

The Hispanic Influence on the History of Rodeo, 1823-1922

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Rodeo has long been thought of as a distinctively American sport.¹ Generations of fans have been led to believe that it was a direct outgrowth of informal contests among cowhands during the romanticized era of the Chisholm Trail drives (1866-1890). Few bothered to question this myth, much less to acknowledge that all of the contests of modern rodeo were popular in some form in Mexico, including Texas and later California, by the nineteenth century. Known collectively as *charrería*, these equestrian contests included roping steers and horses, riding wild bulls and broncos, and bull wrestling.

Some of the reasons that the striking similarities between rodeo and *charrería* have been ignored are themselves a part of rodeo history. Prior to 1916, the precursors to rodeo were always held as part of some other event such as a fair, festival, circus or Wild West show. When, in 1936, these diverse elements gave way to a single, organized sport called rodeo, promoters and contestants attempted to disassociate it with the carnival past. In much the same manner that the baseball establishment used the Abner Doubleday myth to promote America's national game, rodeo organizations manufactured and promoted the myth that their sport came directly from informal contests among Anglo cowboys, ignoring the Hispanic† influence along with the theatrical.

More recently, historians as well as rodeo organizations themselves have acknowledged that the Wild West shows and western festivals were the real forerunners of their sport, while only travel writers mention the striking similarities between rodeos and *charreadas*.‡ The continued omission of the Hispanic heritage of rodeo may now be due to prejudice. DeLeon contends that much of the history of the southwest exhibits a bias against the Hispanic culture. Concerning the Hispanic fairs and fiestas where many traditional sports took

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† The word Mexican properly refers to natives of Mexico. Hispanic is preferred when the group being discussed includes citizens of the United States and/or representatives of several Spanish-speaking countries.

‡ A *charreada* is a Mexican rodeo, a *charro* is a Mexican horseman, highly skilled in roping and riding. *Charrería* is the national sport of Mexico.

¹ Lonny Taylor and Ingrid Maar, *The American Cowboy* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1983), 77; Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, *Rodeo: An Anthropologist Looks At the Wild and the Tam* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 20; James F. Hoy, "The Origins and Originality of Rodeo," *Journal of the West* 18 (July 1978): 17-33.

place, he noted that most Anglo historians "failed to appreciate their cultural merits and instead identified them with the frivolous propensities of Tejanos."²

Yet, the ferias and fiestas, with their charreadas and *corridas de toros* (also *fiestas de toros*: bullfights) were, like the Anglo fairs and festivals, legitimate precursors to American rodeo. Descriptions of their contests abound in the literature, diaries and travel accounts of the nineteenth-century southwest. From the 1880's to World War I, exhibitions of Hispanic contests, horsemanship, and ropemanship were essential features of the Wild West shows, while their competitions were among the most popular events during rodeo's formative years from 1882 to 1922.

This paper will examine the development of charrería and the fiesta sports both in Mexico and in the Anglo-Hispanic culture of the southwest, and then discuss their integration into two predominately Anglo institutions, the Wild West shows, and the cowboy contests which were the precursors to rodeo.

Charrería

The fiesta, originally a legacy from feudal Spain, quickly became an integral part of the Mexican culture, a way to put aside everyday cares and problems. A mixture of Spanish and Indian, Christian and pagan, Mexican fiestas celebrate anniversaries of saints, local traditions, pagan gods, special fairs and markets, and patriotic holidays. Unlike the solemn Sabbath and holy days of the Puritans and their successors in the United States, Mexican fiestas are characterized by music and dancing; fireworks, gambling, sports and drinking are mixed with the prayers, masses and pealing of church bells. Even today, there is a fiesta somewhere in Mexico every day of the year.³

The fiesta de toros was introduced by the conquistadores on St. John's Day, June 24, 1526, to celebrate both the Saint and Cortez' return from his travels. Strongly supported by both church and state, the *corridas* became the most popular means of celebrating such major events as the 1538 peace between Spain and France, as well as important births, deaths, marriages and coronations. *Corridas* were also organized by the priests and royalty to raise funds for building churches and castles, as well as to display their fine horses and equestrian skills.

Sixteenth century *corridas* in Mexico City were contests for gentlemen amateurs who fought on horseback using lances. At the fiestas they sometimes provided greased poles topped with food for Indians to climb, and included several other contests for themselves. The most popular of these were *sortijas* (spearing rings with lances), and *juegas de cañas* (jousting with canes). Gradually different methods of fighting bulls were introduced such as *jaripeo*, in

2. Taylor and Maar, *American Cowboy*, 67; Don Russell, *The Wild West* (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1970), 2; Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 17; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Rodeo," by Don Russell, 981; Willard H. Potter, *Roping and Riding* (Cranbury: A. S. Barnes, 1975), 172; Arnoldo DeLeon, *They Called Them Greasers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), ix-x, 33-35.

3. Jose Alvarez del Villar, *Men and Horses of Mexico*, ed. Margaret Fischer de Nicolon (Mexico, D.F.: El Ediciones Lara, S.A., 1979), 101-6; R. Brasch, *Mexico: A Country of Contrasts* (New York: David McKay, 1967), 43-44; Erna Fergusson, *Fiesta in Mexico* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934), 3-28; DeLeon, *Greasers*, 34.

which the object was to ride the bull to death, and *colear*, wherein horsemen repeatedly grabbed the bulls by the tail and threw them to the ground until they were exhausted. These contests later became popular among the rural charros who developed them into unique sports.

As the corridas became standard Sunday sports as well as Christmas fiestas throughout the country, they took on many distinctively Mexican characteristics, reflecting the mixture of Christian and pagan traditions. The bullfights of Yucatan still retain vestiges of many Mayan cultic rites, and are in truth fiestas to ancient Mayan gods. Bullfighting developed differently in the many regions of Mexico, but by the time of independence, corridas in Mexico City had come to resemble the classical Spanish format.⁴

Although the conquistadores introduced cattle, horses and bullfights into the new world, they were determined to protect their power and status through laws restricting the rights of native Indians, and later *mestizos*, blacks and others. One such law provided that only Spaniards could own land and ride horseback, posing great economic restrictions on the masses, as well as excluding them from participation in the equestrian sports. However, the growth of the ranching industry, along with the Spaniards' unwillingness to do manual labor led to relaxation of the laws proscribing horsemanship, and allowed Indians and mestizo *vaqueros* to perform the hacienda chores. These first cowboys became skilled horsemen and ranch hands, and the cattle industry spread throughout Mexico. Eventually most of the Spanish landlords moved to the cities, turning the supervision of the haciendas over to mestizo managers.⁵

The social class of mestizos also included small farmers, lessees of ranches, muleteers, artisans and rural clerks. Condemned to isolation, this self-sufficient group gradually became a clique with its own unique customs, dress and style of horsemanship. Known as *jinetea*, the charro style of riding is a Mexican adaptation of the Berber. It was introduced to Spain by the Moslems, and first described in Mexican literature by Juan Suarez de Pralta in 1580.⁶

