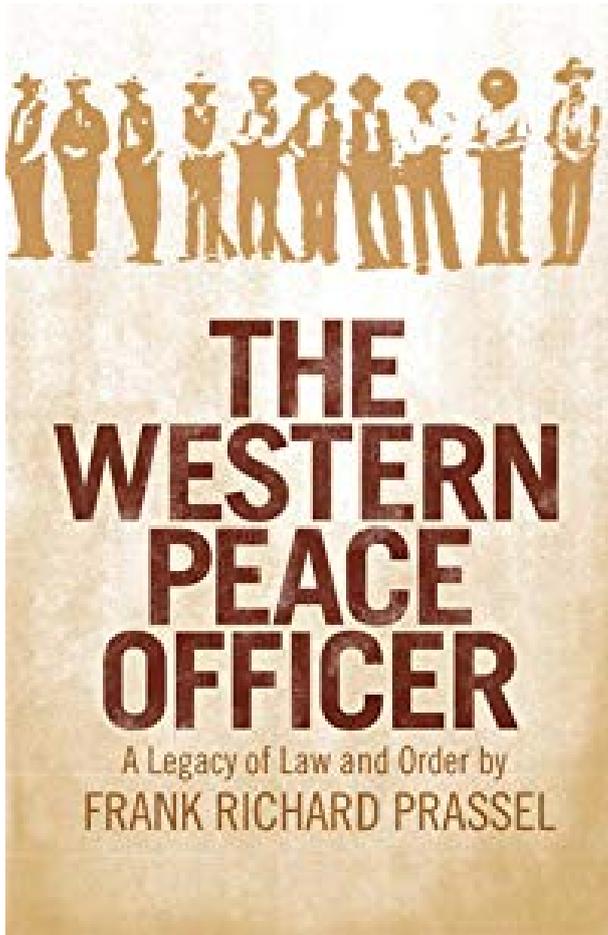


# The Western Peace Officer: A Legacy of Law and Order



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The role of the lawman in the development of the American West has been distorted by an overabundance of dime novels, pulp westerns, Hollywood films, and television programs. Myth has merged with reality, and the stereotype of the badge-packing, gun-wielding marshal has gained complete acceptance in the popular mind. Examining the legends that surround the western peace officer, Professor Prassel argues that he was no better or worse than the members of the community he served. His work was largely routine. Only after journalists and novelists glorified him beyond all recognition did he acquire the resplendent finery and flamboyant manner now common to the cinematic hero. This book describes the activities of a number of law-enforcement agencies. Each level of civil administration in the West had its own police force. Banks, railroads, and cattlemen's associations hired private detectives, and Indian police patrolled reservations. Pinkerton men, Texas rangers, Canadian mounties, and Mexican rurales all played a part in western law enforcement. Men like Dallas Stoudenmire, James Butler Hickok, and Wyatt Earp are discussed, together with more colorful but publicized figures like Frank Watton, one-time sheriff of Navajo County, Arizona. Watton, who ran a drugstore and tended bar, wore a diamond-encrusted badge of solid gold. He once announced a hanging by sending invitations that promised "the latest improved methods in the art of strangulation ... to make the surroundings cheerful and the execution a success." Despite a century of effort, the peace officer failed to bring law and order to the American West. Outdated police methods and antiquated statutes may help to

explain why the West is more violent and crime-ridden today than when the frontier was new. By considering such problems, Professor Prassel's book acquires a particular significance for our times.