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Review of *Riding for the Brand: 150 Years of Cowden Ranching* By Michael Pettit

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Riding for the Brand: 150 Years of Cowden Ranching. By Michael Pettit. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006. xiv + 306 pp. Maps, photographs, notes bibliography, index. \$29.95.

As a family of ranchers, there is little doubt that the Cowdens have contributed to 150 years of the history of the western fringe of the Great Plains in Texas and New Mexico. As descendent and author Michael Pettit suggests, the Cowdens arrived in Texas approximately five years after the state was admitted to the Union. To add an additional perspective, Quanah Parker's band of Comanches were twenty-five years away from accepting reservation life at Fort Sill in Oklahoma Territory as William Hamby Cowden settled in Palo Pinto County, Texas. He clashed with bands of Comanches, but in the late 1870s, with the "Indian menace apparently over, trails and markets for cattle [were] now available." Pushing westward to New Mexico, always on the lookout for greener pastures in the semi-arid environment, the Cowdens formed the storied JAL Ranch, broken up in 1912; but prior to that, their cattle stretched "all the way from Midland [in Texas] to Carlsbad in New Mexico"—a staggering "seventy-five hundred square miles of territory." After the JAL, Guy Cowden carried on the family ranching tradition, accumulating land for a calf operation; and today Sam Cowden with some 50,000 acres carries on his forbearers' tradition of ranching.

Pettit provides both a history and a travelogue of people, places, and things, occasionally presenting a confusing panorama in the process. Past and present thus converge amid what some would refer to as an "old wester" narrative even as he participates as a modern, or perhaps post-modern, cowboy on the Cowden range. Often clichés abound ("code of the West") as he portrays *a history* of family and region. There is little doubt that "new wester" Patricia Limerick would not be at home on "Pettit's range." Cowden women, for example, are mentioned in passing but serve mostly on the periphery of ranch life. Pettit's portrayal of ranching is useful and informative for aficionados, and his details of ranch

piled a multidisciplinary anthology praising the University of Chicago anthropologist Raymond D. Fogelson. The result, *New Perspectives on Native North America*, is a collection of thought-provoking and unexceptional papers, most of which were presented in two double sessions lionizing Fogelson at the 1996 meeting of the American Anthropological Association. Regrettably, alongside several intellectually gripping contributions, readers will find little that is “new” while plowing through five hundred pages in an effort to do so.

Among the most compelling and engaging contributions, chapters by Regna Darnell, Margaret Bender, and Jean O’Brien stand out. In “Keeping the Faith,” Darnell locates Fogelson as an anthropologist “in webs of mutual significance,” “standing at multiple cross points” in “a vital and ongoing tradition of research and scholarly civility” to trace an academically-based intellectual genealogy. For Darnell, Fogelson’s efforts to situate indigenous ontologies alongside the critical force of the anthropological sciences are the residue of “a Boasian commitment to exploring the native point of view” that in the way it is sometimes framed impedes anthropologists from comprehending epistemological complexities.

In “Framing the Anomalous,” Bender confirms that the intellectual legacy of which Fogelson was a part will continue well into the twenty-first century by emphasizing that the original peoples’ sacred histories are crucial in structuring historical consciousness. For Bender, this matter which Fogelson designates as “the epitomizing event” is “highly complex” and “truly our only meaningful starting point.” Although not explicitly noting Fogelson’s influence, O’Brien’s “‘Vanishing’ Indians in Nineteenth-Century New England” nonetheless is essential to the volume because it insists on centering colonialism in intellectual analyses. Like the nineteenth-century local historians with whom O’Brien is concerned, twenty-first-century anthropologists, too, cannot impose their academic order without candidly situating themselves in relationship to the intellectual histories of their field and

honestly reflecting on how original peoples’ ontologies are indispensable to their practice.

New Perspectives on Native North America is a must read for graduate students in anthropology, cultural studies, ethnic studies, and history preparing for comprehensive exams. Like any anthology honoring its organizing subject, it is not without shortcomings. For instance, the object of study signified by its title is misleading; its contents mostly elide the original peoples of Mexico and Canada, which also constitute the territory designated “North America.” Missing, too, is anything critically engaged with universities (busy training the next generation of anthropologists) that link athletics—and fans and students—to abstract concepts that produce colonizing meanings for the “Indian” sign, or the pivotal role of anthropology in these efforts.

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