The mestizos were true Mexicans, not Spaniards, and made up a majority of the insurgents and soldiers who finally won Mexican Independence from Spain in 1821. The styles of dress and horsemanship of these new national heroes were then widely copied, and eventually charrería was made the official national sport of Mexico, the charro dress the Mexican national costume. Following independence, the mestizos became the landowners, and some real charro aristocrats emerged. Unlike the Spaniards, they lived on their huge haciendas where they raised fine horses and fighting bulls. They also developed charrería into a more exacting and dangerous sport, mixing the contests introduced by the conquistadores with the games and skills of the lowly vaqueros to produce a uniquely Mexican sport.⁷

4. Stan Steiner, *Dark and Dashing Horsemen* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 123-24; Enrique Guamer, *Historia del Torreo en Mexico* (Mexico: Editorial Diana, 1979), 42-43; "El Toreo en Mexico," *Artes de Mexico 90/91* (1967), 30-32.

5. Leovigildo Islas Escarega, "Historical Synthesis of Charrería," *Artes de Mexico 99* (1967): 19-21.

6. Alvarez, *Men and Horses*, 30-35.

7. James Norman Schmidt, *Charro Mexican Horseman* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 51-60;

Correr el gallo (run for the rooster) was one of the folk games of vaqueros, muleteers and dragoons with many variations. In every instance, a horseman riding full speed had to snatch a live rooster either from the sand, a tree, or a hand, and carry it toward a goal while the other riders pursued and tried to snatch the bird away. The one who possessed the fowl as he crossed a designated line was the winner, the rooster his prize. In another contest which Anglos called picking up objects, horsemen riding full speed attempted to pick up a series of objects such as coins or handkerchiefs which had been placed along the course.

A popular sport of seventeenth-century Mexico was riding wild bucking horses, and the horses bred on nineteenth-century haciendas were still allowed to run wild until needed. Then they were lassoed, hoodwinked and immediately ridden. After fifteen to twenty minutes of attempting to throw their riders, they usually calmed down, encouraged in part by the torturous bit used for this purpose. Contrary to the claims of some contemporary writers, charros did indeed break horses in the same manner adapted by later Texas Rangers and American cowboys. All three groups used this same method in their bronc riding contests.⁸

An even more exciting feat involving wild horses was the *paso de muerte* (pass of death). Here the charro rode his own horse alongside a wild horse that was galloping full speed, jumped onto the wild horse and rode it bareback until it calmed down. The *paso* is thought to have originated as a method of simultaneously capturing and breaking wild horses, and remains a popular contest.⁹

Both jarriepo and colear were dangerous sports in the plazas de toros, and became much more so as practiced by charros on the open range. There jarriepo became a test of courage and riding skill, for rather than ride the bull to death, the object was to stay on it until it was tame. While jarriepo never had any utilitarian value, colear began as a method for grounding cattle in the sixteenth century, and became a popular sport when roping became more widespread. Colear became the traditional fiesta contest of San Juan day in many places, as well as a delightful diversion for country folk. By the nineteenth century, charros had recorded over ten different methods for executing this test of equestrian skill and dexterity.¹⁰

Like colear, roping evolved from a utilitarian skill to a sport. Mexican children began practicing with the lasso long before learning horsemanship. Many began roping fence posts, farm animals and family pets before they could walk. Charros' skills with the lasso ultimately included roping animals both from foot and from horseback, catching them by the hind legs, forelegs, neck or horns, as well as *florear la reata*. This most spectacular and artistic form of

Alvarez, *Men and Horses*, 23, 30-35, 164-65.

8. W. F. L. S. Bullock, *Six Months' Residence and Travels in Mexico* (London: John Murray, 1824), 247; Arnold J. Rojas, *Last of the Vaqueros* (Fresno: Academy Library Guild, 1960), 17; Alvarez, *Men and Horses*, 36-38.

9. Schmidt, *Charro*, 101-3.

10. Carlos Rincon Gallardo, *El Charro Mexicano* (Mexico: Libreria de Porrúa Hnos. Y Cia., 1939), 160-63; Schmidt, *Charro*, 106-7; Guarnier, *Historia del Torreo*, 42-43.

roping involved spinning the lasso so that the loop made various sizes and shapes as it spun around the body or in the air, and ultimately snared a horse or bull.¹¹

The charro skills of horsemanship, roping, jaripeo and colear were seen in the plazas de toros throughout the nineteenth century, but were of secondary importance to the premier matadores, who all came from Spain. Then in 1878, Ponciano Diaz, a twenty year old from Puebla, burst onto the scene. The “consummate charro,” Diaz became a national hero, “the idol of Mexican bull-fighting.” He fought bulls, placed banderillas, and could do literally everything associated with the Mexican style of riding. With his *cuadrilla* (team) of charros from Puebla, Diaz produced a new and uniquely Mexican style corrida which featured expert horsemen and ropers, different attire, and *suertes* (events) not seen in the Spanish fiestas. Many of Diaz’ entourage achieved stardom in their own right, performing in Mexico, Europe, and the United States. The popularity of Diaz and charro bullfights lasted through the turn of the century and had a profound influence on the development of both rodeo and charrería.¹²

While the charro skills of horsemanship and ropemanship were invaluable in the numerous military conflicts of the nineteenth century, and increasingly popular in the corridas, the skills, courage, competition and showmanship were combined at their most extravagant during the *herraderos* (branding), and *rodeos* (roundups) on the huge haciendas. These fiestas attracted guests from hundreds of miles around. Charros dressed in their finest outfits roped the animals, while lesser hands did the branding and other menial chores. Elaborate meals were served, bands played throughout the day, and dancing frequently lasted most of the night. In addition to the work, there were contests in jaripeo, colear, bucking horse riding and roping, along with horseraces and bullfights that sometimes featured premier matadors from Mexico City. These fiestas are perhaps the true precursors to American rodeo. An enthusiastic description of one held at the hacienda Santa Fe near Vera Cruz, Mexico in 1846, was for years erroneously accepted in the United States as a description of the first American rodeo.*¹³

The Mexican ranching industry had expanded north to San Antonio by 1718, while private ranches were established in California by 1786. When Anglo adventurers, travelers and settlers arrived in these areas they met face to face with the vaqueros, the first American cowboys. The exotic costumes, roping

11. Pierre-Marie François de Pages, *Travels Round the World in the Years 1767, 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 2 vols.*, (London: J. Murray, 1791), 1: 82-83; William W. Carpenter, *Travels and Adventures in Mexico* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1851), 202-3; Josiah Gregg, *The Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max L. Moorhead (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 131-32; Richard Everett, “Things in and About San Antonio,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, 15 January 1859; Theodore Roosevelt, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (1901; rep. ed.: Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1983), 8, 16; Alvarez, *Men and Horses*, 59-60.

