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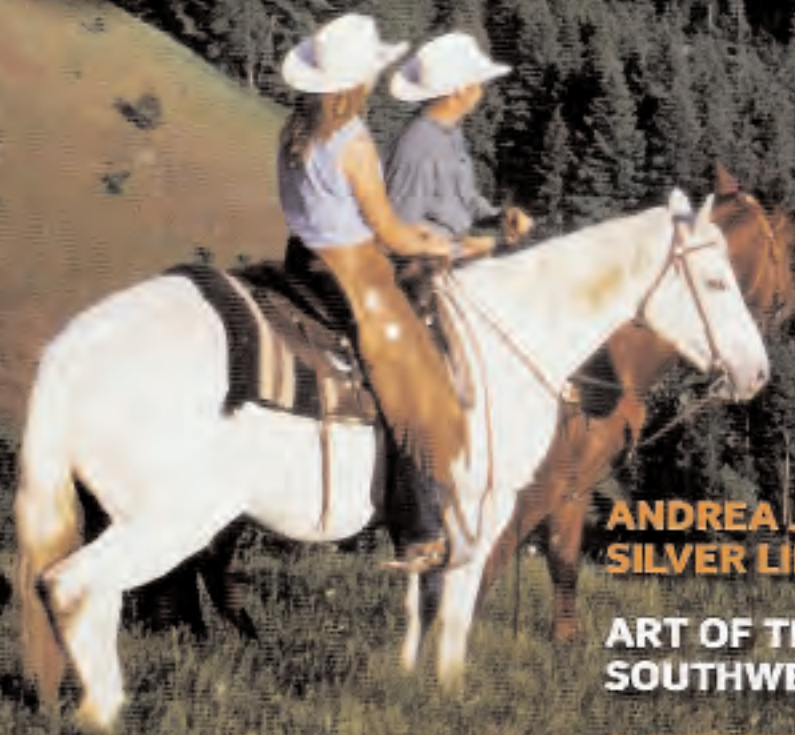
American Cowboy

March/April 2005

THE SPIRIT OF THE AMERICAN WEST

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NOW
EMBRACING
THE CODE
OF THE
WEST?



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America

and the Cowboy Code

SINCE NOVEMBER'S ELECTIONS, THE BIGGEST TOPIC OF DISCUSSION IN POLITICAL CIRCLES HAS BEEN NOT FOR WHOM THE PEOPLE VOTED, BUT FOR

WHAT. IT'S BECOME KNOWN AS THE YEAR WHEN THE PUBLIC PULLED THE LEVER FOR VALUES, FED UP WITH INDECENCIES AND LICENTIOUSNESS IN MEDIA AND IN PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS.

RISE UP AT LAST AGAINST A TOO-LONG-SUSTAINED ASSAULT ON THE INSTITUTIONS OF MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND RELIGION, AMERICANS HAVE SENT A MANDATE TO WASHINGTON AND TO STATE CAPITALS ACROSS THE LAND. IT'S A MOVE HAILED BY MANY AS A RETURN TO AMERICA'S WELLSPRING OF VITALITY—TO ITS HEARTLAND HERITAGE AND TO ITS DEEPEST ROOTED NATIONALISTIC AND MORAL IDENTITY. THE AFFINITIES BETWEEN THIS YEARNING AND PAST AGES' REVERENCE FOR THEIR PIONEER ETHIC AND COWBOY WAY ARE PLAIN ENOUGH. TO EXPLORE THIS PHENOMENON FURTHER, WE SOUGHT THE INSIGHTS OF THREE RESPECTED OBSERVERS OF THE PUBLIC SCENE. WE'RE PROUD TO SHARE WITH YOU THEIR RESPONSES.

GIVEN RECENT SWINGS IN PUBLIC SENTIMENT, ARE WE SEEING SIGNS THAT THIS NATION IS RE-ATTUNING ITSELF TO THE VALUES WE RECOGNIZE AS THE CODE OF THE WEST?





A Code That's Not Been Broken

By Marvin Olasky

Is America now embracing the Code of the West? Short answer: Most Americans are; most elite journalists are not.

Some stats: The New York Times 206 times in 2003 and 2004 put the words "Bush" and "cowboy" together in an article, and The Washington Post did so 234 times during the same time period. The references often were derogatory, as when the Post waxed sarcastic about "that American icon of manhood, the cowboy."

The press as a whole, according to files in the Lexis-Nexis database, put together "Bush" and "cowboy" at least 12,000 times during those two years. The Chicago Tribune, for example, knocked "the unsubtlety of the cowboy and the moral simplicity that people ascribe to the cowboy."

