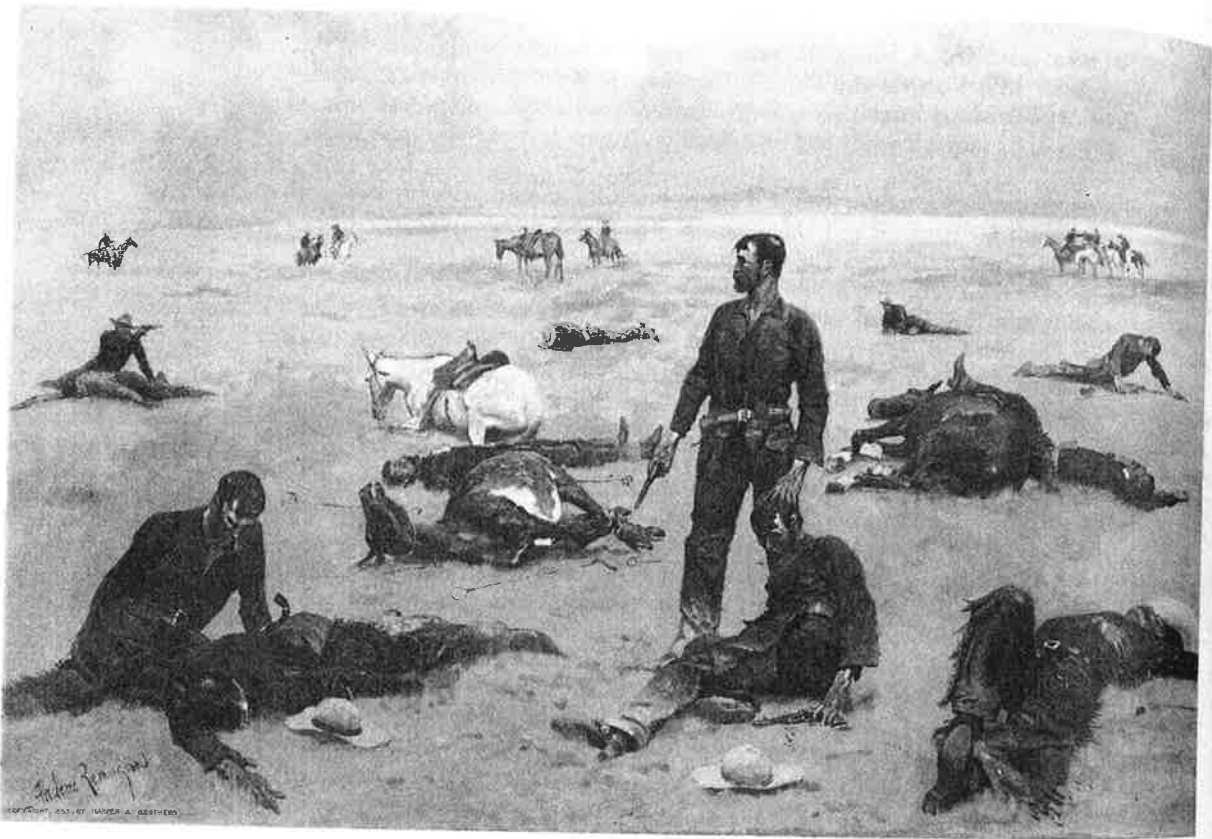


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Chapter Eleven

Violence

RICHARD MAXWELL BROWN

The focus of this essay is the West from the middle of the nineteenth century to 1920—a period in which the violence of the region was not only heavy but destined to become an enduring aspect of the national mythology. First is a discussion of the values that impelled westerners of the time to be violent. Next is an extended treatment of what I have termed the Western Civil War of Incorporation, the key to so much violence from 1850 to 1920. The essay concludes with brief comments on western violence in recent decades, treats the images of western violence so deeply graven in the national consciousness, and closes by addressing two vital questions: Just how violent was the West? Is the West mainly responsible for the American heritage of pervasive violence?

Values

A cluster of beliefs mentally programmed westerners to commit violence: the doctrine of no duty to retreat; the imperative of personal self-redress; the homestead ethic; the ethic of individual enterprise; the Code of the West; and the ideology of vigilantism.

The *doctrine of no duty to retreat* emerged when the West, along with the rest of America, made a transition from the English common law of homicide and self-defense, in which flight or retreat was legally required in combat situations, to the frontier-western-American concept of no duty to retreat. Crucial to the English common law of homicide was the notion of escape: in a personal dispute that threatened to become violent, one must flee from the scene. Should it be impossible to get away, however, the common law required that one retreat as far as possible—"to the wall" at one's back—before violently resisting an antagonist in an act of lawful self-defense.

Following the westward movement of white American settlers beyond the Appalachians, the highest court in state after state canceled the English duty to retreat in favor of the American right to stand one's ground. In 1876, the top Ohio court held that a "true man" was "not obligated to fly" from an assailant. The following year the Indiana Supreme Court got to the heart of the matter: "The tendency of the American mind seems to be very strongly against the enforcement of any rule which requires a person to flee when assailed." An old folk song expressed the popular attitude:

Wake up, wake up darlin' Corrie
And go and get my gun
I ain't no hand for trouble
But I'll die before I'll run

No western gun battle over unbranded cattle or range rights claimed as many lives as Frederic Remington's painting suggests. But the picture, based on a story by Owen Wister, captures the spirit of the no-duty-to-retreat gunplay that characterized violence in the 19th-century West.

Frederic Remington (1861–1909). What an Unbranded Cow Has Cost. Oil on canvas, 1895. Gift of Thomas M. Evans, B.A. 1931, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

The climax of the American renunciation of the duty to retreat came with the U.S. Supreme Court's 1921 decision in the case of *Brown v. United States*. The 7-2 majority opinion endorsing no duty to retreat was written by the noted civil libertarian Oliver Wendell Holmes, whose brisk language was a withering dismissal of the duty to retreat. The Supreme Court's decision reversed a federal-court murder conviction of a self-defending Texan who stood his ground and shot to death a knife-wielding assailant. In private correspondence about the case, Holmes noted that in its common and statute law, Texas was the strongest of all states in favor of the doctrine of no duty to retreat. In Texas, Holmes wrote approvingly, "a man is not born to run away."

Throughout the West, the *imperative of personal self-redress* of grievances was strong. In American frontier history Andrew Jackson, who was reared on the South Carolina frontier and established himself in frontier Tennessee, recounted how his mother's 1781 deathbed admonition to him as a youth of fourteen had been never "to tell a lie, nor take what is not yours, nor sue . . . for slander" but to "settle them cases for yourself"—advice by which the future president, who had killed an opponent in a duel, lived. In the West itself the gunfighting Texas-born New Mexico rancher Oliver M. Lee invoked the ethic of personal self-redress to justify the killings in his embattled career. "I never in my life willingly hurt man, woman, or child—unless they hurt me first. Then I made them pay."

Another powerful inspiration for violent behavior by westerners was, time and again, the *homestead ethic*, whose morality went back to the colonial Anglo-American frontier. This grass-roots doctrine had three key beliefs: the right to have and to hold a family-size farm, the homestead; the right to enjoy a homestead unencumbered by a ruinous economic burden such as an onerous mortgage or oppressive taxes; and the right peacefully to occupy the homestead without fear of violence (such as that by Indians or outlaws) to person or property.

Stretching to the highest realm of the American and western economy was a contrasting value: the large-property owner's *ethic of individual enterprise* in a market economy. The individual-enterprise ethic was strongly supported by the greatest capitalists of the West, including such legendary self-made men as the "Big Four" entrepreneurs who built the railroad empire of the Central and Southern Pacific lines and the "cattle kings" such as Captain Richard King of Texas and William C. Irvine of Wyoming. It was not just the big-name industrialists and agrarian magnates who subscribed so ardently to the entrepreneurial ethic but also countless others in small businesses and the professions. Throughout the West, these aggressive men-on-the-make were ever ready to use violence in allegiance to the individual-enterprise ethic and in defense of their landed and industrial property.

As the nineteenth century wore on, the civilians of the West, brandishing revolvers and rifles in the ordinary course of daily affairs, became one of the most heavily armed populations in the world. The uniquely armed and conflicted society of the West—a "legacy of conquest" in the historian Patricia Nelson Limerick's apt phrase—produced notions of western honor culminating in the *Code of the West*. Central to the Code of the West were the doctrine of no duty to retreat, the imperative of personal self-redress, and an ultrahigh value on courage, which often became, in the phrase of one historian, "reckless bravado"—a bravado that, however, was praised for its courage and not derided for its recklessness.

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An Englishman who traveled across the West from California to Texas in the 1870s–1880s observed firsthand the Code of the West among his quick-to-shoot cowboy mates on a long 1880s Texas cattle drive. For readers of the British *Cornhill Magazine*, this anonymous Englishman enumerated the elements of what he termed the “somewhat primitive code of honour” of the cowboys: honesty, courage, sensitive pride, stoic indifference to pain, and, above all, a violent vengefulness against insult. With the cowboy, it was “frequently not a word and a blow but a word and a bullet,” for the Code of the West was upheld by ready resort to the six-gun. Allegiance to the Code of the West produced a gunfight that claimed a life on this cattle drive. The urban West shared in the code, as the writer Rudyard Kipling found when, at about the same time, he visited the “civilized city” of Portland, Oregon. To his deep distaste Kipling observed that the jury and Portlanders at large viewed a murder case from the perspective of the western code, emphasizing the proper conditions under which a gunfight might legitimately occur and the fairness of such combat. That such prescriptions were often violated was testimony to the view that they were needed.

Nineteenth-century America was obsessed by masculine honor—North, South, East, and West. The Code of the West was a variant of the national emphasis on honor, a variant that was responsive to the particular conditions of western society in which the actuality or threat of gunplay was pervasive. Basic to the Code of the West was what President Dwight D. Eisenhower, in a nationally televised address of 1953, stressed as the essence of that code and as the code of Abilene, Kansas (Eisenhower’s hometown), and its frontier marshal James Butler (“Wild Bill”) Hickok: “Meet anyone face to face with whom you disagree” and “if you met him face to face and took the same risk as he did, you could get away with almost anything [killing included], as long as the bullet was in front.”

Whereas western gunfighting brought the Code of the West into focus, one of the most common institutions of western violence—vigilantism—had its own set of beliefs. The *ideology of vigilantism* was regularized in the vigilante bylaws, constitutions, and oaths to which westerners frequently subscribed. Motivated by the objective of supporting the values of life and property under conditions of frontier and western disorder, vigilante bands took the law into their own hands for the paradoxical purpose of law enforcement—law as they saw it, in its substantive form of justice rather than its procedurally legal sense. Since vigilantes were almost invariably led by the elite, well-to-do members of early western communities, the ideology of vigilantism reflected the need to justify taking the law into one’s own hands (in effect, committing a revolution against the State) on the part of those who were ordinarily the most zealous upholders of the legal system of law and order.

At the core of the ideology of vigilantism were three elements: self-preservation, the right of revolution, and popular sovereignty. To vigilantes, self-preservation was “the first law of nature,” and thus vigilantism was necessary to preserve the community against outlaw activity. By the same token, although vigilante action was a blow against legal authority, it was justified by the right of revolution, which, in analogy to the intolerable conditions that inspired revolution against the British in 1776, justified vigilante bands, which, likewise, were seen as being like “revolutionary tribunals.” By the related doctrine of popular sovereignty, vigilantes as well as Americans at large saw the

people as being above the law—a law viewed as ineffective against frontier crime. To its adherents, vigilantism was but a case of the people exercising their sovereign power, in the interest of self-preservation, against the disorderly. Crucial, also, to the ideology of vigilantism was its economic rationale: vigilantism was not only often far more certain and fair than the regular system of law and order but also much cheaper. A Denver newspaper reported the popular view that an 1879 vigilante hanging in nearby Golden was not only “well merited but a positive gain to the county, saving it at least five or six thousand dollars.”

Behavior

With well over two hundred vigilante movements west of the Mississippi, few states escaped the severe affliction of vigilantism. From the earliest days of the Anglo settlers, Texas was the most active vigilante state. California, with the giant San Francisco vigilante movement of 1856 (whose six to eight thousand members made it the largest in American history) and with many other movements in the gold rush era, was a prototypical state for western vigilantism. In no state, however, was the ethos of vigilantism more deeply embedded than in Montana, where the state capitol memorializes frontier vigilantes.