12. Alvarez, *Men and Horses*, 96; Escarega, “Synthesis,” 20-21; “El Toreo,” *Artes de Mexico* 90/91(1967): 155-59; Guarner, *Historia del Torreo*, 42-43.

* The word *rodeo* will continue to be italicized when it refers to the Hispanic roundup, to distinguish it from the American sport, rodeo.

13. Alfonso Rincon Gallardo, “Contemporary Charrería,” *Artes de Mexico* 99 (1967): 41-42; Mary Lou LeCompte, “The First American Rodeo Never Happened,” *Journal of Sport History* 8 (Summer 1982): 89-96; Frances Calderon de la Barca, *Life in Mexico* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1931), 280-85; the first American edition of Calderon’s book appeared in 1842.

skills and superb horsemanship of these Hispanics made a lasting impression, and were reflected in both literary and graphic descriptions of the cowboy through the 1880s. Many of these same features were copied by the men and women who came to live and work in the southwest, thereby becoming part of their culture and lifestyle.¹⁴

One of the first Americans to learn equestrian games from Hispanics was probably Zenas Leonard, a fur trader. In 1833 as he and his party returned from a trip to California, they stopped in the countryside to celebrate July Fourth. After a festive dinner, toasts, and shooting, running and jumping contests, Leonard and his colleagues began "practicing on our horses-having the two Spaniards still with us, who learned us many singular pranks, and were a valuable addition to our company as they created a good deal of fun."¹⁵ That these "Spaniards" considered a Fourth of July celebration as an appropriate occasion for equestrian games is not surprising, for by mid-century many Hispanic communities in the United States had added that holiday and Washington's Birthday to their calendar of fiestas often celebrated with equestrian contests.¹⁶

Charrería also flourished on the Texas and California cattle ranches where Anglos and Hispanics often worked together. Following the Anglo-Texan victory over Mexico and the establishment of the Republic of Texas in 1836, the political and social order in that area changed rapidly, leaving the *Tejanos* (Hispanic Texans) virtual foreigners in their own land. Deep prejudices, which may have originated with the Hispanophobia and anti-Catholicism of sixteenth-century England, became so pronounced that many Tejano ranchers fled to Mexico, abandoning their land, cattle, and vaqueros.

Aided by Texas laws pertaining to stray cattle, the Anglo-Texans then hired the remaining vaqueros, rounded up and branded the stray cattle, and established the Anglo-Texan cattle industry that continues today. In the process, the Anglo riders adopted and adapted the techniques, dress, equipment, and vocabulary of the vaqueros. From this beginning, a new, pluralistic culture developed.¹⁷

This tradition was given new impetus in 1853 when Richard King established the famous King Ranch near Corpus Christi, and imported entire Mexican villages to live and work there. It has long been acknowledged that the King Ranch vaqueros, known as Kinenos, had a profound influence on the perpetuation of charrería north of the Rio Grande, as well as on the ranching business itself.¹⁸ As DeLeon concluded:

14. David Dary, *Cowboy Culture* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1981), 51; Lyle W. Williams, *Ranches and Ranching in Spanish Texas* (Boston: American Press, 1982), 6; Taylor and Maar, *American Cowboy*, 64.

15. Zenas Leonard, *Adventures of Zenas Leonard Fur Trader*, ed. John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 132.

16. Arnoldo DeLeon, *The Tejano Community, 1836-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 175-77.

17. DeLeon, *Tejano Community*, 10-12, 55-56; Peter Newark, *Cowboys* (London: Bison Books Limited, 1982), 10-14.

18. William Broyles, Jr., "The Last Empire," *Texas Monthly*, October 1980, 168-73; Joseph W. Revere, *Keel and Saddle* (Boston: James R. Osgood Co., 1872), 185; DeLeon, *Tejano Community*, 6; Taylor and Maar, *American Cowboy*, 20; Tom Lea, *The King Ranch*, 2 vols., (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1957), I:124.

The Hispanic Influence on Rodeo

[P]rofessionalism added another dimension to Texas ranching, namely the *rodeo* or more correctly, the traditional games of ranching expertise associated with roundups. Range prowess very naturally spilled over into entertainment forms such as the *carrera de gallos...* or *coleadura de toros...* and other games identifiable with rodeos. In South Texas at least, the skills of livestock management and rodeo performances became synonymous with the legendary Kinenos—the vaqueros of the King Ranch whose reputation persisted unblemished into the twentieth century.¹⁹

One group which was held in even higher esteem than the Kinenos was the Texas Rangers, the first popular heroes of the Republic of Texas. To protect their fellow citizens, Rangers were trained to fight on horseback, and practiced intensively to master the equestrian skills of their adversaries. Having done so, they welcomed the opportunity to display their horsemanship, whether in contests or in battle. Like the charros, they broke their own horses, and contributed to the development of bronc riding as an Anglo sport. Since many Rangers became cowboys and cattlemen, they also influenced the Anglo's adaption of Hispanic ranching techniques and traditions. These Rangers were fluent in English and Spanish, and mixed freely with Spanish-speaking people in both Texas and Mexico. They were involved in many equestrian games and contests on both sides of the border.²⁰

These contests became another way in which charrería was spread through the Anglo culture because entire communities came to watch. A well-known example of this type of competition was a "Riding Match" organized by Ranger Captain Jack Coffee Hays in San Antonio in 1844 to celebrate the signing of a peace treaty. Contestants included local Rangers, Comanches and charro dragoons. Valuable prizes were awarded the winners of contests in shooting from horseback, picking up objects from the ground while riding full speed, and "breaking wild steeds of the desert that had never been backed by a man." In the bronc riding competition, the horsemen had to saddle, mount and ride the wild bronc until it was tame, the traditional charro sport which would subsequently be used in American cowboy contests.²¹

These Texas Rangers, like other Anglos living in the southwest, also enjoyed the traditional fiestas. The most elaborate of these celebrations were during the Christmas season, and on New Year's and St. John's Days. The fiesta San Juan was the most popular time for the *correr el gallo*. In Reynosa during the Mexican War, Texas Rangers accepted a challenge from the Mexican troops there and engaged in a "chicken race" through the streets for most of the day until one charro announced: "*No mas gallenos in Reynosa.*" Anglos also watched the

19. DeLeon, *Tejano Community*, 142-43.

20. Cleo Mackey, *The Cowboy and Rodeo Evolution* (Dallas: Cleo Mackey, 1979), 27-28; Mary Lou LeCompte, "The First Rodeo in Texas" (Paper presented to the North American Society for Sport History, Banff, Alb., May, 1980); Newark, *Cowboys*, 17-25.

