LONESOME DOVE: COMMON GROUND FOR WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

By Gail Hinchion Mancini

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Liberal Studies.

Tom Vander Ven, Ph.D
Project Advisor

Kathleen Long, Ph.D

Patrick Furlong, Ph.D.

Date of Oral Examination: March 25, 1994

INTRODUCTION

In 1986, when members of the Pulitzer Prize committee on literature selected Larry McMurtry's Lonesome Dove for its annual award, the literary world acknowledged this Western saga as a story-teller's masterpiece and validated the novel's contribution to the pool of historic perspective.

In 1989, when Lonesome Dove was made into a television miniseries, McMurtry's work distinguished itself again by breaking records for attracting viewers at a time when the lengthy television miniseries was falling from favor.

Although a masterpiece in its own right, the accomplishment of Lonesome Dove takes on new meaning when considered in light of its popularity with both scholars and the general public, whose perspectives of the American Frontier Experience differ greatly.

On the one hand, America has had a romance with the Western Frontier that can be traced to the days when trails to that frontier were being blazed. The people of this nation have held fast to the idea that an individual can flourish with mere hard work; that this country is the material against which that hard work can be applied, to guaranteed benefit. The Frontier West is our literal proving grounds for that

dream, and the symbolic repository for those ideals.

The making of this ideal West fueled and still fuels the hopes and energies of individuals. As this study will show, the very development of the frontier story is itself something of a saga of the natural human tendancy to embellish fact with dreams. A clear line can be drawn from the work of real estate tycoons or showmen like Buffalo Bill Cody to this century's Western films and arrowhead chinz. Although less obvious, a similar thread runs from the work of those who drafted our Constitution to the earliest Western historians to today's presidential sound bites on New Frontiers. This study will summarize how fictions spun by entrepreneurs and showmen were legitimized by scholars, creating the rock-solid myth that prevails today.

A growing body of research challenges the myth. Accumulating since around the middle of this century, this new Western perspective has its roots in the decline of our nation's pride-filled self-definition as the center of the democratic universe. A new group of researchers is having its way with the popular symbols of the Frontier, from film to art to advertising to the content of presidential speech-making. Its greater energy is saved, though, for those who validated the myth through scholarship, including Frederick Jackson Turner, considered the father of Frontier History. Turner's definition of the Frontier West as some pristine planting ground for American Democracy has provided much target

practice for New Historians, who complain that the Old School legitimized the murderous work of violence-prone white males unconcerned about the sufferings and loss of non-white males and female in general. "Our national folklore is replete with male rugged individuals finding their selfhood in the freedom of an untamed land," writes modern historian Susan Armitage, naming the frontier "Hisland." (11-12)

A summary of the work of these researchers will illustrate a Western experience in which the well being of the individual is lost among greater drives: racialism, nationalism and capitalism.

In short, all the elements of America's hopeful past are present in our romance of the West. And elements of our painful recent history are present in the challenge to the myth of the West. Negotiating between the two groups, McMurtry's Lonesome Dove performs a tightrope walk that meets the agendas of both sets.

In presenting the saga of a cattle drive from the southern to northern-most borders of our nation, McMurtry employs, with zest, nearly every cliche generated in the annals of the mythical West. His leading male characters are the stuff that Western heroes are made of: Woodrow Call and Augustus McCrae are profoundly able, brave and tough. The cowboys sample prostitutes but love their horses. Savage Indians kidnap women. The heroes forge civilization with the necessary use of a noose and a six-gun. John Wayne, an icon of

frontier individualism over years of film culture, would feel right at home as chief guide.

Yet that job goes to a black man, an unacknowledged race in the classic Western. Such neo-classic Western types abound, pushined against familiar Western images. Far from being the scourge of the earth, whores are the object of the most profound human emotion. Incompetents - mostly male and cowboys among them - almost outnumber the cattle. Chapters of this document will elaborate on how the collective weight of these antiheroes celebrates the individual contribution, awarding glory to ALL individuals, not just outstanding characters.

Setting plays an equally important role. As the cattle drive cuts its swath, the image of the new Western town as an outpost of Christian democracy falls, replaced by the vice centers that were cattle towns. The triumph of progress is overshadowed by piles of buffalo bones and hovering camps of starving Indians. Nature humbles our travelers repeatedly. And an earth mother named Clara Allen illuminates the childlike sides of Call and McCrae, and humbles them both.

There are heroes in this novel, but not the heroes we have become accustomed to seeing. One - Clara - is a female. Gus and Call will show themselves to be less than whole and less than triumphant. The most self-assured characters in this novel are a randy bull and a giant bear. And no one makes it to Montana with as much ease as two blue pigs. The cattle drive, if accepted as the lark it is, as Augustus McCrae does,

is indeed an adventure. But perceived, as Woodrow Call does, as a noble pursuit, it is a hollow victory.

By the novel's end, heroism is downplayed. By the novel's end, questions are raised about the nobility of the American Frontier experience. And lessons about the development of this country are compellingly drawn on the unorthodox Lonesome Dove landscape: it happened suddenly and in grand proportion. It happened perhaps not because of heroes, but because of the heroic acts of individuals.

Lonesome Dove bridges the dueling perspectives of Old and New Frontier histories and puts myth in perspective. As such, the novel provides a vision of this country that can be embraced by modern historians, feminists, civil rights leaders, environmentalists, school teachers, steel workers, lawyers, doctors and, with hope, our children: flawed, cruel, naive, brave, soulful, enduring, courageous.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MAKING OF THE FRONTIER MYTH

In Greybull, Wyoming, modern day cowboy Tim Flitner holds out a hand to an untamed horse, letting it catch his scent. Caressing the horse's nuzzle, talking softly, Flitner eventually will coax the sorrel into wearing a saddle. The cowhand wears no spurs. He will not spend hours astride this animal, riding the bucking motion until the horse is exhausted. He will never screech "YEE HAW." This new method of taming horses is called "gentling," (Johnson) and it defies the rought and tumble myth of the cowboy.

Flitner practices his art in a nation where stockbrokers wear cowboy boots, arrowheads adorn chintz and beer is seldom sold without some subliminal Western reference, be it a cowboy hat or an actual rodeo setting. City folk pay money to ride on mock cattle drives or risk their lives in the peaks and crevices of National Parks, seeking experiences as rugged as mountain men once knew. This, while Tim Flitner croons his equine love song: "It's O.K. You don't trust me yet. But it's O.K." (Johnson).

Flitner represents the *real* West. Brush fires throughout California are a modern Western story, as are political battles for precious water. Cowboy boots and dude ranches are symbols of a West that supposedly *was*.

The enduring myth of the West depicts white men who are tough, hardy and independent, white women who, if "good" uphold the moral standards of civilization, and, if "bad" enjoy a randy freedom. For lack of an established structure, guns are a necessary equalizer, but also are likely to be pulled to punctuate to a sentence. The West holds vast resources and unlimited promises of freedom and economic security for individuals. The towns that will grow under the nurturing hands of these rugged souls will foster a new social order born of the guiding Christian light of moral correctness. So enduring are these images, that the American Western Myth should be looked upon as one of the great, creative by-products of our national history.

> For good or for bad, the frontier is where many Americans continue to locate a central core of heroism, the relation of the individual to family and community, the nature of the challenge of making a home; however abstractly we state these things, it takes but an instant to think of frontier icons that express them. (Cronon 25.)

Understanding the enduring nature of Western mythology requires more than noticing that holsters and six-shooters remain a staple in toy stores, or that billboard Marlboro Men can be found staring down on urban rush hour commuters from coast to coast. The mythological West is not just yesterday's reality remembered today in flattering light; its roots are in the earliest moments of the rush West. Brightly-painted exaggerations of reality, glittering and ever-available,

became the foundation of the early scholarly and journalistic versions of the West, creating a history of the West that was, from the beginning, a hybrid of fact and fiction.

Examining Western themes prominent in Lonesome Dove, this chapter will describe how men, women, towns, farmland and cattle all became figures in a grand tapestry, one that depicted an unbroken series of economic and social successes. This romanticized version of Western migration was the combined work of several forces with coinciding needs. On a personal level, individual Western settlers tried to draw others from the East for companionship. Communities leaders wanted the stability of well-established towns. Entrepreneurs had their hands in establishing those towns, and they wanted the profitability that warm bodies would bring. Politically, the descendants of the soldiers of the Revolutionary War wanted to create a successful democratic nation free from the class systems of Europe. And in the international arena of religions and races, Christian Anglos believed they were pushed westward by the hand of God, fully convinced that they were the final and most glorious chapter in the development of the human species.

With all those expectations, it is easy to see that the myth of the American West represented the development of two conflicting themes, one in which the nation was to foster giant economic development and rapid urbanization, the other which nurtured "a distrust of the outcome of progress in

urbanization and civilization"(Limerick, Trails 8). The contradictory myths thrived, side by side, retaining unexamined validity as the nature of the Frontier experience changed. Commerce, not the individual, shaped the new nation. "The garden was no longer a garden. But the image of an agricultural paradise in the West, embodying group memories of an earlier, a simpler and, it was believed, a happier state of society, long survived as a force in American thought and politics" (Smith 139).

These influences combined, in the late 19th century, to inspire historians and increasingly influential masters of mass media alike. Often interwoven, these influences have been continually recycled to this day, omnipresent to the point that anyone would recognize the irony of a gentle cowboy.

THE LAND FOR ADVENTURE

The selling of the Western ideal through showmanship and literature began early. Historian Ann Fabian notes several amusing examples of entertainment in her essay "History for the Masses: Commercializing the Western Past."

> Seventeenth-century white captives returned from lives among the Indians shaped sensational stories that they told, and then profitably sold, to friends, neighbors, and tavern acquaintances. Ministers and moralists discovered useful lessons in tales of redeemed captives and frequently framed them with introductions designed to guide readers to their correct interpretation. By the early nineteenth century western publishers also exploited a market for tales of frontier adventure. The tales circulating freely through an oral culture were printed, bound, and sold to readers who were left free to interpret as they chose (Cronon 227-8).

Perhaps one of the wildest tales where art met life involved the mountain man Kit Carson. Attempting in 1849 to rescue a white woman taken captive by Apaches, Carson and his band caught up with the Indians only too late. Carson found the victim dead. He also found a copy of a book about himself, "the first of the kind I had ever seen, in which I was represented as a great hero, slaying Indians by the hundreds" (Corson 167). Carson was the subject of at least three biographies before 1875, most written by sophisticated men of distinguished backgrounds. The immediate popularity of Carson, or such characters as Daniel Boone represents what Henry Nash Smith, author of Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth describes the phenomenon as "the slightly decadent cult of wildness and savagery" (55). Nash notes that genteel Easterners who set out to write about the West - Francis Parkman, author of The Oregon Trail in the mid-1840s, for example - found the Wild West, as Smith summarizes, "an exhilarating region of adventure and comradeship in the open air....Its heroes...were in reality not members of society at all, but noble anarchs owing no master, free denizens of a limitless wilderness"(55).

"At the end of the 18th century, when John Filson constructed his famous pamphlet *The discovery, settlement, and present State of Kentucke* to lure settlers into Kentucky, he was careful to include with his descriptions of soil and mineral resources a version of Daniel Boone's captivity -

"transcribed," like a good tavern tale of an oral culture, from Boone's "own mouth." It suggested the violent past of a territory now tamed and made ready for settlement..." (Cronon 228). The seductive chords of western expansion are all present: a land tamed, yet a place of adventure and comraderie. But Boone himself flees west from Kentucky, an apparent fugitive from the wave of settlers who swallowed his tale. When his name is raised today, it is not in remembrance of one of the nation's most significant loners. He is a figure of heroic proportion. This image of the strong and solitary man would thrive as a Western mythological staple.

THE SELLING OF THE GARDEN

The pamphlets published by John Filson illustrate the "myth of the Garden" that was taking hold, encouraging those who considered migration. They presented farming with "a cluster of metaphors expressing fecundity, growth, increase, and blissful labor in the earth, all centering about the heroic figure of the idealized frontier farmer armed with that supreme agrarian weapon, the sacred plow" (Cronon 139).

The myth was equally important to the early men of letters, from Benjamin Franklin to Alexis de Toqueville. Writings of the late 1800s bear "repeated reference to the doctrines that agriculture is the only source of real wealth; that every man has a natural right to land; that labor expended in cultivating the earth confers a valid title to it; that the ownership of land, by making the farmer independent,

gives him social status and dignity, while constant contact with nature makes him virtuous and happy" (Cronon 141).

Virtue and purity of purpose were important to the visionaries of the new America. Benjamin Franklin himself could see that the fortune-seekers in power on the Eastern seaboard hardly supported the myth of the new American democracy. "The aging statesman consoled himself for the idleness and extravagance of the seaboard cities with the reflection that the bulk of the population was composed of laborious and frugal inland farmers" Cronon 140-1).

Not only were these farmers "laborious and frugal," their wives were purity personified. In the words of Western historian Peggy Pascoe, women settlers were "Madonnas of the prairie, civilizers of the Wild West,"(Limerick, Trails 41). The home was "a kind of moral and spiritual 'beacon-light'" (Kolodny 166). Particularly available in women's magazines - to which Lonesome Dove's chief female character Clara Allen is a subscriber - these volumes advanced a "cult of domesticity"(Jeffrey 6-7). Catharine Beecher, popular writer and lecturer of her day, defined three important roles for 18th Century women: they trained the minds of the children, nursed infants and sick and managed the family state.(Kolodny 166). In the home and in the school, women served as "the moral, ethical, and spiritual center of family and nation alike, the nursery of republican virtue and the haven from the masculine competitiveness of the marketplace" (Kolodny 163).

