

How Class Could Influence One's Perception on Outlaws During the Medieval Period

ABSTRACT

When first hearing the name Robin Hood, many tend to think of the Disney cartoon character who stole from the rich and helped the poor. After reading multiple articles based on his story, I intend to use this research project as an opportunity to not only debate about his true intentions but to gain understanding about the term, "outlaw," and how it pertains to Robin Hood altogether. I plan to dive deeper into the idea of class in order to understand society's perceptions on outlaws during the medieval period. Although I will be looking at a few other outlaws, Robin Hood will be the primary example in the discussion. In discussing the idea of class, the definition of the term, "outlaw" is debated and certain circumstances are taken into consideration. Secondary sources relating to topics aforesaid, will provide context as well as support to the claim that Robin Hood could have very well just been a man who wanted to help those around him. However, considering the wrongful acts he committed, it could also be argued that Robin Hood was an evil man who did kind acts to blind those around him from the truth. And so, although many questions arise surrounding Robin Hood, the main topic for my research project will be based on the pros and cons of class and how in medieval times, status could impact one's perspective on those around them.



WHAT IS AN OUTLAW?

"Outlaw heroes arise in historical circumstances in which one or more social, cultural, ethnic, or religious groups believe themselves to be oppressed or unjustly treated by those who wield greater power."

Greek tradition: An outlaw is described as "savage rapists and promiscuous murderers"

Turkish tradition: An outlaw is described as "brave and clever hero who is wronged, who is a friend of his own people, and who avenges the injustices of the oppressor"

Universal narrative for the "outlaw hero":

- Forced to defy the law
- Rights wrongs and settles disputes
- Kills *only* in self defense
- Courtly to all women; off limits
- Brave, strong, skilled at something
- Often possesses magical objects



Robin Hood Conspiracies:

- It is unknown whether Robin Hood was real or fake, but it is known that bandits, outlaws, and yeomen of the same narrative existed.
- Robin Hood today would most likely be considered as a terrorist
- Robin Hood was once a nobleman fallen on evil times

CLASS THEORIES

During medieval times, equal antagonism between the lower and upper class was prevalent. RH Hilton states, "violence and cruelty were intensified when occurring as part of social conflict." In other words, there was always an "eye for an eye" sort of dynamic when it came to injustices and the overall approach. The lower class constantly found themselves at odds and would struggle to make ends meet. This would often lead to outbreaks of civil war which would affect the upper class more so than the lower. The poor were viewed as rebellious and ungrateful and the upper class often tried to justify their wrongdoings to keep the peace, whereas the poor would see the upper class as greedy and undeserving, therefore leading to the outlawry and rebellions.

"A dominant leader was necessary not only for disciplining group behavior and providing direction in criminal activities, but also because the society naturally turned to the model of an overlord as the normal form of organization" (Hanawalt, 161). In other words, hierarchy was extremely important amongst all classes. However, when it comes to outlaws and their leaders, like Robin Hood, the upper class sees it as a threat as opposed to something good.



Other examples of outlaws:

- Ned Kelly: Australian bushranger; claimed to be an outlaw due to police oppression
- Janosik of Slovak; often celebrated as honorable outlaw who fought in peasant rebellion
- Osama Bin Laden; wanted to defend oppressed Muslims around the world

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