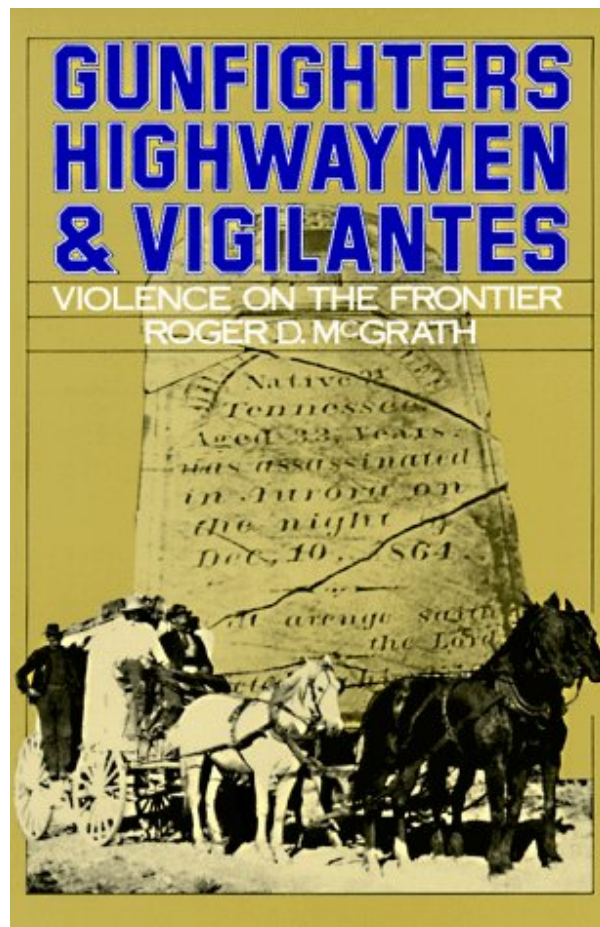


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## From the Inside Flap

"What happened at Bodie and other frontier towns is the subject of Roger D. McGrath's *Violence on the Frontier*, and it is replete with surprises. McGrath takes a sharp look at western violence by comparing community life during the heyday of two California mining camps, Bodie and Aurora. . . . Few if any incidents escaped his keen eye, and he writes with relish about what he found."--Martin Ridge, *California Magazine* "Why is America so violent? When that question is raised, the old chestnut of frontier heritage is inevitably pulled from the fire. . . . McGrath's valuable book suggests that violence in modern America is rooted less in the conquest of the frontier than in the formation of the modern city. . . . His research produces evidence of a powerful set of shared values that rigorously limited violence to consenting adults."--William Broyles, Jr., *New York Times* "This handsomely produced book provides a valuable test case in the study of frontier violence and will provide food for thought for many years to come."--Larry D. Ball, *Western Historical Quarterly* "This is one of the best of a small but growing number of frontier community studies and will offer inspiration and model to other scholars. Its close examination of frontier mining towns yields valuable insights into lives of the men and women who lived--and died--in them. Its concrete assessment of nature of violence and lawlessness in frontier settings not only corrects some past generalizations about frontier violence but also gives historians very useful data to compare with other frontier communities."--John Clendenin Townsend, *Magill's Literary Annual*

## About the Author

Roger D. McGrath was a U.S. Marine and history professor at UCLA. He currently is at California State University-Northridge.

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From the Preface: On the frontier, says conventional wisdom, a structured society did not exist and social control was largely absent; law enforcement and the criminal justice system had limited, if any, influence; and danger--both from man and from the elements--was ever present. This view of the frontier is projected by motion pictures, television, popular literature, and most scholarly histories. But was the frontier really all that violent? What was the nature of the violence that did occur? Were frontier towns more violent than cities in the East? Has America inherited a violent way of life from the frontier? Was the frontier more violent than the United States is today? This book attempts to answer these questions and others about violence and lawlessness on the frontier and do so in a new way. Whereas most authors have drawn their conclusions about frontier violence from the exploits of a few notorious badmen and outlaws and from some of the more famous incidents and conflicts, I have chosen to focus on two towns that I think were typical of the frontier--the mining frontier specifically--and to investigate all forms of violence and lawlessness that occurred in and around those towns.