Eventually, these women's magazines acknowledged the employment of masculine skills in the untamed West, but only as a necessary evil. "Essentially, the image was still a domestic one, and, in keeping with conventional 19th century ideas, women were perceived as selfless creatures living to serve others rather than themselves" (Jeffrey 106).

This portrait of women had a dual purpose: to lure settlers West and to assuage the guilt and concern of Easterners who saw in their own territory a crassly commercial environment too imitative of Europe. Social observers were alarmed by the urban scene. Low wages and increasing poverty and hunger in urban areas were chaffing nationalistic visions of the ideal democracy (Kolodny 163). Debate also raged among the social observers of the upper class, who found that the increasing advantages of wealth and luxury left the middle class woman's life with little meaning. For the myth-makers of feminine roles, the West also was "virgin land": a place where neither the complexities of an industrial society nor even the **basics** of civilization had arrived. In terms of social imagery, female characters could thus be returned to the times when **making** a home, both spiritually and literally, was their cause. "The women in these cabins are given real, but never arduous, work to perform. Theirs is a role that keeps them happily and usefully 'busy from early dawn to twilight'" (Kolodny 168).

The earliest settlers provided the word of mouth that would attract further migration. As soon as they were able to settle in large enough numbers, get roofs over their heads, attract the dry goods to which they had previously been accustomed, they began working to establish churches and schools. "Isolation had disappeared and institutions had emerged," (Jeffrey 105) and letters began going home about how they had come to "feel quite civilized," as Washington State settler Phoebe Judson wrote. "The letters written back to our eastern friends gave such glowing descriptions of our fair dwelling place that some of them were encouraged to make arrangements to cross the plains the following year," Judson's diary shows (Jeffrey 177). No doubt Judson herself participated in this process. Surely she reported to family what she told her own diary on the erection of a church steeple: "my 'ideal home' was one more step nearer completion'" (Jeffrey 179).

MYTH-MAKING AND COMMERCE

Such sweet stories gave rise to the myth that Western towns were steadily developed over time, communities born of common labor and stout-hearted Christian goals. Urban historian John W. Reps unearthed a guide for Western settlers published in 1837 that described the urbanization in evolutionary terms: first the trappers and hunters dotted the landscape with crude cabins and small gardens. Farmers followed and finally, "men of capital and enterprise who

typically transformed the small village...into a 'spacious town or city'" (Reps IX).

More likely, the "men of capital" showed up first. Illinois cattleman Joseph G. McCoy, the self-proclaimed inventor of the cattle market business, saw the intersecting potential of the cattle drive and railroads. He built a stockyard, pens and loading chutes at the new railroad facilities in Abeline in 1867, creating the first cow town in Kansas. McCoy understood the need to attract outside capital. In 1868, McCoy, a promoter at heart and mindful of the need for capital, sponsored Wild West shows in Chicago and St. Louis, with "a collection of three buffalo, an elk and three wild ponies all chased around an enclosure by a pair of costumed Mexican vaqueros" (Dykstra 29). Between 1868 and 1872, a million cattle passed through his operation(Reps 548). More importantly than what passed through was the stable population that stayed, to live and to embellish McCoy's dream and the dream of other town founders. "We are here to live, and get rich, if we can," stated one such Kansas settler, a newspaper editor (Dykstra 74).

David Munger and William Greiffenstein filed town plans for Wichita, Kansas, the day the lands were opened to white settlement in 1870. Their dream attracted a population anxious to benefit from the fast-flowing cash of the combined cattle and rail industries. Significant to their success, the settlers they attracted shared that dream. Townsfolk rallied

for the sale of $200,000 in county bonds to bring the railroad to them. Within months of its completion, 70,000 head of cattle traveled through to points on the Santa Fe line (Reps 551-2). The myth of the individual may be the legacy of the West, but the dream of a fast buck built it. Boosterism thrived.

THE CATTLE INDUSTRY: THE CLASSIC WESTERN MYTH

The cattle industry itself represents a classic vision of Western myth-making in action, for it combined the glamour of fabulous fortunes with glorious stories of individual panache. Conquering the wilderness on horseback, cowboys seemed far more free than those tied to "the sacred plow" (Smith 139).

Cattle drives left a mark in part because the profession took on Mother Nature, forever opening to Americans a territory that once had been known as "The Great American Desert." The territory was:

> A vast waste stretched away on every side to the far horizon, its swells and hollows as lacking in identity as the crests and troughs of the Atlantic rollers....It seemed unlikely that man would ever be more than a wayfarer in these wastes....Into this great solitude rode the cattleman. From the ranches of Texas and New Mexico he pushed his way northward across the lands of the Indian nations to the railroad that had begun to bridge this waste. The desire for new pastures and markets set him further and further north...it was the range cattleman who broke the spell; who made these great areas his own (Osgood 7).

Exaggeration has shaped all accounts of the cattle

industry, but some Texas cattlemen were true giants, launching seemingly impossible adventures and reaping huge profits. Texas cattleman Shanghai Pierce kept as many as 50 hands busy on his ranch (Durham 26). Charles Goodnight paired up with Charles Loving immediately after the Civil War in a relationship that eventually grew as close as that of Lonesome Dove's Woodrow Call and Augustus McCrae. Immediately after the Civil War, Goodnight and Loving broke cattle through New Mexico to the Colorado markets. Their 80 mile drive between two sources of water is commemorated by a similar chapter in Lonesome Dove which leaves no question that the physical challenge was hellish, if not death-defying (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 788-91; Wincer, Part III). Drovers moved some 5.7 million head out of Texas from 1866 to 1885 (Osgood 32). The trips were profitable. Charles Goodnight was said to personally have carried $12,000 home from one trip to the middle western markets. In time, profits climbed as high as $100,000.

The body of General George Custer was barely cooled, the revenge of the U.S. Army against the Sioux still on-going, when cattlemen broke through to Montana to claim the unoccupied territory and its fresh grasslands. In Lonesome Dove, Call and McCrae are the **first** to do so, their fictional journey borrowing heavily from the dangerous real-life adventures of diaries of Goodnight and Loving, but pushing further and faster than the real life legends ever did.

Granville Stuart, a one-time Montana miner and politician, saw the promise of cattle ranching in his state. Between 1880 and 1885, Montana drovers reported profits of 25 to 40 percent, using these possibly fictional figures to attract Eastern and foreign investors.His memoirs establish why speed - and getting there first, as the fictitious Call and McCrae are anxious to do - was essential:

> In 1880, the country (central and eastern Montana) was practically uninhabited. One could travel for miles without seeing so much as a trapper's bivouac. Thousands of buffalo darkened the rolling plains. There were deer, elk, wolves and coyotes on every hill and in every ravine and thicket. In the whole territory of Montana, there were but 250,000 head of cattle including dairy cattle and work oxen. In the fall of 1882, there was not a buffalo remaining on the range and the antelope, elk and deer were indeed scarce. There were 600,000 head of cattle on the range. The cowboy...had become an institution (Osgood 89).

Little wonder that writers and movie makers so adore the tale of the cattleman that they rewrite and refilm it over again. In the mythical version of the West, cowboys and cattle endure. In the mythical version being written at the time, they and their empires fade away gracefully, their disappearance smoothed over by the gracious accounts of hometown scribes such as Samuel Prouty. In 1885, acknowledging the declining cattle traffic, the Dodge City newspaper editorialist wrote the following epitaph for the industry that once held the town together:

> Dodge City has been for the past 10 years an exclusive cattle town. The cattle traffic made money for its citizens but it did not make a town. It was a question whether the country would ever warrant the making of a respectable town here. The rains of the past three years, the assurance that the soil of the country is susceptible of successful cultivation, the recent absorption of the public domain by settlers, the removal of the cattle trail and the rapidly disappearing cowboy, have now thoroughly convinced our people that a permanent commercial metropolis at this point is demanded by the needs of the country (Reps 556).

ANGLO SUPERIORITY AND RACIALISM

In short, circumstances shift, without examination. A similar scenario of informational leaps and gaping holes is common in the standard mythological perspective of human geography. Vaguely, our fellow countrymen and women may know that the Spanish once occupied the Southwest. More clearly, they may understand that Native Americans preceded whites. Then, in a sudden fast forwarding of events, the landscape is all hardworking farmers and cattlemen, lawmen and outlaws, and all of them white.

The races to be conquered had lived, thrived and generated complex societies in the New World for untold centuries. Within decades, they were reduced in the eyes of Anglos to species as inferior as the south's Black slaves. Voices like the editor Samuel Prouty - white, male and paternalistic - dominate the mythical West and, indeed, the American story. The right and the motivation to dominate, both

in voice and action, represents a coup itself born of myths that had been brewing for centuries, but which cohered in force in the 19th century, the century of frontier migration.

"The United States shaped policies which reflected a belief in the racial inferiority and expendability of Indians, Mexicans and other inferior races, and which looked forward to a world shaped and dominated by a superior American Anglo-Saxon race" (Horsman 190). This practice had its roots in "science" as well as economic determinism. A vague biological notion based on skin color gained scientific popularity in the 19th century and gave rise to the separation of races based on distinctive physical characteristics, with Anglo features presumed to be the most superior. Simultaneously, a religios notion took hold that America had been set aside by Providence as the place where the greatest human potential would be realized. Illustrative of this theological theme are comments made by President Andrew Jackson in 1832 on the signing of orders to relocate the Five Civilized Tribes to west of the Mississippi River for their "protection":

> Providence was guiding the hand of the American race, and that the same providence which had blessed the United States with a good government, power and prosperity and provided that inferior peoples should yield their 'unused' domain to those who through its use could benefit themselves and the world (Horsman 202).

The reference to "unused domain" bridges the economic argument to the theological one.

> From the beginning, the usual justification was that Indians were not using the land properly. Relying on hunting and gathering, savagery neglected the land's true potential and kept out those who would put it to proper use...It was not that white people were greedy and meanspirited; Indians were the greedy ones, keeping so much land to themselves" (Limerick, Legacy, 190).

Once started, the Indian wars became symbolically important for the nation as a whole - proof, historian Richard Slotkin suggests, of the nation's "power to shape a progressive future" (8). The Sioux wars, during which General George Custer was killed, provide a culminating lesson in myth versus reality. The completion of these wars opened for white settlement the very northern properties that Lonesome Dove's Call and McCrae covet - with tall, fresh, untrammeled grass.The importance of the episode as fodder for myth lies more in the character of Custer himself. Custer's work out west coincided both with America's centennial celebration, a point at which they were anxious to show how "the 'American experiment' had produced a society that was not only morally and ethnically superior to that of the Old World, but economically more potent as well" (Slotkin 4). But the year also saw "the worst economic depression in its history, and a crisis of cultural morale as well" brought on by the transition to an industrial society that discouraged small

businesses and nurtured a working class (Slotkin 5).

In the midst of this social anguish, Custer became a welcome hero. "To contemplate Custer was to turn from the tragedy of fraternal strife to the classic quest of the republic's heroic ages, the mission to bring light, law, liberty, Christianity, and commerce to the savage places of the earth." War against Native Americans was itself a mythical statement on the nations's "power to shape a progressive future" (Slotkin 9). In the middle of its 100-year celebration, the nation was forced to contemplate Custer's death. With the help of the widely-circulated "Death-Sonnet for Custer" by Walt Whitman, the idea took hold "that Custer's death completes a meaningful myth-historical design, a grand fable of national redemption and Christian self-sacrifice, acted out in the most traditional of American settings" (Slotkin 11).

Mexicans became the target of the same cultural logic that influenced Native American policy. The Mexicans did not develop their lands with zeal; therefore, they were racially inferior and intended to be dominated. "The Mexicans who stood in the way of Southwestern expansion were depicted as a mongrel race, adulterated by extensive intermarriage with an inferior Indian race" (Horsman 210). By the late 1870s, Mexicans found in Texas country are largely perceived of as thieves, and indeed, cross border theft was common, with Mexican cattlemen claiming "they were only taking 'nana's

cattle; - grandmas' cattle - and that the gringos were merely raising cows for the Mexicans" (Montejano 82). Mary Jaques, a real life English visitor to Texas in the 1880s, found that prejudicial notions about the expendability of Mexicans shocking. Observing the British-raised gentlemen of her ilk, she notes that they bragged about the thrill of hanging a Mexican. The Mexican, she wrote, "seems the Texan's natural enemy; he is treated like a dog, or perhaps, not so well" (Montejano 83).

Compared to the cultural, political and theological energy devoted to suppressing Native Americans and Spanish descendants, blacks barely registered in the Frontier picture. Although blacks played prominent roles in the cavalries conquering Native Americans and Mexicans, although they migrated in force as farmers, they simply do not exist in the Western consciousness. Their history is a case of conspicuous absence. In their survey, The Negro Cowboys, Philip Durham and Everett L. Jones found that all ethnic groups - Chinese included - held some spot in Western literature or informal myth, "All but the Negro cowboy, who had vanished" (Durham 2).

