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Its hard to say what causes a man to do what he does, in the case of Jesse James many have guessed and wondered why he was an outlaw. Jesse James was born during a time of great conflict within the nation, the civil war was on the verge of breakout, with slavery in jeopardy and large industries were taking over small farms, the violence that took place can change a man. Looking back over the years and the time in which Jesse James was born can give an insight to his outlaw life. Jesse James was born in a time when brother was against brother, the economy was in turmoil over losing there labor force, slaves, families were being tortured and criminals were emerging from the harsh environments that surrounded them, this is how it would begin. Robin Hood will not be found in any of Jesse James's criminal acts; he was an outlaw through and through.

Jesse James was born in Missouri on September 5<sup>th</sup> 1847, Robert James was his father a preacher and he was married to Zerelda, who had two boys and one daughter, not to mention the son that died during infancy. Frank was Jesse's older brother of four years. Zeraelda was Jesse's mother; she was a caring, strong-willed woman who became one of Jesse's greatest supporters. Breiham describes Zeraelda's upbringing skills, "She brought the boys up strictly, according to the fashion in backwoods Missouri where churches were the center of community social

life, and where pistol toting was normal.”<sup>1</sup> She loved her sons and it was not due to the lack of upbringing that turned Jesse James into an outlaw.

The family started out on a farm in Missouri, with slaves and a place for Robert to preach his sermons, the gold rush brought itchy fingers to many, Breihan states, “The preacher resisted the temptation to follow the lure of the gold rush for more than a year, but on April 12, 1851, he could withstand the tide no longer.”<sup>2</sup> Robert led everyone to believe he was going to California to preach, the truth may not be known of his intentions for when he arrived he became sick and soon died. Jesse and his family suffered many lows after this, losing most of their home, farming equipment and each other, the children were taken from Zerelada at one point. Zerelda soon married another man, Benjamin Simms a neighboring farmer and her family and her farm was soon returned. This did not last long for Benjamin soon died, and this once again left Zerelada alone with her children. Seeing the difficult situation she was put in once again, she found a man that would bend to her will, this man would be known as Dr. Rueben Samuel.

Jesse James, being born to a preacher, although he had struggles growing up, it was not life altering to the point of no return; Jesse was just a farm boy. Triplett writes of Jesse James in his childhood, “ Genial, affectionate and lively, there was nothing in his childhood or early youth to foreshadow his adventurous career that was destined to become more thrilling than any romance, or that would point to an

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<sup>1</sup> Breihan, Carl W. *The Complete and Authentic Life of Jesse James*. New York: Frederick Fell, Inc., Publishers, 19721953. 72

<sup>2</sup> Breihan, Carl W. *The Complete and Authentic Life of Jesse James*. New York: Frederick Fell, Inc., Publishers, 19721953. 71

ending certainly as tragic as could well have been devised.”<sup>3</sup> It seemed in Jesse’s youth that he would follow in his late fathers footsteps as a preacher. Stiles states, “It was during these years of peace and prosperity in this Missouri Zion that the great issues of the age penetrated to the grass roots of Clay County, dividing one family from the next.”<sup>4</sup> Missouri had many difficulties in deciding which side their loyalties would lie, being a slave state they did not secede from the Union making them a border state.

Missouri was divided when the Civil war broke out, men were sent to fight in the North and the South. Missouri was a border state during the Civil War; they were a slave state that did not leave the Union, the problem with this was the emancipation did not free the slaves in Missouri, only the confederacy states. Jesse James believed in his family’s way of life and felt that they should not be punished for owning slaves and should be allowed to keep them to maintain their lifestyle. During this time a band of confederate loyalist produced a group of men known as the guerillas. “During the long and vindictive war between the States, there developed, on the side of the South, small bands of light cavalry, or as the vicissitudes of warfare had never before produced.”<sup>5</sup> (triplett, xxxv)

Growing up in Missouri in the mid 1800’s on a farm with slaves when the Civil War was about to breakout, places Jesse James and his family on the Southern side of the war. Stiles describes the value of slaves, “Next to land, slaves represented