21. LeCompte, "First Rodeo in Texas;" John Critenden Duval, "San Antonio in 1844 and My First Fandango," *The Gulf Messenger* (n.p., n.d.): 652-54 (fragment ca. 1844, Clipping file "San Antonio Development," Daughters of the Republic of Texas at the Alamo Library, San Antonio); Samuel Reid, *Scouting Expeditions of McCollough's Texas Rangers* (Philadelphia: G. B. Zieber, 1848), 56-60, 91-95; Mary A. Maverick, *Memoirs*, ed. Rena Maverick Green (San Antonio: Alamo Printing Company, 1921), 55-56.

race through the streets of San Antonio, and down San Pedro Street in Los Angeles. There in 1853 Don Jose Sepulveda defeated the notorious outlaw Jake Powers.²²

Many of these fiesta sports were also included at the popular ferias, which were themselves sometimes fiestas. Citizens of Santa Fe and San Antonio for years made the long trips to annual fairs at Chihuahua and Monclova. Finally, similar fairs were established along the border, and in Taos, New Mexico, and Cameron County, Texas. There, Hispanics, Indians and later Anglos came to buy and sell goods, and to enjoy the dancing, gambling, and sports.²³

Bullfights were an integral part of many fairs and fiestas, as well as the standard Sunday sport. A bullring was established in Nacogdoches, Texas, in 1810 as part of the Fiesta of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Our Lady of Conception. Soon there were also plazas de toros in San Pedro Park in San Antonio, and in the Church Plaza in Los Angeles.

During the antebellum era, these corridas were attended by all ethnic groups, and often sponsored by leading citizens. Like their counterparts in Mexico City, they featured not only traditional matadores, but *lazedores* (ropers), fine horsemanship, jaripeo, colear, and juegos de canas. Sometimes clowns, fireworks, music and dancing were also included.²⁴

H. L. Kinney, a rancher, promoter and former Texas Ranger was probably the first Anglo to stage a bullfight in the southwest. In 1852 he organized the first State Fair of Texas at Corpus Christi to promote settlement and commerce in the area. Kinney had associates on both sides of the Rio Grande, and intended his fair to appeal to a diverse audience. Along with horse races and cattle exhibitions there were several days of bullfighting starring premier matador Don Camarena and a cuadrilla from Mexico City.

Neither the motley crowd of Anglos, Indians, blacks and Mexican nationals nor the Anglo journalists were impressed with Camarena's performance, but their apparent enthusiasm for the rest of the corrida indicated an appreciation for future rodeo events. Reporters from the *New Orleans Daily Delta* thought the exhibition would have been "a rare sight in a white settlement, a contest for superior horsemanship." They gave lively and often humorous accounts of riders picking up a silver dollar while galloping full speed, roping animals by the forelegs while riding full speed, along with jaripeo and colear.²⁵

22. Gregg, *Commerce*, 241-42; Reid, *Rangers*, 59-60; Maymie R. Krythie, "Daily Life in Early Los Angeles," *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 36 (June 1954):120.

23. John C. Rayburn and Virginia Kemp Rayburn, eds., *Century of Conflict, 1821-1913* (Waco: Texian Press, 1966), 16; Adeline Short Dinger, *Folk Life and Folklore of the Mexican Border* (Edinburg: Hidalgo County Historical Museum, 1972), 33-35; H. H. Bancroft, *The History of Northern Mexico and Texas, 1801-1889*. (San Francisco: The History Company, 1889), 277; Carlos Eduardo Casteneda, *A Report on the Spanish Archives in San Antonio, Texas* (San Antonio: Yanaguana Society, 1937), 155.

24. Walter Prescott Webb, "Christmas and New Years in Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 44 (1941):358-59; Charles Franklin Carter, trans., "Duhaut-Cilly's Account of California in the Years 1827-28," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 8 (1929): 229-31; Oscar Osborne Winther, "The Story of San Jose, 1777-1869," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 14 (1935): 155-56; Krythe, "Early Los Angeles," 28-39, 115-29; Wayne Gard, *The Chisholm Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 225; Boyce House, "Life in Brawling San Antonio was Seldom Dull," *San Antonio Light*, 18 June 1968, 31.

25. *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 20 May 1852; *Marshall (Texas) Republican*, 1 May 1852; *Texas State Gazette*,

Despite the positive tone of such reports, Anglos in many western communities criticized the corridas for brutality, cruelty, excessive noise and violation of the Sabbath. Consequently, by the 1860's the plaza de toros had been removed from the heart of Los Angeles, while in San Antonio Hispanics engaged in a lengthy struggle with lawmakers over their bullfight tradition. Spurred on by Anglo journalists who denounced the depravity of the corridas, the San Antonio City Council issued a series of prohibitions and heard numerous pleas for their repeal. The conflict finally ended in 1891 when the Texas Legislature outlawed both prize fights and bull fights. Meanwhile, both locals and tourists continued to flock to the bull fights along the Texas and California borders with Mexico, as they still do today.²⁶

Colear, or the coledura de toros was popular not only as part of the bull fights, but at certain fiestas and as a Sunday sport.²⁷ Robertson described an informal contest near Matamoros where rancheros drank mescal, smoked cigarettes, and then mounted their horses as the bulls were driven onto the road:

[T]he first horseman dashed after them at full speed, and selecting the largest bull, galloped up to him and stooping lightly from his saddle, seized him by the tail, when, dexterously passing it under his leg he suddenly wheeled his horse about, and by a peculiar jerk brought the bull broadside to the ground, amidst the loud cheers of his companions.²⁸

At more elaborate fiestas, successful charros were greeted by triumphal music from the bands and vivas from the spectators, while unsuccessful performers returned to their places to the accompaniment of jeers, crude jokes, and death marches.²⁹

It is important to recognize that these *rodeos*, corridas and fiestas where charro sports were popular took place in the midst of Anglo society for over sixty years before Anglo-sponsored cowboy contests were introduced. Most of the preceding accounts and descriptions of charreria came from these Anglo spectators. While they generally disapproved the corridas themselves, Anglos often commented favorably about the skilled lazadores, jinetes, and participants in jaripeo and colear. They also watched el gallo pursued through their streets, and enjoyed the traditional *rodeo* sports on the ranches. For this reason, it would be difficult to imagine, much less to prove conclusively, that when public cowboy contests were finally organized, featuring the same events that were seen in

22 May 1852; Hortense Warner Ward, "The First State Fair of Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 57 (1953): 163-74.

26. Minutes of the San Antonio City Council, 1837-1890; General Laws of Texas [22d Leg. 1891] Chap. 50 [S.H.B. no. 24-167: An Act to Prohibit Prizefighting and Pugilism], H.P.N. Gammel, comp., *The Laws of Texas 1822-1897*, 10 vols. (Austin: The Gammel Book Company, 1898), 10: 56-57; Krythe, "Early Los Angeles," 31: *Alamo Star*, 15 July, 5 August 1854; *Alamo Weekly Express*, 16 February 1860; *Brownsville Cosmopolitan*, June-July 1885; *Two Republics* (El Paso), June 1886; *Laredo Chapparral*, December 1899; *San Antonio Express*, 21 July 1888, 23 July 1893, 14-24 July 1894; 24 February 1934.

