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Review of *Comparing Cowboys and Frontiers* By Richard W. Slatta

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Slatta then discusses how indigenous peoples quickly adopted feral (or sometimes stolen) horses, which led to major social transformations. The development of trading-raiding patterns turned erstwhile foragers into formidable foes to European expansion. In the next chapter he compares the far reaches of Spanish empire, arguing that Spanish frontier policies failed because they sought to subdue and control, rather than work with indigenous populations.

Chapter four explores class differences through a careful comparison of Mexican *vaqueros* (cowboys) and *charros* (upper class horsemen). Slatta continues this theme by examining cowboys, gauchos, and llaneros, the latter two far more often subject to political and military disruptions than were cowboys. An examination of the multiple social functions of saloons and pulperias concludes part one.

Part two begins with a re-examination of the Turner thesis, Slatta arguing that frontiers continue to be an important object of study from which we stand to learn much about social change. He demonstrates how such studies may proceed by offering a fine-grained comparison of Brazilian and Argentine cowboys. His comparison of birth and death records illuminates the demographic transitions and subtle differences in gaucho life in the two regions.

The penultimate chapter is a well-illustrated guide to how one does social history when traditional written documents are scarce. In analyzing a heavily mythologized subject like cowboys, one must proceed with caution. Slatta concludes his final chapter with an assault on deconstructionism for confounding texts with reality. But he concentrates here on gently chiding some recent frontier history for reading too much of today's political and social concerns into the past. Despite sporadic "overrevisionism," recent historiography demonstrates that "students of western and frontier history have absolutely no reason to hang their heads."

Comparing Cowboys and Frontiers. By Richard W. Slatta. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. xvi + 320 pp. \$24.95.

The goal of this collection is to encourage the comparative study of frontiers and social history. The first part, six chapters, focuses on "Topics" for comparisons, while the second part, four chapters, discusses how to do comparative history and critically evaluates much recent work. Slatta begins with a comparative discussion of the Venezuelan Llanos, southern Chile, the Pampas, Brazil, and the Great Plains of North America, suggesting that a frontier is a membrane metaphor through which objects, people, and ideas pass in both directions.

As a social science practitioner I appreciate Slatta's linkages to broad issues in the social sciences. This will be a useful text: it is eminently readable, full of good tips on how to do historical research, and includes many topics for future research. A paper edition is very attractive. In short, *Comparing Cowboys and Frontiers* deserves a careful reading by historians, social scientists, and students interested in the histories of the Western Hemisphere.

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