HUCKSTERISM AND INTELLECTUALISM COMBINE

For every 19th century American soul that nurtured a vision of the West as the great Christian experiment, there appeared to have been hundreds more who hungered for the gritty, bloody tale. The Western myth became a lucrative form of entertainment with the development of the dime novel, 10-

cent magazines which first appeared in 1860. Erastus Beadle, who invented the concept, sold almost 5 million between 1860 and 1865 (Smith 100). Westerns were popular, pressing writers to come up with countless tales. As competition grew, so did sensationalism. "When rival publishers entered the field the Beadle writers merely had to kill a few more Indians. But it went farther than that...Killing a few more Indians meant, in practice, exaggerating violence and bloodshed for their own sakes, to the point of an overt sadism" (Smith 101).

There were those, like Kit Carson, who paled when meeting his myth. Then, there was Buffalo Bill Cody, a lowly army scout "discovered" by New York serial story writer, who happily became "an epic hero laden with the enormous weight of universal history. He was placed beside Boone and Fremont and Carson in the roster of American heroes, and like them was to be interpreted as a pioneer of civilization and a standard bearer of progress" (Smith 119).

Cody parlayed the fame from dime novels into a cottage industry. Author of several autobiographies, Cody took the public's zeal for Western stories and gave it a visual spin, creating the popular Wild West Shows that he eventually brought to the great courts of Europe.

> The West of Anglo American pioneers and Indians began reimagining itself before the conquest of the area was fully complete. In the late 19th century, Sitting Bull and Indians who would later fight at Wounded Knee toured Europe and the United States with Buffalo Bill in his Wild West shows (White 613).

Having provided fodder for writers, Cody laid the groundwork for film-makers of the coming century. They embraced the Western with great enthusiasm, often featuring Cody's life story. Spinning ever-new plots from this fictionalized West, the images of the fine arts settled into already familiar themes: the rugged, adventurous male; the virtuous wife (or her colorful counterpart - the whore with a heart,) and the savage. As subsequent chapters will explain, the conventions of Western novels and film were in the works before the mid-19th century, and became firmly established at the turn of the century.

The market for these works has been strong and steady. "By 1958, Westerns comprised about 11 percent of all works of fiction published in the United States" (White 613). Film makers have been busier than writers. Michael R. Pitts has compiled a list of 4,200 films in Western Movies: A TV and Video Guide to 4,200 Genre Films. Thirty prime-time television Westerns were invented in the first decade of the medium. Male, female and non-white characters play by the mythological rules. Maureen O'Hara stands in the background waving goodbye. Blacks don't exist, but Indians do, played by whites. Mexicans are greasy and have bad teeth. John Wayne will save them all and becomes such an icon that even real cowboys measured the excitement of their life on what they had seen on the screen.In a late 1970s New Yorker piece called "The Last Cowboy," journalist Jane Kramer found a Texas cattle

ranch foreman in a funk over the disappearance of the true West. As she pressed him for details, she realized the West he had lost was not the one of his ancestors, but the one he had seen at the movies (White 614).

Other arts reproduce the trend. Frederic Remington's bronze cowboys are never in danger of falling from their bucking broncos. In canvas portraits of the West, Corlann Gee Bush finds "The men have individualistic adventures. Women have babies in arms and perch like manikins on wagons" (Armitage 19). Occasionally in these portraits, the women must be rescued from 'the rapacious savage," a small twist on the madonna theme (Armitage 28).

But the modern American myth is not just rooted in popular culture. It is a part of our intellectual and political landscape, as a result of forces that percolated simultaneously with the development of the Western in literature and film. Buffalo Bill was making appearances in Chicago in 1893, at the same Columbus Exposition where historian Frederick Jackson Turner first presented "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Bucking historical conventions of the day, that defined the fabric of the national story as comprised of the nation's European past or the strife of the Civil War, Turner believed that Western expansion defined the national experiment.

> American democracy is fundamentally the outcome of the experiences of the American people in dealing with the West. Western democracy through the whole of

> its earlier period tended to the production of a society of which the most distinctive fact was the freedom of the individual to rise under conditions of social mobility, and whose ambition was the liberty and well-being of the masses" (Turner 95).

In an economic sense, Turner considered the nation's wealth of free land as democracy's cradle. And while he pronounced the frontier all but filled, he considered the Western frontier to have nurtured a superior form of democracy that was likely to live on.

An eloquent writer, Turner set the tone for the perpetual aggrandizement of the individual, describing the qualities of the classic American settler:

> That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom - these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the Frontier (Turner 61).

The thesis was "heresy." But it also, by 1910, "dominated the profession so completely that the American Historical Association was branded one great Turner-verein," according to Turner biographer Ray Billington.

Late 20th century hindsight, defined by concern for racial and ethnic groups and the environment, is an acute lens through which to view Turner's century-old ideas. Turner's

approach to aboriginal populations seems to put ribbons and bows upon the prevailing attitude that non-Whites had to go. The frontier is "the meeting point between civilization and savagery" (Turner 38). The need to deal with the Native Americans, far from being an ugly chapter in our history, served as "a consolidating agent in our history" (Turner 46). The process of surging forward, of eliminating what was in the way, actually developed the national character, according to Turner. The frontier, with this savage threat, served as no less than "a military training school, keeping alive the power of resistance to aggression, and developing the stalwart and rugged qualities of the frontiersman" (Turner 72.) The challenges of this nation gave rise to a new kind of leader - Andrew Jackson being a case in point - who embodied "the western forces of aggressive, nationalism and democracy" (Turner 71-2).

Turner romanticizes the individual as well as the broader political gestures needed to consolidate economic and social needs. Thus, Turner's legacy was the validation of a Western story in which the conflicting interest of the individual and economic imperatives were made to march together toward greatness. In The Genesis of the Frontier Thesis: A Study in Historical Creativity, Billington documents the research Turner undertook to form his theory and declares the master not a sorcerer, conjuring a Teflon theory in an isolated laboratory, but a synthesizer. The threads of the thesis were

drawn from oral accounts, historical societies, daily newspapers, commercial periodicals and the intellectual writings of both American and European scholars of the day. These sources already considered the elements of Turner's thesis to be fact - from the importance of free land to the unique characteristics of the individual - even if some of the building blocks were folkloric. Although he earned his place as the father of Frontier history - and considered credit for his work "his just due" (Billington 201) - Turner's accomplishment was more narrow than is generally believed today, Billington argues. The significance of Turner's theory was not to create a Frontier perspective, but to create a Frontier hypothesis. "He offered the profession not a completed historical structure but a blueprint with which to build one, and he told his fellow craftsmen that if they built it as he suggested they would understand a great deal about the how and the why of their country's past" (177).

Although his name may not be a staple in American elementary and high school textbooks, his ideas took root such that William Cronon, editor of Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past, laments "...we have not yet figured out a way to escape him. His work remains the foundation not only for the history of the West, but also for much of the rest of American history as well" (Cronon 145). As will be explored more thoroughly in the next chapter, the seamless connection of the frontier experience to ideas of democracy

became our national context.

No one can identify whether each American has been influenced more by the work of Buffalo Bill Cody and the movies or the Turnerian mind-set of America's school textbooks. What is important to know is that the Western mythology keeps coming back at us, be it in the form of the Marlboro Man or President John Kennedy's evocation, in 1960, of A New Frontier and Ronald Reagan's 1985 inaugural reference:

> ...the men of the Alamo call out encouragement to each other; a settler pushes west and sings his son, and the song echoes out forever and fills the unknowing air...it is the American sound: It is hopeful, bighearted, idealistic - caring, decent and fair (Limerick, Legacy, 323-4).

CHAPTER TWO: FINDING THE REAL WEST, LOSING AN AMERICAN STORY

As the previous chapter shows, the Western "myth" was a passionate reflection of what the new nation could be, forged by those with a vested interest in making it thus. Unlike classic myths - enduring but clearly fictitious - the Western myth has merged with fact, providing immeasurable contribution to the national spirit, but influencing Frontier history such that it is, as historian Patricia Nelson Limerick writes, "virtually the P.T Barnum of historical fields, providing opportunities galore for suckers to confuse literal fact with literary fact" (Cronon 168).

As energetically as the turn-of-the-century historian Frederick Jackson Turner tried to define the superior strain of American democracy vis a vis the Frontier experience, so historians like Limerick are enthusiastically unravelling the mythical foundations of our historic perspective. For these historians, Turner's work is the scapegoat, even if, as his biographer, Ray Allen Billington suggests, the thesis has suffered from "overacceptance" (Billington 4). (Rebutting Turner's theories has become a popular technique for launching new Western histories. Arguments with the late master are found in the introductions or first chapters of the works not

only of Limerick, Richard White, Julie Roy Jeffrey, Richard Crosson and Richard Slotkin but other historians reviewed in the research of this project and not cited.)

These so-called New Frontier historians recognized that they have passed through a door opened by the changing face of American circumstances. William G. Robbins, a specialist in the frontier settling of the Northwest, describes the slow cracking of the Turnerian stronghold in a 20th Century historic context:

> Turner's Thesis offered an explanatory model that was largely unchallenged until the spiraling unemployment and economic crisis of the Great Depression....The Turner myth, spurred by American global hegemony immediately following World War II, lived on in lecture halls and public forums...The exceptionalist theme began to erode in the wake of events both distant and domestic - the Vietnam war and the civil strife of the 1960s - when scholars began to take a less optimistic, more tragic view of the American past (Limerick, Trails 187).

The work of these modern Frontier historians fit hand-in-glove - is made more possible by - the post-Vietnam call on the part of American's ethnic groups and by women for a greater voice, by environmentalists concerned about non-renewable resources, by economists who lament the rich-get-richer, poor-get-poorer patterns of 20th century capitalism. Not by coincidence, even the mainstream American public is curious about what **really** happened in the West, as evidenced by the popularity of revisionist Western films, not to mention

when the longstanding association between America and financial opportunity for all appears to have played itself out. The American Dream is ready for a rewrite. And while consensus on the new version is nowhere near formed, current Frontier historians recognize that the search for new truths about the American Frontier can relate, as does the Frontier myth itself, to how Americans perceive themselves.

Suspicion that the American Western story was other than an unbroken chain of economic and social triumphs was raised as early as Turner's day. In his essay, "The Problems of the West," Turner himself quotes, and decries, the work of French philosopher Emile Boutmy, who describes the American experience thus: "The striking and peculiar characteristic of American society is that it is not so much a democracy as a huge capitalization of its enormous territory" (Billington 128).

Turner's theories ruled the day, and Boutmy's claim to fame appears to have begun and ended with Turner's brief rebuttal. But the idea partly defines the new Frontier reality, which also bears continual references to the importance and impact of the myth of the West. For this latter theme, Henry Nash Smith, author of Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth, has gained almost Turnerian stature among modern scholars. Donald Wooster, University of Kansas historian who specializes in environmental issues, lauds Smith as "The first bona fide revisionist, in a sense of

the prophet of a New Western History...for it was he who first told us what was wrong with the old history and dared to call it myth" (Limerick, Trails 7). High praise for Smith can be found in the writings of many of Wooster's New Historian colleagues. A former student of Yale, where Smith reigned, Patricia Nelson Limerick herself now trains modern Western historians. Forty years after Virgin Land, Limerick and her own students are writing a new version of Western history in which the so-called rugged individual was, instead, an innocent if not a victim in an unforgiving territory dictated by a dominant federal government and the interests of business. Individuals of all races and genders were secondary to economic imperatives, generally manifested by extractive industries.

The sheer number of New Frontier histories is exploding, thwarting a comprehensive review in a study of this scope. The summary of new Western history will be restricted to those which correspond to Lonesome Dove, whose numerous themes easily provide a representative framework. As the subsequent sample of New Frontier themes and theorists will show, frontier settlers may have been fooled by promises. But as members of burgeoning new communities, settlers were remarkably adept at abandoning the ideals that purportedly carried them West, artists at discovering the means to the end.

TOILING IN THE MYTHICAL GARDEN

"Westward expansion was supposed to create a land of independent, agrarian landowners and to prevent the rise of a wage-dependent laboring population," writes Patricia Nelson Limerick (Trails, 125). Among other assumptions, "civilization was to find in this region its next, higher incarnation" (Limerick, Trails 8). When Limerick set out to find how true these promises were, she found the story of Howard Ruede. Ruede struck out from Pennsylvania to start a small farm in Kansas in 1877. He had $50 in his pocket, insufficient funds to actually farm. During the first year, he built himself a frequently-collapsing sod house and tried to dig a well. But most of his time was spent doing odd jobs for other farmers or going into town to make extra money as a printer. Town was 13 miles away, and for lack of animals, he walked it, often staying in town rather than making the walk back. In short, Ruede migrated to Kansas to be a farmer, only to become a laborer and boarder, at least in the early years. "I was never so much surprised as when I got Aunty Clauder's letter a couple of weeks ago," Ruede wrote back to his family in Pennsylvania. "She tries to make me out a hero, but for the life of me I can't see anything heroic coming out here to do farm work - do you?" (Limerick, Legacy 133).

Ruede's experience was typical. Farmers were pathetically undercapitalized, so much so that in Lonesome Dove, murdering bandits treat them with disgust and contempt. Farmers often had insufficient capital, for the capital that was needed was

noteworthy. As historian Richard White enumerates:

> One-hundred sixty acres of raw prairie or plains land did not constitute a farm. To work it and live on it, a farm family needed work animals, a wagon, plows, harness, seeders, a house, and a well. A farmer needed barbed wire fencing, barns, and outbuildings. To break the forest 40 acres of a 160-acre homestead and put it into production cost about $1,000 (262).

