

5-2013

## A Wilder West: Rodeo in Western Canada

Renée M. Laegreid

University of Wyoming, rlaegrei@uwyo.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [http://repository.uwyo.edu/history\\_facpub](http://repository.uwyo.edu/history_facpub)



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

### Publication Information

Laegreid, Renée M. (2013). "A Wilder West: Rodeo in Western Canada." *Pacific Historical Review* 82.2, 310-311. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/phr.2013.82.2.310>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Wyoming Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Wyoming Scholars Repository. For more information, please contact [scholcom@uwyo.edu](mailto:scholcom@uwyo.edu).



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS  
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING

---

Book Review: Kelm, *A Wilder West: Rodeo in Western Canada*, by Renee Laegreid

*A Wilder West: Rodeo in Western Canada* by Mary-Ellen Kelm

Review by: Renee M. Laegreid

*Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 82, No. 2 (May 2013), pp. 310-311

Published by: [University of California Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/phr.2013.82.2.310>

Accessed: 20/06/2014 11:53

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Pacific Historical Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

how these findings are ironically at odds with the messages propagated by American cinema, which traditionally celebrates the triumph of civilization. Although they discuss more than 200 films in their book, I wish that they had spent more time analyzing, rather than briefly citing, certain classic works, such as *Giant* (1956), and recent popular films, such as *Rango* (2011) and *There Will Be Blood* (2007).

The last chapter attempts to locate a “middle place” (p. 202) in cinema where whites, indigenous residents, and members of various ethnic groups can cooperate in working the land while at the same time ensuring its future survival. But the book is not entirely successful in positing an alternative to the narrative paradigm offered by most Hollywood films. The authors use the “garden” (p. 217) as a metaphor for describing this fictional utopic space, relying on the same Biblical rhetoric associated with European exploration and Anglo Saxon Manifest Destiny. The attempt to propose a solution to this ethical conundrum is a worthy one. Yet it reminds me that, while art can illustrate problems in our society, it can’t necessarily solve them.

*University of California, Los Angeles*

BLAKE ALLMENDINGER

*A Wilder West: Rodeo in Western Canada.* By Mary-Ellen Kelm. (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2011. xii + 296 pp. \$85)

Mary-Ellen Kelm’s study of Western Canadian rodeo focuses on the provinces of Alberta and the intermountain and Fort St. John regions in British Columbia, areas where rodeo activity emerged as important community events in the early twentieth century. Although the forms and structures of rodeo came to Canada via the United States, and the United States continued to influence the sport, Kelm argues Canadians “adapted the standard scripts to their own purposes” (p. 2). Here, rodeo became a place of encounter, a contact zone, a struggle for both settler and Aboriginal communities.

In Canada’s ranching regions, settler and First Nations peoples had a long history of interaction, and while by the early 1900s, Métis and Aboriginal interaction involved wage laborer work for ranchers, the interaction helped avoid the discriminatory “cowboy vs. Indian” attitude found in U.S. rodeo. Kelm specifically rejects the idea that Canadian rodeo is a glorification of settler conquest of Aboriginal peoples. Instead, Canadian rodeo included and encouraged Aboriginal and Métis participation in rodeo from the very start and deliberately avoided defining rodeo cowboys as white. Kelm’s argument

succeeds well in the first chapters, focusing on cultural encounters between settlers, Aboriginal, and Métis people at all levels of rodeo: organizers, advertisers, contestants, and spectators. As rodeo shifted from small, local competitions to larger, professionally sponsored events from the 1940s through the 1970s, organizers worked to ensure Aboriginal and Métis riders could compete by reducing entry fees, relaxing regulations, and establishing Indian representative positions within the Cowboy Professional Rodeo Association (CPRA). Even so, their participation in CPRA rodeos declined precipitously, leading to the growth of Indian and reserve rodeos in the early 1970s.

Masculinity theory weaves its way throughout the book, albeit unevenly. The chapter on constructing the image of the professional rodeo cowboy is excellent. Kelm details the CPRA-led transformation of contestants from wild, ranch-hand cowboys who rode in rodeos, to professional rodeo cowboys with values firmly set within post-World War II norms: manly, sober, a provider for his family, protector of rodeo stock, and a self-aware ambassador of the sport. The connection between masculinity among white men and cultural/social norms becomes more tenuous as the study moves into the late 1960s and 1970s, although her analysis of masculinity and rodeo among First Nations and Métis riders remains quite good. The transborder analysis is rather uneven as well. While Klem mentions that U.S. rodeo influenced Canadian rodeo in general terms, specific connection to events, people, rules, or organizations that originated in the United States and directly impacted the development of rodeo in Canada is missing.

Criticisms aside, this is a serious cultural study of Canadian rodeo. It is a reminder that national cultural values and attitudes play a significant role in all aspects of western study, even in the seemingly monolithic nature of transborder rodeo. Extensive archival research, a transborder context, and the integration of masculinity theory distinguishes *A Wilder West: Rodeo in Western Canada* from descriptive or celebratory works on the sport, securing it within the growing body of scholarly studies on rodeo history in the Americas.

*University of Wyoming*

RENEE M. LAEGREID

*Forging a Fur Empire: Expeditions in the Snake River Country, 1809–1824.* By John Phillip Reid. (Norman, Okla., Arthur H. Clark, 2011. 229 pp. \$29.95)