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"What happened at Bodie and other frontier towns is the subject of Roger D. McGrath's *Violence on the Frontier*, and it is replete with surprises. McGrath takes a sharp look at western violence by comparing community life during the heyday of two California mining camps, Bodie and Aurora. . . . Few if any incidents escaped his keen eye, and he writes with relish about what he found."--Martin Ridge, *California Magazine* "Why is America so violent? When that question is raised, the old chestnut of frontier heritage is inevitably pulled from the fire. . . . McGrath's valuable book suggests that violence in modern America is rooted less in the conquest of the frontier than in the formation of the modern city. . . . His research produces evidence of a powerful set of shared values that rigorously limited violence to consenting adults."--William Broyles, Jr., *New York Times* "This handsomely produced book provides a valuable test case in the study of frontier violence and will provide food for thought for many years to come."--Larry D. Ball, *Western Historical Quarterly* "This is one of the best of a small but growing number of frontier community studies and will offer inspiration and model to other scholars. Its close examination of frontier mining towns yields valuable insights into lives of the men and women who lived--and died--in them. Its concrete assessment of nature of violence and lawlessness in frontier settings not only corrects some past generalizations about frontier violence but also gives historians very useful data to compare with other frontier communities."--John Clendenin Townsend, *Magill's Literary Annual*

## About the Author

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## Most helpful customer reviews

50 of 51 people found the following review helpful.

The Real Real West

By Steve

This book opened my eyes to what life on the western frontier was really like. Forget current media fictionalizations, the frontier was not a shooting gallery. No handsome stranger rides into town to save the cowering inhabitants from evil. The crooks and crooked politics are all there, just like they are today. The sheriff was not always the stalwart defender of the law, in fact he sometimes had business interests to protect.

McGrath offers a carefully documented narrative of the day to day goings on during the gold rush. The data is from public records and the fill-in is from newspaper archives. A detailed yet readable account of frontier life. Far better than any cowboy novel, this is the real west.

Steve Hurst

19 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

Eye opening conclusions drawn from strenuous research

By Mesquite Pete

I found the title of this book to be a bit misleading, as Roger McGrath's research in the book involves violence committed by much more than just gunfighters, highwaymen and vigilantes. I was also surprised to find the research to be concentrated solely on two boom towns on the Nevada/California border. But the research is so deep and so thorough, you can come away with a very good idea of what kind of violence was present in that time and place. McGrath then uses that research to compare the violence found in an 1800's frontier town with the violence we encounter in cities of our present time. These comparisons, which he brings out at the very end of the book, were very enlightening and thought provoking, and made the book well worth my time to read.

24 of 27 people found the following review helpful.

"GOODBYE GOD, WE'RE GOING TO BODIE"

By STEPHEN T. McCARTHY

Just a few days ago, I received my latest copy of THE NEW AMERICAN magazine and found an excellent article in it by Roger D. McGrath titled, "MAKING OUR SCHOOLS SAFE." This edition of the fine current events periodical was inspired by the terrible Virginia Tech campus shooting. McGrath wrote, "For several decades now, I have said that every 'gun control' law should be titled a 'Criminal Empowerment Act,' . . . Reality demonstrates that it is all well and good that sheep pass laws requiring vegetarianism, but until the wolves circling the flock agree, those laws don't mean a thing." His article made me realize how remiss I have been in failing to write, until now, a review for his outstanding book GUNFIGHTERS, HIGHWAYMEN & VIGILANTES.