Prominent western senators (Leland Stanford, California; Wilbur Fisk Sanders, Montana; William J. McConnell, Idaho) and governors (Stanford, California; John E. Osborne and Fennimore Chatterton, Wyoming; Miguel A. Otero and George Curry, New Mexico) had been vigilantes, as had such members of the economic aristocracy as the capitalists Stanford and William Tell Coleman of California and the cattle king Granville Stuart of Montana. Especially in Texas and occasionally elsewhere, vigilantes terrorized entire communities and, once in a while, as Walter Van Tilburg Clark suggested in his classic antivigilante novel *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1940), punished the innocent. Yet, the offense of vigilantes was far less in violating the spirit of the law than its letter. Violations of the letter of the law, although serious, were widely acclaimed by the people and even by notables of the bench and bar.

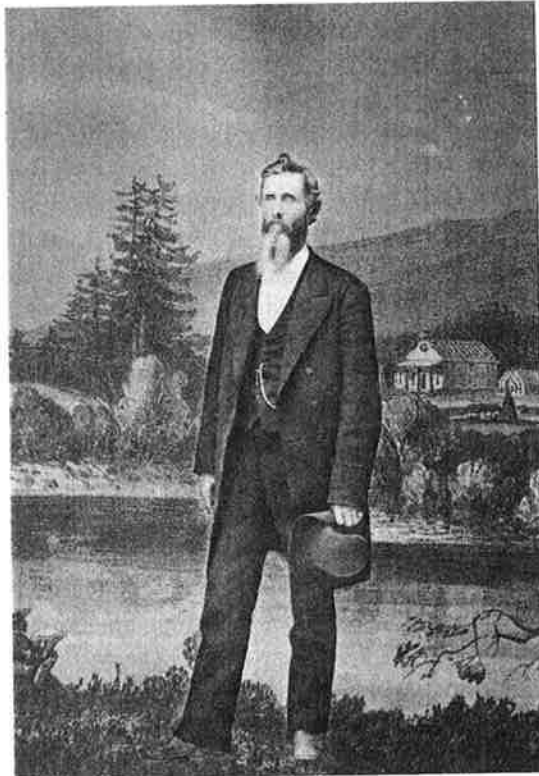
The local campaigns of vigilantes were often aspects of a crucial pattern of violence pervading the West from the 1850s to 1920. At its core was the conservative, consolidating authority of capital—the force that was, in the scholar Alan Trachtenberg’s conception, “incorporating” America during the late nineteenth century. In the West this process of incorporation was well under way by 1870 and lasted to 1920. Yet, opposing factions and individuals fought the incorporating trend politically and, often, violently.

The polarizing antagonism resulting from the trend of incorporation produced a civil war in the West—one fought in many places and on many fronts in almost all of the western territories and states from the 1850s into the 1910s. In its broadest terms, the “Western Civil War of Incorporation” pitted insurgent or resistant Indians against the political pressure and military force that concentrated them in reservations throughout the West. The Western Civil War of Incorporation also impinged economically and culturally on the traditional lifeways and livelihoods of the Hispanos of the Southwest, who fought back, for example, in northern New Mexico with the Gorras Blancas (“White Caps”) and in southern Texas with the *bandidos*. The expansive western farm

Though gunfighters dominate popular imagery of western violence, the perpetrators of violence came from many walks of life. Numerous politicians and business leaders—including the California senator, governor, and railroad magnate Leland Stanford and the Montana cattleman Granville Stuart—participated in the vigilante violence that enforced the interests of conservative businesses in the late-19th-century West.



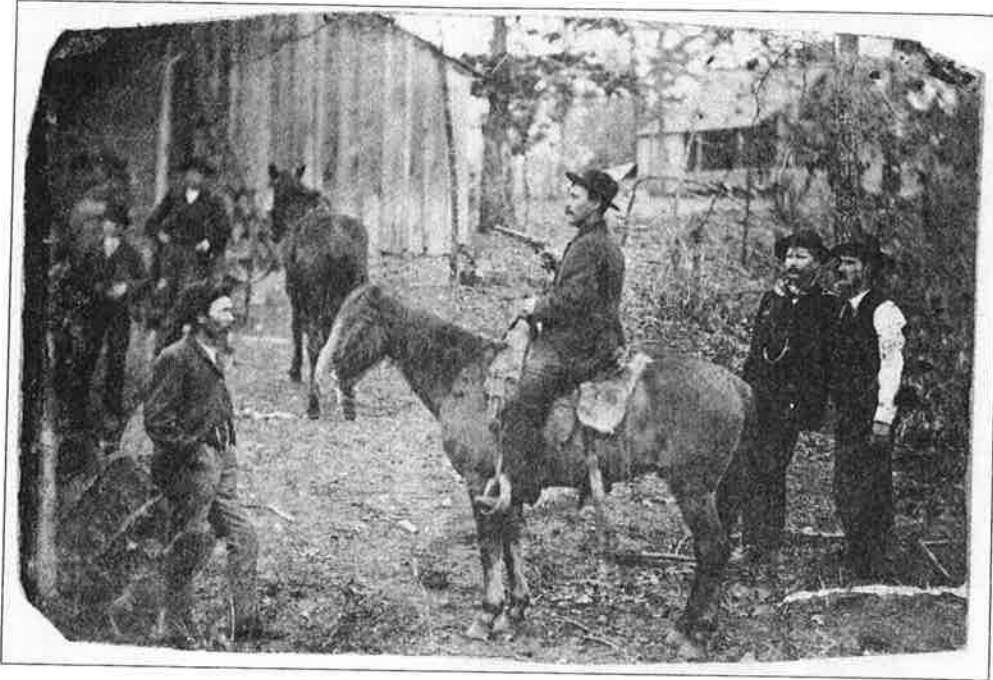
Watery studio. Leland Stanford, Wife, and Son. Albumen silver print, ca. 1881. Stanford University Archives, Stanford, California.



E. H. Train (1831–99). Granville Stuart. Photograph and pen and ink on paper, 1877. Montana Historical Society, Helena.

Mugging for a family photograph, Jesse James playfully posed on horseback with his gun drawn, ironically acknowledging his own status as a popular bandit hero.

Unidentified photographer. Jesse James on Horseback. Tintype, ca. 1870. Everhard Collection, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.



and range country was incessantly rocked by land wars and brigandage while the propertied class curbed the disorder of chaotic boomtowns. In the mines, mills, and logging camps on the wageworkers' frontier of the West, employees resisted corporate industrialists with strikes that frequently ended in violence. An alliance of capital and government fought back with paramilitary efforts to control the far-flung workplaces of the West.

In the forefront of the Western Civil War of Incorporation were the gunfighters of the region. The best known were the two or three hundred glorified gunfighters whose fame and exploits became a part of the legend of the West—gunslingers such as Wild Bill Hickok, Jesse James, John Wesley Hardin, Billy the Kid, and Wyatt Earp. Much more obscure were the thousands of grass-roots gunfighters whose exploits became little or not at all known beyond their own localities. Although generally not as effective as the glorified gunfighters, the grass-roots gunfighters could be deadly. One of them—Walter J. Crow of California—individually exceeded the single-gunfight killings of Hickok, James, Hardin, Billy the Kid, Earp, or any of the other glorified gunfighters. In the range country and boomtowns of the pastoral and mining West, gunmen were the shock troops in the Western Civil War of Incorporation. On one side of this intraregional war were the conservative incorporation gunfighters, whose ranks included glorified gunfighters like Hickok of Kansas, Earp of Kansas and Arizona, and Frank Canton of Wyoming and Oklahoma and grass-roots gunfighters like Crow of California. The incorporation gunfighters were often northern in background and members of the Republican party. Frequently southern or Texan in their roots and Democratic in politics were the dissident resister gunfighters, some of whom, like Jesse James and Billy the Kid, were mythologized as popular heroes—as “social bandits.”

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Conceptualized by the British historian E. J. Hobsbawm, a social bandit is, in American terms, a notable lawbreaker widely supported, paradoxically, by the law-abiding members of society. In the West the crimes of social bandits were often approved because they expressed the discontents and grievances of those who would never dare commit such crimes on their own. The historian Richard White has traced the grass-roots admiration for social bandits in the tradition of Jesse James, whose bravery and daring was applauded as being that of "strong men who could protect and revenge themselves." Skilled gunhandlers, these social bandits often robbed banks and railroads whose steep charges were deeply resented by peaceable western farmers, ranchers, and townspeople in the post-1865 period when economic conditions caused severe hardship for those of small means. These western social bandits not only were outlaws but also were resister gunfighters in the Western Civil War of Incorporation.

African-American gunhandlers, who fought effectively on both sides of the Western Civil War of Incorporation, were fairly numerous. Among the black resisters was Isom Dart (an alias of Ned Huddleston) of the Brown's Park outlaw faction of Colorado and Wyoming. On the other side of the regional civil war was tall, tough Jim Kelly, a star gunslinger for the magnate I. P. (Print) Olive, whose embattled "gun outfit" of cowboys stormed across ranges in both Texas and Nebraska.

The Western Civil War of Incorporation coincided with a trend from 1865 to 1900 in which wealthy and powerful individuals, companies, and corporations sought either to force settlers off the land or to overcharge them for their occupancy. In effect, this was a land-enclosing movement, which in the West engendered instability and discontent comparable to that caused by the land-enclosure movements in England from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century. Especially aggressive in the West were the big ranchers, whose gunfighting cowboys tried to exclude small ranchers and homesteading farmers from the ranges. Crucial, also, to the land-enclosing trend were some top railroads of the West, which, through congressional land grants, tied up huge acreages and set the price of land sales to settlers.

It was just such a land grant, to the Southern Pacific Railroad, that bred the Mussel Slough conflict in California. In the agriculturally rich Mussel Slough country thirty miles south of Fresno in California's Central Valley, the homestead ethic of the settlers clashed with the capitalistic entrepreneurial ethic of the "Big Four" owners of the Southern Pacific—Collis P. Huntington, Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins. In dispute between the settlers and the railroad were thousands of acres for which the pioneers and the railroad had conflicting land claims. The legal dispute over the land's ownership entered the federal circuit court, where in 1879 Judge Lorenzo Sawyer, a friend of Stanford and Crocker, decided in the railroad's favor. The settlers responded with night-riding vigilantism to intimidate local supporters of the railroad and, in a no-duty-to-retreat mood, prepared to defend their richly productive small farms with firearms.

The crisis exploded into the deadliest civilian gunfight in far western history on 11 May 1880, when settlers resisted eviction from their homes. With a final toll of seven deaths, the Mussel Slough shootout far exceeded the three dead of the legendary Earp battle near the O.K. Corral in Tombstone, Arizona, the following year but was entirely

the work of grass-roots gunfighters—five pioneers versus two railroad supporters. The five settlers (resister gunfighters) were all killed by the two incorporation gunfighters on the Southern Pacific side, both of whom also died. In killing the five settlers, however, one of the incorporation gunslingers, Walter J. Crow, took more lives than were ever claimed on a single occasion by any of the glorified gunfighters such as Earp, Billy the Kid, or Hardin.

Public opinion in the nation and in California was strongly on the side of the settlers. The conclusion was drawn that a huge American and western corporation, the Southern Pacific, headed by a few millionaires, would not content itself with depriving industrious farmers and family men of their homes but would have them shot down in cold blood. In London, Karl Marx followed the California conflict; after the five farmers died, he wrote to an American correspondent that nowhere else in the world was class conflict—"the upheaval most shamelessly caused" by capitalist oppression—taking place "with such speed" as in California. The Mussel Slough affair and its mordant gunfight burned into the consciousness of late-nineteenth-century Americans. One of the five novels based on the Mussel Slough was Frank Norris's powerful American classic *The Octopus* (1901); its title—long applied to the Southern Pacific in California—was, in effect, a hostile metaphor for the incorporating forces of the American West.

Defeated in both their courtroom and their gunfighting battles with the Southern Pacific, the Mussel Slough dissident farmers, losers in this phase of the Western Civil War of Incorporation, had no choice but to leave their farms or pay the railroad. Most left. The resulting resentment affected an entire generation in California's Central Valley, far more than the hundreds of farmers who had been in direct conflict with the railroad. An outcome of this feeling was the popular admiration for a famous team of robbers, the social bandits Chris Evans and John Sontag, who repeatedly struck Southern Pacific trains from 1889 to 1892. The antirailroad lawbreaking of Evans and Sontag, both glorified and resister gunfighters, was a surrogate for the seething resentment toward the Southern Pacific by peaceful, law-abiding Californians. Evans and Sontag fought in two spectacular shootouts with law officers and railroad detectives, the last of which in 1893 killed Sontag and ended their criminal careers.

