quite useless. The biography of James on *Your Dictionary* mentions Settle as one of the best sources for James reading, but also lists many of the books by Carl W. Breihan as well. “Jesse Woodson James Facts,” *Your Dictionary*, <http://biography.yourdictionary.com/jesse-woodson-james> (accessed October 17, 2015). The other page is the James profile on *TheFamousPeople.com* which offers a lackluster biography out the outlaw and uses an image of Jesse James, the motorcycle enthusiast, as the profile picture. “Jesse James Biography,” *TheFamousPeople.com*, <http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/jesse-james-3887.php> (accessed October 17, 2015).

the James-Younger Gang met their end at Northfield, Minnesota. Following that defeat, Jesse formed a new gang whose loyalties did not match his old crew. Two of that group's members, the Ford brothers, then conspired with Missouri Governor Thomas Crittenden to assassinate Jesse. On April 3, 1882, Robert Ford murdered Jesse. Sometimes they also mention John Newman Edwards and dime novelists as being responsible for creating the James legend, and other times they include some of James's "Robin Hood" stories. Practically none of these pages make any notations of James being a slaveholder, and they rarely depict him as anything other than a hero. However, the lack of information on these pages pales in comparison to the misinformation on sites dedicated to purporting James conspiracy theories.⁸⁴

Beyond those connected to Pastore and Ganis, sites arguing that James faked his death can be found all over the internet. While the notion goes back generations, thanks to the World Wide Web, it has a brand new life and highly susceptible audience. Anyone can create such a web page based on whatever "evidence" that person chooses and then purport it as some sort of historical cover-up. Some of the more popular conspiracies are one's that linger from the 1930s. One such theory proclaims J. Frank Dalton to be the real outlaw, despite being publicly discredited in his own life and then being ridiculed as a fraud by most

⁸⁴ Here are some examples of these sites with little more than blurbs. *Biography*, "Jesse James, Biography," <http://www.biography.com/people/jesse-james-9352646> (accessed June 26, 2015). The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Jesse James and Frank James," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Jesse-James-and-Frank-James> (accessed June 26, 2015). This page actually gives a bibliography that includes Settle. Paul G. Kooistra, "Jesse James," *American National Biography Online*, <http://www.anb.org/articles/20/20-00510.html> (accessed June 26, 2015). *Know Southern History*, "Jesse James: 1847-1882," http://www.knowsouthernhistory.net/Biographies/Jesse_James/ (accessed June, 26, 2015).

James historians.⁸⁵ Another hoax is that told by Betty Dorsett Duke, who claims to be the great-granddaughter of the real Jesse James who lived in Texas under the alias James L. Courtney until his death in 1943.⁸⁶ A fanciful version of the James story as told by a “relative” is quick to get attention of many. However, in the case of Duke, there are plenty who call her a liar and say she has no familial connection to James at all.⁸⁷ While experienced James researchers would not utilize sites such as these, someone who is a novice or a naïve history buff might find these pages to be fascinating and view them as factual.

The same can be said for all of the misrepresentations of the historical Jesse James in the modern popular media. Those with a background in scholarship understand how far off these reinterpretations of the James story are from history, but the average person does not. They see something spectacular in a James movie, hear a similar account in a James documentary, and then find a related article on a web page and believe a fantasy to be reality. As such, these individuals never dive into the scholarship on matter as they already found a James narrative they are comfortable with through multiple popular sources. Moreover, since many of the popular producers still attempt to sell their stories as being factual the

⁸⁵ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 171. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James*, 328-334, 338-339. One such page that still promotes this Dalton story is that of the Jesse James Wax Museum. Jesse James Wax Museum, “Welcome to the Jesse James Wax Museum,” <http://www.jessejameswaxmuseum.com/index.php> (accessed June 27, 2015).