27. Revere, *Keel and Saddle*, 185; Gregg, *Commerce*, 242; Carter, "Duhaut-Chilly's Account," 229-30; Dinger, *Folklife and Folklore*, 33-35.

28. John Blount Robertson, *Reminiscences of a Campaign in Mexico* (Nashville: J. York, 1849), 94-95, quoted in *Chronicles of the Gringos*, eds. George Winston Smith and Charles Judah (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 313.

29. DeLeon, *Tejano Community*, 142-43.

charrería, they represented a new and distinctive sport rather than a continuation of years of tradition.

Unfortunately, there is little written evidence about cowboy contests formal or informal prior to 1882. The absence of information about these contests in the popular press is due in part to the fact that the cowboys themselves were not popular figures. The word cowboy was rarely used except in a derogatory manner until the 1880's, when deteriorating economy and destitute conditions among both northern industrial workers and southern farmers created an appetite for new heroes. As Taylor and Maar point out:

Suddenly, in the mid-eighties, a new Jeffersonian figure burst upon America: the cowboy. As pictured in the illustrated press of the mid-eighties, he was young, heroic, independent, and relentlessly Anglo Saxon ... to Americans a century ago, the cowboy embodied all of the old American virtues, emergent once more in a time of national despair.³⁰

The Wild West Shows

Many historians agree that the emergent popularity of the cowboy, and subsequently of cowboy sports, was both a cause and a result of Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows and their host of imitators. Col. W. F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody was a frontiersman, scout, rancher and vaudeville star, as well as an outspoken admirer of the cowboys and their skills. During the 1870's his stage shows included Indian dances, tricks with the lasso and mock battles, with Cody himself often appearing in an elaborate charro suit.³¹

When Cody returned home to North Platte, Nebraska in 1882 and found that no Fourth of July celebration had been planned, he took matters into his own hands and produced a memorable show which was an extravagant extension of his vaudeville acts. Buffalo hunts, Indian dances and attacks on stage coaches were enacted for the huge crowd, and thousands of cowhands competed for valuable prizes in roping, riding and shooting. As Russell observed: "Cody's exhibition, staged under the frontier conditions he was attempting to depict, was the original, not only of the Wild West show, but of the rodeo . . ."³²

Where Cody got the idea for the contest is not known, but in its aftermath, cowboy contests became increasingly popular and well publicized in western communities, and Cody himself organized Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Between 1883 and 1916 this show and a host of imitators toured the major cities of the United States and many of the capitals of Europe. In the process they radically altered the popular image of the cowboy, creating in the popular consciousness an idea of what cowboy sports should be, and keeping the skills and traditions of the charros in the spotlight as an integral part of the American western scene.

Part of the appeal of the shows was their timely theme and flamboyant showmanship, but their enduring popularity also stemmed from clever promotions. Just as conservative moral forces in the southwest had denounced the

30. Taylor and Maar, *American Cowboy*, 63.

31. Joseph J. Arpad and Kenneth R. Lincoln, *Buffalo Bill and the Wild War* (Palmer Lake: Filter, 1971), 6; Russell, *Lives and Legends*, 258-61; Taylor and Maar, *American Cowboy*, 67.

32. Russell, *Lives and Legends*, 291; "North Platte," *The (Omaha) Daily Bee*, 7 July 1882.

Hispanic fiestas as frivolous and depraved, conservative guardians of Victorian morality elsewhere demanded that respectable entertainment have some uplifting cultural or educational values. Thus, successful impressarios such as P. T. Barnum or Cody knew to promote their attractions in the rhetoric of moral elevation and cultural refinement. Buffalo Bill's Wild West was never a "show" but "America's National Entertainment, the Real Thing! No Imitation About it, All True! All Honest!"³³

Despite these claims, wild west cowboys were never depicted as manual laborers who worked cattle, but as supermen who could rope, ride and shoot with amazing skill, perform acrobatic feats on horseback and rescue women and children in distress. As part of their "Cowboy Fun" they exhibited bronc riding, steer riding, relay races, picking up objects from the ground while riding full speed, and reenacted the Pony Express. While the Wild West thus glamorized the cowboy, it was in at least one respect more true, honest and authentic than the later western novels and films, for along with the Anglo cowboys there were large numbers of Hispanics. These "Mexican Vaqueros" did not perform in segregated acts, but were an integral part of the shows. Many of Cody's original vaqueros, including superstar Antonio Esquivel, were from San Antonio.³⁴

Had the western movies followed Cody's pattern, the traditional image of the west would have developed differently, and the Hispanic heritage of rodeo would have been preserved. But while Hollywood adopted Cody's roping, riding, shooting, acrobatic cowboys, they took their demographics from Owen Wister's novel *The Virginian*, which includes neither black nor Hispanic characters. Fortunately, other Wild West shows featured both Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals who exhibited the latest innovations in charreria.³⁵

Beginning in the 1880's, matadors, picadores, and banderilleros demonstrated their skills, while troupes of charros performed tricks with the lasso and on horseback. Traveling with Pawnee Bill from 1890-92, Señor Francisco promised that he could lasso a running horse by any foot called for by the audience; rope, mount and ride a wild buffalo; and rope a steer running full speed from horseback and throw and tie him in ten seconds. Others included champion lariat thrower Indelicio Maldonado, and the most famous and influential Hispanic performer of all, Vincente Oropeza.³⁶

The "Premier 'Charro Mexicano' of the World," as Oropeza billed himself, made his first United States appearance in July, 1891. Performing in San

33. John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Millions* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 6; *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West* (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1981), 40; DeLeon, *Greasers*, 9, 34, 74.

34. Wild West Archives, The Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, Texas; Pawnee Bill Museum and Mansion, Pawnee, Oklahoma; National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Rodeo Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (hereinafter referred to as RHOF); Russell, *The Wild West and Lives and Legends*; Russell to LeCompte, 1 February 1882; Raymond W. Thorpe, *Spirit Gun of the West: The Story of W. F. Carver* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark, 1957), 143-44; Harry Blackman Sell and Victor Weybright, *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 130; Glenn Shirley, *Pawnee Bill* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 100-159; Taylor and Maar, *American Cowboy*, 67.

35. Joe B. Frantz and Julian R. Choate, Jr., *The American Cowboy: The Myth and the Reality* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 184; Taylor and Maar, *American Cowboy*, 71-74.

36. Wild West Archives, Amon Carter Museum; Thorpe, *Spirit Gun* 187, ff.; *Dallas Herald*, 1-31 October 1886; Shirley, *Pawnee Bill*, 140; *Dodge City Democrat*, 21 June 1884; *Two Republics (Mexico City)*, 16 April 1887.

