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*Review of North American Cattle-Ranching Frontiers:  
Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation* By Terry G.  
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*North American Cattle-Ranching Frontiers: Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation.* By Terry G. Jordan. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993. Foreword, preface, notes, index. xi + 439 pp. \$35.00 cloth. \$17.95 paper.

In this important companion to his earlier book, *The American Backwoods Frontier*, Terry Jordan has again taken the study of cultural diffusion into a new realm of inquiry and interpretation. Although mainly a synthesis of a vast and interdisciplinary literature, *North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers* offers a revisionist explanation of the origins, spread, and patterns of cattle ranching in most of North America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. This study will prove to be an even more innovative and controversial work than *Backwoods*, for the questions asked and the solutions provided are grand ones indeed.

A cultural geographer, Jordan tailors his narrative with grace, style, and a profusion of attractive, hand-drafted maps, many of them based on the author's earlier empirical research. A few drawings and several photographs from field visits further enrich the visual presentation, while travelers' accounts augment the secondary literature, which is cited in seventy-five pages of endnotes (excluding comments). Together with the thirty-six page bibliographical essay, Jordan's study is now the standard reference on the cultural geography of North American cattle ranching from its Old World origins to the present.

To reveal the many guises of American cattle ranching, Jordan introduces us to its "Atlantic Fringe Source Regions," stretching from equatorial west Africa north to the Shetland Islands. The primary culture hearth, however, was *between* Britain and west Africa, in the southern Iberian marshes and hard-scrabble hills of Spain's Andalucía and Extremadura. After emerging in this Mediterranean environment, a distinctively Iberian upland/lowland system of ranching practices was transferred to the Caribbean by the Spanish, where it met new environments and merged with British and African herding

traditions. This Antillean complex moved quickly to the Mesoamerican mainland, where latent highland and coastal derivatives emerged in a rapid migration north, eventually splitting in two to form eastern Gulf Coast (Louisiana) and western Pacific Coast/highland (California) forms.

Jordan explains how the Anglo-American hearth, South Carolina, developed from an Antillean complex much altered by intensive British husbandry traditions. African contributions, Jordan says, were negligible. A Carolina “cowpens” complex spread southwest through the southern Piney Woods and northwest into the Appalachian valleys, giving rise to both the Lowland and Upland Southern cattle raising traditions, respectively, the latter influenced significantly by Pennsylvania Midlanders. Refuting Walter Prescott Webb, as well as his own previous work, Jordan identifies the meeting place of Spanish and Anglo traditions in late eighteenth-century Louisiana, not mid-nineteenth-century South Texas. Nevertheless, both Upland and Lowland (Anglo-Afro-Hispano-Cajun) Southern complexes met to form a hybridized, Anglo-Texan cattle culture that shot longitudinally through the Great Plains to Canada after 1865. But even before this, Anglos in California had adopted the practices of the Hispanic “charros,” taking them, albeit with less vigor and stimulated by the mining frontier, landward into the Great Basin and the Pacific Northwest.

The author’s most substantial revision of the cultural geography of North American cattle ranching appears in his final chapter, one likely to jolt those unaccustomed to Jordan’s insights. He downplays the role of Texas cattle culture in shaping western ranching in view of the ecological collapse of that culture in the 1880s. In its place, Jordan credits Midwestern Anglo cattle raising techniques—perfected on the Iowa and Missouri prairies—for spreading west into the Great Plains, beyond the Rocky Mountains, and into western Canada and the Great Basin. Reaching the Pacific coast by the turn of the

century, Midwest cattle culture even supplanted rooted practices in the Texas and California core areas.

Jordan’s strengths are many. His landscape description is richly detailed and easy to follow; his grounding in environmental science complements his command of a literature in several languages. The examination of northern Mexico and the westward spread of Midwestern traits is superb. The author’s expertise with material culture and log construction proves valuable in tracing diagnostic cultural traits in the Rocky Mountain West.

While intended as a diffusion study, Jordan’s work—particularly its ecological explanations for frontier shifts—would have profited from more discussion of beef and land markets, specifically in relation to railroads and cowtowns. Treatment of the Great Plains (“Texas Extended”), despite the region’s fundamental importance to ranching up to the present, is limited. Jordan’s skepticism regarding African American influence on Plains ranching may be premature, due to the deficiency of literature on the Indian Territory, where postbellum, cattle-rich Creeks and Cherokees depended on skilled freedman labor. Other reservations may arise from a lack of attention to the dynamics of social and gender relations and to the stories of real people beyond a survey of the careers of cattle kings and listings of who-moved-where and when. These complaints, however, given the topic and the sources used, would no doubt be difficult, if not impossible, to overcome.

More curious is the absence of a chapter-length examination of the origins and development of the Midwestern complex upon which Jordan places so much importance. Only a brief space is devoted to the Midwest stocker-feeder complex, while Upland Southern linkages to the Chesapeake and Virginia valleys, for which there is an extensive literature and some debate, are overlooked. Perhaps the author has set his sights on this material in an upcoming volume.

*North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers* will be of compelling interest to anyone concerned

with the history of cattle ranching, its material culture, and ecological adaptations. In this captivating, remarkably readable, yet scholarly, book, Jordan offers a new, exciting, persuasive interpretation of a very old cultural legacy.

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