



JESSE JAMES

1 x 60



International

JESSE JAMES

1 x 60

CONTACT

Tom Koch, *Director*
WGBH International
125 Western Avenue
Boston, MA 02134 USA

TEL 617-300-3893
FAX 617-779-7900

tom_koch@wgbh.org
wgbh.org/international

The legend of Jesse James is one of America's most familiar—and most fictitious. *Jesse James* is the true story of an outlaw who has captured the imagination of generations of Americans. "There's something about this legend that Americans have a hard time letting go of," says film producer Mark Zwonitzer. "Perhaps it's the much-needed idea of a hero or the allure of an outlaw...I hope this film will set the record straight on Jesse James."

Raised in a household where half the family income came from slave labor, Jesse had a warrior's spirit and was destined to fight for the southern cause. In the spring of 1864, Jesse rode to war, and over the next year, he would be schooled in violence and terror. "Jesse and his companions, they're not satisfied just to kill the enemy...they'll break skulls, they'll slash throats," explains author Fred Chiaventone. "What they set out to do was to terrorize all of their enemies and to dissuade people from supporting the federal cause." They would spread word of their deeds and also of their threats, providing sensational front-page stories for local newspapers.

On September 27, 1864, James' gang murdered 22 unarmed Union soldiers and, as part of a larger guerrilla army, ambushed and butchered 150 federal soldiers. The Confederacy surrendered the following spring, but Jesse continued to fight. The James brothers, along with their gang, robbed banks, stagecoaches and railroads, leaving a trail of dead bodies in their wake.

But the hideous crimes of the James Gang read as something quite different in the papers. James and his cohorts penned a series of published letters and press releases, and had a strong ally at the *Kansas City Times*. James created his own fame, painting himself as a defender of southern manhood and a fighter of the establishment—the corrupt railroad corporations and banks. The legend of the victimized farm boy from Missouri who fought against northern oppressors spread far and wide. Jesse himself came to believe the image he created.

For nearly two decades, Jesse James, heartless thief and cold-blooded murderer, pushed ahead with his outlaw career. His gang would be reconfigured multiple times, compensating for members who were lost to death or simply to lack of interest in the outlaw lifestyle.

But Jesse never gave up the fight and never abandoned his desire for fame. And while his image as a benevolent thief won him many fans, the true story of his vicious career put a price on his head. Threats came from all sides. Tired of having their safes emptied, the railroad companies hired a detective agency to hunt down the James boys. Finally, in 1882, a \$10,000 bounty was too much for fellow gang member Bob Ford to resist. He assassinated James in a fitting manner—Jesse was unarmed, and shot from behind.

06.01.100

**AMERICAN
EXPERIENCE™**

CREDITS

Series Executive Producer: Mark Samels

Series Producer: Sharon Grimberg

Producer, Writer, Director: Mark Zwonitzer

Co-Producer: Jamila Wignot

An AMERICAN EXPERIENCE production for WGBH Boston.

Cover Photo Credit: Ralph P. Ganis