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Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War

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tific knowledge by collecting data on the environment, and he could use that same material to attract settlers to his locale. Blatant boosterism and medical science went hand in hand on the American frontier.

The remaining chapters on "Cultivation" (both land and body could be "cultivated" and brought into harmony through diligent work) and "Racial Anxiety" (involving prejudice about blacks, whites, and Indians; blurred boundaries between races; pseudoscience; and environmental and other complexities) and the conclusion held my interest to the end.

Valencius frequently pushes the metaphorical potential of her texts to the limit. A case in point involves the "Red River Raft," a troublesome blockage of trees and debris in that stream in southwestern Arkansas. "To a people plagued with constipation," she writes, "and outfitted with a series of remedies designed to loosen various obstructions and release stubborn menstrual flow, the raft was another reflection of the ways the natural world and the human body were subject to a consistent set of properties, functions, and problems" (144).

More comfortable with narrative sources than with the numerical data compiled to advance the science of medical geography, Valencius shows no awareness of the mountain of statistics collected by the Provost Marshal General of the United States during the Civil War. Processed thereafter and technically beyond the chronological scope of this book, the material is noteworthy as the last ripe fruit of medical theory rooted in the classical world. The microbe hunters found little use for medical geography.

There is much to praise and little to criticize in this important book. The conceptual apparatus is as applicable to Iowa as it is to Missouri and Arkansas.

Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War, by T. J. Stiles. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. xiii, 510 pp. Map, notes, index. \$27.50 cloth.

Reviewer Roger A. Bruns is a historian and retired deputy executive director of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission at the National Archives in Washington, DC. His latest books are *Almost History* (2000) and *Desert Honkytonk* (2000).

When we think of bandits, we think of the Old West of the nineteenth century, the West of train robberies and six-shooters, horses and gunfights in dust-blown streets of no-account towns. We think of the revered legends—the heroes of dime and pulp novels and the misunderstood loners of the silver screen. We think of Jesse James riding into Northfield in *The Long Riders*. From novelists and journalists, historians

and writers of folk songs, screenwriters and movie actors, we've been showered with images. Most of them are overdrawn; many are simply fictitious. But we revel in them all. We tell the old stories again and again, and each time the deeds seem to become even more astonishing, the figures ever more heroic and romantic. With *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, T. J. Stiles plunges into this minefield. He emerges with a first-rate examination of James and all the commotion he caused not only in his own time but also later on.

James was America's most famous criminal. From songs and myths, books and newspapers, and tall stories handed down, his legend grew. A man who had killed many and robbed often became a figure representing manliness, courage, cunning, and daring. Here was a Confederate soldier who refused to lose, a man of the people who took on the railroads, the police, the banks, and the government—and thrived. Outwitting and outfoxing his pursuers, protected by friends, James became the Robin Hood of the prairie.

By the early 1870s, the James Gang had become national news. Much of the phenomenon can be traced to a *Kansas City Times* journalist named John Newman Edwards, a former Confederate adjutant who admired James and made it his personal mission to tell the world of his deeds. In Edwards's stories, readers were introduced to a new American hero. Edwards churned out glorious prose about the chivalry and courage of James and his compatriots.

By 1903, more than 270 stories about Jesse James had made the pages of the pulp industry. Some were loosely based on fact; others were totally imaginative. In ballads and odes the legend grew about this misunderstood warrior laid out by treachery and bad fate, this heroic badman of the plains, this train robber and bank robber who committed his crimes mostly for honor and pride, not for money. It was from those images that the great bandit hero image flourished. When officers asked train robber Frank Ryan in 1915 why he had turned from a life of respectability to that of a thief, he answered, "Bad companions and dime novels. Jesse James was my favorite hero. I used to read about him at school when us kids swapped dime novels."

James embodied a combination of conflicting strains of good and evil and assumptions about justice, well-ordered society, freedom, and individual rights. The outlaw was not "all bad." There were aspects of his past and content in his character from which the authors could find redemptive features, from which heroic elements could be passed on. Over the years, not only did the public buy much of this nonsense, but historians also peddled it, gave it respectability and even adorned all

of it with a theory—that of the social bandit from the peasantry who wages class warfare against his oppressors.

Splendidly researched and elegantly written, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* blasts the myths like dynamite on an old mail car. Basically, James was a thug—a talented thug, but a thug nonetheless. Given license to act out his thuggish tendencies during the Civil War, he, along with other ex-Confederate rampagers, continued fighting the Yankees, or at least the ex-Yankees of the plains. He and his friends did it because they could and because they liked doing it. They did it because they hated Yankees or Yankee sympathizers. They did not do it because they had populist political aspirations. It was not to Robin Hood that James could trace his influence, Stiles shows convincingly, but to the aptly named Bloody Bill Anderson, the notorious and brutal Confederate guerilla fighter with whom James rode during the war.

Despite the best efforts of writers such as Stiles, we can expect new bandit heroes. As long as there is fascination for the clever or bold or outrageous criminal, there will be outlets for feeding the myths.

Rails across the Mississippi: A History of the St. Louis Bridge, by Robert W. Jackson. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001. ix, 266 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Kevin Byrne is professor of history at Gustavus Adolphus College. His research and writing have focused on the history of technology, railroads, and the American military.

Robert Jackson's detailed, well-researched volume explores the intricate history of the planning, financing, and construction of St. Louis's Eads Bridge, examining local, national, and international contexts. Designer and self-styled genius James Eads, an entrepreneur without prior engineering experience, and industrialist Andrew Carnegie emerge from a welter of names as the most prominent players in the drama. Challenging conventional techniques, Eads envisioned a unique arched, two-level bridge that would be a monument to his life's achievements, much to the chagrin of Carnegie, who secured British financing and headed the company building the superstructure. Carnegie and associates preferred efficiency and profit and, true to Gilded Age principles, kept their attention keenly focused on accumulating personal wealth. Meanwhile, Eads's insistence on innovative designs and preference for steel led to expensive delays, several workers' deaths, and significant cost overruns, as did complications over the related building of a tunnel and union depot in St. Louis. Seven years after beginning construction in 1867—three years overdue and

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