

Anarchy in the United States

Written by Jesse Mathewson.

It is well known that commonly accepted history is not always what is right, but what has been propagated the most. There is, however, a level of comfort afforded those who may be mistaken regarding our past. After all, what is repeated most often becomes reality. The Wild West gained its colorful reputation through the propagation of dime store novels and poor Hollywood representations. The formation of the legendary Wild West show in 1883 by Buffalo Bill Hickok and others, helped to spread the myths long before television. These shows, books, and movies demonized the injuns' and glorified the rough and tumble of the outlaw's lifestyle. Instead of showing millions of people the truth, which would have never sold a book or a ticket, they showed the highlights. What was glorified and eventually memorialized via film by stalwarts like Jimmy Stewart and John Wayne, were the negatives. The Wild West became a place where every day at noon there was a shootout, facing your opponent and gunning him down was accepted as long as you had a badge. The Earps were happening and the Indians were crazy savages that always lost to the cowboys.

I grew up believing this. I lived and breathed the cowboy versus Indian meme. I built six-guns and lever action repeaters from old pieces of two by four. My brothers and I shot and killed each other more times than I care to count, and finally we found daisy bb guns and our fathers welding goggles. Now death had pain involved. The agony of bb's at 300 fps and the welts raised generated little question that we were men at a young age, and men didn't complain about war wounds. I was 13 when I found my first previous encampment from a U.S. Calvary bivouac. I remember seeing a piece of leather and metal sticking out of the ground and so I returned with a shovel. After three weeks of digging, I had everything from old copper spoons to buttons with US Calvary on them and laudanum bottles. After dusting it off and polishing the metal pieces, I placed it all in a horizontal box and entered them into the local fair. One first place ribbon later, and several moves left me with nothing of that collection but memories.

What was the Wild West outside of the tourist traps we see now and the stupid reenactments by second rate actors? Was it actually endless gunfights and hangings, or was it more than this? The truth is often over shadowed by that which allows us the most flexibility in discussions and interpretation.

In their ground breaking book, *The Not so Wild, Wild West: Property Rights in the Frontier*, authors Terry Lee Anderson and Peter Jensen Hill go back through their grandfathers experiences in the Wild West from Montana to Wyoming. They negate the common myth of the daily gunfight and the outlaws ruling everyone. They define a story of hard work, hard choices, and the resulting success of two immigrant businessmen, one who did not even

speak English, making their fortunes during the roughest, toughest era of American history.

This was the real Wild West, a land of hard work, hard choices, and true liberty. A country where you worked closely with your neighbors to survive the winters, and took personal responsibility for your decisions. Statistically, the gentle East was more crime ridden following the War of Northern Aggression than the Wild West ever was. In the entire history of the Wild West there was only one confrontation on main-street ever recorded, and that was the shootout between the organized crime leaders the Earps and the vaunted cowboys. Contrary to the myth propagated by Hollywood and modern Tombstone residents, the Earps were not reasonable guys. They were well armed, badged killers who knew that they needed to control the way others in Tombstone spent their money because they would never be caught working a mine or any legitimate enterprise.

The largest amount of deaths that occurred in the Wild West was accidental and work related. Doctors and timely medical care was hard to come by in the East and impossible in the Wild West. Falling from your horse and getting hurt may represent an agonizing death, especially if you were taking care of your farm or ranch by yourself. With days of travel by foot or horseback separating people's houses and towns, there was a hard land. However, it was by default a land of liberty, for you were in charge of your own destiny. It was by your hands and choices that you became wealthy or survived or sometimes died. What law existed was virtually ignored as being the pathetic meanderings of lazy politicians and carpet bagging gold diggers from the East coast. For close to a hundred years moving west was synonymous with liberty, and was the real American dream for millions.

Since the advent of movies and other genres of entertainment, there have been a focused desire to entertain versus educate. Since the last individual state government was incorporated into the empire we know as the United States, the true nature of the Wild West has been forgotten except by those sons and daughters and grandchildren of the men and women who desired liberty more than the temporary protection offered by the state. Watching a western does not count as history, regardless of how many times the credits say, "based on a true story."

So when someone asks regarding whether anarchy has ever existed, point them to the Wild West. It was a land of opportunity, liberty and no central government for close to a hundred years. From Kentucky to California, anarchy was in existence and worked well. People prospered and people died, but more than anything people were truly free to live as they wanted and do what worked best for them. A quick look at the state controlled sections of the world throughout history and today and you will see that people die, and people rarely prosper, but most of all people are neither free nor do they know liberty. So what would you prefer, liberty and the ability to thrive based on your own free uncontrolled labor or what you have now?

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