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<sup>3</sup> Triplett, Frank. *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*. New York: The Shallow Pree, Inc., 1970. 3

<sup>4</sup> Stiles, T.J. *Jesse James*. New York: Alfred A. Knope, 2002. 87

<sup>5</sup> Triplett, Frank. *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*. New York: The Shallow Pree, Inc., 1970. xxxv

the single most valuable type of property in the state; demand pushed prices ever upward, leading one historian to call the 1850's the "golden age of slave values."<sup>6</sup> The James family depended on their slaves to survive and Jesse worked and lived with the slaves day in and day out, this was their way of life. Breihan explains the attitudes towards slavery, "Tempers flared constantly as the dispute raged over slavery, and the James boys heard the fiery talk of abolitionists and would be secessionists."<sup>7</sup> James's older brother Frank, enlisted in the Confederate Army in 1861 and soon joined the guerilla troops in fighting unionist. The Guerilla troops were often called bushwhacker, they were in constant combat and most of which they instigated. Stiles says, "After the murder of the prisoners, Frank joined his comrades in a dash into Missouri City, where they spent the night pillaging local Unionist."<sup>8</sup> There were no exceptions; anyone who was a unionist was subject to their wrath. James admired Frank and would help the troop, and listened to stories being glorified of the attacks they had been in, when they came to the farm; Jesse was waiting till he was of age to join the troop.

Frank James would visit often with his guerilla troop. Zerelda, his mother would feed, mend and clothe the troop when they were there. On coming to the farm they would hide in the woods, many union militias were looking for them and they had to stay hidden. The state was still divided with many unionist and confederates. On one such occasion the union militias came to the farm, they took Jesse from the fields. " Taking him from the plow, they drove him before them, he on

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<sup>6</sup> Stiles, T.J. *Jesse James*. New York: Alfred A. Knope, 2002. 45

<sup>7</sup> Breihan, Carl W. *The Complete and Authentic Life of Jesse James*. New York: Frederick Fell, Inc., Publishers, 1972/1953. 71

<sup>8</sup> Stiles, T.J. *Jesse James*. New York: Alfred A. Knope, 2002. 87

foot, they on horses, lashing him with his plow lines and beating him with their bayonets.”<sup>9</sup>(Triplett,5) Jesse’s mother begged for her boy’s life and prayed for his torture to end. “These strokes found him a boy; they left him a man-no, not a man, but a tiger with a fierce thirst for human gore than the mad man-slayer of the Indian Jungles” .”<sup>10</sup>(Triplett,5) This event has been called one of the turning points for Jesse James into his criminal life, as well as the events that followed after.

After Dragging Jesse James from the plows to the main house they took his stepfather, Reuben Samuel, and questioned him. Breiham describes the scene, “The militia resorted to a violent form of torture to extract information: they placed a rope about Dr. Samuel’s neck and strung him up a tree.”<sup>11</sup> Next, they brought his mother and questioned her about the whereabouts of her son Frank and the Guerilla troops. Zerelda what indulge any information so they turned on Samuel. They strung Samuel up on a tree with the noose around his neck and preceded to question him about Frank, he denied any information. The union soldiers were ruthless and gave Samuel a swing, this went on until Samuel finally broke, telling them the location of Frank and the troop in the woods.

Jesse James joined the Guerilla troops in 1864 with his brother Frank at his side. Jesse James was sixteen years old when he joined the Guerilla troop. Triplett states, “Murder was their usual mode of argument; arson their recreation, and

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<sup>9</sup> Triplett, Frank. *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*. New York: The Shallow Pree, Inc., 1970. 5

<sup>10</sup> Triplett, Frank. *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*. New York: The Shallow Pree, Inc., 1970. 5

<sup>11</sup> Breihan, Carl W. *The Complete and Authentic Life of Jesse James*. New York: Frederick Fell, Inc., Publishers, 19721953. 77

robbery their industry.”<sup>12</sup> The brothers rode with William Quantrill and “Bloody Bill” Anderson, these men were ruthless and expected nothing less from their members. The Guerilla troops had many supporters and the stories told of their greatness, in defeating the enemy unionist, were spread throughout the Midwest. Settle states, “Guerilla fighting behind enemy lines cannot be carried on successfully without a sympathetic civil population to sustain it with shelter, subsistence, information, and men.”<sup>13</sup> The men of these troops went from house to house to hide out while waiting for their next attack, they eluded the law by being on the move and with many supporters it was easy to do.