Antonio where local Hispanics were virtually ignored by the media, Oropeza was treated exceptionally well. Both his shows and press conference were favorably reported. Even San Antonians long accustomed to watching expert ropers recognized that Oropeza was in a class by himself, as when he “threw a coil of rope high in the air, jumped through it as it descended and before it reached the ground whirled it over his head and lassoed a running horse.” His charro suits attracted almost as much attention as his rope work, particularly the two pound silver-mounted hat and beautifully tanned goatskin coat trimmed with silver and lace, and “such a tight fitting pair of trousers that it was a wonder he got them off.”³⁷

Nowhere is the Hispanic influence on both the Wild West shows and rodeos more evident than in Oropeza’s case, for as a headliner in the shows and a champion in both the United States and Mexico, he is credited with introducing and popularizing trick and fancy roping in the United States. While trick roping, catching an animal by throwing some kind of loop, or catching several animals with one throw of the lasso, had been seen in Wild West shows from the beginning, fancy roping, the American equivalent of *florear la reata*, was Oropeza’s particular specialty. A charismatic showman, he also exhibited pinpoint accuracy in all the rope tricks, and concluded his act by spelling his name, one letter at a time, with the spinning rope. In 1893, Oropeza became the star of Cody’s new feature “Mexicans from Old Mexico,” and remained a premier attraction in the Wild West for the next sixteen years. By the time of his retirement, trick and fancy roping had become a standard event at cowboy contests across the country.³⁸

In summary, these charros, vaqueros, *cuadillas* and cowboys kept a majority of the charro events on display throughout the United States from the 1880’s. Among their featured acts were *florear la reata*, roping animals in a variety of unique ways and in very quick time, picking up objects from the ground while riding full speed, and wrestling steers and/or bulls to the ground by the horns or tail. Riding wild bucking horses and Texas steers were also included in the shows. While the original charro contests involved riding bulls, steers were used in the shows because they were easier to handle, and to transport across the country and around the world. For that same reason, Wild West shows used outlaw horses* rather than wild broncs, as is still true in rodeo today. All of these charro sports were presented to the audience as part of the life and work of “real cowboys” and in fact they did appear as part of the cowboy contests that were the forerunners to rodeo.

37. Vicente Oropeza Files, RHOF Archives; Russell to LeCompte, 1 February 1882; *San Antonio Express* 19, 27 July 1891; Escarega, “Synthesis,” 23; Santa Ana Higinio Vazquez, *La Charrería Mexicana* (Mexico:n.p., 1950), 20-21.

38. Richard M. Ketchum, *Will Rogers: His Life and Times* (New York: American Heritage, 1973), 43; Donald Day, *Will Rogers* (New York: David McKay, 1962), 20.

* An outlaw horse looks like any other horse, can be handled and transported about with ease, but once a rider mounts its back it begins to pitch and buck and continues until the rider is thrown or dismounts. Few outlaw horses have ever been tamed and many have baffled rodeo contestants for years.

Cowboy Contests

Rodeo historians have usually maintained that contests held at western fairs and celebrations such as the Fourth of July were the precursors to rodeo. They have failed to mention that the traditional Hispanic ferias and fiestas continued throughout the nineteenth century as well, with the Fourth of July added to the list of Hispanic holidays in Texas and the southwest. Also overlooked is the fact that the Anglo-sponsored events featured most of the very same contests that continued to be part of the traditional Hispanic celebrations, including bull-fights, bull riding, correr el gallo, sortijas, picking up objects, steer roping, team roping, and bronc riding.

While there is little written evidence concerning informal roping and riding contests among American cowboys, their existence has long been part of western folklore. In fact, many of the diverse contests of rodeo and charrería were really the folk games of predominately equestrian societies, and it was in this context that they were transmitted from Hispanic to Anglo. In the nineteenth century, cowboy contests were really folk festivals as were the rural charro fiestas. Around the turn of the century, both charrería and rodeo became professionalized. Subsequently, trick and fancy roping was passed from professional charro to professional cowboy through the Wild West Shows, having never been part of the traditions of the western range.

As far as can be determined, the first organized, public cowboy contest in America was a Fourth of July celebration in Deer Tail, Colorado in 1869. The best horsemen in the area gathered for the contest in which slick saddles were used with stirrups not tied under the horses and spurs prohibited. A British hand named Emilnie Gardenshire won the competition when he succeeded in staying on the notorious Montana Blizzard for fifteen minutes. Gardenshire finally subdued the bucking, jumping, pawing horse and rode him around the circle in a gentle gallop to claim his prize as the Champion Bronco Buster of the Plains.³⁹

While the rules regarding spurs and stirrups were unique, requiring the contestants to ride until the horse was tame was standard in both the United States and Mexico through the early twentieth century. In some instances, contestants were required to lasso, blindfold, and saddle the horse before the ride. In contemporary rodeo, contestants mount the horses in the chute, and must ride for only eight seconds, while in Mexican charro competition the horses must still be ridden until tame.⁴⁰

The Deer Tail contest, like the earlier celebration described by Zenas Leonard, presaged the tremendous popularity of Fourth of July cowboy contests

39. "Frontier Sketches," *The Denver Field and Farm*, 8 July 1899, 6; Clifford P. Westermeir, *Trailing the Cowboy* (Caldwell: Caxton Printers, 1955), 344-45; Kristine Fredriksson, "Rodeo's Role in the Celebration of Fairs and Festivals," Paper presented at the Conference on America's Midways, the Smithsonian, Washington, D.C., April 1983.

40. Tom B. Saunders, "How the Word Rodeo Originated as Applied to Western Events," *The Quarter Horse Journal*, June 1968, 28-29; Jimmy Walker, "The First Rodeo," *Frontier Times*, April-May 1963, 52; Porter, *Roping and Riding*, 170; Glenn R. Vernam, *Man on Horseback* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 400; Robert West Howard and Oren Arnold, *Rodeo: Last Frontier of the Old West* (New York: Signet Books, 1961), 34; Foghorn Clancy, *My Fifty Years in Rodeo* (San Antonio; Naylor, 1952), 5.

which began in the 1880's, and still endures. For example, in 1884, in Dodge City, Kansas, a cuadrilla from Chihuahua actually killed longhorn bulls as part of the corrida during an elaborate two-day Fourth of July celebration. Also featured were horse races, lassoing matches, shooting matches and baseball games. Thanksgiving and New Year's were also popular holidays for western contests. Along with horse racing, roping and riding, there were a variety of other events. At the 1891 Tournament of Roses, correr el gallo was included, although in deference to the ladies, a dummy bird was substituted for the live rooster.⁴¹