⁸⁶ Duke uses flaws in the 1995 DNA test done of the exhumation of James grave in Missouri for proof. She later wrote several books on matter, *Jesse James Lived and Died in Texas* (1998), *The Truth About Jesse James* (2008), and *Jesse James: The Smoking Gun* (2011). All of these works rely on skeptical evidence to make their arguments and continue to do so on the web pages dedicated to them. Duke died on August 25, 2015, but her books and the web page produced by her family keep her version of the James story alive. Daniel and Teresa Duke, *Jesse James’ Death Hoax and Buried Treasure*, <http://www.jessejamesintexas.com/> (accessed October 17, 2015).

⁸⁷ Eric James, “False Statement by Betty Dorsett Duke,” *Genealogy.com*, <http://www.genealogy.com/forum/general/topics/outlaws/9639/> (accessed October 17, 2015). Yeatman also discredits her claims in his chapter on James imposters. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James*, 339.

average person likely will not be familiar enough with James scholarship to know these are exaggerated claims.

The chance that these people will find a differing version is somewhat minimized by the fact that James scholars have not been very involved with these media to contradict these perpetuated fantasies. They continue to leave their accounts mostly in books most people do not know. And what they have contributed to popular media is likely to be overlooked with all the other material available. However, this level of involvement is something scholars need to reexamine. If popular producers are going to sell people the “truth” and then give them mostly the “legend,” then it is up to scholars to find a way change this scenario. These James historians are the people who actually know the truth about James and are the only people with a real capability to share it with the world. As such, James scholars need to find a way to take their research out of their literature and put it into a medium that Americans normally frequent when looking for the James story. Without such efforts, the American public’s understanding of James will remain one of legend, not of history.

Conclusion

Don't That Picture Look Dusty: Some Final Thoughts on Jesse James and the Reinterpretation of History in Popular Media

Jesse James's place as one of America's most recognizable historical names is quite secure as the outlaw's story will continue to be one of this country's most beloved narratives for years to come. Filmmakers, documentarians, web designers and other artists will keep publishing works on James as long as the public will consume them, and that desire will not be satiated any time soon. As such, the manner in which popular producers depict James is the way a large portion of the American populace views the outlaw. And with that in mind, scholars need to focus upon the outlaw's popular legacy as much as his place in American history.

While Jesse James lived an extraordinary life, none of his actions changed the fate of this nation or were emblematic of how average Americans lived during his lifetime. He fought in the Civil War. He battled some of the early Southern hardships of Reconstruction and likely held to some of the early Lost Cause ideologies. More remarkably, he put together one of the longest and most prolific criminal careers in American history. However, the reason his name became part of the American mythos is because popular producers told his tale in such a grandiose and exaggerated fashion that his story became a perpetual piece of Americana. Starting with John Newman Edwards's newspaper articles through Frank Triplet's exaggerated biographies to dime novels and songs then movies, the media turned the story of Jesse James into one of this country's most revered legends. And it has always been through these popular productions where most Americans learned his "history."

William A. Settle and all of the scholars who followed in his footsteps did amazing work to separate the fantasies from the realities in regards to James's life, but then many of them tried to turn James into some kind of historically significant figure.¹ Their desires to see his tale matter on a historic level clouded their ability to recognize that it is not his story that makes him relevant to history, but how others manipulated his life in the media which makes James an important figure to America's cultural history. James's story is not one that belongs in the histories of the Civil War, Reconstruction, or the Lost Cause. It is one though that should be examined as we continue to explore the history of the American media and the creation of our celebrity culture through such means. Trying to discuss the developments of the James legend as only an aspect of James's history, not the essential part of his story, devalues the overall significance of Jesse James to this nation's past and identity.²

Moreover, it overlooks James's place in American mythology as if it is something of the past. The outlaw's tale still resonates with the American public and many popular producers retell his story either directly or indirectly.³ He has not maintained the prominent position he once held, but one would be hard pressed to find many Americans who do not know his name. Filmmakers, documentarians, webmasters, song writers, and many other

¹ Settle sought to make him a major figure in the history of Reconstruction through his effects on the political scene in Missouri. William A. Settle, Jr., *Jesse James was his Name* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 3. T.J. Stiles attempted to argue his story embodied the ways Southerners and Americans in general overlook the role slavery played in the development of the region, the nation, and our mythology. T.J. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 392-395.

