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Rodeo: An Anthropologist Looks at the Wild and the Tame

Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence

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Rodeo people call their sport "more a way of life than a way to make a living." Rodeo is, in fact, a rite that not only expresses a way of life but perpetuates it, reaffirming in a ritual contest between man and animal the values of American ranching society. Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence uses an interpretive approach to analyze rodeo as a symbolic pageant that reenacts the "winning of the West" and as a stylized expression of frontier attitudes toward man and nature. Rodeo constestants are the modern counterparts of the rugged and individualistic cowboys, and the ethos they inherited is marked by ambivalence: they admire the wild and the free yet desire to tame and conquer.

Based on extensive field work and drawing on comparative materials from other stock-tending societies, *Rodeo* is a major contribution to an understanding of the role of performance in society, the culturally constructed view of man's place in nature, and the structure and meaning of social relationships and their representations.

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