Often, farmers drew mortgages from banks or, soon enough, a thriving mortgage industry whose interest rates ranged from 8 to 12 percent. In the recession of the late 1880s that hurt so many cattle ranchers, farmers also lost their shirts. Some 90 percent of Kansas farmers and 45 percent of Nebraska farmers defaulted on loans (White, 262-3).

Remarkably, these agricultural settlers often left one farm only to start another, apparently in search of the personal wealth they had expected. One rural Oregon community found that only about one in three in residence in 1879 were still there in 1880. In east central Kansas, about two-thirds of the settlers present in 1860 had taken off for new territories by a decade later. "Only success proved much of an impediment to movement. Usually the wealthiest part of the community tended to stay, whereas the less successful people tended to move on" (White 186). One should not assume, however, that agricultural wealth formed the foundation of Western towns. Indeed, urban areas beat farmers out West.

> By 1880, the west had become the most urbanized region of the United States. Many people lived concentrated in a small area while around them lay thousands of

> square miles of sparsely populated land...Towns often existed before farmers and ranchers arrived in any numbers (White 184).

Numerous examples indicate that young men in search of wages flooded West far more rapidly than farmers, providing a demand (for entertainment and accommodations) that influenced Western social dynamics far more than agriculture. The stories of cowboys, depicted with both humor and poignancy in Lonesome Dove's trail drive sequences, point out the folly of perceiving the West as a romantic experience for individuals. Cow hand work, for as little as it paid, was a dangerous job that included such risks as getting struck by lightning, gored by bulls, trampled by horses, drowned in rivers. Moreover, the cowboy was wedged in a trail hierarchy of power that left him little independence. He took orders from the trail boss, and if the cook told him to get water, he better do so or prepare to go hungry. All this for wages that rarely reached higher than $35 a month (Porter 502).

Although some cattle bosses were larger-than-life characters, the cattle driving business was hardly a lone man's pursuit. When one thinks of the great trail blazers like Shanghai Pierce or Charles Goodnight, one thinks of a man, a horse, and the settling sun. In reality, although short-lived, the large cattle operations were the precursors of the multinational corporation, with investment money frequently coming in from Great Britain (Osgood 94-5). Throughout the northern region, conglomerates came to be typical. Investors

who had to buy land in Texas merely assumed its ownership in Nevada, Idaho and Wyoming. P.B. Weare made a fortune exporting first prairie chickens, then buffalo robes and finally grain. "By 1881 he had 50,000 head of cattle grazing on public lands in three territories. Even larger was the Sparks-Harrell operation in Nevada and Idaho, which at its peak supposedly had 150,000 cattle grazing on 3 million acres (White 271). In 1865, Texas cattle could be bought for $3 a head and sold to northern markets for $30 to $50 (Young 73). The promise of profits became a catalyst for fevered investment, much as the cry of "gold" did in California. Investors found the gains too good to resist and moved into Texas. The enormous XIT Ranch in western Texas, owned by Chicago investors, covered 3 million acres."

Westerns movies and literature tend not to mix their businesses: a cattle drive movie is about cows; the development of the railroad is a completely different genre. As a result, the absolute reliance of the growing cattle industry on trains is not common cultural knowledge. Likewise, popular cowboy and cattle drive lore fails to acknowledge the numerous forces that conspired to bring the industry to its knees less than two decades after it began. Greed expanded the cattle industry beyond what the land could support. Overgrazing opened the door for starvation. Drought weakened underfed cattle; deeply cold winters finished them off by the millions. Deeply connected to investors, even the great

Charles Goodnight lost his shirt (McMurtry New Republic 38). Had the industry not collapsed under its own weight, massive conflict would have ensued. Cattlemen had claimed massive amounts of the public domain without right or title, often fencing in huge stretches to keep his cattle near. With a national spirit invested in the image of the little guy and his little plot of land, homesteads eventually made claim on the cattleman's domain.

Yet the farmer, once settled on his plot, was no less independent of greater economic factors than the cattleman was independent of banks, investors, railroads and free land. Beside side work for wages, as Ruede performed, besides farmers' aforementioned relationship with bankers, they rapidly became small-time players in a complex economic system tied to transportation. In 1840, Mississippi historian John W. Monette described the importance of the steam boat, which had begun reaching as far as Montana, via the Mississippi and Montana rivers. He perceived it as a triumph of the Republic and proof of the nobility of the American frontier experiment (Smith 198). To the contrary, concludes Henry Nash Smith:

> The steam engine was not only to subordinate the yeoman farmer to the banker and merchant of the new Western cities; eventually it transformed him into a producer of staple crops for distant markets and thus placed him at the mercy of freight rates and of fluctuations in international commodity prices (182).

Examining the gap between fantasy and reality for Frontier women, Annette Kolodny tells the story of settler Sarah Everett, a mere 29 years old, who has received a package of bows and other dress trimmings from her sister in New York. The gift has made this woman, this "madonna of the prairie" weep. "I am a very old woman. My face is thin sunken and wrinkled, my hands bony withered and hard. I shall look strangely I fear with your nice undersleeves and coquettish cherry bows (Kolodny 174).

Nothing, including the correspondences of their female friends, prepared women for life as settlers. The myth that they would remain the same, the setting merely more rustic, wore down as fast as Sarah Everett's looks or the leather on Howard Ruede's single pair of shoes. The litter of abandoned household goods along the wagon trails better illustrates the gap between expectations and reality. Preparing to continue life exactly as they knew it, settlers commonly packed their wagons too heavily for their ox to bear, particularly through mountainous passes. Women literally walked, not rode, west, and arrived without a pot to cook in. "The way west was a thoroughfare littered with abandoned goods and dead animals," cooking stoves and baking ovens being among the conveniences most frequently tossed, along with clothing and dry goods (White 200). An estimated 3 percent of all travelers died on the way West, most often victims of cholera or diphtheria (White 199). Julie Roy Jeffrey's study of Frontier women

failed to turn up convincing evidence that women actually favored the move; her best conclusion was that women accompanied their men to keep the family together. Arrival at one's destiny meant life in sod huts and insufficient funds and equipment for farming. Illness and the death of children, barbaric living conditions and lack of social interaction, drove some women to suicide, others to attacking their husbands, as Jeffrey's survey of trail diaries shows.

Jeffrey found that life for women improved as they began settling in communities of multiple families. But her work and that of others on women in these developing communities Turner's contention that groups of migrants forged superior democratic and socially pure settings. Western women were supposed to have been the moral arbiters. But woe to she who t r i e d t o p l a y t h a t r o l e .

In the previous chapter, the diary of Phoebe Judson, a Washington state settler, described the raising of a church steeple in town, and how it symbolized her return to civilization, to her "ideal home" (Jeffrey 179). These early days of town life among her fellow settlers brought little commercial activity. But as the town grew, requests to open saloons were submitted. On hearing of the saloon, women of her town tried to rally their political power.

> With hearts all aflame with love for husbands, sons and fathers," she recalled, the women "rallied to the rescue," only to find that rescue was not

> desired. "We visited by ones and twos, and in companies, the different members of the city council, and pleaded for the safety of our loved one; but all in vain - our pleadings, prayers and entreaties - greed of gold carried the day (Jeffrey 180).

Voices of moral righteousness soon were defined as the activities of the eccentric fringe. "The radical reformers who stood for total eradication of sinful elements in local society...was attributed to the 'praying woman's temperance movement, an alliance of evangelical, feminist and anti-liquor idealism" writes historian Robert R. Dykstra, who studied the influence of the cattle trade on Kansas towns (Dykstra 245). These voices were drowned out by what Dykstra calls "the politics of factionalism" (Dykstra 207) but which might as well have been called the influences of "Greed of Gold." "Western women, in the end, retired to their homes" (Jeffrey 189) to let vice and capitalism play out around them.

The thriving business of prostitution represents another example of the moral ambiguity which defined the Western town. At best, women who campaigned against prostitution succeeded in having brothels banished to the edge of town (Reps 548). In her comprehensive study of prostitution in the West, Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery, Anne Butler describes the social approaches communities devised for coping with moral ambiguities of vice. Reviewing newspapers and courthouse criminal records, Butler documents a reality in which prostitution is embraced, but prostitutes are socially

punished for carrying out their job. To remain "undisturbed by the sordid realities around them," communities left the punishment of prostitutes to sheriffs and judges (76). Prostitutes were frequently arrested and fined. And as Butler's study shows, to make sure they paid those fines, many a sheriff and judge released prostitutes from jail so they could return to their livelihood (100-1). Thus, the business of policing this illegal activity actually became one of supporting it. "Without the peculiar involvement of officials, frontier prostitution could not have existed as it did for the bonanza years (76)".

Yet for straying from the cult of domesticity, prostitutes were widely harassed, non-white prostitutes bearing the brunt of social condemnation, Butler found. In newspaper accounts of their arrests, even their deaths, prostitutes were frequently ridiculed. Only rarely did the published voice of reason question a system in which prostitutes were fined, but saloon owners received immunity (Butler 84).

Townsfolk were passionate about protecting their developing communities - sponsoring "vice" as an important source of revenue. They also were loath to spend a nickel to advance civilization, education being a key example. "Even bustling frontier Kansas City...had only one public school in the late 1850s, which most city children could not attend. A school census indicated that 90 percent of school-aged

children were not in school (88)". That Kansas City's children did not have access to free public education until 1867 represents, to historian Julie Roy Jeffrey, a failure to ensure that children would be exposed "to the moral, religious and educational values (88)".

THE WILD WEST

No example seems to illustrate communal tolerance for semi-civilization as well as the presence of violence. Western mythological images are replete with shoot-outs and corpses hanging from nooses. "Violence existed, the myth said, but the violence was personal and it largely vanished as society imposed law and order (White 328)". Episodes on the establishment of law and order are themselves among the most colorful in Western lore. Wild Bill Hickok served as Abeline Town Marshall for a time; Wyatt Earp kept peace in Wichita.

In reality, townspeople considered these employees helpful primarily in preventing drunken behavior. Hickok and Earp both did double-duty as street commissioners, charged with the repair of thoroughfares in advance of the spring cattle runs (Dykstra 124). Gunshot homicides resulting from quarrels "were somehow considered legitimate," particularly if they occurred in saloons, over gambling and among transients (Dykstra 129). Peace and order did not rule just because city leaders established the sheriff's position, erected courthouses or even banned the presence of handguns within city limits, as they did in Wichita (White 330). During the

heyday of Kansas cattle drives, instances are recorded in which businessmen threatened to hang the town marshall for gunning down cowboys (Dykstra 121). Townspeople were cautious about protesting violence, fearing to offend "clannish Texans easily roused to a kind of ethnocentric defensiveness (Dykstra 116)" In Abeline, court records show only three men hung for murder during the height of the Kansas cattle days. Town lore recorded at least that many examples of lynchings (Dykstra 129).

The military contributed to the bloodthirsty nature of frontier law and order with "tomahawk justice," a scalp-for-a-scalp philosophy of shooting Indians on sight, easily adopted by non-military migrants. "Instead of acting as a police force to help ferret out individual offenders, army officers often avenged an Indian raid by swooping down upon a camp and slaughtering as many as possible, with no attempt to distinguish the guilty from the innocent (Gad 18)". And as the anecdote about justice in Abeline shows, civic-minded citizens continued the bloodthirsty tradition. Between 1849 and 1902, at least 210 vigilante movements in the American west claimed 527 victims, most of whom were hanged White 332). Parsimony motivated citizens, who

> Sometimes seemed to be more frustrated with the cost of suppressing crime than with crime itself. In such cases, they stormed jails to hang men already in custody, thus saving the town or county the cost of a formal trial and execution. Most of the residents of Golden, Colorado, for example, praised an execution by a local vigilante group for having saved the county $5,000 to

$6,000 (White 333).

Depicting the trend in Lonesome Dove, McMurtry records the panic of murderer Dee Boot as he clings to hope that he will be hung before the townspeople storm the jail (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 675-6; Wincer, Part III). In a more wry comment on the blood lust, McMurtry frames an angry mob in the shadow of a spanking new Santa Rosa courthouse. A heinous Indian killer has successfully killed himself minutes before his hanging. Fearing riot, the sheriff strings the dead body from the noose for public display, providing immense satisfaction for the crowd (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 938).

GOVERNMENT'S CONTRIBUTION

In 1883, the women of Wichita attempted to establish an aid program for farmers whose crops had been destroyed by locusts and then by drought, and who literally were starving and freezing. Town boosters and property owners rejected the "whining" cries for aid through a county tax. "Fearing either to acknowledge the extent of the disaster or to accept out-of-state aid, men minimized the situation." A local community newspaper acknowledged that the bad publicity might retard community growth (Jeffrey 183).

Development and prosperity were key concerns not just at the local level, but at the state and national level. Farmers might be left to starve with no assistance from townspeople, but even those who prospered found they had to battle representatives of other financial strongholds, like cattle or

the rails, for representation. The history of the development of Kansas - a stopping point for the Lonesome Dove cattle drive - is replete with examples of how underhanded political machinations skewed state policy in favor of the cattlemen and in direct opposition to the benefit of farmers. State officials worked to find loopholes that would allow Texas cattle throughout the state, despite the presence of the deadly yellow fever that killed Midwestern livestock. For years, farmers had to tolerate damage to their crops caused by drives heading north. Farmers were like some "dog in a manger," Dykstra summarizes (Dykstra 182).