² Settle for one seems to think these James legends are just cultural heirlooms scholars will just have to live with as forces greater than the truth allow them to be passed down through the generations. Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 180-201.

³ Look at a television show like Joss Whedon's cult classic, *Firefly* (2002). Many aspects of the James story can be found all throughout this western drama set in outer space. The series tells the story of a space pirate who once fought in a failed rebellion against an oppressive intergalactic government. His second in command fought with him in the rebellion and with his crew they rob installations which belong to the repressive regime. Moreover, they often end up aiding individuals hurt by these despots and even manage to pull off a train heist. *Firefly*, created by Joss Whedon (2002; Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2003) DVD.

popular artists continue to retell his story in new and even more embellished ways than before. Sometimes they show reverence for some of the efforts made by scholars, but it comes only in glimpses of history still mixed in with a great deal of fantasy. Despite these inaccuracies, many of these popular producers still attempt to advertise their productions as being truthful.⁴

This is a fact of which scholars need to be aware. The only reasons most Americans do not know more about the historical James is because no one has been completely willing to give them his story through a medium they frequent. Ron Pastore attempted such a feat with his documentary. He ultimately failed to win over the masses with this production, but that was not because they were not interested. It was because he spouted ludicrous conspiracy theories and gave only circumstantial evidence to support these claims.⁵ However, real James historians do not have this problem as they have volumes of reliable source material to substantiate their positions to an American public eager to see them.

William A. Settle once commented that fictional narratives translate better to television and the movies, and while that is very true, that does not mean more historically accurate productions would not find success.⁶ By no means should James historians feel

⁴ Look at the way many James films use some version of the phrase “The True Story” in their advertisements. YouTube, “The Last Days of Frank & Jesse James 1986 Trailer,” posted by Craig Anderson, June 29, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9T7-EkbaJg> (accessed September 24, 2015). YouTube, “Frank And Jesse Trailer 1994,” posted by Video Detective, December 27, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weif8XXjoi> (accessed September 24, 2015). “Theatrical Trailer,” *The Long Riders*, directed by Walter Hill (1980; Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2001) DVD. *The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid*, directed by Philip Kaufman (1972; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2007) DVD.

⁵ Read some of the responses in some of the forums on *TreasureNet.com*, many of the people were intrigued by Pastore’s ideas, but gave up on them after they put some thought into the skeptical nature of his evidence. “Search, Keyword: Pastore,” *TreasureNet.com*, <http://www.treasurenet.com/forums/search.php?searchid=10490886> (accessed October 17, 2015).

⁶ Letter from William A. Settle, Jr. to Tom Watson, August 13, 1980, microfilm roll 2, William A. Settle, Jr. Papers, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.

compelled to try to make movies or documentaries. That is not their job nor do they have the training for it, but that does not mean they could not become more involved. However, instead of simply offering some notes or brief consultations, they could work with screenwriters more closely to develop more historically accurate scripts. They could do the same with documentarians. Otherwise, these scholars leave the matter in the hands of the film's editors, many of whom likely do not have enough working knowledge of James history to know what to use. It is understandable that such a task is difficult as it is tough for anyone to break into the film industry. Although, there is one medium in which anyone can become a global force by simply logging on, and it is the one most capable of changing the public narrative on James.

The internet offers untold possibilities for changing the public understanding of the historical Jesse James. Just simply keeping tabs on the James *Wikipedia* page could do wonders in providing the correct details of the outlaw's life to the public. Moreover, seeing the internet as method to educate the public instead of just advertising could also do a great deal. Scholars could start online forums, produce web articles, make educational *YouTube* videos, or create online primary source archives. Even more simply, they could add thorough James narratives, timelines, and bibliographies to their existing pages. They could also post articles that dispel many of the legends and conspiracy theories to aid people in knowing what is real and what is fantasy. Any of their research they can put online would be helpful in changing public perception or at least give people more of a chance to know fact from fiction.