Anglo fairs, often organized by agricultural societies, were introduced in the west in the 1850's, with horseracing a popular attraction. Sortijas was included at several fairs in the San Antonio area in the 1870's, and by the 1880's cowboy tournaments and vaquero tournaments were featured at fairs throughout the west. The most popular cowboy contest at these fairs was steer roping.⁴²

In 1882, a Cowboy's and Ranchman's Tournament was added to the Capital State Fair which had been held in Austin, Texas since 1875. The prize for roping and throwing a wild steer in the quickest time was a silver-mounted saddle, bridle, martingales and spurs worth over three hundred dollars. Ten men competed and T. J. Morris won the prize and the crowd's admiration with a time of one minutes, 55 seconds.⁴³

Just how good Morris' performance was, or how it would have compared with performers such as Sr. Francisco will never be known. Despite the popularity of steer roping from the 1880's through the twentieth century, there were no standard rules or distances. Contests were held in the huge infields of half-mile race tracks, or simply open fields where spectators on horseback created the boundaries. Since there were neither chutes nor gates, animals were released by hand and given a head start ranging from thirty to three hundred feet before the cowboys could take hold of their lassos and give chase. The man who lassooed the steer, threw it to the ground and tied it by three legs in the shortest time was the winner.⁴⁴

Full grown Texas longhorns, often weighing over one thousand pounds were used in the contests, and many horns were broken before humane laws ended steer roping contests in most states during the early twentieth century. Today,

41. *Dodge City Democrat*, 21 June 1884; Charles Fredrick Holder, "A Tournament of Roses," *Harper's Weekly* (14 February 1891); 126-27.

42. Charles E. DeLong, "California's Bantam Clock: The Journals of Charles E. DeLong," *California State Historical Society Quarterly* 10 (1932):385; *San Antonio Express*, April-May 1876, November 1888; *Austin Statesman*, 24 October 1882; *Comal Current*, 12 October 1885; Howard and Arnold, *Last Frontier*, 34.

43. *Austin American Statesman*, 27 and 28 October 1882.

44. Robert D. Hanesworth, *Daddy of 'em All: The Story of the Cheyenne Frontier Days* (Cheyenne: Flintlock, 1955), 36-37, 59-63, 163; Florence Fenley, "First Roping Contest in Texas," *The Cattleman*, May 1941, 45-48; Howard R. Lamar, ed., *The Reader's Encyclopedia of the American West* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, Co., 1977), 1028; Walker, "First Rodeo," 52; Clancy, *Fifty Years*, 9; Westermeir, *Trailing*, 349-60; Howard and Arnold, *Last Frontier*, 34; Omar S. Barker, "Rodeo Then and Now," *Official Program: Rodeo de Santa Fe* (1960): 6; *Austin Statesman*, 4, 28 October 1882; *The Houston Post*, 15 June, 4 July 1888; *San Antonio Express*, 1-23 November 1888, 6 July 1889, 5 July 1891, 4, 8 July 1894; *Fort Worth Gazette*, 5 December 1890; *The Wild Bunch* 1915-1917. *The Wild Bunch* was a trade publication for rodeo and Wild West performers. It was published from April 1915 through July 1917. Hereinafter, information gained from a summary of all issues will be referred to as "Wild Bunch 1-3."

while both individual and team roping of full grown steers is permitted in contests sponsored by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA), Mexican *corrientes* weighing between 400 and 450 pounds are used instead of huge longhorns.⁴⁵

Because of the tremendous popularity of horse races in the west, racetracks were among the first sports facilities constructed. They were used for a variety of other events as well, either in addition to or in conjunction with the races. One of the major features of both Ladies' Day and People's Day at the Pacific Beach Driving Park in San Diego in October, 1888, was a vaquero tournament. Events included *sortijas*, picking up objects, and steer roping. Valuable prizes were offered for first, second, and third places, as well as a pair of silver inlaid Mexican Spurs for the "Best All Around." In both the *sortijas* and picking up objects, contestants were allowed three trials, and the person securing the most objects or rings was the winner. Grace and style counted an additional point, with ties to be broken on the basis of humane treatment of horses. All three events were held in the huge infield of the racetrack, which posed a particular challenge to the steer ropers, as previously mentioned. Interest in this tournament was so great that entries had to be limited, and contestants were finally selected on the basis of their reputations in Mexico.⁴⁶

These are but a few examples from the hundreds if not thousands of events between the 1880's and the turn of the century. In some places the Anglo holidays took on a fiesta-like atmosphere, while others developed their own unique features. These folk festivals were almost exclusively for local residents who made up a majority of organizers, spectators and participants. Nonetheless, a surprising number of Hispanics won the various roping and riding contests.⁴⁷

By the turn of the twentieth century, a new kind of event, the western heritage festival, had become the major force in rodeo. Citizens of Cheyenne, Wyoming are credited with originating this tradition in 1897. They organized the first Cheyenne Frontier Days to celebrate and perpetuate their heritage in the historic era that had just passed. Mock battles, stage coach holdups, Indian dances and two cowboy contests, roping and bronc riding, made up the original program. The similarities between the first Frontier Days and Buffalo Bill's Wild West were so great that the two were combined for the 1898 Frontier Days celebration. Thereafter, however, promoters found a different way of expanding the program by the addition of more contests.⁴⁸

Many of the new competitions were merely contrived to sound "western" and enjoyed a short run, but others were adapted from those Wild West acts which by that time had become widely accepted as representing the "authentic west." From the shows came the stagecoach races, Pony Express races, and trick and fancy riding. Also introduced into the contests from the Wild West shows at this

45. *Facts!* (Colorado Springs: Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, 1982), 24.

46. *San Diego Union*, October-November 1888.

47. Clancy, *Fifty Years*, 10; Westermeir, *Trailing*, 359; *San Diego Union*, 28 October 1888.

48. Hanesworth, *Daddy of 'em All*, 11-30; Russell, *Wild West*, 59-60.

time were three charro events: trick and fancy roping, steer wrestling, and steer/bull riding.

The popular Frontier Days was widely copied, and similar events with names like Roundup, Stampede, and The Passing of the West, were staged in such numbers that they created a kind of circuit which professional contestants could follow. In an effort to outdo one another, promoters devised new contests and expanded their programs so that there were as many as twenty events in a single day. No two festivals were alike, and there were no standards. Contestants at each site were handed copies of the local rules when they paid their entry fees and had their numbers pinned on their backs.⁴⁹

Despite the chaos, these new festivals replaced the fairs and holidays as the most important sites for cowboy sports, with Cheyenne the most prestigious. These contests also represented the beginning of rodeo's transition from authentic folk festival to modern professional sport. Finally, the new contests of trick riding and the three charro sports became the most popular rodeo events during the early twentieth century. The group which first attempted to establish an organization of contest professionals between 1915 and 1917 proposed that only those skilled in bronc riding, steer roping or trick and fancy roping be permitted to join.

