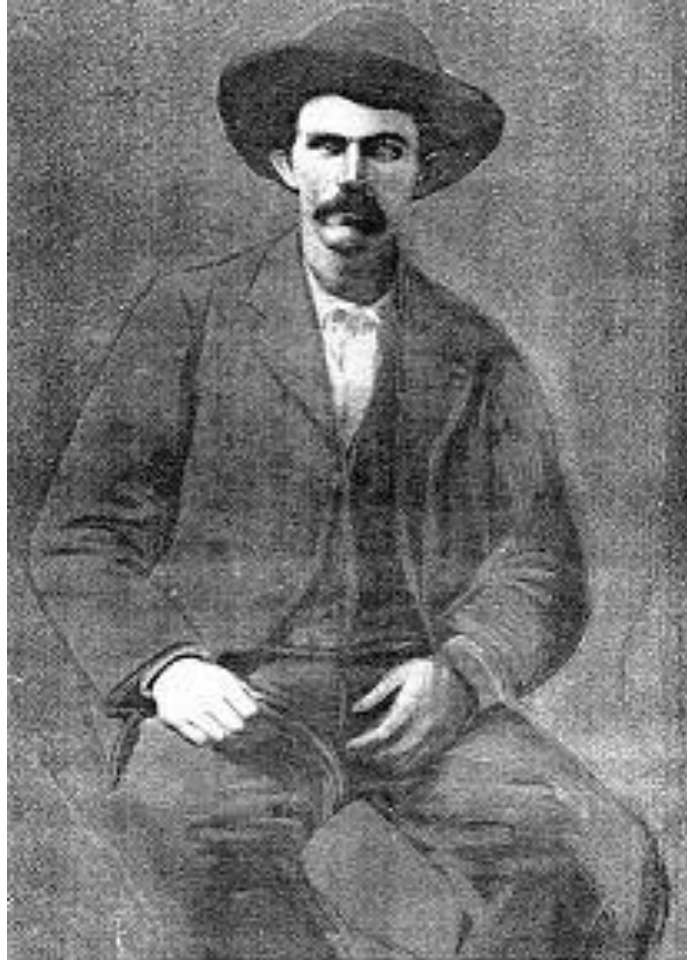


## **Jesse James: Avenger Or Cold-Blooded Killer?**



*Jesse James*

Jesse James' legendary status began in his own time and still attracts world-wide fascination. He is referred to as America's Robin Hood (Avenger), a robbin' hood, an outlaw, a patriot and a terrorist. Terrorist seems to be used out of place in this instance due to it being a modern word often misused to abuse one's enemies - is it revealing of those who use it to describe him? Whatever the case may be the debate will probably never end because one man's Robin Hood is another man's terrorist.

Some claim the Border War between Missouri and Kansas rages on, and when one hears accounts like those on PBS' American Experience's Jesse James, one gets the feeling that the Civil War, the battle between the North and South, is also still being fought with words instead of bullets.

Is Jesse James a target because he's a legendary hero who fought for the South and is still very much in the public eye? Did a writer dub him a terrorist for a new twist on an old story to sell books? Is "to the victor go the spoils" true? Did the victorious North write unfavorable accounts of Jesse James because he and his comrades were so effective in battling them? Is it still happening?

[http://www.mcwm.org/history\\_mizzoukansas.html](http://www.mcwm.org/history_mizzoukansas.html)

Although there are favorable reviews on Amazon.com for T. J. Stiles' *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (2002), there are also unfavorable reviews due to his portrayal of Jesse James. Which is the actual fact of the matter?

PBS recently aired a program about Jesse James that portrayed him and his comrades in a very negative manner. To read a transcript of this program click here:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/transcript/james-transcript/>.

The following participants were part of the program:

**"Participants: Fred Chiaventone**, Author, *Moon of Bitter Cold* and *A Road We Do Not Know*; **Michael Gooch**, Local Historian; **Deb Goodrich**, Author, Publisher, *Kansas Journal of Military History*; **Tom Goodrich**, Author, *Black Flag: Guerrilla Warfare on the Western Border* ; **Christopher Phillips**, Historian, Author, *Missouri's Confederate: Claiborne Fox Jackson and the Creation of Southern Identity in the Border West*; **Phil Stewart**, Local Historian, Pentagon Correspondent for *Reuters*, Specialist on Colombia's guerrilla war and Brazilian politics; and **T.J. Stiles**, Author, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*"

T. J. Stiles is a native of Minnesota, a state known for their low opinion of Jesse James and his gang. Mr. Stiles may have been the first to dub Jesse James a terrorist. However, author Betty Dorsett Duke says that according to his personal diary Jesse James did not participate in that robbery. In a book Mr. Stiles wrote titled *Jesse James* (1994) he revealed that his family legend has it that he is related to William Stiles, a member of the gang shot dead during the Northfield robbery.