William A. Settle was absolutely right when he said the James legend will never die.⁷ However, that does not mean the legend has to remain as the primary public narrative of the outlaw. With some greater exploration into the effect James still has on American culture, James scholars can find inroads towards changing the public understanding of James to a more historically accurate one. Moreover, they need to view this as their responsibility to do so. Popular producers will not stop recreating the James legends until they stop selling. They also are not going to stop advertising their fantasies as “histories” since that billing makes these productions more enticing to the public. If anyone is ever going to combat this, it must be the James scholars. They know the outlaw’s history better than anyone and they have the credibility to give any production legitimacy. Writing histories works well for educating other historians and future scholars, but these efforts do not often reach the American public. As such, James historians need to utilize more popular media in order to spread the true story to an American populace that knows mostly tall tales. This work might not destroy the James myths entirely, but it can make it to where the factual history of James is the narrative on the outlaw instead of another story about an American legend.

⁷ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 201.

Bibliography

Books:

- Barney, William L., Lloyd Kramer, and Donald Reid, eds. *Learning History in America: Schools, Culture, and Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Boggs, Johnny D. *Jesse James and the Movies*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2011.
- Brant, Marley. *Jesse James: The Man and the Myth*. New York: Berkley Books, 1998.
- . *The Outlaw Youngers: A Confederate Brotherhood*. Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1993.
- Breihan, Carl W. *The Complete and Authentic Life of Jesse James*. Introduction by Homer Croy. New York: Frederick Fells Inc., 1953.
- . *The Day Jesse James was Killed*. New York: Frederick Fells Inc., 1961.
- . *The Man Who Shot Jesse James*. Cranbury, NJ: A.S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1979.
- Buel, James W. *The Border Outlaws. An Authentic and Thrilling History of the Most Noted Bandits of Ancient or Modern Times, the Younger Brothers, Jesse and Frank James, and Their Comrades in Crime*. St. Louis, MO: Historical Publishing Co, 1882.
- Croy, Homer. *Jesse James was my Neighbor*. Introduction by Richard E. Meyer. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. Orig. pub. 1949.
- Dellinger, Harold, ed. *Jesse James: The Best Writings on the Notorious Outlaw and His Gang*. Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot, 2007.
- Edwards, John N. *Noted Guerrillas, or the Warfare of the Border*. St. Louis, MO: H.W. Brand, 1879. Orig. pub. 1877.
- Faragher, John Mack, and Robert V. Hine. *The American West: A New Interpretative History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Fisher, David. *Bill O'Reilly's Legends & Lies: The Real West, The Companion Volume to the Fox News Series*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2015.
- Fitzgerald, Michael W. *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007.
- Foner, Eric. *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Ganis, Ralph P. *Uncommon Men: A Secret Network of Jesse James Revealed*. St. Petersburg, FL: Southern Heritage Press, 2000.

