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## Review of *Some Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys: A Collection of Articles and Essays* By John R. Erickson

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*Some Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys: A Collection of Articles and Essays.* (Western Life Series, 4). By John R. Erickson. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2000. Index. xi +153 pp. \$14.95 paper.

"My interest in ranch life is probably genetic," writes Western author and ex-cowboy John R. Erickson. "My mother's people were Texas frontiersmen, ranchers, and cowboys back to 1858." Although the present reviewer grew up in Dublin (Ireland, not Texas), my interest is also genetic, as my movie-loving father filled me with stories of the West. He would have enjoyed Erickson's little book, as did I.

The organization is thematic, with sections containing short essays and articles on people, place, climate (terrible!), animals, cowboys, ranch, rodeo, and tools (saddles and boots—in *Catch Rope* [1994] Erickson examined roping). While based heavily on anecdote and experience, the book also draws on research, with sources occasionally listed in the text. Short paragraphs and colloquial language convey a journalistic, storyteller feel, reflecting the oral nature of cowboy culture.

But the stories convey strong messages. Above all, Erickson emphasizes the capacity for survival displayed by generations of (white) people, cowboys especially, confronting the wind-blasted landscape of the Texas Panhandle. "The fact of the matter," he writes in typically pithy style, "is that cowboys may be as hard to get rid of as the roach, and for the same reason: they're adaptable." Recent adjustments to the market-driven realities of

ranch life—trucking their horses to work, for example—ensure that cowboys will persist. Further, America needs the cowboy myth of hard work, expertise, adaptability, and romance: "for he is our magic mirror on the wall. When we look into the mirror we see our past and our present, what we were and what we have become."

In his most thought-provoking essay Erickson suggests how much has been lost by contemporary urbanites, the first people to live "in a world without animals." And he arrestingly critiques popular culture's projection of "good" human qualities onto animals while simultaneously demonizing humans. Yet when he claims that "A horse dignifies himself through work," is Erickson not projecting human (indeed American) values onto another species? More disturbing, by stating that "Panhandle history really began in 1876," he sadly perpetuates stereotypes of Indian peoples as "outside history," irrelevant except as obstacles to be overcome by later arrivals.

Still, this is an engaging and informative read for Western fans. One disappointment can hardly be blamed on Erickson. I began the "tools" section with racing heart: now to six-guns and Winchesters! But apparently today's cowboy does not need such things. Progress, I grudgingly admitted.

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