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Review of *The Modern Cowboy* By John R. Erickson

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The Modern Cowboy. By John R. Erickson.
Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press,
1981. Illustrations, bibliography. 247 pp.
\$15.95.

John R. Erickson researched *The Modern Cowboy* in a working laboratory that extended from horizon to horizon in his particular section of the Great Plains, the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles. He writes from personal experience, gained in years of working as a cowboy on modern ranches. He makes plain the fact that the cowboy of today must master many skills unknown to the cowboy of the colorful open range before the era of tractors, vaccination, controlled breeding, and "calf-pullers." The modern cowboy should be a mechanic and something of a veterinarian and horticulturist as well. Although he still rides horses and ropes cattle, he also builds pasture fences, repairs windmills, and puts up hay. Even so, as Erickson makes clear, the romance is not all gone from the life of the cowboy. The glamour invested in the old-time riders of the purple sage by great western movies and innumerable cowboy stories still firmly surrounds the cowboy, a durable fellow indeed, both in fact and fiction.

Most important, perhaps, as Erickson points out, is the fact that the cowboy is still needed. As long as Americans prefer beef on their tables, and until the cattle business modernizes and mechanizes him out of existence, the cowboy will be a part of the scene.

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