- Ganis, Ralph P., with Julie Hampton Ganis, Jerry D. Shouse, Jr. And Matthew C. Bumgartner. *Desperate Measures: Jesse James and the Klan Battles of Reconstruction*. Hickory, NC: Tarheel Press, 2007.
- Hansen, Harry. *The Civil War: A History*. New York: New American Library, 2001.
- Hansen, Ron. *Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2007.
- Hanson, Joseph Have. *The Northfield Tragedy: or, the Robber's Raid: a Thrilling Narrative: a History of the Remarkable Attempt to Rob the Bank at Northfield, Minnesota; the Cold-blooded Murder of the Brave Cashier and an Inoffensive Citizen; the Slaying of Two of the Brigands; the Wonderful Robber Hunt and Capture Graphically Described; Biographies of the Victims, the Captors & the Notorious Younger and James Gang of Desperadoes*. St. Paul, MN: John Jay Lemon, 1876.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. *Bandits*. Rev. ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981. Orig. pub. 1969.
- James, Jesse Edwards. *Jesse James, My Father; The First and Only True Story of his Adventures Ever Written*. Memphis, TN: General Books, 2010. Orig. pub. 1899
- Lewis, Jon E. *The Mammoth Book of The West: The Making of the American West*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2001.
- Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987.
- Loewen, James W. and Edward H. Sebesta, eds. *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader: The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause."* Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010.
- Love, Robertus. *The Rise and Fall of Jesse James*. Introduction by Michael Fellman. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. Orig. pub. 1925.
- Osterweir, Rollin G. *The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865-1900*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1973.
- Pastore, Ronald J. and John O'Melveny Woods. *Jesse James' Secret: Code, Cover-ups, and Hidden Treasure*. San Diego: Sunbelt Publications, 2007.
- Ross, James R. I. *Jesse James*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Dragon, 1988.
- Settle, William A. Jr. *Jesse James was his Name, or, Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.
- Smith, Adam I.P. *The American Civil War*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007.
- Steele, Phillip W. *Jesse and Frank James: The Family History*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1987.

Steele, Phillip W., and George Warfel. *The Many Faces of Jesse James*. Gretna, LA: Pelican, 1995.

Stiles, T.J. *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.

Triplett, Frank. *The Life, Times, and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*. Introduction by Joseph W. Snell. New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1970. Orig. pub. 1882.

White, Richard. "When Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill Cody Both Played Chicago in 1893." In *Does the Frontier Experience Make America Exceptional?*, edited by Richard W. Etulain, 45-58, Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999.

Yeatman, Ted P. *Frank and Jesse James: The Story Behind the Legend*. Nashville, TN: Cumberland House, 2001.

Younger, Cole. *The Story of Cole Younger by Himself: Being an Autobiography of the Missouri Guerrilla Captain and Outlaw, His Capture and Prison Life, and the Only Authentic Account of the Northfield Raid Ever Published*. Introduction by Marley Brant. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000.

Films:

American Outlaws. Directed by Les Mayfield. 2001; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2001. VHS.

Firefly. Created by Joss Whedon. 2002; Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2003. DVD.

Frank and Jesse. Directed by Robert Boris. 1995; Santa Monica, CA: Trimark Home Video, Lions Gate Entertainment, 1999. DVD.

I Shot Jesse James. Directed by Samuel Fuller, Found in Eclipse Series 5: The First Films of Samuel Fuller (The Baron of Arizona / I Shot Jesse James / The Steel Helmet) (The Criterion Collection). 1949; New York: Eclipse, 2007. DVD.

Jesse James. Directed by Henry King. 1939. Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 2006. DVD.

Jesse James. Part of *American Experience* series by PBS. Directed by Mark Zwonitzer. 2006; Hollywood, CA: PBS Home Video, 2006. DVD.

Jesse James Under the Black Flag. Written and directed by Franklin B. Coates. 1921; Phoenix, AZ: Grapevine Video, 2003. DVD.

Jesse James' Hidden Treasure. Written by Jodi Flynn, Mike Kelly, and Christina Ruddy. 2009; New York, NY: A&E Home Video, 2010. DVD.

“Jesse James: The South’s Last Rebel.” Part of the series, *Gunslingers*. Directed by Christopher Cassel. Network, American Heroes Channel. Original air date, August 3, 2014. <http://www.ahctv.com/tv-shows/gunslingers/gunslingers-video/jesse-james-comes-of-age-amid-blood-and-death/> (accessed September 29, 2015).

Legends of the American West: Jesse James. Directed by Marino Amoruso. Part of DVD set, *The Real Jesse James Collection*. 1992; Santa Monica, CA: Genius Products, LLC, 2007. DVD.

