

Lawrence, Elizabeth Atwood. *Rodeo: An Anthropologist Looks at the Wild and the Tame*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982. Pp. xi, 288. Index, notes, photographs. \$19.50.

Scholarly books about rodeo are in short supply, and Lawrence's award-winning work has already attracted widespread attention. The book represents a very different approach from any other on the subject, not only because it is the first anthropological study, but because of the author's unique background. Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence is neither westerner, rancher nor rodeoer, but a licensed veterinarian and professor of veterinary medicine. Her interest in the relationships between men and animals led to graduate study in anthropology. *Rodeo* was originally written as her dissertation for the Ph.D. in Anthropology at Brown University.

Field research for the book was completed between 1975 and 1978, and was limited to standard, male, professional rodeo in ranching communities of the great plains which exhibited historical continuity between ranching and rodeo. Lawrence focused on the way this ranching society uses rodeo "...as a ritual event which serves to express, reaffirm and perpetuate its values, attitudes, and way of life" (p. 5). Within this ritual framework, the rodeo cowboy is said to represent the legendary Chisholm Trail Drivers of 1867-1889, and the various rodeo events are explained as they relate to ranch work of the nineteenth century.

These limitations must be borne in mind when analyzing the text. Many of Lawrence's statements are true when applied to the ritual sense of rodeo but are not accurate when applied to rodeo as sport. Moreover, many of the social and cultural interpretations Lawrence proposes are unique to the groups Lawrence studied and should not be indiscriminately applied to rodeo in general.

The unifying theme of the book is the many ways in which rodeo perpetuates significant aspects of cowboy and frontier life, particularly the relationship between the wild and the tame, between man and the animals. The discussion of animals is the most outstanding feature of the book. Lawrence writes with sensitivity, focusing on the ways animals were trained, treated, and regarded by their human partners and adversaries. She carefully describes the differences among species, and among animals in the different rodeo events, explaining their roles as symbols, sacrificial beasts, and teammates with man in athletic contests.

A second theme, underlying the entire narrative, is that rodeo is truly a man's world, a world where women are barely tolerated. Women who invade the male sanctuaries, such as the areas behind the chutes, are treated as "non-persons." While Lawrence provides considerable insight into this macho culture, explaining the anthropological significance of the sex symbols, gestures and roles, it appears that her own status as the ultimate outsider, and Eastern woman, influenced the data she obtained. There is a feeling of "Sure lady, now go away" about much that she reports from informants.

One example of this bias is the most unbelievable, unanimous support for rodeo that Lawrence found among ranchers and ranch hands who considered it essential to their trade. Other scholars asking similar questions at the same time found quite the opposite. Savage (*The Cowboy Hero*, p. 125) reports that both he and Surface found divergent opinions among ranchers, although there was certainly agreement that rodeo performers were "hardly cowboys." Far from being essential to ranching, they felt rodeo took away some of their best prospective employees. Many working cowboys were not even familiar with the leading rodeo winners of the time.

The book's major weakness is historical. Lawrence's lack of historical training leads to misleading statements, missed connections, and ultimately to erroneous conclusions that present a simplistic and short-sighted view of rodeo history. Lawrence contends that rodeo stems from two sources: informal contests among working cowboys, and Wild West shows. By her account, when the range was fenced and trail drives ended, annual roundups were instituted. Both economic necessity and social affair, these roundups spawned informal roping and riding contests which ultimately joined with wild west shows to create rodeo.

To explain the legendary trail drivers whom modern rodeo cowboys represent, she presents a series of quotations from men whose writings quite literally created the historic, legendary cowboy: Siringo, Adams, and Abbott among others. From her discussion of their writings we learn that the cowboy was king and his horse his throne, and that cowboys feared being tied to routine and pitted all who did not know reckless freedom. These cowboys, she concluded, "...come to find self-identity through being constantly at war with those portions of the universe that can be conceptualized as 'the wild' (p. 64):"

Lawrence's information about informal contests relies on Westermeir,

(*Man, Beast, Dust, and Trailing the Cowboy*) who is probably responsible for more misinformation about rodeo history than any other writer. Westermeir, for example, is the prime perpetrator of the myth that the first American rodeo occurred in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1847. Lawrence faithfully repeats this error, but does not explain how this first rodeo could have occurred thirty years before the Chisholm Trail opened, before even mythical cowboys existed.

Lawrence's discussion of wild west shows, taken directly from Russell, is excellent. Russell's works, (*Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, and *The Wild West*) have given wild west shows their rightful place in rodeo history. However, Russell is not a rodeo historian, and Lawrence does nothing to compensate for the gaps left by Russell's orientation to the topic. She provides no insights as to why these cowboys who feared routine and found self-identity in the 'wild' would sign up with Buffalo Bill for three years or more performing the same shows, day after day, year after year, in such civilized places, as Paris, Rome, London, New York and Chicago.

Despite the limitations and unanswered questions, *Rodeo* is a very good book. It contributes much to our understanding of the social, cultural and symbolic significances of rodeo and of the animals who make it happen. There are numerous implications for further study: anthropological, historic and comparative. However, *Rodeo: An Anthropologist Looks at the Wild and the Tame*, should not be considered a reliable source for information about rodeo history.

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