Riding Bareback: Rodeo Communities and the Construction of American Gender, Sexuality, and Race in the Twentieth Century

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Citation

Abstract
“Riding Bareback” uses rodeo as a site of analysis to investigate the continual expansion and contraction of the supposedly authentic West in the twentieth century. For over a century, rodeo has been a vibrant and multifaceted stage on which diverse groups of people, both within and beyond the geographical West, have embodied the plethora of cultural meanings attached to westernness. Rodeo is an epistemology of the West, meaning it is a way of knowing and expressing what it means to people to be western. Rather than offering a history of gender in rodeo, this is a history of gender through rodeo, showing how the West was written onto individual bodies with national and international ramifications. “Riding Bareback” critically investigates marginalized rodeo communities across the twentieth century, specifically professional rodeo cowgirls from the 1900s until the 1930s, the Texas State Prison Rodeo from the 1930s until the 1980s, and the International Gay Rodeo Association in the 1980s and 1990s. These rodeoers have performed westernness in order to claim legitimacy as Americans, even as they often marginalized themselves and others even further.

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The history of homosexual men in the American twentieth century largely focuses on the public spectacle of sexuality. As historians argue, many homosexual communities existed across the country albeit in different capacities. From the 1920s through the 1980s, the publicity of homosexuality became a primary concern for the state, and for the general population. These historians show, when many homosexual communities contested gender norms, they were subsequently harassed, policed, and forced back into an underground culture. In recent years, scholars have turned their gaze upon regional communi...