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford. Directed by Andrew Dominik. 2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2008. DVD.

The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid. Directed by Philip Kaufman. 1972; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2007. DVD.

The James Gang. Part of the series *Biography*, produced by A&E. Directed by Donna E. Lusitana. Boxed as part of the DVD set *The History Channel Presents: Jesse James: American Outlaw*. 1993; New York: New Video, 2007. DVD.

“The Legend of Jesse James.” Part of the series *Expedition Unknown*. Produced by Brea Tisdale. Network, *Travel Channel*. Original air date, January 29, 2015. <http://www.travelchannel.com/shows/expedition-unknown/video/the-legend-of-jesse-james?PageSpeed=noscript> (accessed October 17, 2015).

The Long Riders. Directed by Walter Hill. 1980; Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2001. DVD.

The Plot to Kill Jesse James. Directed by Mike Loades. Boxed in DVD set *The History Channel Presents: Jesse James: American Outlaw*. 2006; New York: New Video, 2007. DVD.

“The Story of Jesse James.” Part of the series, *Legends & Lies*. Produced by Bill O’Reilly. Network, Fox News. Original air date, April 12, 2015. <http://www.billoreilly.com/video?chartID=762&vid=763954452301062789> (accessed June 30, 2015).

The True Story of Jesse James. Directed by Nicholas Ray. 1957; Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013. DVD.

Internet Sources:

Amazon.com. “Search Results for Jesse James in Books.” http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_c_0_10?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-

- [keywords=jesse+james&sprefix=Jesse+Jame%2Caps%2C384](#) (accessed October 19, 2015).
- Biblio.com*, “Frank Triplett,” <http://www.biblio.com/frank-triplett/author/11660> (accessed October 27, 2015).
- Biography.com*. “Jesse James, Biography.” <http://www.biography.com/people/jesse-james-9352646> (accessed June 26, 2015).
- Brant, Marley. *Marleybrant.com*. <http://marleybrant.com/page1.php> (accessed November 11, 2013).
- Breech, John. “Look: Drew Brees Looks Eerie Like 19th President Rutherford B. Hayes.” *CBS Sports*. <http://www.cbssports.com/nfl/eye-on-football/25070746/look-drew-brees-looks-eerily-like-19th-president-rutherford-b-hayes>, (accessed June 2, 2015).
- Brown, David. “Switch-Pitcher Pat Vendetti Looks like Soccer Luminary Lionel Messi.” *CBS Sports*. <http://www.cbssports.com/mlb/eye-on-baseball/25207622/h-pitcher-pat-venditte-looks-like-soccer-luminary-lionel-messi> (accessed June 7, 2015).
- Carleton Digital Collections*. “Search for Jesse James Dime Novels.” <https://contentdm.carleton.edu/cdm4/browse.php?CISOROOT=%2FDimeNovels>, (accessed November 2, 2011).
- Clay County Missouri*. “Milton F. Perry Research Library.” https://www.claycountymo.gov/Historic_Sites/Jesse_James_Farm/Related_Information/Milton_F._Perry_Research_Library (accessed October 29, 2013).
- Duke, Daniel and Teresa. “Jesse James’ Death Hoax and Buried Treasure.” <http://www.jessejamesintexas.com/> (accessed October 17, 2015).
- Encyclopedia Britannica.com*, “Jesse James and Frank James,” <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Jesse-James-and-Frank-James> (accessed June 26, 2015).
- Ersjdamoo. “Jesse James and the Secret Socieity.” *Ersjdamoo’s Blog. WordPress*. Posted, July 12, 2012. <https://ersjdamoo.wordpress.com/2012/07/12/jesse-james-and-the-secret-society/> (accessed October 17, 2015).
- Friends of the James Farm. *Jesse James.org*. <http://www.jessejames.org> (accessed June 18, 2015).
- Google*. “Search Results for Jesse Woodson James.” <https://www.google.com/search?q=Jesse+James+Hidden+Treasure&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8#q=Jesse+Woodson+James&tbas=0> (accessed October 17, 2015).
- HistoryNet.com*. “Jesse James.” <http://www.historynet.com/jesse-james> (accessed October 17, 2015).

