



From Guns to Gavels: How Justice Grew Up in the Outlaw West

Bill Neal

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When a thirteen-year-old boy strikes out on his own in 1885, leaving his Civil War–ravaged Mississippi homeland for the wild Red River borderland between North Texas and Indian Territory, the American West is a land beyond the reach of the law. Crime thrives in the absence of law officers, courtrooms, judges, and jails. Vigilante justice, the posse, and the hangman’s noose fill the void. But by the time the young man—now a veteran outlaw—dies by the gun in 1929 after a tempestuous career, the Old West has been largely tamed, its official legal systems firmly in place. In this companion volume to *Getting Away with Murder on the Texas Frontier*, veteran defense attorney and prosecutor Bill Neal takes readers from Mississippi to the frontiers of West Texas, Indian Territory, New Mexico Territory, and finally the frozen Montana wilderness through a series of linked, true-life tales of crimes and trials. Tracing the struggles of incipient criminal justice in the Southwest through an engaging progression of outlaws and lawmen, plus a host of colorful frontier trial lawyers and judges, Neal reveals how law and society matured together. Virtually an anecdotal textbook, *From Guns to Gavels* follows a bloody trail from the Wild West through the decade after World War I, when the gavel-wielding, black-robed Judge Blackstone at last gained ascendancy over “Judge Winchester” and “Judge Lynch.”

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