That the individual could even **get** land to call his own was often a misnomer, or a matter of force and violence. In both Montana and Texas, wars broke out between large-scale cattle operations whose owners had squatted without title on the property with best access to water and tried to discourage the legal assumption of their property through violence. Fence-cutting wars broke out in Texas between large-scale cattlemen and smaller entrepreneurs who wanted to start their own ranches (White 345). The affluent Northern cattleman John Sparks of the Sparks-Harrell operation in Nevada and Idaho was said to have sent two of his best hands to kill a sheepherder whose stock had encroached on his grazing land (Young 223-4). From legislating to prevent the spread of Texas fever to taking a stand in favor of the farmer against the wealthy cattleman, governmental action tended to be anti-climactic.

Kansas legislators who finally banned the fever-carrying Texas Longhorn, for example, did so after new means of transporting cattle out of Texas became popular and as the Longhorn's popularity declined among northern cattlemen.

The federal government might have vowed to aid migration for farming - the Homestead Act of 1862 would certainly suggest as much - but enough other policies worked against the farmer to make one wonder whose side the government was on. Richard White points out that the earliest surveys of the West, performed by Clarence King, head of the U.S. Geological Survey, were by his choice of mineral deposits instead of water sources for farmers. "When King chose to use the U.S. Geological Survey primarily to survey mineral deposits (rather than dam sites and water sources for irrigation), he chose to emphasize resources whose ultimate development would benefit mining corporations and not western farmers. He thus quite consciously contributed to corporate penetration of the West (135.)"

The nation's early process of distributing lands placed them generally in the hands of "Land speculators, absentee landlords, or moneylenders charging anywhere from 30 to 60 percent annual interest," writes Annette Kolodny, who adds:

> As early as 1836, President Andrew Jackson was expressing his alarm at the growing monopoly of the public lands in the hands of speculators and capitalists, to the injury of the actual settlers in the new states and of emigrants in search of new homes... Jackson's alarm had been well grounded: Of the 38 million acres of

> public lands sold between 1835 and 1837, 29 million, three quarters of the whole were acquired by speculators (Kolodny.)

President Jackson's alarm did little to change the practice of distributing the nation's lands to businesses before the individual farmer. The next large-scale episode involves the distribution of land to the transcontinental railroad developers. Between 1862 and 1872, Congress gave more than 125 million acres of land in aid in the construction of the railroads. Railroads ultimately received almost 200 million acres of land (White 145). While Congress understood that the railroad grants would tie up valuable agricultural land, its members evidently believed this was to be a short-lived problem. To the contrary, undecided about where to lay track, railroads tied up as much as one-third of a state's farmable land. The program had to be ended in 1871 (White 147).

Regardless of how poorly the federal government distributed the land, the fact of federal control tied settlers to governmental relationships more entangled than any experienced by those in the already-incorporated states (White 137). The federal government tied strings to individuals, and seemingly shackled the territories that would become new states. So complained Martin Maginnis, the delegate to congress from Montana, in 1984.

> The present Territorial system..is the most infamous system of colonial government that was ever seen on the face of the globe. (Territories) are the colonies of your Republic, situated three

> thousand miles away from Washington by land, as the 13 colonies were situation three thousand miles away from London by water (Limerick, Legacy 79).

Between scouting, charting and distributing federal land, subsidizing transportation and settling problems with the Native Americans, the hand of government was everywhere.

> The governments did not pursue pioneers west; it more often led them there. Anglo Americans did not compel the government to follow; instead, the government guided and molded their settlement. The armies of the federal government conquered the region, agents of the federal government explored it, federal officials administered it, and federal bureaucrats supervised (or at least tried to supervise) the division and development of its resources (White 48).

ETHNIC GROUPS

If there is a defining characteristic to Western settlers, it has less to do with rugged individualism and purity of purpose, and more to do with collective moral rationalization in the interest of getting the job done. This study has explored the contrast between fact and reality specifically for white Anglo males and their wives and paramours, in locations and social settings common to the 1870s territories on the cattle trails between the Rio Grande and Canadian border. Initial attention exclusively to whites has its purpose: if the American Frontier experience at once lionized and abandoned the likes of Hoard Ruede and Sarah Everett, it should be no surprise that rationales were found for exterminating Native Americans, denigrating the

descendants of Spaniards and ignoring Blacks altogether.

The previous chapter illustrated some of the rationale behind federal policy regarding Native Americans, and the importance in Western myth of the grand Native American wars. Summarizing of Indian relations based on fact, Richard White minces few words in his own assessment: "Most white Americans...were simply unwilling to allow Indians, whether transformed or not, to retain land and to achieve equality (Horsman 193)".

The relocation of the Cherokee nation from the Georgia area to west of the Mississippi is one of those watershed examples in Native American relations, crystallizing the difference between myth and reality. Then President Andrew Jackson, as illustrated in the previous chapter, was congratulating himself on hearing the call of Providence. Jackson's successor, Martin Van Buren, also lauded removal, explaining, "The wise, humane, and undeviating policy of the government in this the most difficult of all our relations foreign or domestic, has at length been justified to the world in its near approach to a happy and certain consummation (Limerick, Legacy 194)." That happy consummation - during punishing heat or fatal cold with inadequate food and medical care - came to be called the "Trail of Tears." A count of deaths of Cherokees alone during relocation and settlement is estimated between four thousand and eight thousand."Removal made it clear that there was no room for a common world that

included independent Indians living with whites. (Limerick 194)".

The lore of battles with Native Americans obscures historical fact, particularly the point that Native Americans are not and never have been members of one definable group. Accurate historical accounts include clear evidence of savagery; but also of the noble savage. Native Americans were economically raped repeatedly, but also savvy enough to cash in on economic opportunities such as selling buffalo hides or charging tolls to cattle owners for moving animals across their reservations (Osgood 94-5). Statistical analysts have shown that more Indians were killed by disease than were felled by the U.S. Army, and they have shown that warring Native American tribes did each other in more soundly than the military (Paul 129). Hunger, illness and malnutrition - deliberate governmental policies "of pacification and neglect"(Osgood 147) - killed more Indians than any other wars.

That a century's history of migrant-aboriginal relationships could, in our historic memory, be compressed to one grand image of Indian wars proves the power and potential of abbreviation in the service of myth. Descendants of the Spaniards who landed here are now all grouped together as "Hispanics," another example of creative abbreviation that simultaneously reinforces the power of the white Anglo and strips the non-Anglo party of its history and dignity.

One prevailing, useful truth about the Spanish is that they lost in a game of might and power, falling first not to Anglos sweeping in from the East but to the generations of their descendants who had intermarried Indians or, although pure-blooded, had grown tired of ties to Europe. The new Mexican government, brought to life in 1821, welcomed the migration of Anglos, unintentionally inviting their demise.

The Anglos who came - like the legendary Stephen F. Austin, one of the fathers of Texas - brought enough settlers that whites soon outnumbered Mexicans two-to-one (White 65). The battle lines over power were drawn over economic considerations. As soon as the Mexican government discouraged plans of the immigrants to introduce steamboat trade connecting the Santa Fe Trail to the Gulf (in order to protect its pack mule industry, (Montejano 18) Anglo immigrants - now in sizeable numeric force - began marshalling sophisticated economic and political forces that would eventually crush the new Mexican government.

When lands changed hands between Mexico and the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidaglo in 1848, longtime thriving Mexican ranches were absorbed by the United States. The treaty did not require their sale of the land. But they had no political power or influence and they were surrounded by a military presence of Texas Rangers and U.S. military personnel who loathed them. "When the Mexicans first sold to Americans...they were not simply individual holders of

property selling on their own free will; they were selling *because they were Mexicans* who...saw imminent American military and political destruction (De Leon 296)".

Within 50 years, the land-owning dons were but a memory, having become strangers in their own territory. Historian David Montejano documents how the land was transferred to the hands of a white economic elite. Often descendants of the early settlers like Austin, they had the power and the capital to transform the territory from minor ranching and transportation interests to a network that had joined the world market (Montejano 34).

And what of blacks? They came as slaves, with Austin's immigrants. After the Civil War, they sought work on the trails. George Sanders, a one-time cattle hand for Shanghai Pierce, estimated that as many as 12,000 African Americans and Mexicans worked the cattle trails, one third the 35,000 drovers ultimately involved in cattle trail work. Black cowhands were so prevalent that nearly every company employed at least one (Porter 495). In Lonesome Dove, Larry McMurtry's portrait of the cowhand Joshua Deets is taken right from the pages of the diaries of Charles Goodnight, whose faithful slave-assistant Bose Ikard was with him for half his life. Profiles of individual black cowhands depict characters as lively and flamboyant and - at the time - famous as Wild Bill Hickok or Buffalo Bill Cody. William Lore Katz recounts the story of several of these characters in The Negro West. Yet

Katz makes the point that while black men may have had employment opportunities - be they cowhand work or Army service - by nature these jobs were peripatetic, and prevented these hardworking and able men from helping to develop stable, thriving black communities. The flamboyant cowboy and rodeo star Nat Love ultimately left the range for a job as a Pullman porter, "the best type of position open to black men at the time"(152).

AND THE MORAL OF THE NEW STORY?

In this relatively new process of setting the record straight, revisionist historians may be prolific, but they have not necessarily been accepted. So strong are the prevailing attitudes about the old Western paradigm that Patricia Nelson Limerick has seen her revisionist peers avoid identification as Western historians: they are gender or ethnic specialists, environmental historians, regional historians, but never Western historians. Her colleagues may not want to be identified as members of this Old Boys club, but the club does not seem to want them either. Revisionists face charges of "Turner Bashing." Limerick, Cronon, Wooster and White are referred to as the "Gang of Four" (Limerick, Trails 187). Larry McMurtry himself refers to revisionists as the purveyors of "Failure Studies" and complains they are revealing nothing new - nothing regional historians had not revealed in well-read volumes written throughout the century (McMurtry, The New Republic 35).

Whether these historians are meeting the standards of their peers is beside the point to the American public. More important is the realization of New Frontier Historians that they have not escaped the Turner paradigm (Limerick, Trails 145) nor created a "new orthodoxy" (Limerick, Trail xiv). *New* facts on the *real West* may be turning up daily. But a new context - a new interpretation of what these facts have to do with our ingrained ideals of individualism, democracy and nationalism - has not. Merely showing that the Frontier experience was not what Americans thought is several steps shy of helping Americans interpret how these new perspectives blend into the weave of our national fabric.

In contrast, one leaves Lonesome Dove with the deeply seeded connection to the past still intact. This feeling is possible in spite of the many challenges in the story to time-honored myths, as the following literary analysis will show.

CHAPTER THREE: LONESOME DOVE - THE CLASSIC WESTERN THAT WASN'T

Reviewing Lonesome Dove for *Western American Literature*, Ernestine Sewell could not help but notice the many characteristics of the novel that comply with the conventions of the classic Western.

> A panoply of big sky, the surging of mighty waters, vast expanses of grassland, a cattle drive studded by adventure and misadventure: these - with or without a camp cook for comic relief, a soiled dove for romance, a thundering herd of horses, and some Indians - will fulfill the expectations of those readers who judge western fiction by the use of conventions set to a formula. For that audience, Larry McMurtry's novel Lonesome Dove proves eminently satisfying (Sewell 219).

The novel's two chief characters, Woodrow Call and Augustus McCrae, are so manly Sewell is compelled to call them "Cowboy Gods." Prior to the opening of the story, Call and McCrae already have been dubbed heroes, having exhibited great talent for exterminating Native Americans and Mexicans under the auspices of the Texas Rangers. Heading into middle age, the two transfer their now unneeded heroic skills to a cattle drive, which not only requires them to lead young men through the wilds, but to face new wilderness and as-yet untamed Native Americans. A team for more than 30 years, Call and

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Native Americans. A team for more than 30 years, Call and McCrae are bonded, McCrae explains, by the love of adventure. "...Riding a fine horse into a new country. It's exactly what I was meant for, and Woodrow too (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 832; Wincer Part IV)".

Call represents the traditional Turnerian Western hero, embodying the "dominant individualism working for good and evil (Turner 61)". He is a man of few words with solid morals including a steely work ethic; a man for whom living those ideals constitutes almost a physical need. Romantic love baffles him; his greatest affection is shown for his horse, "Hell Bitch." In contrast to Call's attachment to duty, McCrae cannot get enough of women, love, whiskey, cards or conversation. He does not appear to have a serious bone in his body. "It was a kind of lapse he had been subject to all his life: things that were clearly dangerous didn't worry him enough (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 465)". But McCrae is a remarkably skilled soldier and cowhand, the kind frequently called upon to slay a camp full of bad guys single-handedly, and who does so with great relish and delight.

At first glance, Lonesome Dove is the "Hisland" country described by Western feminist historian Susan Armitage (Armitage 12). Despite the presence of these classic Western characters and plot lines, Lonesome Dove leaves the classic Western in the dust as McMurtry pursues decidedly modern themes, both historical and literary. In his characters, plots

and settings, McMurtry continuously frames the story in familiar traditions, then nudges the boundaries of those traditions outward, subtly redrawing the lines.