- James, Eric. "False Statement by Betty Dorsett Duke." *Genealogy.com*.
<http://www.genealogy.com/forum/general/topics/outlaws/9639/> (accessed October 17, 2015).
- Jesse James Wax Museum.com*. "Welcome to the Jesse James Wax Museum."
<http://www.jessejameswaxmuseum.com/index.php> (accessed June 27, 2015).
- Know Southern History.net*. "Jesse James: 1847-1882."
http://www.knowsouthernhistory.net/Biographies/Jesse_James/ (accessed June, 26, 2015).
- Kooistra, Paul G. "Jesse James." *American National Biography Online*.
<http://www.anb.org/articles/20/20-00510.html> (accessed June 26, 2015).
- LATIMES.COM*. "TV Listings, 10/5/14-10/11/14." *LATIMES.COM/TV Times*. pdf.
<http://media.trb.com/media/acrobat/2014-10/23927447936420-03123523.pdf>
(accessed October 17, 2015).
- McLellan, Dennis. "James Ross, 80, was Great-Grandson of Jesse James," *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 2007, *The Boston Globe*,
http://www.boston.com/news/globe/obituaries/articles/2007/03/10/james_ross_80_judge_was_great_grandson_of_jesse_james/ (accessed March 9, 2015).
- Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. "Documentary." <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/documentary> (accessed May 5, 2015).
- Michael, Jonathan. "The Rise of the Anti-Hero: Why the Characters in TV and Movies We Love Most are the Ones with Fatal Flaws." *Relevant*.
<http://www.relevantmagazine.com/culture/tv/rise-anti-hero> (accessed July 13, 2015).
- National James-Younger Gang. <http://www.nationaljamesyoungergang.org/about-us/>
(accessed June 18, 2015).
- Owen, Mark. "What You Didn't Know About John Wilkes Booth & Jesse James." *Illuminati Conspiracy Archive*. <http://www.conspiracyarchive.com/Articles/Booth-Jesse-James.htm> (accessed June 27, 2015).
- PBS.com* "Timeline: The Life and Death of Jesse James." *American Experience*.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/james/> (accessed June 23, 2015).
- Phillip W. Steele.com*. "About the Author," <http://www.phillipwsteele.com/about.html>
(accessed February 20, 2015).
- Samuelson, Nancy B. "Review: *Desperate Measures: Jesse James and the Klan Battles of Reconstruction* by Ralph P. Ganis with Julie Hampton Ganis, Jerry D. Shouse, Jr. And Matthew C. Bumgartner. Tarheel Press, Hickory, North Carolina 2007 ISBN#: NONE," *Stray Leaves*, <http://ericjames.org/wordpress/category/corrections/> (accessed June 28, 2015).

Stanford University Libraries/Academic Text Service. "James Boys Weekly." *Dime Novels and Penny Dreadfuls*. http://suloads.stanford.edu/swprd_dp/pnpack.draw?pid=430, (accessed November 2, 2011).

Stiles, T.J. *T.J. Stiles.net*, <http://www.tjstiles.net/bio.htm> (accessed June 17, 2015).

TheFamousPeople.com. "Jesse James Biography." <http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/jesse-james-3887.php> (accessed October 17, 2015).

TreasureNet.com. "Search, Keyword: Pastore." <http://www.treasurenet.com/forums/search.php?searchid=10490886> (accessed October 17, 2015).

Valdiva, Judge Victor. "Review: Jesse James' Hidden Treasure." *DVD Verdict*. <http://www.dvdverdict.com/reviews/jjhiddentreasure.php> (accessed October 16, 2015).