Indirectly related to the Mussel Slough conflict was the sensational 1889 killing of David S. Terry of California—an event in which the gunfighter tradition of the West dramatically merged with the Western Civil War of Incorporation. A potent force in the anticorporation wing of the state's Democratic party, Terry had been a strong supporter of the Mussel Slough settlers against the Southern Pacific. Meanwhile, a personal and legal dispute festered between Terry and Justice Stephen J. Field of the U.S. Supreme Court. As the leading member of the Supreme Court in the late nineteenth century and in his concurrent role as a federal circuit judge on the Pacific Coast, Field, a Californian, had spearheaded court decisions favoring the Southern Pacific and other corporations. His judicial associate and protégé, the federal circuit judge Lorenzo Sawyer, had dispossessed the Mussel Slough settlers. As the head of a powerful clique of economically conservative West Coast federal judges that included Sawyer, Field was a pillar of the establishment cause in the Western Civil War of Incorporation and, as such, a political and ideological as well as personal and legal opponent of Terry.

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To protect Field from the threats of the violence-prone Terry, who had killed one man in a duel, David Neagle—a tough gunhandling lawman from Tombstone in the era of Wyatt Earp—was hired to serve as Field's bodyguard in the Golden State. When Terry slapped Field in a California railroad depot on 14 August 1889, Neagle immediately shot Terry dead in what quickly became a western and national cause célèbre. The outcome of a legal process reaching the Supreme Court (Field abstaining) found Neagle to be without fault in the killing. Unconvinced were anti-Field partisans, who saw the killing as premeditated murder in the interest of an economic and judicial order that favored incorporating millionaire industrialists.

The range-cattle industry was a major theater of war in the Western Civil War of Incorporation, and it had both urban and rural battlegrounds. In urban terms the conflict was fought in the raw towns of the Great Plains that sprang up where cattle trails met the railroad shipping points to the midwestern packinghouses. In famed boomtowns like Abilene and Dodge City, the incorporating faction of urban merchants wanted to curb the disorder and violence of the Texas cowboys who whooped into town wild for pleasure after months out on the townless trails north of Texas. To intimidate and, if need be, to arrest or even kill cowboys, the mercantile clique used its dominance of boomtown governments to employ skilled gunfighters like Wild Bill Hickok and Wyatt Earp to keep the Texans in line.

The boomtown phase of the Western Civil War of Incorporation had strong political and cultural overtones. Thus, the typical cowboy who roared into the likes of Abilene and Dodge City was a Texan, a southerner in outlook, an ex- or pro-Confederate, and a Democrat. On the other side were the merchants or entrepreneurs like Joseph G. McCoy of Abilene, a northerner who arranged for Wild Bill Hickok to keep order in Abilene. Hickok had established his gunfighting credentials as early as 1861 and became nationally known for his 1865 slaying of Dave Tutt in Springfield, Missouri, in the prototypical western showdown. Hickok, a northerner who fought for the Union in the Civil War and was reared in an Illinois abolitionist family, was a strong Republican in politics. In Abilene in 1871, Wild Bill intimidated violence-prone Texas cowboys and climaxed the season with a face-to-face killing of Phil Coe, a skilled Texas gunfighter and gambler. Incorporation gunfighters and lawmen like Hickok and the Earp brothers were in the van of the movement that safely incorporated Abilene, Ellsworth, Hays, Newton, Wichita, Dodge City, and other boomtowns into a social and economic system dominated by enterprising capital.

In the immense rural range country, the pattern in the Western Civil War of Incorporation pitted the cattle kings against small ranchers, cowboys, farmers, and rustling horse and cattle thieves who resisted the land-monopolizing thrust of the big cattlemen. In Montana, the reign of Granville Stuart and other cattle grandees (including a young Theodore Roosevelt, whose home ranch was across the territorial line in present North Dakota) was challenged by horse thieves in alliance with a motley faction of wolf hunters and ruffians whose outlaw haunts were in the wild Missouri Breaks river country of Montana. The horse-theft operations stretched from the Montana-Canada borderland down into Wyoming. Fed up with these outlaw inroads, "Stuart's Stranglers," as the vigilantes were called, embarked on a devastating campaign

that burned the bandit cabins along the wooded shores of the Missouri and killed the inhabitants. Stuart, later to be idolized as "Mr. Montana" (the state's most revered pioneer), deputed a strong force of cowboys, who swept through eastern Montana and on into North Dakota, where those marked for death on a hit list, provided by Stuart, were killed. Theodore Roosevelt knew well the cattle-king leaders of Stuart's vigilante campaign, strongly approved of it until his dying day, and always regretted that Stuart and the others, fearing that the loquacious Roosevelt would talk too much, had kept him out of the triumphant campaign that, with over a hundred fatalities to its credit, was the deadliest of all western and American vigilante movements.

By the time Stuart's Stranglers disbanded in 1884, the Montana-Dakota range country was conquered territory in the Western Civil War of Incorporation. This was far from true across Montana's southern border, where in the late 1880s and early 1890s a Wyoming coalition of small ranchers, homesteading farmers, and cowboy outlaws resisted the growing aggressiveness of a powerful faction of big cattle ranchers. At the core of this faction, eastern and British aristocrats presided over their investments in the cattle country, lording it over the cowboys who toiled for them. Many of the latter struck back at the arrogant employers by rustling from them on the sly in order to break free and establish competing small spreads. By 1892, as the grandees of the Wyoming Stock Growers' Association saw it, wide areas of central and northern Wyoming were held by those who harassed and stole from them. With convictions of accused cattle thieves hard to come by from juries of local folk who were hostile to the cattle kings, the latter perfected their vigilante plans. Defiant Johnson County was marked for the strongest dose of lynch-law medicine.

Political divisions in Wyoming reflected the rising range conflict. The cattlemen tended to be Republican and, indeed, had strong support in 1892 from Wyoming's Republican governor, from its Republican party state chairman (Willis Van Devanter, who as a conservative U.S. Supreme Court member in the 1930s was a staunch opponent of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal), from its two Republican U.S. senators, and as it turned out, from the Republican occupant of the White House, Benjamin Harrison. Tilting against the cattle kings in Wyoming were the insurgent Democrats and Populists. Undoubtedly inspired by the success of Granville Stuart's flawless vigilante campaign only eight years before, the Wyoming big-cattlemen vigilantes (who called themselves "Regulators" in the tradition of the first American vigilante movement, the frontier South Carolina Regulators of 1767-69) replicated Stuart's operation. Like Stuart in Montana, they compiled a victim list (seventy in Wyoming) and prepared a lightning thrust by rail and horse into the enemy country.

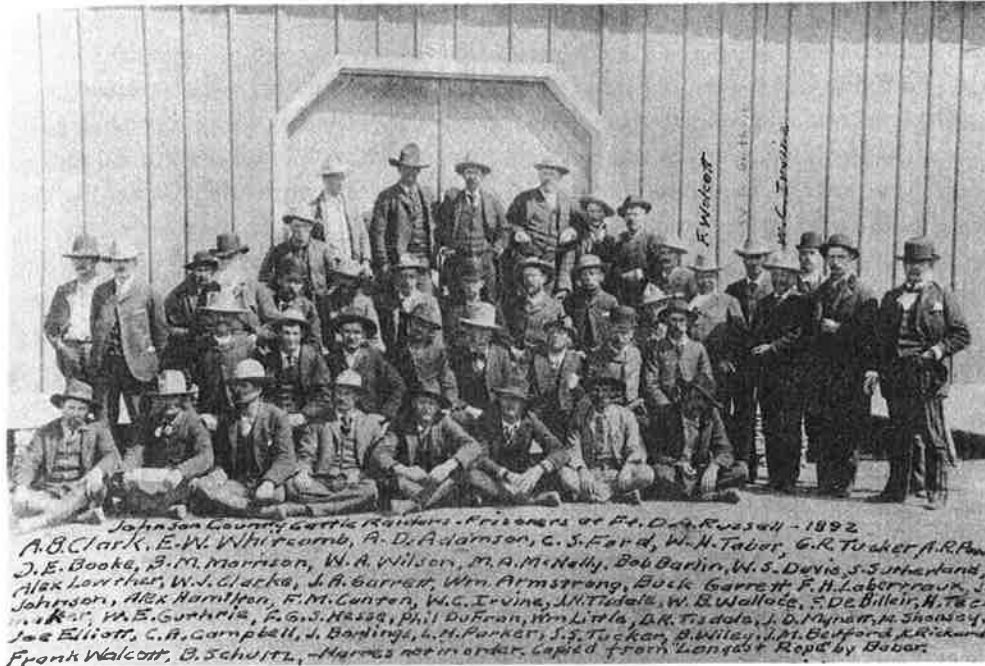
The cattle magnate Frank Wolcott headed the Regulators. He enlisted a mercenary band of Texas gunfighters under Frank Canton, a gunfighting ex-sheriff of Johnson County. First by special train and then by horse, this paramilitary force headed for the rustlers' domain. Along the way, however, the overconfident Regulators came to grief. After a notable first success in besieging and killing two resister gunfighters, the rustlers Nate Champion and Nick Ray, Wolcott and company rode on north to Johnson County. South of the county seat of Buffalo, the Regulators were intercepted and pinned down by a giant posse of citizens alerted to the invasion.



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Photographed a few weeks after their failed invasion of Johnson County, Wyoming, in April 1892, the self-proclaimed "Regulators," a group of big cattlemen and hired guns, were in temporary defeat. Later set free without a trial, they eventually won their battle with smaller homesteaders and ranchers for domination of the Wyoming range cattle industry.

Charles D. Kirkland (1857-1926). "The Invaders." Johnson County Cattle War (taken at Fort D. A. Russell). Photograph, 1892. American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie.

On the brink of annihilation by the Johnson Countians, the Regulators were saved only by the intervention of U.S. cavalry (called out by the Republican chain of influence, which ran from the Wyoming Stock Growers' Association to President Harrison in Washington, D.C.). The cavalry imposed a truce, no bloodshed occurred, Johnson County authorities ran out of money in their legal prosecution of the invaders, and Wolcott, Canton, and all the rest went free. Meanwhile, outraged Wyoming voters avenged the blatant invasion of Johnson County by repudiating the pro-vigilante Republican party in the fall 1892 election. Yet the Johnson County War was only a temporary setback for the big cattlemen of Wyoming in the Western Civil War of Incorporation. From the open violence of a vigilante campaign, the determined cattle barons shifted to the stealth of murderous ambushes by the bounty hunter Tom Horn, who picked off victims until his homicidal career was ended by a legal execution in 1903. The result was a triumph for the big cattlemen. By 1910, possibly even sooner, the range country of Wyoming was a part of the fully incorporated West.

In the Southwest, fence cutting was the major tactic used against the incorporating efforts of the cattle kings. Resistance surged in violence-torn central Texas during the 1880s and 1890s. In county after county, farmers and small ranchers cut the fences of the land-enclosing big cattlemen who were gradually forcing so many of the small operators off the land or on to reduced holdings. The fence-cutting property destruction peaked in 1883-84 and 1897-98 but lost the battle against the broader trend.

In its institutionalization of political violence and assassination from the late 1860s to shortly after 1900, the New Mexico Territory was unequaled in the West. The government in New Mexico lacked the credibility, power, and will to curb the violence of the territory's intricately arrayed, deeply divided elements. In conflict after conflict,

the incorporating forces battled against those, like the *Gorras Blancas* ("White Caps"), who resisted them.

The White Caps were poor Hispanic villagers who struck back—by burning barns, cutting fences, and occasionally using sniper fire—at the aggressive Anglos and *ricos* (rich Hispanos) who used their knowledge of the law and the ways of modern urban society to seize portions of the age-old communal land of the sheepherding villagers. By day these *pobres* ("poor ones") voted Populist and streamed into Knights of Labor lodges, but at night, as White Caps, they destroyed the fences and outbuildings of the *ricos*. White Cap violence was a guerrilla struggle that for a time halted the incorporating trend and through court victories preserved the communal grazing lands. A 1960s throwback to the White Caps of the 1890s was the Alianza movement, formed by Reies Tijerina to reclaim land lost by rural Hispanos to Anglo chicanery, according to Tijerina. Ultimately failing in its objective, Tijerina's crusade came to a climax in 1967 with the violent seizure of the county courthouse in Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico, during which one person died.

In the 1870s, in the northern New Mexico county of Colfax, violence erupted against the incorporating trend. The issue was the Maxwell Land Grant Company, a giant combine of absentee lawyers and capitalists who planned to convert the Maxwell grant in Colfax County into an enormous economic empire. Here the resisters were not Hispanos but Anglo small ranchers, cowboys, and townsmen who used the law as well as the violence of vigilantism and gunfighting to defend their small land claims against the Maxwell magnates. In the Colfax County War, the dissidents rallied around one of the West's most fearsome resister gunfighters, Clay Allison. Anchored by the powerful political support of Republican nabobs in Santa Fe and Washington, D.C., the Maxwell Land Grant Company outlasted the violent resistance of Allison and others and, erecting a land, cattle, and mining empire of nearly two million acres, dominated the county until the 1960s. In central Arizona a lethal vigilante movement on behalf of incorporating big ranching and commercial interests ended the chaotic, bloody Tonto Basin War of the 1880s, which took twenty to thirty lives.