SOME LITERARY BACKGROUND

Defining Lonesome Dove as a hybrid will be easiest by first defining some traditions in Western novels and films, the modern delivery system for Western lore.

Western literary historian John Cawelti describes the formula: "The Western story is set at a certain moment in the development of American civilization, namely at that point when savagery and lawlessness are in decline before the advancing wave of law and order, but are still strong enough to pose a local and momentarily significant challenge (TCLC 8)". Native Americans and outlaws are typically central, civilization is "in the wings, waiting for its clue (TCLC 8)". The Western evolved into a series of basics plots that are used time and again, but rarely mixed: Custer's last stand; a transportation type story such as the wagon train voyage or the story of the construction of the railroad; cattle-related stories involving either the development of a cattle empire or the conflict between ranches and their neighbors; the outlaw story; the marshall story; the revenge story (TCLC 9) Heroes are a staple, and they always carry a gun, Cawelti adds (TCLC 13).

James Fenimore Cooper was no farther west that New York when he began establishing the formula with his

"Leatherstockings" stories, the most famous being The Last of the Mohicans. Cawelti notes how Cooper brought together a "tripartite of townsmen, savages and intermediate hero (TCLC 9)".

Owen Wister's 1902 best seller The Virginian is cited as the forerunner of the standard Western film and television hero (Athearn 165). He is a man of few words, principled motives and deeply-held dreams. Robert G. Athearn calls it "the hairy-chested school of literature (171)." After World War I, Zane Grey put the genre into the hands of hundreds of millions of readers. Writing less than Wister about social structures and working harder on realistic images, Grey still managed to deliver "Turner's thesis on a fictional platter (Athearn 169)".

The great outdoors is an ever-present character in these novels. Amid glorious settings, men engage in "a courageous contest with nature, a combat against a respected opponent, in which only the best of men were successful (Athearn 169)". The land moves Owen Wister's Viriginian so deeply that he tell his new bride he sometimes wants "to become the ground, become the water..mix myself with the whole thing. Never unmix again (Tompkins 4)." They appreciate the silence of the great land, as though it cleanses their souls and makes these strong, silent types feel less alone (Tompkins 168). The fact that these men **are** silent is no small matter. "Westerns distrust language. Time and again they set up situations whose message

is that words are weak and misleading, only actions count; words are immaterial, only objects are real," writes historian Jane Tompkins. She could have been describing Woodrow Call. Western scholars Michael T. Marsden and Jack Nachbar find the strong, silent type has only very recently been complemented by a new kind of hero: "the philosopher has been added - the man of ideas (TCLC 91)". Gus McCrae is a giant among this type.

Athearn pinpoints the 1950s as a point when films began to shift focus from the individual hero and toward perspectives of communal activity (181). The race barrier slowly cracked as blacks appeared in casts, and Native American women and children began to stand among the warriors (182-3). "There was a shift in perspective; but in general, the old mythological qualities had not been destroyed or even damaged," Athearn concludes, his survey ending in the mid-1970s (180). Until that point, there remained discernable "good guys," and the right good guys always won, notes Richard Etulaun, another Frontier Western scholar (TCLC 2).

In literature, "a 'new fiction' has grown up alongside the new history," writes Eliott West (Limerick, **Trails** 110-1). West cites a number of authors beginning in the late 1970s whose works highlight "stories of disappointment and persistence, grudging accommodations, the ghosts of traditions" breaking with the heroism of the traditional Western novel. "There is little about promise, but much about

costs. Dreams have become obsessions and comic lusts. The characters - whether snake-farm proprietors, rodeo Indians, or over-mortgaged turkey farmers - are bound to the country by a bitter affection, a connection that is hard earned and as inescapable as blood kinship (Limerick, **Trails** 111)."

Also in the 1970s, films began exploring the issue of fact versus myth, as in The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance. In that John Wayne film, a newspaper editor learns that one of the great legends of the West is a fraud. He decides that it is more valuable to uphold the legend than the truth. "This is the west, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend," he advises (Cronon 227).

At this writing, the silver screen is being littered with nouveau versions of the grand old names of the west: Geronimo; Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday. The Ballad of Little Joe, a 1993 film, tells the story of a woman who disguised herself as a male cowboy in drag. Summer, 1994 brought Bad Girls, featuring four chap-wearing, gun-toting women with cleavage, well-coiffed locks and a dead eye with a target, even while on horseback. Summarizing the new trends in Western film-making in an essay for the *New York Times*, Same Howe Verhovek observations about new Western themes mirror the themes of New Frontier history:

> The old West's new myth-makers are now drawing a place very difference from the backdrop for the stark morality tales through which Gary Cooper and John Wayne galloped.

> In part, the changes in Hollywood's vision reflect a new era that likes its myths debunked. They are the spirit that turned Columbus, the epic navigator, into Columbus, the brutal despoiler of a pristine world.
>
> In the West, just about every hero has come in for a thrashing, not just in films and novels but even in policy debates in Congress - ranchers are welfare cowboys on Federal subsidies, gold miners befoul rivers, Paul Bunyan kills spotted owls.

In short, the Western story is revised but not reinterpreted, the pendulum swings as far away from Turnerian themes as it can. But rebuttals of what once was believed do not stand as a new set of beliefs.

Far from eschewing the format of the classic Western, McMurtry's story has the already mentioned John Wayne-scale military heroes cum empire builders, and not one but two sets of extraordinarily heinous outlaws, one set run by a savage Native American-Mexican, Blue Duck. The story has housewives, whores and gamblers with six-shooters at the ready. Unlike the New Western Historian's practice of unraveling the old, McMurtry embraces the longstanding mythological framework. But he definitely retools it, shifting some traditional themes - like nature - by degrees, adding others - like ethnic characterizations - where they were lacking. Gently preparing the reader with subtle breaks from tradition, McMurtry then performs extensive revisions on gender themes and they myth of heroism.

LANDSCAPE

Through Newt, the youngest member of the Hat Creek Cattle outfit, McMurtry acknowledges the unmapped country that has typified Western lore. "Captain, how far is North?" the callow boy asks his idol, Woodrow Call. "Newt, North isn't a place. It's a direction (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 222-3; Wincer Part I)". Like many Western predecessors, Lonesome Dove is a story of man against nature. But *place* is not the wholesome challenge that the strongest will survive. Nature is ever-changing and fatal.

Crossed south to north for 2,500 miles, this West is a landscape of enormous variation and climatic differentials. With the exception of Texas, Kansas and Nebraska towns, the trail to Montana is defined by rivers. Geographical markers, they are also physical challenges. The most memorable of river anecdotes involves the killing of Sean O'Brien, who is fatally poisoned by water moccasins whose nest had been disturbed (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 301-4; Wincer Part I and II).

Once the Hat Creek outfit hits the Great Plains, the men are overcome by fear of Indians. They would have been smarter to worry about thunderstorms. Within a night, Bill Spettle is dead, struck by lightning (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 529). Insects are a greater threat than Native Americans. The Arkansas sheriff July Johnson is bitten in his sleep by something he never sees. He is out in the middle of no where,

growing delirious, his legs swelling. "If a doctor saw it he could probably just cut it off and be done with it (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 679)." Such was the fate of Dillard Brawley, "The one white barber in Lonesome Dove (who) had to do his barbering on one leg because he had not been cautious enough about centipedes," remarks McCrae, who served as sawbones for Brawley (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 5). When a cloud of grasshoppers descends on the cattle drive, the invasion lasts for hours.

> Newt's first fear when the cloud hit was that he would suffocate. In a second the grasshoppers covered every inch of his hands, his face, his clothes....Newt was afraid to draw breath for fear he'd suck them into his mouth and nose....When Newt risked a glimpse, all he saw was millions of fluttering bugs...His misery increased to a pitch and then was gradually replaced by fatigue and resignation. The sky had turned to grasshoppers - it seemed that simple (McMurtry Lonesome Dove 32)".

Once the storm passes, the cattle are left grazing in grass, most of which "had been chewed off to the roots (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 568)." Imagine what these insects did to farms.

Without trees or caves as natural shelters - no place for the Hat Creek outfit to hide when a relentless sand storm begins carrying "small, low clouds blowing...behind the little sand streams came a river, composed not of water but of sand (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 282; Wincer Part I)". These battles with nature are not always cast in such grand scale.

In the case of Ogallala farmer Maude Jones, the constant whistling of wind drives her to suicide. "Can't stand listening to this wind no more," states the note she leaves behind (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 652).

The author creates a sense of the power of pristine land as he shifts scenes from the crude but thriving Texas to the unsettled territory that once was called The Great American Desert. Other fictional cowboys have traveled this land, and taken comfort from it. Vespers in Riders of the Purple Sage, sleeping under the stars in a windy canyon feels, "that he was no longer alone (Grey 91)". In contrast, as Gus tracks the heinous Blue Duck and a kidnapped prostitute named Lorena, he misses his companions and the sounds of civilization.

> He had forgotten emptiness such as existed in the country that stretched around him. After all, for years he had lived within the sound of the piano from the Dry Bean, the sound of the church bell in the little Lonesome Dove church, the sound of Bol whacking the dinner bell....But here there was no sound, not any (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 466-7).

ETHNIC PORTRAYALS

Consistent with life in the 1880s, McMurtry establishes the essence of the Anglo ethnocentricity that marked the time, introducing the theme quickly and with satirical gusto. In only the fifth paragraph of a more than 800 page novel, McCrae thinks the better of scaring off a rattle snake with gunshot

because folks in the nearby town might conclude there is an uprising either of Native Americans or Mexicans. "If any of the customers of the Dry Bean, the town's one saloon, happened to be drunk or unhappy - which was very likely - they would probably run out in to the street and shoot a Mexican or two, just to be on the safe side (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 4)". The outfit's black cowboy, Joshua Deets, although probably the most valued hand of the Hat Creek Cattle Company, has the admiration of his colleagues but no visible authority or rank and a true sense of place: what few words he speaks usually are "Yes Captain," either to Woodrow Call or McCrae. In one of the most telling chapters, the two partners spend a considerable time wondering why Deets is in a sulk. They finally conclude it is because he is the only man of his stature whose name has not been chiseled into the official Hat Creek business sign. "Of course, it had not occurred to Augustus to put Deets's name on, Deets being a black man (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 88)".

McCrae and Call have personally killed or otherwise suppressed most of the Comanches and Kiowas in Texas, and are nonchalant about the threat of tribal attack. But other characters, including members of their cattle drive, have a sense of awe and fear about Native Americans. On his search for July Johnson, Roscoe Brown almost misses Texas and hits Oklahoma instead, until he is intercepted by troops from the U.S. Cavalry.

> "It's a good thing you run into us, Deputy," one soldier said. "If you'd kept on going west into the Territory, the dern Indians would have got you and et your testicles off."
>
> Et my what?" Roscoe asked, appalled at the casual way the soldier dropped such a terrible remark.
>
> "I've heard that's what occurs if you let ' em catch you alive," the soldier said.
>
> "Well, what's the Indian situation in Texas then? " Roscoe asked. The soldiers seemed completely uninformed on the subject. They were from Missouri. All they knew about Indians was that they liked to do bad things to white captives (McMurtry Lonesome Dove 360)".

In his creation of Blue Duck, McMurtry cheats neither the legend nor the reality that some Native Americans were marauding murderers. Blue Duck's kidnapping of the prostitute Lorena opens the door for a classic cowboy/Native American standoff between Blue Duck's gang and the ever-capable Gus McCrae.

But parallel to familiarly-styled episodes, McMurtry develops a Native American presence that speaks of oppression, degradation and cultural loss. Lonesome Dove clearly shows that all Native Americans were not the same. Blue Duck may run wild over West Texas but he's not going to show up in Red Cloud's Great Plains territory. Over the geography that Lonesome Dove covers, the Southwestern tribes are "put down." The Midwestern Sioux are still scalp-happy and kill Elmira, the runaway wife of July Johnson. The plains tribes north of

Nebraska mostly are battling starvation. McMurtry's scene in which Deets is killed by a frightened teen-age Indian boy, the closest thing to an adult male left in a starving tribe of women and young children, summarizes this situation on the Great Plains (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove Cpt 90; Wincer Part III).

The tiny group attracts the attention of the Hat Creek Outfit by stealing a dozen of its horses, to eat, not to ride. The small tribe is feasting when the former Texas Rangers show up. Call, afraid to set precedent for horse thieves, insists on reclaiming them but is willing to leave a few animals as a gift. As they debate their generous plans, one young warrior of the tribe mounts an unexpected charge against them, impaling Deets with a lance. "The young man couldn't stop coming and couldn't stop hating, either. His eyes were wild with hatred. Deets felt a deep regret that he should be hated by this thin boy when he meant no harm (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 800)".

McMurtry again intertwines traditional Anglo perspective with ethnic detail when depicting Mexicans. The contempt the Texas heroes have for Mexicans has already been noted. Four distinctly different Mexican characters - each marked by an intuitive sense of nature - offer gentle testimony to the richness of Mexican heritage.

Bolivar, the Hat Creek cook, is a Mexican who crosses back and forth working menial jobs. He had been "a competent

Mexican bandit before he ran out of steam and crossed the river (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 7; Wincer Part I)". In his sedentary life with the Hat Creek outfit he may make $3 to $4 a month. Like many Mexicans who comprised the United States labor force in the late 1800s, he continually returned to his family in Mexico, retaining his Mexican cultural roots. To the men, he was just a tired bandit and a poor cook. Beneath what they saw lived a past no one knew. The Americans "were not his companeros. Most of his Companeros were dead, but his country wasn't dead, and in his village there were a few men who liked to talk about the old days when they had spent all their time stealing Texas cattle (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 345)".