Jesse James was believed to have had a syndrome called Violentization, Stiles describes the process, “It is how dangerous criminals come into being.”<sup>14</sup> The process has four stages. The first stage is called brutalization, during this stage it starts out with someone they are close to or themselves being demoralized and controlled by an authority figure. Also during this stage someone who is close to them, such as an inmate or in Jesse’s case one of the guerilla members’ or even his own brother, who urges violence and bad behavior, along with glorifying violent stories. Stiles states, “Brutalization leads the subject to reject religious and cultural norms of civil behavior.”<sup>15</sup> The second stage, belligerency, where the individual is aggressive or has warlike behavior, Jesse rode with these men and performed acts of

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<sup>12</sup> Triplett, Frank. *The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James*. New York: The Shallow Pree, Inc., 1970. 4

<sup>13</sup> Settle, William A. *Jesse James was His Name*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1966. 17

<sup>14</sup> Stiles, T.J. *Jesse James*. New York: Alfred A. Knope, 2002. 103

<sup>15</sup> Stiles, T.J. *Jesse James*. New York: Alfred A. Knope, 2002. 103

cruelty on many. The third stage being the most difficult is violent performances, this is where the individual must perform violent acts on others. Jesse was no stranger to violent and criminal acts on others, he would call on a unionist at his home and shoot him at the door in front of his family. Stiles states, "The subject pushes through a psychological barrier, and actually inflicts pain on an other."<sup>16</sup> The final stage is virulency. During this stage of the process the individual feels as though his social status is changing after he has committed an act of violence; now he believes people fear, congratulate and reward him for his criminal acts.

Jesse James and his brother formed their own gang in 1868, the James-Younger gang often changed its member depending on the robbery and its location, and there was often a large span of time in between robberies. The gang started out fighting for the glory of the confederacy, but soon turned to shellfish wants and needs, and the murdering and plundering continued as a way of life for the James brothers. Jesse James was a ruthless man; he will ever be remembered for his criminal acts throughout the West. Etulain describes Jesse James, "He was one of "the boldest bandits to ever plague the world," dazzling and "dashing and skillful," in his bravery and nerve. He was the 'worst man, without exception, in America," coldhearted and viscous."<sup>17</sup> Jesse James took no hostages and killed with ease. Any person related to the Union or owning business as a Union loyalist was subject to Jesse James criminal acts.

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<sup>16</sup> Stiles, T.J. *Jesse James*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. 103

<sup>17</sup> Etulain, Richard, W., Riley, Glenda. *With Badges & Bullets*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999. 159

Missouri's western border was the access point into the unsettled states the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific coast. This was where the Oregon trail began, Clay County boomed during the next ten years as people migrated into the west. Etulain writes of the legend, "The western legend who emerged, and who continues to ride through American dreams, was a border man who had skirted the lines among many parts of American history and our understanding of who we are."<sup>18</sup> Border man has been referred to as the stretch of land between Missouri's western boundary, Arkansas and Indian Territory. Jesse James and his gang-attacked business in these areas owned by union loyalists, there were no exceptions. Large industries that had union presidents, or railroads that were conducted by former unionists, banks that had union money were the main point of attack for the gang.

Jesse James was an outlaw in the west for almost twenty years. How Jesse James became an outlaw has been looked at from many points of view, some say he was a southern sympathist fighting with the Guerilla troops to support his family's way of life with slavery, others say his family was attacked by unionist soldiers, and still some have called him a Robin Hood. What is myth and what is truth have been argued about throughout the years, but one thing is for certain, Jesse James was an outlaw and is remembered more than some presidents of the United States.

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<sup>18</sup> Etulain, Richard, W., Riley, Glenda. *With Badges & Bullets*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999. 160

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