The most enduring range-country episode in the Western Civil War of Incorporation occurred in southern New Mexico and Arizona from the 1880s to 1910. The opposing alignments were similar to those elsewhere, from Texas to Montana and from the Missouri to the Pacific. On the incorporating side was a faction of big cattlemen and Republican capitalists and politicians whose citadels of power were in the growing urban centers of the region. Resisting the incorporators was a typical coalition of small ranchers and cowboy outlaws, whose dissidence was spearheaded by some notable resister gunfighters opposed, in turn, by potent incorporation gunfighters on the other side. Rustling cattle from the large herds of their opponents was a constant tactic of the anti-incorporators, who, in general, tended to be southern or Texan in origin, Democratic in politics, and premodern in their values—emphasizing family and individual loyalty, the no-duty-to-retreat syndrome of personal self-redress, and manly courage. In conflict were not just contrary claims of land and property but two opposed worldviews: one stressing modern, urban, capitalistic values and the settlement of disputes through the legal system (a ground of combat favoring the know-how and sophistication of the

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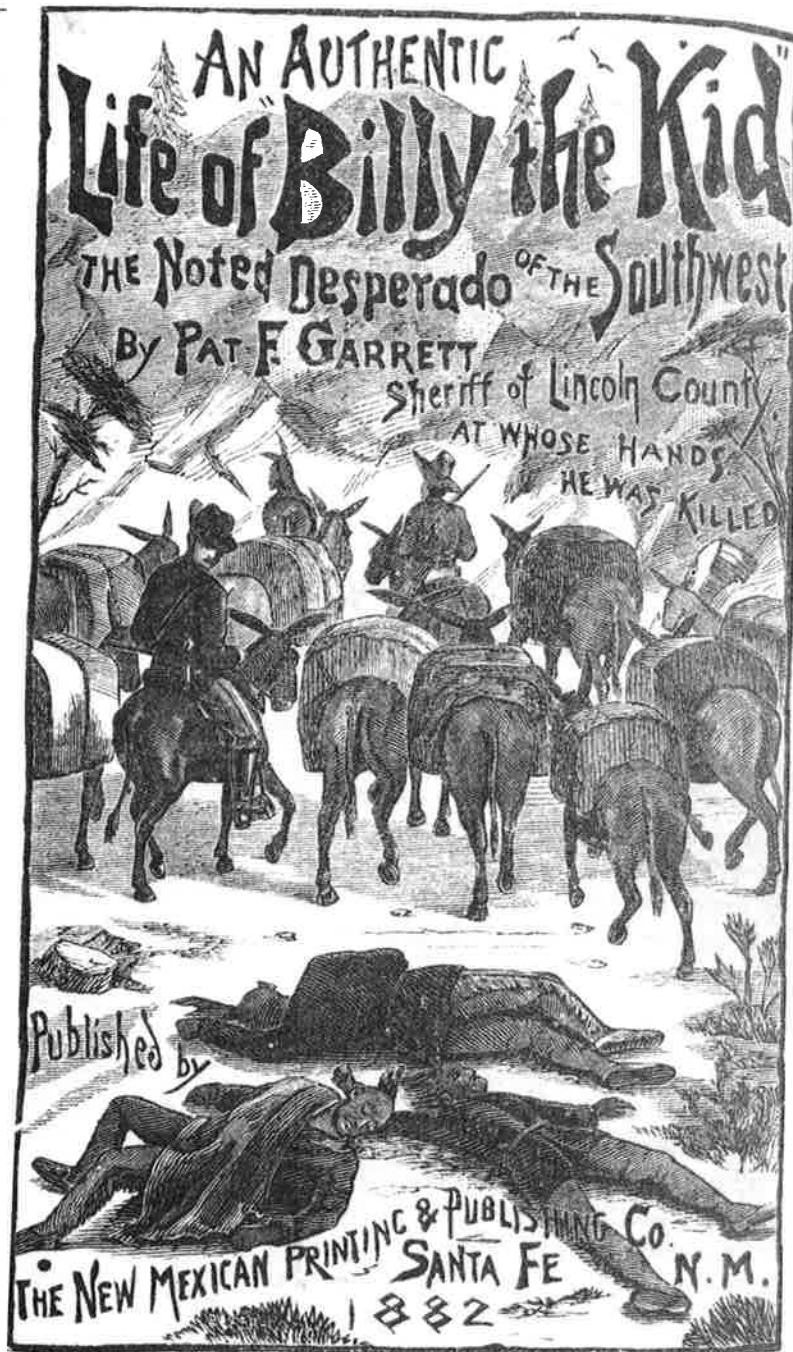
Crucial to so much of the trouble that turned southern New Mexico and Arizona into a dark and bloody ground from 1880 to 1910 was the famous Lincoln County War in New Mexico during 1878. The Lincoln County War was a veritable university for gunfighters, with no less than nineteen of them (including Billy the Kid) honing their gunshooting skills in the 1878 conflict. Trouble came from the partnership of Lawrence G. Murphy, James J. Dolan, and John H. Riley, who in the 1870s had, in effect, incorporated Lincoln County into their own economic domain based on the store they operated in the county seat, also named Lincoln. By 1876, when the ambitious young Englishman John Henry Tunstall came into Lincoln County, the small ranchers, farmers, and cowboys were restive under the oppressive domination of town and county by "the House" (the phrase was a reference to the imposing two-story store on Lincoln's single, rambling street—that is, the mercantile house of Murphy, Dolan, and Riley). More than just a store, the House was a corrupt political and economic faction that had much in common with the Tweed Ring of New York City and many other such rings in Gilded Age America and the West. The House in Lincoln County thrived on a complex system of ill-gotten gains. Murphy-Dolan-Riley outlaw hirelings stole cattle from the ranch king, John Chisum, for beef that was sold at inflated prices to the U.S. government's Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation and to Fort Stanton, both located in Lincoln County. In all of this, the House was bolstered by its allies in politics, in the judiciary, and in law enforcement.

Grass-roots discontent with the greed of the House found no practical outlet until the appearance of Tunstall, who forged an alliance with a dissident local lawyer, Alexander McSween, and with the cattle king Chisum, whose cattle losses were illicitly enriching the House. Amply backed by capital from his father's profitable London business, Tunstall (with McSween) soon opened a store in competition with the House. Customers flocked to the new Tunstall-McSween store. No less cynical and selfish than the House, Tunstall hoped to create his own ring and monopolize the mercantile possibilities of the county. Although he hired a band of tough cowboys (including Billy the Kid) to handle his burgeoning ranch (also made possible, like the new store, by munificent loans from his father), Tunstall's English culture led him to accept the ethic of legality and to refrain from violence. The House was not so forbearing. The brutal murder—or assassination—of Tunstall by House hirelings on 18 February 1878 triggered the Lincoln County War. Tunstall's gun-wielding cowboys remained loyal to his memory and to his surviving partner McSween (and his spirited wife, Susan McSween). An all-out range war ebbed and flowed across the county and climaxed in the five-day battle fought along Lincoln's lone street on 15–19 July 1878, resulting in a bitter defeat for the McSween side. After the Tunstall store was set on fire in the battle's conclusion, McSween was shot to death when he fled from the flames while Billy the Kid made one of the most famous of his many escapes.

The Lincoln County War led to the mighty myth of Billy the Kid as a social bandit. Born Henry McCarty in New York City, the lad moved with his widowed mother and his brother through Indiana and Kansas to New Mexico. With his mother remarried to

Sheriff Pat Garrett promoted the mythic stature of his nemesis, *Billy the Kid*, in 1882 by publishing a popular and widely inaccurate account of the gunfighter's life. Western violence, popular culture, and commerce remain closely linked, with violence still an important theme of much western literature, art, and film.

Pat Garrett (1850–1908). *An Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* (Santa Fe, 1882). Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.



a miner, William Antrim, the future Billy the Kid led a normal schoolboy life in Silver City, New Mexico, until 1874, when his mother died and the Antrim family fell apart. The teen-age Billy committed a petty theft, became a fugitive, killed a bully in Arizona, and, back in New Mexico under the alias of William Bonney, became a cowboy working on Tunstall's Lincoln County ranch. The Kid's strong loyalty to Tunstall and the

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McSweens drew him into the Lincoln County War; by the end of the battle, he was the top gun on the anti-House side. Not until 1989—more than a century after the Kid's death—did a full, realistic biography of him, by Robert M. Utley, appear. The Kid was neither the hero of myth nor the psychopath of the antimyth but a youth quite typical of the time and place; during his "short and violent life" (Utley's phrase) of twenty-one years, he took not twenty-one lives (one victim for each one of his years, according to the legend) but no more than a far-from-negligible ten. The Kid's career in his last two years collided with the forces of incorporation and became a brief but significant episode in the Western Civil War of Incorporation.

Thrown on his own at the end of the Lincoln County War, Billy the Kid—literate and ambitious—tried and failed to find a niche in law-abiding society. (His nickname was created by newspapers and dime novels in the last year of his life; his friends and enemies in New Mexico spoke of him as "the Kid" but not "Billy the Kid.") John Chisum, the wealthy Tunstall-McSween ally, denied the Kid the combat pay Billy claimed for service in the Lincoln County War—a denial that may have been influenced by Chisum's disapproval of the budding romance between Billy and his niece, Sallie, as well as by the cattle king's famous parsimony. Earlier, the Republican territorial governor of New Mexico, Lew Wallace (a Civil War general and the future author of the best-selling novel *Ben-Hur*), reneged on a deal with the Kid. The governor had promised the Kid a pardon in return for his crucial testimony against two brutal killers. The Kid kept his part of the bargain, but Wallace faithlessly denied him the pardon. With all avenues to a peaceful civilian life closed to him, the Kid became a full-time cowboy outlaw.

Heading a gang of gunfighting veterans of the Lincoln County War, Billy rustled cattle in Lincoln County and the Texas panhandle. This brought down on him the incipient forces of incorporation in Lincoln County, now centered in the mining boomtown of White Oaks and the cattle town of Roswell. A coalition of town businessmen, professional men, and aggressive big cattlemen formed to silence the Kid's deadly guns and end his cattle thefts. But the Kid had resources in this conflict. His sunny nature had earned him a wide circle of Anglo and Hispanic friends throughout southern New Mexico. The rising Roswell entrepreneur Joseph C. Lea and his neighbor, John Chisum, headed the effort to suppress Billy and his gang. The Kid's erstwhile friend Pat Garrett, a tall Texan and former buffalo hunter, was put up for sheriff and elected despite the opposition of the popular Billy, who supported Garrett's rival. Garrett broke up the gang, cornered and arrested the Kid, and saw him tried and sentenced to death for a homicide in the Lincoln County War—the only killer in the war to be tried and convicted. With Wallace's promised pardon definitely withheld, the desperate Kid shot to death two guards and escaped from the Lincoln jail. By now, "Billy the Kid" was a famed figure whose violent career was flaunted in the nation's newspapers and ten-cent paperbacks. Garrett, assisted by the spying of the cattle-range detective John W. Poe, tracked the Kid to one of his favorite haunts: the compound of Pete Maxwell at old Fort Sumner, New Mexico, on the Pecos River. Here, in midnight darkness, Garrett found the Kid and killed him with one shot.

The triumph of Lea, Chisum, Garrett, and Poe over the hapless Billy the Kid ushered in a new incorporated era of dominant town-and-country wealth and large-landed cattle

property in southern New Mexico. The new order flourished under the leadership of its rising Republican political boss, attorney, and militia colonel Albert J. Fountain, who enjoyed the crucial support of the large ranchers of the country. Fountain and the big cattlemen had close ties to the lawyer Thomas B. Catron of Santa Fe, the avaricious Republican political boss of New Mexico who came to own or directly control more land than any other American in history. Meanwhile, more and more small ranchers and cowboys from central Texas filtered into the Tularosa basin, which stretched west from the mountain heights of Lincoln County. Ambitious, blessed with incomparable cowboy skills, and proudly bearing the no-duty-to-retreat proclivity to violence of their central Texas backgrounds, these aggressive newcomers saw only one way to survive against the land-enclosing tactics of the established big cattlemen: to steal from the herds and protect themselves with six-guns and rifles. The model and leader of these anti-incorporation Texans was Oliver M. Lee, a natural-born cowman, peerless horseman, and matchless gunfighter. The big cattlemen formed a stockmen's association to fight off the interlopers and employed a most-willing Albert J. Fountain to mount an antirustling militia campaign and legal effort to end the threat of Lee and the Texans to the incorporated state of affairs. Lee formed his own alliance with an ambitious Democratic politico and gunfighting lawyer, the ex-Kentuckian Albert Bacon Fall (who, decades later, with coat turned to the Republican party, became Warren G. Harding's ill-fated secretary of the interior).