Po Campo, the outfit's second cook, had "worked the Llano," or Texas Panhandle, making a go as a rancher before being victimized by Indians (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 511; Wincer Part II). (Blue Duck had murdered his sons.) Clearly approaching old age, Campo represents Mexicans who became Texans by virtue of the border settlements following the Mexican American war. Although his ranching days were ended by Indians, the eventual loss of his land was typical of Mexican-Texans once the state joined the union.

Cholo, Clara Allen's right hand man, was kidnapped as a child by Indians who traded him to northern tribes. Cholo eventually escaped to a life in the white world as a hired hand. Despite a life away from his homeland and culture, he holds fast to his ethnicity. "He hadn't lived long in Mexico.

But he still liked to speak Spanish with Clara (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 659)".

The fourth Mexican character, Pedro Flores, makes only a cameo appearance, but his character serves as a catalyst. Flores is a Mexican still living in Mexico, engaging in the cross-border horse thievery considered stealing "Nana's cattle." ("Mexican cattle 'thieves'...claimed they were only taking 'nana's cattle' - grandma's cattle - and that the gringos were merely raising cows for the Mexicans (Montejano 82)." Although Call and McCrae view Flores as a bandit and an adversary, Flores is a legitimate, wealthy and well-guarded landowner, whose thriving operation dwarfs that of the Hat Creek Company and symbolizes the aristocratic Mexicans who once thrived in the area. When Call learns that Flores has died in his sleep, he becomes absolutely convinced to move to Montana. The last of the foes from his Rangering days are gone. "The fun's over around here (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 183; Wincer Part I)".

McMurtry's portrait of the black cowboy Deets is a blend of several true biographies of black cowboy legends. Deets predicts the arrival of a sandstorm, practically to the minute, despite the blue skies all around (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 278; Wincer Part I). His tracking skills are so astute that he knows he will find Jake Spoon among the gang of murdering outlaws named the Suggs Brothers - knows from spotting the tracks of Jake's horse (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove

278; Wincer Part I). "Deets had the best hearing in the outfit, although Deets himself claimed to rely just as much on his sense of smell (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 117)". In battle, "Deets's great ability was in preventing ambushes. He would seem to feel them coming, often a day or two early, when he could have had no particular clues (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 487)."

More than appreciating his nose, Call appreciated his judgement. "Deets observed, he remembered; rarely would he volunteer advice, but when asked, his advice was always to the point. His sense of weather was almost as good as an Indian's, and he was a superlative tracker (McMurtry Lonesome Dove 390)".

Deliberate parallels exist between Call's reaction to Deet's death and the one recorded by the legendary cattleman Charles Goodnight, who commemorated his friend with the epithet: "Served with me four years on the Goodnight-Loving Trail, never shirked a duty or disobeyed an order, rode with me in many stampedes, participated in three engagements with Comanches, splendid behavior (Durham 91-2)". Call's tombstone ode to Deets reads: "Served with me 30 years. Fought in 21 engagements with the Comanche and the Kiowa. Cheerful in all weathers, never sherked a task. Splendid behavior (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 808; Wincer Part IV)".

Tender as McMurtry's portrait may be, it has deliberate holes and shadows. Deets, like so many of the cowboys in

Durham and Jones's survey, is known only by one name. As already noted, he can barely remember two himself. The reader knows that Call is from Scotland via Mississippi; Gus is from Tennessee; Lorena the prostitute is from Mobile; Clara from Austin. But Deets has no past before his Rangering days with Call and Gus. He also has no future independent of the Hat Creek outfit, yet no power or authority among the men. Even when Call had no better or more experienced hand, "he could not formally make Deets the leader over two white men (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 129)". Were it up to him, Deets never would have left Texas, a thought he keeps to himself, but entertains often, including at death. "It was a mistake, coming into other people's country. It only disturbed them and led to things like the dead boy" who had killed him (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 800).

MCMURTRY'S WOMEN

While McMurtry's ethnic characters are hewn with gentle care and a pervasive sense of balance, the women of Lonesome Dove are explosive, presenting an almost hurricane-force against female stereotypes of meanness, passivity and feminine gentility. They serve double duty as they put the male heroic myth in perspective as well.

McMurtry will abandon historic accuracy to serve his purposes. Julie Roy Jeffrey, author of Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West 1840-1880, may have found that real women retired home after trying to assert their moral

authority, but Peach Johnson would never have backed down. Peach may only be the wife of the late mayor of Fort Smith, Ark., may only be the sister-in-law of the sheriff, but it is she who runs the place, launching Sheriff July Johnson to arrest his brother's murder (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove Cpt. 26; Wincer Part I). July and his deputy sheriff Roscoe Brown are stick figures in her shadow, wallowing in a world of moral gray in which the only obvious law enforcement task is to clear the streets of drunks. "The truth was, the killing (of Peach's husband) had confused him, for he had been a good deal fonder of Jake (Spoon) than of Ben," muses Brown (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 247).

With these two as examples of law enforcement authority, no wonder prostitution thrives. As with other themes, McMurtry portrays prostitutes in a classic Western framework. Lorena is **the** reason for visiting the town of Lonesome Dove. On a visit to Ogallala, Newt is initiated to manhood by a prostitute named Buffalo Heifer (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 750-1; Wincer Part III). Making his break from tradition, McMurtry creates a series of single women characters who are defined by their personalities or by their lack of opportunity, but never merely as society then defined prostitutes: "a single woman, far from home and family, who pursued her sordid life in singular guilty misery (Butler 26)".

Lonesome Dove has prostitutes as black-hearted as the worse bandits, like Sally Skull of Fort Worth who claimed to

have paid to have sex with a black man and who viewed Lorena's kidnapping and captivity by Indians as a lucky opportunity for cross-ethnic fornication (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 544; Wincer Part II). Nellie of Ogallala is beaten regularly both by her madam, Rosie, and the madam's gambling husband, Shaw. The madam wants her to turn quick tricks; the gambler-husband wants her to leave the cowboys alone to play cards. She lives in fear of both (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 730-3). July Johnson's wife Elmira is no victim. She hooks July into marriage to get out of Missouri, then quickly slips away from their new life in Arkansas to search for her outlaw-lover, Dee Boot (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 254-260). No legitimate female calling of the day could have held Elmira, particularly motherhood. Her indifference to her children is marked both by her abandonment of her infant and her unemotional reaction to the murder of her first-born (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 702; Wincer Part III). And then there is Janey, who is not a prostitute but who is sexually abused as she is traded from male to male as a gambling debt. To escape, she does what stereotypical prostitutes rarely do: she knocks her captor cold and takes care of herself. Although she does not live long, she is noteworthy as a survivalist cut from the stereotypical cloth of mountain men (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove Cpt. 43 and 52; Wincer Part II). Prostitutes often were referred to as "soiled doves (Jeffrey 121)". Conclusions can be drawn, then, in light of McMurtry's finely-etched portraits

of two prostitutes in particular. The destinies of several men revolve around Lorena. The love sick cowhand Dish Blodgett drives through blizzards to get to her; Jake Spoon instantly falls for her; Gus can't choose between her and his longtime love Clara Allen; Xavier Wanz, one of her employers, burns himself alive in his saloon out of sadness for losing her. Throughout it all, Lorena is aloof, emotionally self-protective, even repelled by the many shows of affection on her behalf. Lonesome Dove is the name of a town. But it also is an apt description for this soiled dove.

Or is the Lonesome Dove Lorena's direct opposite, Maggie, the prostitute who set her heart on Woodrow Call (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 291-6). Frightened, fragile and needy, "it was obvious to everyone that she was far too soft for the life she was living." The mother of the Hat Creek's adolescent hand Newt, Maggie has been dead a decade before the opening of Lonesome Dove. Yet for the lasting impact she has on Call during their brief affair - to be discussed in detail later in this chapter - she is a force as great as any of nature's calamities. Maggie's neediness was her most obvious characteristic and the one that drew Call again and again. But eventually, it just spooked him and he stopped coming back.

> She had the boy, lived four years, and died. According to Gus she had stayed drunk most of her last year."
>
> "Broke her heart," Gus said, many times.
>
> "What are you talking about?" Call said. "She was a whore.

"Whores got hearts," Augustus said (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 393; Wincer Part II).

Perhaps the most important point McMurtry makes about prostitutes is that many who chose the profession had no other prospects for sustenance. Few had the wherewithal to live as Janey did; but still, they had to live. As Clara, McMurtry's most clear-eyed female character notes, "I might have done the same under some circumstances (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 767; Wincer Part III)".

WOMEN AS HEROES

Circumstances, not choice, appear to be what also drive homemakers; McMurtry deals both boldly and in subtle, careful detail with the myths surrounding the female settler. His most active challenge to the 19th century domestic stereotype is the widowed farm wife Louisa Brooks, at whose home Roscoe Brown camps on his search for July Johnson. Louisa Brooks, who has buried two other husbands, proposes to Roscoe. Although clearly half the figure she is, he'll do. Men don't seem to be good for much, except, as Louisa puts it, "a bounce now and then, and that's about it (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 326)". Still, she prefers not to be lonely.

In Louisa, McMurtry offers a satirical challenge to the image of the Western man and his mount. Consider, for example, the virile image of Woodrow Call breaking the wild-eyed female mustang "Hell Bitch" in the opening of both the novel and the television miniseries. Compare it, then, to this scene with Roscoe and Louisa Brooks, omitted from the television series

for obvious reasons.

> When he awoke he got a shock almost worse than if he had found the rattler curled on his chest: Louisa was standing astraddle of him. ...Louisa stuck one of her wet feet under the blanket and kicked it off....Then, to his extreme astonishment, Louisa squatted right atop his middle and reached into his long johns and took hold of his tool. Nothing like that had ever happened to him, and he was stunned, though his tool wasn't. While the rest of him had been heavy with sleep, it had become heavy with itself....Louisa was wiggling around without much interest in what he thought about it all....A time or two he was practically lifted off the ground by her efforts; he was scooted off his tarp and back into the weeds and was forced to open his eyes again in hopes of being able to spot a bush he could grab, to hold himself in place (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 324-6).

When it comes to men, Louisa and Clara Allen are remarkably like Lorena: they deliberately keep their expectations low. As a young beauty in Austin, Clara is a career girl of sorts in that she runs the store her parents left when they were killed by Indians (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 74). She has several suitors, the youthful Texas Rangers Jake Spoon and Gus McCrae included. When it actually comes to selecting a husband, she spurns Gus, the man who interests her and makes her life interesting. She marries the one whose dull personality sentences her to a life of intellectual and emotional isolation. This choice is absolutely deliberate on Clara's part, as McMurtry makes clear. Clara explains to Gus why she rejected him and chose Bob Allen. "I'm too strong for

the normal man (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 775)". Later, she elaborates with Lorena, explaining that life with the adventurous Gus would have been a struggle, while life with dullard was more smooth. "Bob was too dumb to realize there'd be a struggle...Half the time he didn't notice it even when he was in it. So mainly I had the struggle with myself....It's been lonely (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 909; Wincer Part IV)".

She may spend her days in her husband's old hat and coat as though feminine vanity were not part of her perspective, but she is not immune to feminine mythology. She laments the loss of her youth and beauty. "I was always the youngest and the prettiest and now I'm not," she tells Gus (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 775). Clara reads the women's magazines of her day, and measures herself against the expectation that she be relentlessly cheerful, and judges herself lacking. Her character possess "a selfishness in her that she had never mastered. Something had been held back - what it was, considering all that she had done, was hard to say." Thinking about it, though, made her "tense with self-reproach (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 656)".

McMurtry's depiction of Clara's life makes it difficult for the reader to be so reproachful. Like most pioneers, their first home must be built from sod. Clara lives in hers 15 years, hating "the dirt that seeped down on her bedclothes, year after year. It was dust that caused her firstborn, Jim, to cough virtually from his birth until he died a year

later...It seemed to her that all her children had been conceived in dust clouds, dust rising from the bedclothes or sifting down from the ceiling (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 650)".

Children are, of course, a part of this portrait, although not always a cheerful one. The deaths of her sons were "the three deaths Clara felt had turned her heart to stone; she hoped for stone, anyway, for stone wouldn't suffer from such losses (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 649)". By her own words, these deaths define her frontier experience far more than the sod house or the isolation. "The only times I've ever wished I could die is when I've had to sit and watch a child suffer (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 904)".

Clara's life is hard and unrewarding, but it is not futile. Her sons are dead, her looks are fading, her intellect is understimulated, but her nurturing core flourishes and her ability to create a life around her, to eventually fill her home with adoptive family and spend her days in the stables with horses, is depicted as Lonesome Dove's most distinguished and noble accomplishment. She literally takes in, or at least touches, many of the men on the cattle drive, a power equal to the leadership qualities of Call and McCrae. By making solid choices, Clara becomes Lonesome Dove's only fully satisfied and fulfilled character. Her status as a heroine is unmistakable.