Deb Goodrich and her husband Tom Goodrich are natives of Kansas, a state also known for their disdain of Quantrill and his men, including Jesse James. This is largely due to the Lawrence Raid. However, there's another side to this story. Most historians fail to mention *why* they claimed they raided Lawrence. Besides Osceola, the collapse of a Kansas City jail holding some of Quantrill's noted guerrillas' female relatives reportedly caused it.

<http://www.rulen.com/partisan/osceola.htm>

<http://civilwar150.kansascity.com/articles/darryls-jail-story-612/>

<http://civilwar150.kansascity.com/articles/darryls-jail-story-612/>

<http://penningtons.tripod.com/scv1.htm>

Phil Stewart is from Missouri but according to Beth Beckett, the current curator of the James Farm & Museum, he was fired from his position of their historian. He is also closely associated with Eric James, owner of the James genealogy site Stray Leaves, as well as the James Preservation Trust.

[http://www.jessejamesintexas.com/History!\\_Is\\_it\\_to\\_die\\_for.pdf](http://www.jessejamesintexas.com/History!_Is_it_to_die_for.pdf)

<http://www.jessejamesintexas.com/index.htm>

When speaking of the atrocities Jesse James and his comrades allegedly committed the participants of the televised program failed to mention any of the atrocities committed by those who fought for the North, especially Jennison's Jayhawkers:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_R.\\_Jennison](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_R._Jennison)

The participants claim that Quantrill's men disemboweled and committed other atrocities on the men they killed during the war.

Does anyone have documented proof that Quantrill's men actually did these things?

Does anyone have documented proof that these same types of atrocities were also done to Quantrill's men?

These allegations are reminiscent of the recent story of U. S. Marines urinating on dead Taliban fighters. One soldier described it like this:

"Nevertheless, the things the soldiers shouted during combat were very revealing of the state of mind that war produces. (For the record, I'm sure the Taliban was screaming pretty much the same things about us.) At one point a Taliban fighter had his leg shot off during a firefight and was crawling around on the hillside, dying, and the men I was with cheered at the sight. That cheer deflated me. I liked these guys tremendously, but that celebration was just so ugly. I didn't want them to be like that.

Later, I asked one of them about it, and he explained that they had been happy because they were that much closer to all going home alive. They weren't cheering the enemy's death; they were cheering their own lives. That particular fighter would never again be able to kill an American soldier."

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/28/jennisons-jayhawkers/>

The participants spoke of the Centralia Massacre in disparaging Jesse James and his comrades. However, the following excerpt from Frank James' account tells a different side of the story (first

published in 1900 for *Harper's Weekly*):

*'When great, big, grown men, with full possession of all their faculties refer to that battle as 'the Centralia Massacre,' I think they are pleading the baby act. We did not seek the fight. Johnson foolishly came out to hunt us, and he found us. Then we killed him and his men. Wouldn't he have killed every one of us if he had a chance? What is war for if it isn't to kill people for a principle? The Yankee soldiers tried to kill every one of the Southern soldiers, and the soldiers from the South tried to kill all the Yanks, and that's all there is to it.*

*We were just out there in the bush, not molesting anybody, when Johnson and his men came out after us. We never took prisoners. We couldn't do it. How could we carry them around with us? We either killed them or turned them loose. As for the Centralia fight, it reminds me of Macbeth: 'Never shake thy gory locks at me; Thou canst not say I did it.'*

*'We didn't make war on women and children. They were the only people whom I sympathized with during the war. Men ought to be in the fight on one side or the other. Nor did we fight the citizens, except when they played the informer. I understood one citizen was killed in Centralia in a drunken row. That ought not to have been done. The Yankees killed many more noncombatants that we did.'*

One writer describes the ongoing controversy about Jesse James very well in describing Jennison - it depends on who once asks:

"Today the "jayhawk" is best known as the mascot for University of Kansas sports teams; the university's Web site describes it as a fanciful combination of the blue jay and the sparrow hawk, each a pugnacious bird in its own right. During the Civil War, though, the term had a much different meaning: depending on which side you asked, a jayhawker was either a hero or a thief. In practice, he was usually both."

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/28/jennisons-jayhawkers/>

Photographic evidence reportedly surfaced in 2011 providing strong evidence that Jesse James did not die as history reports, but lived on in Texas and died from old age. The photographs may be viewed at <http://www.jessejamesintexas.com/index.htm> or in Betty Dorsett Duke's, *Jesse James – The Smoking Gun* (2012), also for sale on Amazon.com. She recommends reading *The South Was Right* (1991,1994).

<http://www.amazon.com/South-Was-Right-Walter-Kennedy/dp/1565540247>. According to the three books Ms. Duke has written about Jesse James since 1998, those who knew him held him in high regard.

It always pays to read both sides of any story before forming an opinion – the truth usually falls somewhere in between.