Pressed by Fountain's indictment of Lee for cattle theft, Lee, Fall, and the rustling small ranchers seemed to be on the run. That soon changed in 1896 with the disappearance of Fountain and his young son, Henry, as they traveled by buggy from the courtroom in Lincoln back to their home in Mesilla on the Rio Grande. Fountain and his son were never found. It became an open secret to many in the region, and is confirmed by historians, that Lee and two of his cowboys carried out a plot hatched by or, at least, joined in by Fall to waylay Fountain (Fall's personal rival for the political domination of southern New Mexico) and murder him and his son. The bodies were buried in the mountains away from the crime and were never found. Once more, the incorporating faction of cattle kings and powerful Republican politicians led by Thomas B. Catron turned to Pat Garrett, who, again made county sheriff, was given the mission of bringing Lee and his henchmen to justice for killing the Fountains. Garrett eventually arrested Lee, who was brought to trial in 1899. Catron came south from Santa Fe to head the trial team against Lee but turned out to be no match for the histrionics and legal skill of Lee's defense attorney, Albert Bacon Fall. It took only eight minutes for a strongly anti-incorporation, anti-big cattleman, pro-cowboy jury to find Lee not guilty.

The fiasco of Lee's trial was a dramatic but only temporary check of the incorporating trend. The ironic outcome of the Tularosa war was that Fall and Lee soon became incorporators themselves. Deeply conservative in his social and economic views, Fall increasingly felt out of place in a Democratic party dominated by the quasi-populism of William Jennings Bryan. Fall switched to the Republican party and, with his rival Fountain out of the way, succeeded to the leadership of the party in southern New Mexico. In 1912, Fall realized a longtime ambition by being elected to the U.S. Senate from the newly admitted state of New Mexico. Lee's subsequent career was similar to that of his lifelong friend Fall. Lee became one of the largest ranchers in southern New

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Mexico, eventually heading the million-acre Circle Cross Ranch (the area's largest) and serving two terms in the New Mexico legislature. In effect, Fall and Lee had used the violence of gunfighting and murder to move from the losing to the victorious side of the Western Civil War of Incorporation. There is no better example of a powerful western and national economic and political career built on violence than that of Albert Bacon Fall—Republican U.S. senator, cabinet member, and power in the high councils of his party as well as heavy speculator in Mexican mining property and baronial New Mexican cattle grandee. Many westerners—and none better than Fall—exemplify the historical sociologist Charles Tilly's maxim that the history of violence is nothing less than the history and organization of power.

By the early 1880s, vast Cochise County in the extreme southeastern region of Arizona was another battleground in the Western Civil War of Incorporation, with conflicts in both the rural range country and the urban streets of the county seat, Tombstone. The opposing forces in Cochise County represented the pervasive pattern of incorporating versus anti-incorporating factions. Headed by the mine owners and managers of booming Tombstone, the incorporating element was mainly Republican in politics, northern in background, urban in culture, and modern in outlook. The opposing faction included urban Democrats of Tombstone but centered on an alliance of small ranchers (many of whom rustled cattle from large ranchers) and cowboy outlaws (including "Curly Bill" Brocius and John Ringo), who were also Democrats as well as mainly Texan or southern in their backgrounds. The cowboy outlaws dominated the backcountry village of Galeyville and periodically rode into Tombstone for boisterous good times that unnerved the Republican elite of Tombstone, which was headed by the mine magnate E. B. Gage and the editor and mayor John P. Clum. Supporting this establishment was the youthful Episcopalian minister Endicott Peabody (later to be the revered schoolmaster and White House chaplain of Franklin D. Roosevelt), who, soon after his missionary period in Tombstone, founded and for decades headed America's most exclusive private school for boys, Groton, in Massachusetts. An exponent of muscular Christianity, Peabody knew and liked Wyatt Earp, for whom he had a lifelong admiration.

Wyatt Earp and his brother Virgil (as well as their younger brothers, Morgan and Warren) were a crucial bloc in the Cochise County conflict. The modernizing Tombstone elite turned to the gunhandling talents of Wyatt and Virgil (and their brothers) in an attempt to end the killings in Tombstone and play down the city's anarchic "man for breakfast" image. In turning to the Earps (and their gunfighting colleague Doc Holliday), the Republican elite hoped to stabilize life in turbulent Tombstone and convince California and eastern investors that the boomtown was a safe field for profitable investment. In contrast to the Earps, the small ranching and rustling families of the Clantons and the McLaurys (along with their cowboy-outlaw allies) were violent protagonists for the unincorporated, premodern, traditional values of the rural cowboy coalition of Cochise County. Strong Republicans of an Illinois-Iowa family of Civil War-era unionists, the Earp brothers were right at home on the side of Tombstone's urban elite, for Wyatt, Virgil, and their brothers were enthusiastic and profitable investors and speculators in Tombstone-area mine and real estate property. Personal clashes with the Clantons and McLaurys brought the Earps (and Holliday) to

a violent confrontation with them near Tombstone's O.K. Corral on 26 October 1881. When the Earps fired away at the Clantons and McLaurys in their famous gunfight of that day, they were fighting for their entrepreneurial, Republican, incorporating values as well as their lives. The triumph of the Earps and Holliday (the two McLaury brothers and the one Clanton who faced them were all mortally wounded) was followed by a series of shootings in early 1882. Credited with at least two or three more killings, Wyatt left Cochise County, as did his brothers. They were consoled by their profits in booming Tombstone but saddened by the death of Morgan Earp in a pool-hall ambush. The gunpower of the Earps won a notable victory in the Western Civil War of Incorporation, for their success was to defeat and break up the cowboy-rustler-outlaw faction headed by the Clantons, the McLaurys, Brocius, and Ringo.

Resembling the cowboy-outlaw episode of Arizona was a long-range crime wave in the four-state enclave of Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. An outlaw dynasty flourished in this region from the 1860s to the 1930s—from the time of Jesse James to that of Pretty Boy Floyd. As the historian Paul I. Wellman has shown, Charles Arthur ("Pretty Boy") Floyd (killed in 1934) was "the lineal successor" of William Clarke Quantrill, the Confederate guerrilla leader in Missouri. The fearsome Quantrill was the Civil War mentor of the youthful guerrillas Frank and Jesse James and Cole Younger in the violent arts of riding, raiding, and shooting. Thus began a middle-border outlaw dynasty perpetuated, said Wellman, "by a long and crooked train of unbroken personal connections, and a continuing criminal heritage and tradition handed down from generation to generation." The James-Younger gang (1866–82) began the American outlaw tradition of armed bank robbery at Liberty, Missouri, on 13 February 1866. Although the first train robbery had been by the Reno brothers in Indiana in 1866, it was the James-Younger gang that, again, made this innovative act of American banditry a national tradition. Carrying on this new pattern of gunfight-punctuated bank and train robberies were the 1880s gang of Belle Starr and the 1890s gangs of the Dalton brothers, Bill Doolin, Al Jennings, and Bill Cook. A vital link in the outlaw dynasty was Belle Starr's nephew, Henry Starr, who personally bridged the gap between the nineteenth-century brigands and the likes of the 1920s–1930s gangsters Al Spencer, Frank Nash, and Pretty Boy Floyd. From the James and Younger brothers down to the Dalton and Doolin era, these daring desperadoes fit the pattern of social banditry: men whose audacious exploits won the admiration of rural people wilting under the economic and cultural pressure of a modern, industrializing, corporation-dominated society.

Even as the middle-border outlaw tradition flourished, the Western Civil War of Incorporation was by 1900 making the transition from its main nineteenth-century battle sites in the boomtowns and range country to the early-twentieth-century mining camps, mill towns, metropolises, and commodity-crop fields. The overall issue was the taming of dissident, often radical, labor unionists for toil in a West marked for domination by profit-conscious private investors. The conflict between labor and capital in the Western Civil War of Incorporation predated 1900 but became critical in the new century. The first sustained violence in this industrial phase of the Western Civil War of Incorporation was what the historian George S. McGovern has termed Colorado's "Thirty Years War"—an 1884–1914 conflict amid the state's hard-rock mines and soft-coal fields.

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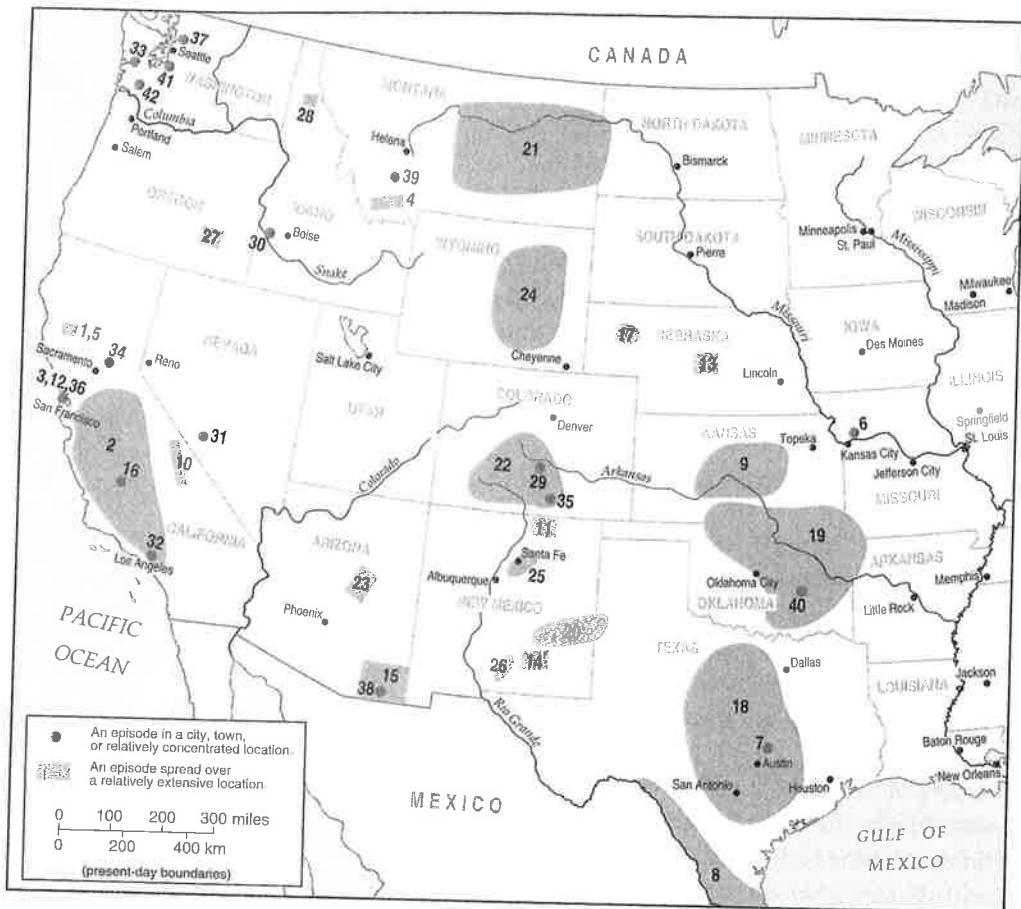
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Gunfighting continued, but the variety of violence in the Western Civil War of Incorporation now included the riot and the use of dynamite in connection with strikes and lockouts. High points in the Colorado turbulence occurred in the Rocky Mountain mining camps, where the radical new anti-incorporation Western Federation of Miners (WFM) fought back against repressive mine owners in Leadville (1894), Telluride (1901), and Cripple Creek (1903–4). Bloodiest of all was Cripple Creek, where a typical alignment was the state militia against the mine-and-mill unionists. The WFM was a losing cause in Cripple Creek, even though the professional terrorist Harry Orchard, on behalf of the union, killed thirteen strikebreakers while dynamiting the town's railroad station.

The alliance of industrial corporation and state militia figured in one of the most violent episodes in western history, the Ludlow Massacre of 20 April 1914, which tragically concluded Colorado's "Thirty Years War." This was the climactic event in a long, bitter strike of the United Mine Workers against the Rockefeller-controlled Colorado Fuel & Iron and independent companies in the southern Colorado coalfield stretching northward from Trinidad. Evicted from their company-owned houses, the miners at Ludlow and other coal camps settled into their own tent cities and stayed on strike. Many of the union men were Greek or Hispanic and were subjected to the highly prejudiced harassment of the predominantly Anglo militia, adding an ugly ethnic dimension to the conflict.

