



Women Who Kill Men: California Courts, Gender, and the Press (Law in the American West)

Gordon Morris Bakken

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The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a revolutionary period in the lives of women, and the shifting perceptions of women and their role in society were equally apparent in the courtroom. *Women Who Kill Men* examines eighteen sensational cases of women on trial for murder from 1870 to 1958.

The fascinating details of these murder trials, documented in court records and embellished newspaper coverage, mirrored the changing public image of women. Although murder was clearly outside the norm for standard female behavior, most women and their attorneys relied on gendered stereotypes and language to create their defense and sometimes to leverage their status in a patriarchal system. Those who could successfully dress and act the part of the victim were most often able to win the sympathies of the jury. Gender mattered. And though the norms shifted over time, the press, attorneys, and juries were all informed by contemporary gender stereotypes.

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