Vincente Oropeza won the first World's Championship of Trick and Fancy Roping in 1900, and it was a major contest event through the 1930's. Will Rogers, certainly the most famous American rope spinner of all time, gave Oropeza full credit for introducing the sport and inspiring his career,⁵⁰ while Willard Porter, Director of the National Rodeo Hall of Fame made this assessment of Oropeza's contribution:

[H]is tenure with the Wild West show gave many North American cowboys a different perspective of trick and fancy roping. What Vincente did with such style and grace soon caught on and became a spectacular feature of both contract shows and contest rodeos.⁵¹

In competition, trick and fancy ropers were expected to perform both on foot and on horseback, and were judged on their gracefulness as well as the intricacy and difficulty of the roping. Moreover, if they failed to snare the animal, the whole performance went for naught. At some contests, as many as eight trick and fancy ropers performed at once, while at other competitions, all were required to be ready to perform twice daily. They also had to be ready to exhibit their skills any time they were called on by the arena director.⁵²

Wrestling steers to the ground was an old charro trick. In addition to colear, they wrestled steers by the horns, sometimes preparatory to riding them.

49. Bill King, *Rodeo Trails*, (Laramie: Jelm Mountain Press, 1983); *The Wild Bunch* 1-3.

50. Willard H. Porter, *Who's Who in Rodeo* (Oklahoma City: Powder River, 1982), 94-95; Chester Byers, *Cowboy Roping and Rope Tricks* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 74; Day, *Will Rogers*, 20; Thomas C. Jones, ed., *Halls of Fame* (Chicago: J. G. Ferguson, 1977), 429; Oropeza Files, RHOF Archives; *Daddy of 'em All*, 44.

51. Potter, *Who's Who*, 95.

52. Argonne Association of America, *World's Championship Cowboy Contests, Official Program* (New York: R. R. Doubleday, 1922), 15-16.

Neither method was a popular rodeo contest until after 1904, when Bill Pickett, a black Texas cowboy, exhibited his unique style at the Cheyenne Frontier days. Pickett jumped from his horse to the steer's back, grabbed its horns, and twisted its neck, and then sank his teeth into the steer's upper lip. This biting made Pickett a star and bulldogging a popular event. Although the biting was later prohibited, steer wrestling had become an established part of cowboy competition. As performed today, it contains elements of three charro contests: *paso de muerte*, *jaripeo*, and *colear*.⁵³

While Pickett's heroics popularized steer wrestling, steer riding, the wild west version of *jaripeo*, never took hold as a contest. When promoters reverted to the original event, substituting *el toro* for the longhorns, bull riding began its rise to popularity, and is now rodeo's premier event. Anthropologists would probably explain this development rather easily, since for thousands of years the bull has symbolized the paramount masculine values, great strength and virility. Man's diverse ritualistic efforts to tame the bulls have attracted enthusiastic crowds since the time of the Minoan acrobats, and it is not surprising that the addition of bull riding increased rodeo's appeal. It has also enhanced the macho image of the cowboy.⁵⁴

Throughout the years from the 1890's to World War I, the similarities between American cowboy contests and *charrería* were such that participants from the United States and Mexico competed in both countries. One of the top contestants in American trick and fancy roping between 1915 and 1917 was Pablo Martinez of Mexico City, while future Rodeo Hall of Famers George L. (Kid) Fletcher, Johnnie Mullins, Oral Zumwalt, and Tex Austin all competed in Mexico.⁵⁵

By 1917, all of the major Wild West shows had closed, and their creator and biggest star, Buffalo Bill had died. To fill the void, many new producers, promoters and contractors entered the contest business, while some of the top performers joined circus troupes. Important new contests with big purses were produced in large eastern cities while the western contests continued to proliferate. Then, in 1922, Tex Austin produced the first World's Championship Cowboy Contest in Madison Square Garden. Designed to appeal to an eastern, urban audience, and scaled down to fit the confines of the Garden, Austin's production made no pretense of depicting the authentic west in the wide open spaces. It was in every respect a sports event and not a show.

Entries were closed well in advance of the ten-day run, and the names and numbers of the contestants, along with the rules for each event, were published in the illustrated program. There were ten events: "bareback bronc riding, fancy

53. Wilbert H. Timmons, ed., *John F. Finerty Reports Porfirian Mexico, 1879* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1974), 151-52; Steiner, *Dashing Horsemen*, 120-25; Schmidt, *Charro*, 103; Escarega, "Synthesis," 20; Porter, *Who's Who*, 96-97; Vernam, *Man on Horseback*, 408; Hanesworth, *Daddy of 'em All*, 46-48; *The Wild Bunch* 1 (June 1916): 13; J. Jacob Oswaldel, *Notes on the Mexican War, 1846-47-48* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1885), 521-22; Colonel Bailey C. Hanes, *Bill Pickett, Bulldogger* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 59-69.

54. Lawrence, *Rodeo*, 180-98; Jack Randolph Conrad, *The Horn and the Sword: The History of the Bull as Symbol of Power and Fertility* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1957), 9. Conrad's entire work concerns the anthropological interpretations of bull rituals from the stone age through the Spanish Corridos.

55. Porter, *Who's Who*, 20-21, 56-57, 92-93, 138-39; *The Wild Bunch* 1-3.

roping, cowboys bronc riding with saddle, steer wrestling, cowboys trick and fancy riding, steer riding, and [a] wild horse race.” Included in this list are the precursors to the five standard events of contemporary PRCA rodeos: bareback bronc riding, saddle bronc riding, bull riding, steer wrestling, and calf roping. Equally significant, all of these 1922 events except trick riding and the wild horse race had long been part of charrería, and were at that time still organized and conducted much as they had been in Mexico for hundreds of years.⁵⁶

After 1922, the eastern indoor contest rodeo began to rival the western heritage festival as the most significant form of cowboy sport. As the modern rodeo developed and became more organized, much of its early history was ignored and forgotten. Yet it seems clear that the Hispanic influence on American rodeo was continuous throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, involving the Anglo and Hispanic ranching cultures and folk festivals of the southwest, the Mexican sport of charrería, and the Wild West shows. From the 1880’s through the First World War, performers and contestants from Mexico regularly participated in American shows and contests. Today, the five standard events of PRCA-sanctioned rodeos represent the culmination of over four hundred years of tradition that began with the Spanish conquistadors. This evolution was summarized in 1931 by the editor of a western periodical who observed: “From them [sic] early times back yonder in 1521, when the first cattle landed on North American soil, cowboys have practiced most of the sports that are seen to this day on cattle ranges and at rodeos . . .”⁵⁷ However, to acknowledge its Hispanic heritage does not conflict with the widespread belief that rodeo is a truly American sport. Rather it means that like American society generally, rodeo is a product of diverse cultural and ethnic traditions.

56. Argonne Association, *Official Program*.

57. “Rodeo Up-to-Date,” *Hoofs and Horns*, 24 July 1931, 8.