



The Feud That Wasn't: The Taylor Ring, Bill Sutton, John Wesley Hardin, and Violence in Texas (Sam Rayburn Series on Rural Life, sponsored by Texas A&M University-Commerce)

James M. Smallwood

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Marauding outlaws, or violent rebels still bent on fighting the Civil War? For decades, the so-called "Taylor-Sutton feud" has been seen as a bloody vendetta between two opposing gangs of Texas gunfighters. However, historian James M. Smallwood here shows that what seemed to be random lawlessness can be interpreted as a pattern of rebellion by a loose confederation of desperadoes who found common cause in their hatred of the Reconstruction government in Texas. Between the 1850s and 1880, almost 200 men rode at one time or another with Creed Taylor and his family through a forty-five-county area of Texas, stealing and killing almost at will, despite heated and often violent opposition from pro-Union law enforcement officials, often led by William Sutton. From 1871 until his eventual arrest, notorious outlaw John Wesley Hardin served as enforcer for the Taylors. In 1874 in the streets of Comanche, Texas, on his twenty-first birthday, Hardin and two other members of the Taylor ring gunned down Brown County Deputy Charlie Webb. This cold-blooded killing—one among many—marked the beginning of the end for the Taylor ring, and Hardin eventually went to the penitentiary as a result. *The Feud That Wasn't* reinforces the interpretation that Reconstruction was actually just a continuation of the Civil War in another guise, a thesis Smallwood has advanced in other books and articles. He chronicles in vivid detail the cattle rustling, horse thieving, killing sprees, and attacks on law officials perpetrated by the loosely knit Taylor ring, drawing a composite picture of a group of anti-Reconstruction hoodlums who at various times banded together for criminal purposes. Western historians and those interested in gunfighters and lawmen will heartily enjoy this colorful and meticulously researched narrative.

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