McGrath's publication was used as the textbook for a very popular course he taught on American West history at the University of California, Los Angeles, while I was a full-time employee on that campus. I purchased my copy at the ASUCLA Student's Store in 1990, and I have gone back to reread sections from it numerous times over the years as GUNFIGHTERS, HIGHWAYMEN & VIGILANTES examines my favorite American epoch and it raises scholarly historical research to an absolute art form! Sifting through innumerable newspapers, as well as court records, jail registers, and journal entries from that time, McGrath fashions a nearly comprehensive account of the violent goings-on in the Nineteenth Century California

mining camps of Aurora and Bodie. (In its time, Bodie was considered to be perhaps the wildest of all Wild West towns. So pervasive was its reputation in the territory for rowdyism that stories of "The Bodie Badman" were legendary, and it is rumored that one little girl upon learning that her parents were about to move the family to Bodie wrote in her diary, "Goodbye God, we're going to Bodie." The town is now a fabulous Historical State Park in a condition of arrested decay - a real "must-see" for any fan of the American West!)

In the Preface to his book, McGrath asks, "Was the frontier really all that violent? What was the nature of the violence that did occur? Were frontier towns more violent than cities in the East? Has America inherited a violent way of life from the frontier? Was the frontier more violent than the United States is today? This book attempts to answer these questions and others about violence and lawlessness on the frontier and to do so in a new way. Whereas most authors have drawn their conclusions about frontier violence from the exploits of a few notorious badmen and outlaws and from some of the more famous incidents and conflicts, I have chosen to focus on two towns that I think were typical of the frontier - the mining frontier specifically - and to investigate all forms of violence and lawlessness that occurred in and around those towns."

McGrath's investigation consumed several years and exhausted every available source, and "The results say much about America's frontier heritage and offer some real surprises - several long-cherished notions about frontier violence are thoroughly repudiated while other widely held beliefs, long suspected of being mythical, are demonstrated to be well founded in fact." In the process of learning about the "real" Old West, we meet lawmen and outlaws, cowboys and Indians, highwaymen and petty thieves, soiled doves and gamblers, miners and claim-jumpers, brawlers and gunfighters, vigilance committees and law-and-order associations, pistol-packing women and a brilliant one-armed lawyer who never lost a case.

Along with saloon keeper George Hand's authentic and humorous Old West Arizona diary, *Whiskey, Six-Guns and Red-Light Ladies: George Hand's Saloon Diary, Tucson, 1875-1878*, and Mark Twain's hilariously exaggerated firsthand account of Old West Nevada, *Roughing It* (Mark Twain Library) -- the funniest book I've ever read! -- Roger McGrath's more sober and scholarly *GUNFIGHTERS, HIGHWAYMEN & VIGILANTES* ranks as "The Best Of The West" on printed page. But that's not to say that McGrath's book is an entirely humorless affair. In the chapter titled "Rough And Rowdy", for instance, we learn of a "Bogus Billy The Kid" and of Mike "Man Eater" McGowan:

Even an impostor made a name for himself among the ranks of Bodie's fistfighters. On a Thursday night in 1882, "a rough looking fellow" entered a saloon and announced to the score of patrons that he was Billy the Kid and that he could stand any man in the room on his head. This boast caused half of the men in the saloon to retreat through the back door. "The balance of the select company of tax payers and Christian statesmen," said the Bodie Standard, "advanced on the bogus Billy the Kid, and when he struck the sidewalk it sounded as though Berliner had hit a base drum. When the man got up he explained that his name was simply John Smith and that his father went by the same name." [page 187]

The most notorious of Bodie's brawlers was Mike McGowan, known as the Man Eater. McGowan had earned his sobriquet in Virginia City, where he delighted in chomping on the ears and noses of his foes. He obviously received his share of defeats, however, because his head was described as having been "beaten all out of shape." ... In Bodie, he managed to chomp on Sheriff Peter Taylor's legs, chase a man down Main Street with a butcher knife, break a pitcher over a waiter's head, threaten to chew off the justice of the peace's ears, eat a stray bulldog, and engage in several fistfights. The Man Eater was finally given a choice of a long jail term or exile from Bodie. He chose the latter and wound up back in Virginia City, where he was arrested for vagrancy. "This must be a mistake on the part of the authorities," said the Bodie Standard, "for Mike has a visible means of support. He has an upper and lower row of teeth." [page 187]

I guess this goes to show that EVERY century has had its "Man-Eating" MIKE. And here we thought there was something unique about our own "Evander Holyfield-Eating" MIKE Tyson.

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