At Ludlow on April twentieth occurred the events that shocked America: an all-day gunfight between strikers and militia, the burning of the tent city, and the death by suffocation of thirteen women and children in the "Black Hole of Ludlow"—a declivity beneath a burned-over tent in which the women and children had taken refuge. Enraged by the tragedy, hundreds of miners and their sympathizers roared across the coal-mining counties in a spasm of property destruction that ended only when federal troops were sent in by President Woodrow Wilson to restore order. The U.S. soldiers, unlike the state militia, were impartial in their preservation of peace. The result was a defeat for the union and a costly victory for the Rockefeller family. Young John D. Rockefeller, Jr., never entirely overcame the onus of his disastrous intractability against the union nor, in the eyes of many early-twentieth-century Americans, did the enormous philanthropies of the Rockefeller family fully compensate for the tragedy at Ludlow.

Enmeshed in the Western Civil War of Incorporation was what the labor historian Carlos A. Schwantes terms the "wageworkers' frontier"—the social and industrial context of Colorado's Thirty Years War and other such conflicts. The wageworkers' frontier of the West embodied an explosive combination of the deep tensions of industrialization with the combative frontier psychology of the West. The Pacific Northwest wageworkers' frontier stretched from the mining camps of Idaho and Montana to the coastal logging stands and mill towns of Washington and Oregon. Keynoting the violence was the industrial warfare in the Coeur d'Alene region of the northern Idaho panhandle in the 1890s. The trouble began in 1892 with mineowners and labor unionists trading casualties and temporary victories; soon, to protect mine property from the dynamiting of union forces, state and federal troops intervened and incarcerated hundreds of miners in the infamous "bull pens" of the towns of Wallace and Wardner. Embittered by their defeat in the 1892 struggle, alienated strikers founded the



The Western Civil War of Incorporation, 1850s-1919

Below are brief descriptions of the 42 episodes in the Western Civil War of Incorporation, the numbers of which correspond to the numbers on the above map. The following abbreviations are used to designate the outcome of the episodes: V = victory for incorporating faction, D = defeat for incorporating faction, A = ambiguous outcome. (Other abbreviations used: IWW = Industrial Workers of the World, WFM = Western Federation of Miners, VIG = vigilantism was used by incorporating faction.)

1. First Round Valley War, northwest California, 1850s-1865. Incorporating white settlers carry on genocidal campaign of dispossession against local Indians. **V**
2. Mexican outlaws' activity, California, 1850s-60s. Incorporating California rangers suppress guerrilla-like insurgency of native Mexican outlaws: Joaquin Murrieta, Tiburcio Vasquez, and others. **V**
3. San Francisco vigilantes, 1856. Incorporating mercantile elite led by William T. Coleman uses vigilantism against Irish-Catholic working-class element. **VIG V**
4. Montana vigilantes, 1863-65. Incorporating faction of vigilantes of Virginia City and Bannack (headed by Wilbur Fisk Sanders, et al.) vs. an outlaw gang led by Henry Plummer. **VIG V**
5. Second Round Valley War, northwest California, 1865-1905. Land-enclosing big ranchers vs. small landholders. **V or A**
6. James-Younger outlaw gang, Missouri, 1866-82. Bank- and train-robbing outlaws led by social-bandit Jesse James and headquartered in Clay County vs. incorporating industrial, financial, commercial, and state-government forces. **V**
7. Williamson County War, Texas, 1869-76. Yegua Notch Cutters outlaw gang vs. Olive family of incorporating big ranchers. (The Olives defeat the outlaws, but their heavy losses force them to move to the more open range country of Nebraska; see #13, below.) **A**
8. *Bandido* insurgency, south Texas, 1870s-1910s. Gregorio Cortez, Juan Cortina, and other Hispanic outlaws vs. incorporating force of Texas Rangers. **V**
9. Kansas cattle towns: 1870s-80s. Incorporating merchants represented by Wild Bill Hickok and other incorporation-gunfighter law enforcers vs. Texas cowboys in Abilene, Hays, Wichita, Dodge City, and other Kansas cattle towns. **V**
10. Owens Valley, California, 1870s-80s. White settlers incorporate local Paiute Indians into labor force. **V**

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11. Colfax County War, New Mexico, 1857-76, 1882, 1888. Incorporating large land company (represented by Thomas B. Catron) vs. local settlers (including resister gunfighter Clay Allison) upon whose homes the company impinged. **V**
12. San Francisco, 1877. Incorporating "Pick Handle Brigade" of establishment vigilantes (led again by William T. Coleman) vs. working-class rioters in sympathy with nationwide rail workers strike. **VIG V**
13. Custer County, Nebraska, 1877-79. Incorporating big ranchers led by Olive family from Texas (see #7, above) vs. homesteading small farmers. **D or A**
14. Lincoln County War, southern New Mexico, 1878. Unique conflict between two incorporating factions that nullified each other; the ultimate victor was New Mexico's top incorporator, Thomas B. Catron. **V**
15. Cochise County War, southeast Arizona, 1878-81. Urban, industrial elite of Tombstone (violently spearheaded by the Earp brothers) vs. a coalition of out-county small ranchers and cowboy outlaws. **V**
16. Mussel Slough conflict, California, 1878-82. Incorporating Southern Pacific Railroad headed by Collis P. Huntington, Leland Stanford, and Charles Crocker vs. small-farming settlers in dispute over land. **V**
17. Sand Hills War, northwest Nebraska, 1880s-90s. Incorporating big cattle ranchers vs. homesteaders. **A**
18. Fence-cutting conflict, central Texas, 1880-1900 (including a peak event, the Fence Cutters War, 1883-84, afflicting at least 12 counties). Land-enclosing big ranchers vs. small ranchers and farmers. **V**
19. Outlaws vs. law enforcers; Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas; 1880s-1910s. Bill Tilghman, Chris Madsen, Frank Canton, and other law enforcers represent incorporating forces vs. the Belle Star, Dalton brothers, Bill Doolin, and other outlaw gangs that often had popular support as social bandits. **V**
20. Billy the Kid outlaw activity, southeast New Mexico and west Texas, 1880-81. Incorporating big ranchers and business and professional men vs. Billy the Kid's rustling gang. **V**
21. Granville Stuart's Montana vigilante movement of 1884. Incorporating big cattle-rancher vigilantes led by Granville Stuart vs. horse-stealing outlaws. **VIG V**
22. Colorado's Thirty Years' War, 1884-1914. Incorporating mine owners and managers with state-government allies vs. organized labor. (See #29 and #35, below, for two of the major events in the Thirty Years' War.) **V**
23. Tonto Basin War, Arizona, 1886-88. Incoming incorporating commercially-minded large-landholding and ranching elite vs. traditionally-minded early settlers in a war touched off by the Pleasant Valley feud of the Grahams vs. the Tewksburys. **VIG V**
24. Wyoming range conflict, late 1880s-1901. Incorporating elite cattle ranchers and establishment allies vs. small ranchers, homesteaders, and cowboy allies. The latter won a temporary victory in the Johnson County War (1892), but the bounty-hunting kills of incorporation gunfighter Tom Horn (1894-1901) sealed the cattle kings' victory. **VIG V**
25. *Gorras Blancas* (White Caps) conflict, northern New Mexico, 1890s. *Gorras Blancas* spearheading traditional Hispanic pastoral villagers vs. incorporating land-enclosing Anglo and Hispanic elite ranchers and lawyers. **D**
26. Tularosa war, southern New Mexico, 1890s. Incorporating big cattle ranchers and business and professional allies vs. traditionalistic small ranchers and cowboys. **A**
27. Harney County conflict, Oregon, 1890s. Big cattle ranchers vs. homesteaders. **A**
28. Coeur d'Alenes War, northern Idaho, 1890s. Incorporating mine owners supported by state and federal governments and military forces vs. organized labor (including WFM) in the Coeur d'Alenes mining country. **V**
29. Cripple Creek conflict, Colorado, 1894-1904. Incorporating mine owners and managers vs. organized labor, including WFM (part of Colorado's Thirty Years' War; see #22, above). **V**
30. Caldwell, Idaho, assassination of ex-Gov. Frank Steunenberg, 1905, and its aftermath, 1906-07. Anti-incorporating miners' union (WFM) vs. incorporating forces represented by Gov. Steunenberg, who supported the incorporators in the Coeur d'Alenes war (#28, above). An important result is the unsuccessful trial of WFM leaders for the assassination of Steunenberg. **A**
31. Goldfield, Nevada, conflict, 1907. Incorporating mine owners vs. IWW. **V**
32. Los Angeles, 1910. Dynamiting of *Los Angeles Times* building by labor-union conspirators results in significant loss of life, but anti-union backlash results in victory for *Times* publisher Harrison Gray Otis as spearhead of incorporating forces in southern California vs. labor-union movement. **V**
33. Aberdeen, Washington, 1911-17. Incorporating lumber-mill magnates and town allies vs. IWW. **VIG V**
34. Wheatland, California, riot of hop pickers, 1913. Anti-incorporating IWWs and migrant workers vs. owners of Durst hop ranch and law-enforcement allies. **V**
35. Southern Colorado coal-mining conflict, 1913-14. John D. Rockefeller and other incorporating mine-owning forces vs. organized labor. Culminates in miner-families' loss of life in "Ludlow Massacre," 1914 (part of Colorado's Thirty Years' War; see #22, above). **V**
36. San Francisco, bombing of World War I Preparedness Day parade, 1916. Incorporating industrial and business forces vs. organized labor (including its radical fringe). **V**
37. Everett Massacre, Washington, 1916. Conflict between incorporating lumber-mill magnates and allies of vs. organized labor. IWW intervention results in the massacre with labor element's casualties being heaviest. **VIG V**
38. Bisbee, Arizona, conflict, 1917. Incorporating mine interests and town and law-enforcement allies vs. striking miners (including IWW). Vigilantes deport 1,186 strikers and allies. **VIG V**
39. Butte, Montana, lynching of Frank Little, 1917. Little, an anti-World War I activist and IWW organizer, fell afoul of local vigilantes. **VIG V**
40. Green Corn Rebellion, eastern Oklahoma, 1917. Uprising of anti-World War I poor farmers and tenants against incorporating landlords and townspeople.
41. Seattle General Strike, 1919. Incorporating Seattle forces (led by the mayor) defeat the general strike, an event accompanied by turbulence but not violence. **V**
42. Centralia, Washington, massacre and reprisal, 1919. Incorporating town element vs. IWW. **VIG V**

Summary and Analysis of the 42 Episodes: Thirty-four (or about 4 out of 5) of the 42 episodes resulted in clear-cut victory for the incorporators. Yet, the remaining 8 episodes (including 5 with ambiguous outcomes) underscore that, although the overall result of the Western Civil War of incorporation was victory for the incorporating conservative forces, the resisting elements were strong. In fact, in at least 23 of the 34 episodes, the opposition or threat to the incorporators was significant. (The numbers of these are 2-4, 6-9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 18-20, 22-24, 28, 29, 32, 35, 37, 41.) The era of World War I (in this case, 1916-19) coincided with a final powerful surge of the incorporating trend, resulting in seven episodes (#36-#42). In all but two of these episodes (#37 and #41), the war was a direct factor (#36, #38, #39, #40) or an indirect factor (#42). All seven resulted in clear-cut incorporating victories. Note: The incorporation of Indian tribes through their concentration on reservations and incorporation into local labor forces was widespread in the West. Episodes #1 and #10 are examples of this type of incorporation.

radical, violence-prone Western Federation of Miners (WFM). Striking back in 1899, the WFM attacked the Bunker Hill and Sullivan mine, the leading enterprise of the Coeur d'Alenes, and destroyed its huge, costly concentrator with dynamite. This was too much for Idaho's hitherto prolabor governor Frank Steunenberg, who induced the federal government to send in troops. The latter put the area under martial law and broke the WFM strike by herding six to seven hundred miners into the hated bull pen.

Governor Steunenberg's action and the resulting repression of the WFM in the Coeur d'Alenes led to two dramatic events in the Western Civil War of Incorporation. The first was the organization of the revolutionary, anti-capitalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Chicago in 1905. The second was the 1905 assassination of Steunenberg by the WFM terrorist Harry Orchard, whose bomb killed Steunenberg (no longer governor) outside his Caldwell, Idaho, home. The aftermath of the crime was not restricted to the life sentence received by Orchard. Charges of conspiracy in the murder of Steunenberg were filed against the charismatic WFM secretary-treasurer, William D. ("Big Bill") Haywood, and two of his associates. The result was one of the greatest show trials in western history, in which the Chicago radical and criminal lawyer Clarence Darrow successfully defended the accused. The acquittal of Haywood and his colleagues was widely viewed by organized labor and its sympathizers as a vindication of the anti-incorporating militant labor movement of the West.