But the 51 percent who voted for George W. Bush last November, with his Iraq policy the centerpiece of the campaign, appeared to understand major parts of the Code of the West. They understood the need to stand up to tyrants and bullies like Saddam Hussein and to act even when the only choices available are bad ones. Of course, the Code of the West concerning fighting parallels the "just war" theory developed by the great theologian Augustine more than 1,500 years ago. Bad guys kill for joy, but Western heroes fight only when they have a just cause and right intentions. They use the amount of violence needed to stop aggression while minimizing the danger to noncombatants. They fight against known killers who plan further aggression.

The Code of the West helped to save the United States during the Cold War, when the choices were appeasement of tyrants, trigger-happy mutual destruction, or a long, tough struggle against Communism. It's no accident that television Westerns were most popular during the 1950s, when our nation faced exceptionally dangerous times that required a combination of fearlessness plus restraint.

Sadly, since we now have a cold and often hot war against terrorism, we need once again that willingness to fight against evil, even when dandies disparage such conduct. (New York Times headline: "To Some in

Europe, the Major Problem Is Bush the Cowboy.")

In domestic policy as well, most American voters prefer the Code of the West's emphasis on individual and familial responsibility. They approve of men honoring, protecting, and loving women, instead of turning in on themselves. (Eleven states had referenda on same-sex marriage; 11 states said no.)

Many Westerners have been employees of big organizations, from cattle companies in the past to conglomerates now, but the emphasis always has been on cutting the best deal available and being ready to cut out if told to act unethically. That's why it was important to own a horse and a saddle, and to have some money for a stake. Those who had settled down needed to own their own land and a gun to defend it. That sounds a lot more like the "ownership society" projected by the candidate for whom most Americans voted.

I find among my students at the University of Texas a real hankering for Code of the West ethics: Tell the truth, do what you say you're going to do, work hard, help people in distress. Of course, they and others often disregard but still honor in theory the part that Gene Autry emphasized about keeping clean in thought, speech, action, and personal habits.

Still, most leading journalists and a sizeable minority of Americans still hug the Code of the East: big government at home, appeasement abroad, and immorality a matter of personal preference. So the battle continues.

Marvin Olasky is a professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin and the editor-in-chief of World, the national weekly news magazine from a Biblical perspective (and the fourth most read newsweekly in the United States). Dr. Olasky has written 13 books of history and cultural analysis, including Compassionate Conservatism, The American Leadership Tradition, and The Tragedy of American Compassion.



**You don't have
in cowboy country
practice its code**

Eastern elites and their Hollywood counterparts call it “flyover country” today. I suppose it’s because they look down on it, and not always from an airplane. But the truth is that it is, as it was when our land was young, “cowboy country.” And today the hardy folks living there for the most part still live by and practice the Code of the Old West, the code that helped build this nation as it expanded from sea to sea.

It is an unwritten code. It does not need codification by the u.s. Congress. It does not need to be interpreted by the courts.

In cowboy country a man’s word is his bond. You can trust him. In cowboy country a man extends a helping hand to his neighbor - or to a stranger. In cowboy country women are respected and treated as ladies. In cowboy country a man accepts responsibility for his deeds and for the welfare of his family. He does not turn to government for a handout but instead offers a hand up to those in need. In cowboy country liberty is more important than government mandated security. And in cowboy country folks believe in and turn to God, because his hand easily can be seen throughout that vast expanse.

You can see the workings of the Cowboy Code today amongst the common folk, the down-to-earth Americans wherever they may live. Once neighbors met to help erect another’s house or barn. Today they dig deep in their wallets to help the less fortunate or the victims of disasters both natural and man-caused. Or they send their young men and women to fight for truth and justice. The Lone Ranger has expanded his range to encompass many parts of the world.

You don’t have to have been born in cowboy country to understand and practice its code. But it helps if you have lived there. In the beginning men and women carried that code with them across the mountains and rivers into the untracked plains and wilderness that were the West. That still happens today. And today, as it has been throughout our history, men who live by that code come out of the West to lead the nation.

Unwritten Laws, Indelible Truths

By Lyn Nofziger

This is not a political commentary, and Ronald Reagan is dead these many months, but in retrospect this leader who came out of the West exemplified more than most presidents the meaning of the code. The elites, those who sneered at his dedication to liberty and at his belief that God had set this country here between two mighty oceans as a beacon of freedom to the entire world, called him a “conservative.”

But in fact he was a man who instinctively lived by the Cowboy Code. He was a man whose word was his bond, who was true to his principles, his God, and his wife. In an age where decency and respect and consideration for others are on the decline he was an old-fashioned and unabashed gentleman.

He was a man who looked at America and Americans and saw what was positive about them, what was good and right and strong.

