

# The Ox-Bow Incident (Modern Library Classics) by Walter Van Tilburg Clark

[An American Classic And A Classic Western](#)

Set in 1885, *The Ox-Bow Incident* is a searing and realistic portrait of frontier life and mob violence in the American West. First published in 1940, it focuses on the lynching of three innocent men and the tragedy that ensues when law and order are abandoned. The result is an emotionally powerful, vivid, and unforgettable re-creation of the Western novel, which Clark transmuted into a universal story about good and evil, individual and community, justice and human nature. As Wallace Stegner writes, [Clarks] theme was civilization, and he recorded, indelibly, its first steps in a new country.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Features:

- \* ISBN13: 9780812972580
- \* Condition: NEW
- \* Notes: Brand New from Publisher. No Remainder Mark.
- \* [Click here to view our Condition Guide and Shipping Prices](#)

THE OX-BOW INCIDENT is a classic tale. It also is a classic Western, and because the Western is so central to American culture, THE OX-BOW INCIDENT surely is more important -- more classic, if you will -- for Americans than for others. To be sure, at times the writing is somewhat dated, but that flaw is negligible. The cast of characters (at least 20) is very finely drawn, with only one (the uncouth town drunk Monty Smith) tending overly towards a stock portrayal. By and large, the psychology underlying the characters is astute. And there is some very fine writing of scenes, especially the one a quarter into the novel of the weather changing and the storm coming on. But the reason to read the novel, even if you have seen the movie, is for the story. It was powerfully presented in the movie, but is even more powerfully presented in the book.

My one and only complaint or reservation has to do with the last chapter. It is superfluous. I suppose that the two additional deaths contained in that chapter and Davies confession tend to make the book more of a Greek

tragedy, but that's not really necessary: this is a quintessential American tragedy, and it doesn't need any retribution or retrospective moralizing.

An aside on the subject of lynching, which is at the dramatic center of the book. Like the Western, lynching is a peculiarly American phenomenon. It is a blot on our history, but one we should remember, not repress. The best book documenting the horrors of lynching in America -- a book that should be much more widely known and circulated -- is *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*.

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