On behalf of the WFM, the charismatic Big Bill Haywood was one of the key founders and leaders of the IWW, whose members were frequently referred to as "Wobblies." Using class struggle as its theme, the IWW spread throughout the West. Some of its strongest support came from the loggers and sawmill workers of the Pacific Northwest. In contrast to its revolutionary rhetoric, the IWW was more often the victim than the initiator of violence, but in the spirit of no duty to retreat, it unhesitatingly fought back in a series of Pacific Northwest confrontations with capital and its supporters. These face-offs were especially acute in western Washington, where the 1916 Everett Massacre killed twelve, mostly Wobblies, and the 1919 Centralia Massacre left five dead, including one Wobbly. In Butte, Montana, in 1917, Frank Little, the IWW organizer and radical opponent of U.S. participation in World War I, died after being swung from a trestle at the end of a vigilante rope. Among many other IWW conflicts in the Western Civil War of Incorporation, Wobbly organizing among hop-field agricultural workers in Wheatland, California, in 1913 led to a strike. The ensuing riot and gunfight between sheriff's deputies and the IWW group produced five deaths, three of them on the anti-IWW side. The Wheatland episode was used by John Steinbeck as the model for the climactic act of violence in his reform novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

Early in the twentieth century, Los Angeles, in the process of supplanting San Francisco as the metropolis of the Far West, was a bastion of antiunion sentiment. On 1 October 1910, two American Federation of Labor militants, the brothers John J. and James B. McNamara, blew up the *Los Angeles Times* building, killing twenty people. The brothers were angered by the fierce open-shop policy of the *Times*' powerful publisher, Harrison Gray Otis, a prime incorporator of Los Angeles and its sun-drenched environs. Although the loss of life in the destruction of the *Times* building was a traumatic setback

for Otis, the backlash was, in the long run, a net gain for incorporation. Otis was in the city's San Fernando construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct from the Owens Valley development and the Los Angeles Aqueduct in a delay of the outreach of Los Angeles. Harry Chandler.

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for Otis, the backlash of public opinion against labor and its supporters in Los Angeles was, in the long run, a triumph for the *Times* publisher and for the cause of incorporation. Otis was one of the members of the Los Angeles elite whose land speculation in the city's San Fernando Valley area greatly benefited from the early-twentieth-century construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, which, by bringing water hundreds of miles from the Owens Valley, gave the city the water supply needed for its booming economic development and vastly increased population. But what helped Los Angeles hurt the Owens Valley, where citizens banded together in 1924 frequently to dynamite the aqueduct in a delayed but fruitless rebellion against incorporation within the imperial outreach of Los Angeles and against the likes of Otis and his successor as *Times* publisher, Harry Chandler.

The conservative forces in the Western Civil War of Incorporation often employed the Pinkerton Detective Agency. The Pinkertons firebombed the family home of Jesse and Frank James and assisted in breaking up the bank- and train-robbing gang. Under the leadership of James McParlan (who earlier had played the key role in the Pinkertons' shattering of the Molly Maguire labor terrorists in the anthracite fields of Pennsylvania), the Denver office of the Pinkerton agency waged an effective but bitterly contested war against the nascent labor unions of the West. Wells Fargo and the Southern Pacific were among the powerful private concerns with their own detective forces.

The public enforcers of the law—local marshals and police, county sheriffs, state agencies such as the Texas Rangers and the Arizona Rangers, U.S. marshals and their deputies—were ambivalent. In numerous cases, these functionaries conducted tough but honorable—even heroic—operations to enforce the law in what was certainly an unruly region. On many other occasions, these law enforcers were willingly co-opted by the conservative side in the Western Civil War of Incorporation—for example, the gunfighting lawmen Wild Bill Hickok and Wyatt Earp and the widespread attack on the IWW. Aside from the involvement of law enforcement in the Western Civil War of Incorporation, local officers had to cope with the rampant disorder of the gunfight-prone West in the late nineteenth century. The bloodiest such confrontation occurred in 1872 in the Indian Territory (present-day eastern Oklahoma). At the community of Going Snake, an internal Cherokee feud and a jurisdictional conflict between a Cherokee court and a U.S. commissioner resulted in a gun battle that killed eleven people, eight of whom were members of a posse led by U.S. deputy marshals. This was the largest massacre in the two-century history of the federal marshal system.

The turbulent 1870s–1880s mining camp of Bodie, California, was typical of the violent pastoral and mining boomtowns where highly homicidal gunfighters were seldom condemned by law or public opinion as long as they observed the Code of the West. Away from these mining camps and prairie towns, however, the rapidly urbanizing West of the late nineteenth century resembled the rest of the United States. According to a study of Alameda County, on the east side of San Francisco Bay, these areas were becoming less violent as the criminal-justice system responded to the mounting public demand for a peaceful civic culture.

Sometimes a part of the Western Civil War of Incorporation and sometimes not were the ethnic, racial, and religious conflicts that all too often yielded massacres and

murderous riots. Ethnic animosities were at times related to industrial violence in the West, whereas religious identity was frequently linked to ethnic status. In religion, one key conflict was between Mormons and the Gentiles (non-Mormons) who opposed them. After a violent expulsion from northwestern Missouri, where eighteen died in the Haun's Mill Massacre of 1838, the Mormons created the new metropolis of Nauvoo, Illinois, near which Mormonism's founder, Joseph Smith, was murdered in 1844. Moving again, the Mormons found a new refuge in the West. Established in 1847 under Brigham Young, the Mormon colony in Utah thrived, but trouble rose anew when its practice of polygamy was openly announced. Ensuing tension between the Mormons and the federal government produced a U.S. Army expedition into the Mormon country. Near-hysterical feelings of self-defense swept the Mormons of Utah in 1857 as they prepared to fight for their lives. War was averted, but in late summer a heinous act of violence—the Mountain Meadows Massacre—occurred in southwestern Utah, where, among the frontier Mormon villagers, religious frenzy in the face of the federal threat was highest. The tragic outcome was the slaughter of about one hundred men, women, and older children of a California-bound wagon train of Arkansans by a Mormon-led force of Paiute Indians and local Mormons. Only eighteen of the younger children were spared in what was the largest massacre of white civilians in western history. An order from Brigham Young came too late to save the victims.

The long-term warfare between whites and Indians sometimes passed the line from quasi-military fighting to the massacre of civilians on both the white and the Indian sides. Massacres of Indians by Indians were not unknown, with the last large episode occurring near Camp Grant, Arizona, in 1871 when some one hundred Apaches were killed by a band spearheaded by ninety-four of their traditional Papago enemies who had been incited by Apache-hating Anglos and Hispanos of Tucson. Of massacres of whites by Indians, Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and twelve others were killed by Cayuse at the Whitmans' mission near present Walla Walla, Washington, in 1847. On the Oregon Trail in Idaho were the Ward (1854) and Otter (1860) wagon train massacres, with eighteen and thirty-two lives lost, respectively, to Shoshones. These massacres were exceptions to the rule that Indians far more often aided the overland pioneers than attacked them. One hostile Indian campaign by the Apache band of Josanie (Ulzana) in New Mexico and Arizona killed forty-five civilians in 1885. Much earlier, rebel Indians killed many civilians in the Pueblo revolt of 1680 in New Mexico and in five uprisings by California Indians against Hispanic mission communities in 1775–1824.

Exactingly much heavier casualties than Indian massacres of whites were white massacres of Indians: the Bear River Massacre in southeast Idaho in 1863 (90 women and children killed); the Sand Creek Massacre in eastern Colorado in 1864 (about 200 Cheyenne men, women, and children slain); and the Marias River Massacre in northern Montana in 1870 (173 Blackfeet deaths, mostly women and children). Women and children were also killed in the 1868 massacre of 103 Cheyennes on the Washita River in western Oklahoma and the 1890 slaughter of 150 or more Sioux at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Federal soldiers conducted all of these massacres except for that by the Colorado militia at Sand Creek. Merciless were the genocidal tactics of land-grabbing white men in the fecund Round Valley region of California's northwestern mountains



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The photographer George Trager recorded the mass burial of 146 Sioux gunned down by the Seventh Cavalry on 29 December 1890 at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Though the massacre seemed to mark the end of Indian-white warfare, it was part of a continuing pattern of western violence in which federal troops were called on to police internal dissidents.

George Trager (1861–after 1892). Burial of the Dead at the Battle of Wounded Knee, S.D. *Albumen silver print*, 1 January 1891. Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

in the 1850s and 1860s. Here the population of the Yukis and other Indians fell from over 11,000 to under 1,000.

White fears of Chinese job competition inspired the West's virulent anti-Chinese movement, which was often spearheaded by radical labor reformers. The result was a long chronicle of violence and intimidation: anti-Chinese riots in Los Angeles (eighteen to nineteen Chinese dead in 1871), Seattle, and Tacoma; an 1887 slaughter of ten Chinese miners at Log Cabin Bar, Oregon, on the Snake River; and, two years earlier, a massacre of fifty-one Chinese (with the expulsion of four to five hundred others) at the coal-mining center of Rock Springs, Wyoming.

Violence between Hispanos and Indians early in the years of Spanish colonization in the Southwest was followed by Hispano conflict with the later-arriving Anglos. Violence by Hispanic outlaws and gunfighters against Anglos represented a species of resistance in the Western Civil War of Incorporation but also included the independent factor of ethnicity. This was true of the vigilante lynching of a Mexican woman, Josefa (later often called Juanita), in Downieville, California, in 1851, who had killed a drunken miner who had molested her.

Women, much less involved than men in local murders and assaults, were seldom legally executed, and Josefa was one of only several women lynched in the West. One study shows that black women inmates in the Kansas state prison were disproportionately represented in the female prison population because of racial discrimination. Recent research on physically mistreated wives in the mixed urban and rural society of

Lane County, Oregon, of the 1890s suggests that these women were unusually assertive and that their abusive husbands were economically unsuccessful and psychologically insecure.

From mid-century on, the Hispanic *bandidos* of California and Texas waged an anti-Anglo vendetta. In the Golden State, gunfighting Hispanic outlaws operated in the 1850s–1870s against the Americans who streamed in after the U.S. acquisition of California. Much of this was sheer criminal activity, but the raids and killings by the social bandit Joaquin Murrieta and others also had strong rebellious overtones. Similar animosities operated in a vast zone in southern Texas. Such notable Mexicans as Juan Cortina had the dual identity of border brigand and patriotic Hispanic nationalist. Resembling their outlaw counterparts in California were Gregorio Cortez and other resister gunfighters celebrated by Texas Hispanos in folklore and song as social bandits. Raids back and forth across the Texas-Mexico line found the *bandidos* at war with civilian law officers, Texas Rangers, and, occasionally, U.S. troops. The last such raid was a bold 1915 attack on the Norias unit of the King Ranch north of Brownsville.

Conclusion

By 1920 the Western Civil War of Incorporation was over, with the conservative side emerging strongly victorious. A final surge of seven episodes of the regional civil war had occurred in the 1916–19 era of World War I as the forces of resistance made their last stand. In the overall war, one of the episodes (the White Cap conflict in New Mexico) was a defeat for the incorporators; seven others were ambiguous or unclear in their outcomes. These eight episodes in which the anti-incorporating faction was not clearly vanquished—along with the heavy violence in most of the other episodes—show that resistance to the incorporating trend was dauntless.

Brutality and oppression were plentiful in the Western Civil War of Incorporation but should be viewed in proportion. Mitigating the harsh reality of and coexisting with much of the Western Civil War of Incorporation was a remarkably open, mobile, and expanding society in the West from the 1880s. This enabled a great many of the lower class and middle class not only to avoid the tragic battlegrounds in the regional civil war but to prosper and thrive. Nor should the popularity of the incorporating victory be overlooked and underestimated, for there was a widespread desire—by no means restricted to the elite and the affluent—for the more orderly, structured society that was one result of the Western Civil War of Incorporation. After 1890 a series of social, economic, and political reform movements and advances in popular education for the upwardly mobile softened the impact of the Western Civil War of Incorporation without diminishing the order and stability that was, in part, its legacy.

In the aftermath of the conservative triumph in the Western Civil War of Incorporation, the region, from 1920 to 1960, experienced its least violent times. But the relative calm of that era dissolved into turbulent decades of protest, riot, crime, and assassination. The anti-Hispanic Zoot Suit Riot in Los Angeles in 1943 was a portent of the West's post-1960 period of violence. In its own distinctive way, western violence of the 1960s and after mirrored the postindustrial surge of crime and disorder that afflicted all the technologically advanced democracies of the world, except for Japan. No

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country was more affected than the United States. Typifying the new turbulence was the unprecedented phenomenon of numerous serial murderers whose relentless violence was exemplified by Ted Bundy's killing of at least nineteen women in Washington, Utah, and Colorado in 1974-75.