Because he came out of a milieu where liberty went hand in hand with honor and integrity and individual responsibility, he believed there was nothing Americans could not do, no obstacle they could not overcome, no foe they could not conquer if they put their minds to it.

But Reagan was not alone in his approach to life and to liberty, and the Code of the West has not disappeared with his death. There are leaders today, men and women whom we have seen emerge in recent elections, and others who will be leaders tomorrow who will carry this country to even greater heights. And they will do so, because they instinctively practice and follow the precepts that have built this country, the precepts that are best embodied in what we still call the Cowboy Code, the Code of the Old West.

Lyn Nofziger currently works with The Carmen Group, a Washington, D.C., public relations firm. Nofziger was press secretary for Ronald Reagan during Reagan’s successful campaign for president and later served as Reagan’s assistant for political affairs. He has published four Western novels-his “Tackett” line-all of them revolving around his fictional hero, Del Tackett.



to have been born
to understand and
.”

Rediscovering the Quintessential American Hero

By Jim Owen

Is America really ready to embrace the cowboy and his code? My answer is an unequivocal “yes.” If I didn’t believe that, I wouldn’t have spent every waking hour for 14 months writing a book titled *Cowboy Ethics: What Wall Street Can Learn from the Code of the West*. I wrote it because I am convinced many Americans are yearning for what the cowboy represents.

Now I may be the last person you’d ever expect to write a book like this. I’m no cowboy; I’ve never roped a steer or even saddled a horse. I’ve spent 35 years in the investment industry. In truth, until I plunged into this book project, I hadn’t thought much about cowboys in years. What I had been thinking about, though, were the people I encountered in my business travels and in my own community - people who had nice homes, families, and every trapping of financial success, yet seemed to be missing something fundamental in their lives.

Reflecting on how much things had changed in the last 50 years, I thought back to my childhood heroes, the cowboys who captured my imagination in the Saturday matinees and in books like Louis L’Amour’s. I remembered how much I wanted to be just like them - to be brave and true of heart and always ready to stand up for what is right. And I found myself wondering, *Who do we have to look up to now?*

Putting business on the back burner, I began spending my days reading cowboy memoirs and history and my evenings watching the classic cowboy films. Then one day I saw one of David Stoecklein’s stunning Western photos, the one he calls “Hero of the Storm,” depicting a man who has rescued a calf in a freezing blizzard. It nearly took my breath away. I asked myself, *What kind of person would go out into the storm on a winter’s night for a calf he doesn’t even own? Could I imagine myself or anyone I know doing that?*

And suddenly, it all clicked for me. I realized that cowboys are heroic, because they live by their beliefs, no matter what the personal cost. They demonstrate courage, honor, and loyalty on a daily basis, subordinating their egos and self-interest to a larger purpose.

They share a dedication to the land and their simple, rugged way of life. But most important, they share a set of values—a code they all know and live by.

That moral clarity is, I think, what many of us have been missing. With this book, I have tried to respond in my own small way by translating the unwritten rules of the range into 10 timeless principles that are true to the cowboy spirit but have meaning for all of us today. Since the book was published, I’ve heard from hundreds of people at book events and through calls, letters, and emails. Over and over, they’ve said how sick and tired they are of a culture glorifying materialism and self-gratification. Parents have told me how hard it is to teach virtues their children dismiss as hopelessly old-fashioned. Businesspeople have talked of their discomfort at working in a climate where “anything goes.”

Overwhelmingly, their responses have confirmed a deep hunger for shared values in our society - a need for something that anchors our lives, shapes our American identity, and brings us together in troubled times.

Of course, we’ve all heard a lot of talk about “moral values” in the wake of last November’s election. But frankly, I think that what many of us want is a set of values transcending any political, religious, or cultural agenda.

The Cowboy’s Code is the one thing I’ve found that rings with universal truth. We may not be able to agree on Iraq or gay marriage or stem cell research. But can’t we all embrace the idea that “your word is your bond” and some things should never be for sale? Isn’t the Golden Rule something we all can aspire to uphold?

There is a good reason why the cowboy is our nation’s most enduring hero. More than just an icon of America’s past, the working cowboy is the embodiment of values that helped build our nation - values we all share as part of our heritage. Each of us, no matter who we are, can aspire to live up to the quiet, day-to-day heroism of the cowboy. With the Code of the West as inspiration, we all have the chance to be heroes in our own lives.

*Jim Owen is an owner/partner of Austin Capital Management, Austin, Texas. He is the author of two books on investing and is a speaker before business and community groups. His book, *Cowboy Ethics: What Wall Street Can Learn from the Code of the West*, is published by Stoecklein Publishing.*