White, Alan. "12 Spectacular Acts of Wikipedia Vandalism." *BuzzFeed*. <http://www.buzzfeed.com/alanwhite/spectacular-acts-of-wikipedia-vandalism#.vpJDEzVWQ> (accessed June 11, 2015).

Wikipedia, "Jesse James." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesse_James (accessed June 11, 2015).

Wiser-Alexander, Kathy. *Legends of America.com*. <http://www.legendsofamerica.com> (accessed June 22, 2015).

Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office. "National Register of Historic Places: Independence Rock National Historical Landmark," *Arts. Parks. History*. <http://wyoshpo.state.wy.us/NationalRegister/Site.aspx?ID=281> (accessed May 30, 2015).

Your Dictionary.com. "Jesse Woodson James Facts." <http://biography.yourdictionary.com/jesse-woodson-james> (accessed October 17, 2015).

YouTube. "American Outlaws – Making Of." Posted by *_Knöwîng Nöthîng Îs Bëttër Th@n Knöwîng @t @ll_* [sic], September 24, 2008. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPGn1TWzrcc> (accessed September 24, 2015).

YouTube. "Frank And Jesse Trailer 1994." Posted by Video Detective, December 27, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weifF8XXjoI> (accessed September 24, 2015).

YouTube. "The Last Days of Frank & Jesse James 1986 Trailer." Posted by Craig Anderson, June 29, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9T7-EkbaJg> (accessed September 24, 2015).

YouTube. "The Story Behind the Legend of Frank & Jesse James: Biography, History (2001)." Posted by The Film Archives, June 11, 2015.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoKNByqJ61I> (accessed September 29, 2015).

Journal Articles:

Jarmuzewski, Nicholas. "Jesse James: The Myth as Perpetuated by John Newman Edwards." *Nelson Quarterly Journal*. (April, 2008): 188.

Wybrow, Robert J. "From the Pen of a Noble Robber: The Letters of Jesse Woodson James, 1847-1882." *Brand Books* 24, no. 2 (Summer, 1987): 1-22., pub. by the English Westerners' Society.

Wybrow, Robert J. "Jesse's Juveniles." *Brand Books* 12, no. 1, (October, 1969): 1-3.

Newspaper Articles:

Edwards, John Newman. "A Terrible Quintette," *St. Louis Dispatch*, November 1873.
 Quoted in Dellinger, Harold, ed. *Jesse James: The Best Writings on the Notorious Outlaw and His Gang*. Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot, 2007.

Edwards, John Newman. *Sedalia Daily Democrat*, April 13, 1882. Quoted in William A. Settle, Jr. *Jesse James was his Name, or, Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.

Unknown author, *St. Joseph Herald*, August 14, 1884. Quoted in William A. Settle, Jr. *Jesse James was his Name, or, Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.

Unknown author, *Texas Siftings*, April 29, 1882. Quoted in William A. Settle, Jr. *Jesse James was his Name, or, Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.

Paper Collections:

William A. Settle, Jr. Papers. Missouri State Historical Society. Columbia, MO.

Vita

Allen M. Sherrill was born in Statesville, North Carolina to Michael and Beatrice Sherrill. He graduated from Newton-Conover High School in May 2003. He entered North Carolina State University the following autumn. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in History and an Associate's in Nonprofit Studies in May 2007. Afterwards he began working with the Catawba County Historical Association as the Site Manager for the Murray's Mill Historic District. He later decided to return to school and entered into the graduate school at Appalachian State University in January 2010. He completed his Master of Arts in History in December 2015.

Mr. Sherrill currently resides in Newton, North Carolina. He remains a faithful member of Beth Eden Lutheran Church in Newton, North Carolina and serves the congregation as a member of the Sound/Video Recording Team and as the Assisting Minister for special observances. His future plans are to pursue a career in a history-based field such as a junior college professor or a museum professional. He also has some desires towards venturing into documentary filmmaking, but more likely as an aside rather than a primary vocation.