Led by the massive Watts riot in Los Angeles, group violence was at its greatest in the black-ghetto uprisings of the 1960s. Watts in 1965 had much earlier precedents in the Texas riots of African-American soldiers in Brownsville in 1906 and Houston in 1917. By the 1980s, ultra-violent drug-dealing gangs of young male African Americans and Hispanos spread through the big cities of the West from their citadels in the ghettos and barrios of Los Angeles. Black gang members spearheaded the Los Angeles riot of 1992, but Hispanos, Asians, and whites were also among the rioters. The riot was a combination of protest, crime, and nihilism, a reflection of late-twentieth-century western racial diversity, and an indication of the growing anomie of western cities.

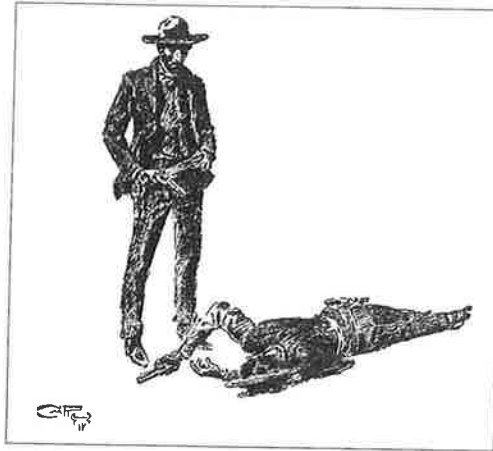
A throwback to the white-Indian conflict of a century earlier was Wounded Knee II: a fatal 1973 confrontation between Indian militants (two killed) and federal marshals at the site of the 1890 massacre in South Dakota. Most shocking of all was the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas on 22 November 1963, followed five years later by the scarcely less-unsettling assassination in Los Angeles of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, a younger brother of the president. The western setting of the Kennedy assassinations was an eerie reminder to the historically knowledgeable of a long tradition of assassinations in territorial New Mexico, a tradition that was grounded in the latter's unstable and deeply conflicted society. Aside from the western locations, however, there was nothing uniquely western about the assassinations of the Kennedy brothers.

Many of our images of recent violence in the West come not from the fiction of print or film but from the news seen by millions on television. The presidential motorcade suddenly disrupted by gunfire blasting into the body of John F. Kennedy or the flames searing the horizon of riot-torn Los Angeles are images deeply etched in the national consciousness.

Yet, the most enduring image of western violence is the "walkdown": two holstered westerners, armed with six-guns, pace toward each other down the bleak street of a frontier town, ready to draw and shoot. Climaxed by the inevitable burst of gunfire, the image focuses on one of the men, dying in the dust—dropped by the bullet of the survivor, standing tall in triumph. In this image, the victorious gunfighter is the hero and his fallen foe the villain. In the popular parlance, the hero wears a white hat—the villain a black one.

This image of the western walkdown was fixed in the American mind by its portrayal in the climactic episode of the most influential western novel—*The Virginian* (1902), by Owen Wister. In Wister's book, the heroic Wyoming cowboy, "the Virginian," slays the evil Trampas. So popular was Wister's novel (avidly read by President Theodore Roosevelt, the author's good friend, to whom the book was dedicated) that the walkdown became the central formulaic event in the western fiction of print and film. Yet, as the historian Kent Ladd Steckmesser has suggested, the fictional walkdown in *The Virginian* may have been based on a real walkdown—one at which onlookers by the town square of Springfield, Missouri, saw Wild Bill Hickok gun down his enemy, Dave

The "walkdown," fixed in the popular imagination by the climactic scene of Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902), remains a central visual metaphor for western culture. The enduring popularity of the image reflects a public taste for clear-cut moral distinctions between good and evil and an enduring fascination with violence as a means to enforce the rule of law.

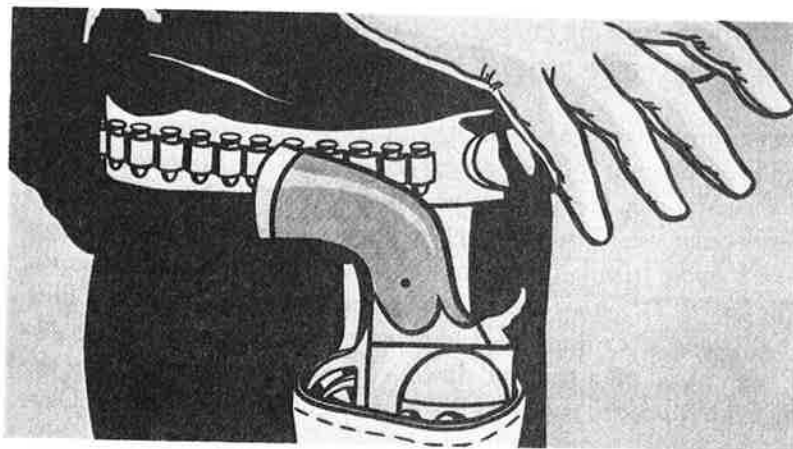


Charles M. Russell (1864–1926). *The Virginian Looks Down at Trampas*. Drawing reproduced as book illustration in Owen Wister, *The Virginian* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc, 18th printing, 1979).



Film still from *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1968), directed by Sergio Leone. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.

Roy Lichtenstein (b. 1923). *Fastest Gun*. Magna on canvas, 1963. © Roy Lichtenstein. Courtesy of the artist.



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Tutt, in 1865. True to the formula, Hickok was presented as a hero to those who read the account of this prototypical no-duty-to-retreat western gunfight in *Harper's*, the nation's favorite magazine.

Scholars have devoted much attention to popular western fiction, of which *The Virginian* remains the most significant example. Henry Nash Smith traced the origins of the genre to the Leatherstocking novels of James Fenimore Cooper. Smith also emphasized the decline of the popular western into the literarily debased form of the dime novel with its mass readership in the later nineteenth century. Aside from the literary quality of popular western fiction, specialists have focused on the values upheld by it. The scholarly consensus is that popular western fiction, whether in print or film, embodies a deep formula in which the hero, according to John G. Cawelti's study *The Six-Gun Mystique* (1984), mediates between civilization and savagery (or, in the comparable terms of other scholars, between culture and nature, order and chaos). The gunfighting skill of the hero represents the savagery of violence, but his objective of besting evil is in the interest of civilization. In this deep formula the hero is also a transitional figure: one who employs the violence of the frontier West to establish the peaceable society of civilized values that should succeed it. Thus, the hero reflects deeply conservative social values aligned against the threat of anarchy.

Neither Smith nor Cawelti were impressed with the literary quality of formula western fiction, but among recent scholars who take these writings more seriously as literature are Christine Bold, Michael Denning, and Cynthia S. Hamilton. Denning holds that dime-novel authors used the western setting "not only for escapist adventure but to state social conflicts through figures of bank and train robbers," aggrieved cowboys, and range wars. Wister based *The Virginian* on the conflict between the big cattlemen of Wyoming and the rustler element, the conflict that peaked in the Johnson County War. Wister was a firm friend of some of the cattle barons of Wyoming, and *The Virginian* expresses, in literature, their conservative version of the Western Civil War of Incorporation. Wister's villain, Trampas, was modeled on a true bad man—one of the Wyoming rustlers whom Wister himself had met. The heroic Virginian rides with a vigilante band of the kind that took to the field in the Johnson County War.

Since Wister, popular western fiction in both print and film has often reflected the Western Civil War of Incorporation and the emergence of a cognitive split in the mythology of the western hero. The conservative winning side in the Western Civil War of Incorporation bred a socially conservative myth of the hero—for example, the fictional Virginian and the mythic versions of the real-life Wild Bill Hickok and Wyatt Earp. The anti-incorporating side in the regional civil war generated a dissident social-bandit myth in which the heroes were real-life outlaws like Jesse James, Billy the Kid, Joaquin Murrieta, and Gregorio Cortez. Both the conservative mythic hero and the insurgent social-bandit hero have had wide appeal because Americans are deeply ambivalent about established power and dissident protest.

Aside from mass-market formula fiction, many authentic novels of high quality have been based on episodes of western violence: *The Ox-Bow Incident*, by Walter Van Tilburg Clark, the previously mentioned antivigilante novel; *The Lady* (1957), by Conrad Richter, inspired by the tragic deaths of Judge Albert J. Fountain and his son; *A Very Small Remnant* (1963), by Michael Straight, based on the Sand Creek Massacre;

and, with its climax in the slaughter of the Blackfeet on the Marias River, the remarkable *Fools Crow* (1986), by James Welch.

There are two key questions about western violence. First, just how violent was the West? Due to the values of its people, the Western Civil War of Incorporation, and the ubiquity of ethnic, racial, and religious conflict, the West was a turbulent region. This was the result, however, of the particular historical experience of the West. Westerners were not innately more violent than people elsewhere. Leading social, economic, and political blocs freely resorted to violence to advance or defend their interests. Closely connected to key episodes of this western violence were such leading figures and men of power as Leland Stanford, Stephen J. Field, Thomas B. Catron, Albert Bacon Fall, and Granville Stuart. Yet, some qualification is in order.

Many communities and areas of the West were notably violent, but others were not. No region of the West was more violent than central Texas from 1860 to the 1890s, a huge area bounded roughly by Fort Worth, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, and San Angelo. In this locale of multicultural convergence, Hispanos, German immigrants, and slaveholding southern whites invaded the realm of the native Indians. Violence abounded as a result of the Civil War and its aftermath and also as a result of white-Indian warfare, vigilantism, cattle-range conflict, outlaw activity, community feuds, ethnic and racial tension, agrarian discontent, and political tumult. Gunplay was common, as exemplified by John Wesley Hardin, the West's deadliest gunfighter with over twenty killings arising from his participation in post-Civil War white-black racial strife and in political conflicts and community feuds.

A central Texas culture of violence based on the spirit of no duty to retreat skewed the behavior of the people. As a contemporary wrote, self-defense was "the usual plea of the man-slayer" with "wide latitude" given to its definition. "A look may, if it have . . . sufficient of malice in it, justify resort to the pistol pocket. A touch [to the pocket] frequently justifies instant shooting." Nor was the violence self-contained in the Lone Star State. Central Texas cowboys, cattle kings, and outlaws riding the trails north, northwest, and west took their bent to violence with them, as seen in such gunfighters as Frank Canton in Wyoming and Oliver M. Lee in New Mexico as well as the outlaws John Ringo and Curly Bill Brocius in Arizona. Central Texas expatriates significantly tinctured wide western expanses with the virus of violence.

President Lyndon B. Johnson was born and reared in the heart of the violent region of central Texas. Johnson biographers and Johnson himself have averred the formative influence of his central Texas homeland in shaping his presidential attitudes and values. His relentless determination to defend militarily what he saw as the American national interest in South Vietnam was typical of his central Texas heritage of no-duty-to-retreat violence. As Johnson made his 1965 decision to commit large-scale land forces to the defense of South Vietnam, he invoked the spirit of one of his heroes, a gunfighting Texas Ranger, Captain L. H. McNelly, to admonish the American people that "courage is a man who keeps coming on."

Away from central Texas, disputes over property rights and human rights were endemic in industries like mining, timber, and cattle. Often related to the Western Civil War of Incorporation, such conflicts generated an enormous amount of violence.

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An influential treatment is the trilogy by Richard Slot

Mining, mill, and cattle towns were frequently violent places, but there were also many communities in the West where violence was rare. In 1960, the homicide rate of the West was second to that of the South among the nation's regions. Contrary to this overall sectional pattern, however, two sets of western states had homicide rates in 1960 that were among America's lowest: a Northwest group of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Utah; and a Great Plains wedge of Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. Some basic cultural predispositions were behind the low proclivity to homicide in these states. Both groups of states had strong contingents of core settlers from the Northeast whose regional culture, as the social historian David Hackett Fischer has noted, made them averse to violence.

Governmental structure was a key factor in western violence. Comparative studies of the Canadian and the American West show that miners prone to violence and vigilantism under the loose, permissive rule of the American federal system became peaceable and law-abiding when they migrated to Canada, where the more centralized, stricter government was staunchly intolerant of violence. And yet, as violent as it was, the American West never produced anything like the hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties resulting from the anarchic political violence in the South American nation of Colombia from the 1940s to the 1960s.

Although on a far smaller scale than in Colombia, violence was a principal factor in western U.S. history. This leads to the second question about western violence: has it been mainly responsible for America's unenviable distinction as the most violent nation among its peer group of the technologically advanced democracies of the globe? The answer is no. The turbulent history and values of the West have been a major contributor to our nation's violent heritage but no more so than ethnic, racial, religious, industrial, agrarian, and political conflict or than the crime, lynch-law, and violent examples and legacies of the American Revolution and the Civil War. The West is but one example of the pluralism of American history and society that has yielded both the bane of violence and the blessings of freedom and opportunity. In spite of the incorporating trend of 1850–1920 and the excess of violence, millions of immigrants worldwide have been attracted to the open, democratic society of both America and its western region.

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