HALFWITS AND UNLIKELY HEROES

Clara's relative satisfaction in her isolated Nebraska

farm - equipped, though it is, with a full family cemetery - is framed as a metaphoric alternative to the manly cattle drive. In the powerful creation that is Clara - or even the feisty Louisa Brooks and Janey - McMurtry raises issues about machismo as one of the driving forces of Western development. And if these female characters don't correct the notion that the West was won solely by manly men, then McMurtry's confederacy of half-witted, lovesick and frightened males does.

Fighting with McCrae in a showdown with Blue Duck's gang, July Johnson never manages to get off a shot. He is lovesick for the prostitute Elmira to the point of suicide (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 550). His deputy, Roscoe Brown, is more pathetic, needing the leadership of the preadolescent female wild child, Janey, to keep him alive. Aus Frank is a genuine madman, spending his waning years at the banks of the Canadian River collecting buffalo bones and tossing them into pyramids (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove Cpt. 52). The buffalo hunter Big Zwey, who accompanies July's estranged wife Elmira on her escape from July, believes that by his presence near her in the same wagon, he has somehow fathered her child (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 671). Far beyond creating the occasional cowboy afraid of his shadow, McMurtry measures each cast member against the elements of classic Western heroism, gradually devaluing the notion.

One of the most charming plays on the notion of heroes

and cowards is Pea Eye Parker. Although a longtime member of Call and Gus's legendary Ranger troop, he is so lame-brained he can't remember that sure as the sun will rise, he will have to urinate after a good night's sleep.

> Pea Eye came stumbling through about that time, trying to get his pizzle out of his pants before his bladder started to flood. It was a frequent problem. The pants he wore had about 15 small buttons, and he got up each morning and buttoned everyone one of them before he realized he was about to piss (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 52; Wincer Part I).

Yet through his extraordinary endurance and his willingness to follow orders, Pea Eye walks naked and without water for days to find help for the wounded Gus McCrae, ultimately helping to reunite Call and McCrae before McCrae dies (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 852-60; Wincer Part IV).

In contrast to the faithful Pea Eye is the feckless Jake Spoon, another colleague from Call and McCrae's Texas Ranger days. Riding into the Hat Creek headquarters at the beginning, Jake - on the lam from July Johnson for accidentally killing Fort Smith Mayor Ben Johnson - muses about the beautiful grasses of Montana, thereby launching the whole affair. Yet he is the first to drop out, before the drive ever gets out of Texas, losing Lorena to Blue Duck in the process.

Having served as catalyst for the grand rugged adventure, Jake drifts into the world of genuine Western outlaws - the Suggs Brothers, by name. He kills a second time - a farmer who struck him for flirting with his wife, a killing Jake

rationalizes as yet another accident, justified as self-defense (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 577). Although physically packaged as grandly as any of McMurtry's heroes, he is without either determination or the slightest understanding that his actions are his own doing. "Beauties were his real calling, (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 575", his murders are "accidents" and his presence on a heinous Suggs killing spree "bad luck again...It was enough to make a man a pessimist, that such things had started occurring regularly (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 604-5)". When he is captured with the Suggs Brothers, by Gus, Deets and Call no less, his old companeros must hang them. "Ride with an outlaw, die with him," he (Gus) added. "I admit it's a harsh code. But you rode on the other side long enough to know how it works. I'm sorry you crossed the line, though."

"I never seen no line, Gus," he said. "I was just trying to get to Kansas without getting scalped (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 637; Wincer Part III)".

OUR HEROS

More lines are erased as McMurtry deals with the notion of the classic Western hero through Call and McCrae. Etched in grand scale, they have the oxen-sized duty of hauling his massive story: all those men, all those miles, all those rivers, all those cattle. Call is the image of strength and dependability, the intractable boss-man; Gus, a philosophical soul, embodies the pleasures of manly adventure. Yet each soon

plays against the types they were intended to represent.

McCrae is of heroic scale and skill. But unlike most of the characters in the novel, he is liberated from the machismo characteristics that drive most of the men, especially Call. Predicting a life of terminal boredom, McCrae runs away from his Tennessee gentleman farmer's existence to pursue adventure and pleasure. He has been oddly content gambling and whoring in Lonesome Dove, and one cannot help side with Woodrow Call in the conclusion that McCrae is lazy. Capable to the point of being flashy as a lawman, a gunfighter and a cowhand, McCrae rarely acts out of duty.

Although mouthy about his prejudices, he isn't afraid to consider a prostitute a human being, a Native American a source of wisdom and instruction, or a woman like Clara a match for his wit. When Lorena is captured and assaulted by Blue Duck and his gang, McCrae not only recaptures her but nurses her back to physical and psychological health. Intuitively, he understands the degree of patience this will take. And intuition is a rare commodity in classic Western cowboys.

McCrae's big mouth and *joie de vive* make him the natural conduit for all sorts of perspective on the Frontier experiment. But his most non-traditional contribution is that of an emotional crutch for Call, a man he considers too tied to duty at the expense of his soul and the feelings of others. As McCrae tells Newt, Call's unacknowledged son:

> He likes to think everybody does their duty, especially him. He likes to think people live for duty - I don't know what started him thinking that way. He ain't dumb. He knows perfectly well people don't live for duty. But he won't admit it about anybody if he can help it, and he especially won't admit it about himself....He's got to keep trying to be the way he thinks he is, and he's got to make out that he was always that way - it's why he ain't owned up to being your pa (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 834; Wincer Part IV).

McCrae considers his partner's brief affair with Maggie to be Call's one chance at being human, an affair Gus knew had deteriorated because Call could not tolerate the crack in control that tenderness brings. "All his life he (Call) had been careful to control experience as best he could (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 394)". By going to a prostitute, he had turned against his ideals. By leaving her, by failing to acknowledge their son, by keeping his distance until she died, "He had forever lost the chance to right himself, that he would never again be able to feel that he was the man he had wanted to be." And yet he viewed the child not as a means to right a wrong but as a reminder of his failure. Giving Newt his name would mean an admission that he had failed someone (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 394-5)". Redemption for Call clearly will involve embracing Newt, whom he actually begins to take pride in as Newt moves into manhood. Yet redemption will not come. Given a last-chance opportunity to tell Newt they are kin:

> Call found he couldn't speak at all. It was as if his whole life had suddenly lodged in his throat, a raw bite he could

> neither spit out nor swallow....He had failed in all that he had tried to be: the good boy standing there was evidence of it. The shame he felt was so strong it stopped the words in his throat....All his life he had preached honesty to his men...He himself was far worse, for he had been dishonest about his own son, who stood not ten feet away (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 921).

Despite appearances as a loner, Call is symbiotically tied to McCrae. The relationship is so close that Clara uses the verb "divorce" when lamenting how much she would like to have separated the two (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 780). Their relationship is almost a hobby for McCrae, who considers one of his masterpieces the fact that, as he tells Call, "I kept you from not getting no worse for so long (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 880)". But to Call, the relationship is one of unacknowledged emotional need. Hints of this closeness come, first, during McCrae's prolonged absence from the cattle drive as he tracks down Lorena and Blue Duck. Call begins to worry he has died; the possibility "came to him several times a day, at moments, and made him feel empty and strange....Some days he almost felt like turning the cattle loose and paying off the crew (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 512)". When McCrae does die, Call is riddled with confusion. "Gus's death...had caused him to lose his sense of purpose to such an extent that he scarcely cared from one day to the next what he was doing...Work, the one thing that had always belonged to him, no longer seemed to matter (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 891)".

In one of the more perverse moments of their

relationship, McCrae asks Call to promise he will bring McCrae's body all the way home to Texas for burial. The suggestion is patently absurd, as Call is frequently told by the townspeople of Miles City, Montana; by the people he passes on the trail home, and most forcefully by Clara, who curses McCrae in his grave for the idea because it separates Call from Newt. "A promise is words - a son is life," she tells Call (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 931; Wincer Part IV).

Gus does not make his deathbed wish only for himself, but for Call: "It's the kind of job you was made for, that nobody else could do or even try. Now that the country is about settled, I don't know how you'll keep busy, Woodrow. But if you'll do this for me you'll be all right for another year, I guess (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 877; Wincer Part IV)".

Perhaps for any other man, the request would have been perverse. But McCrae is correct in believing that his longtime friend does not have the depth or capacity for what others would consider *living*. When he finally reaches McCrae's designated burial ground, Call is himself worn to the bone, McCrae's body is nearly in shreds. Getting his friend back to Texas has been a nearly superhuman effort, and has made Call the brunt of ridicule. Yet Call experiences no epiphany as he finishes the burial, no emotional synthesis of his experiences that points him in a new direction. The entire affair remains within his narrow-minded context of duty and loyalty, and he comments: "This will teach me to be more careful about what I

promise. (McMurtry; Lonesome Dove 941; Wincer Part IV)".

McCrae dead, Call disillusioned, McMurtry lays to rest the concept of Cowboy Gods. Yet within the context of McMurtry's many characters, the effect is not so much like the death of the myth as a realignment of tasks. In Lonesome Dove, the heroes are shrunk, but with the roles of other cast members enlarged, a sense of an ensemble develops. This shifting of status, in what turns out to be a kind of celebration of the little people, is key to McMurtry's Frontier vision.

CHAPTER FOUR: MCMURTRY'S RESOLUTION OF THE OLD AND NEW WESTS

Grand strokes of adventure and heroism provide the zesty tone of Lonesome Dove, but there are underlying currents of darkness. The entire story itself begins with Bolivar the cook clanging a dinner bell, a gesture pronounced by all as useless and irritating. When Call finally returns to Lonesome Dove after burying almost all his close friends, he again finds Bol banging that bell. By now, the sound is like a carillon, playing a dirge on failure, futility and the importance of picking dreams well. "They say you're a man of vision," pleads a newspaper reporter who wants to hear the story of Call's trip to Montana and back. "A hell of a vision," Call replies (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 939; Wincer Part IV).

The nature of Lonesome Dove as hybrid - the contrast between Old and New historic perspectives - already has been described. But to merely tally old versus new or myth versus reality is to diminish its value. Lonesome Dove bears signs - the validity of the historic footings being one - that McMurtry has deliberated about what was then, what is now, and of what service a modern day Myth of the West can be to Americans. The result is a novel unique among modern popular Western efforts and enduring for its ability to set a standard that considers not only the requirements of literature, but

the idealistic needs of Americans.

Having ruminated about the real West, the mythical West and the failed West, McMurtry provides a voyage in which audiences bear witness to, even internalize, the transformation of our impressions of the Frontier. As the Hat Creek company embarks on a voyage, so does the reader or viewer. The starting place is John Wayne territory. The ending place, although geographically the same as the beginning, is where Patricia Nelson Limerick and Company dwell. Whether the Old or the New dominates is no more the point than whether the cows actually make it to Montana. McMurtry keeps both sides alive, safely wrapped in a wondrous tale that also is a story of a cultural history in transition from the glamour of the mythical West to the reality of hardship and loss. The importance is that the reader or viewer - 20th century inhabitants destined to have an inner connection to the mythical West - is brought into a newly fashioned country, the best of the old and new now in harmony.

Prone to avoiding interviews, McMurtry has not provided a clear blueprint of his intentions. But his writings on Lonesome Dove suggest that the emerging, multifaceted Western perspective was intentional, if not a transformational for McMurtry himself.

NEW PERSPECTIVE, INDEED

For starters, he found a place for New Frontier themes, although he accuses the New Historians of producing no more

than "Failure Studies (McMurtry, The New Republic 39)". Although McMurtry's West is by no means Hisland, the author does not accept the Frontier story as merely an episode in conquest and conquering. Even seen as the handiwork of avaricious empire builders, "the winning of the West was in large measure an imaginative act (McMurtry, The New Republic 36)". The breadth of the story reflects McMurtry's conviction that while the legacy of settlement may be unwelcome consequences, the development of the Frontier as an astonishing accomplishment. Its makers may have been greedy, but they saw what could be, and made it happen.

At the very least, humans endured, a theme that is of no small consequence to McMurtry. "Revisionists would like us to believe that they were more or less the first to notice, or at least to emphasize, how violent, how terrible, and how hard winning the West exactly was," McMurtry decries, adding that among his own Texas ancestors, the revelation is hardly news: "Everyone noticed how hard it was (McMurtry, The New Republic 35)". Those who lived the tale certainly saw, as Call did, "a hell of a vision." That phrase, McMurtry notes, is taken not from his own imagination. Rather, they are words attributed to Charles Goodnight, who lost his cattle empire to his Eastern backers, but gained a reputation as a legend (McMurtry, The New Republic 38). Men like him "saw the end in the beginning, saw the death and the destruction that lay between as well (McMurtry, The New Republic 38)".

Enduring is high human achievement, or so the story shows. Call and McCrae's lives may serve as a recrimination to mythical concepts like heroism, but those lives also stand as lessons in surviving any era. Take things too seriously, as Call does, and a person is liable to live a long but lonely life. Better to mix in a little McCrae, who tells Lorena, "If you want one thing too much it's likely to be a disappointment. The healthy way is to learn to like the everyday things, like soft beds and buttermilk - and feisty gentlemen (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 380)".

Equally versatile is McMurtry's celebration of the sum of the parts. The theme is slyly introduced in the most obscure of Lonesome Dove's running jokes. In the opening, there is reference to a sign McCrae has made for the Hat Creek outfit. In a moment of vanity, Gus has included some Latin phrasing which he, himself, cannot translate but which he believes lends the sign style. He considers the sign his masterpiece, hauls it to Montana, and insists that it be hauled back to be used as his gravestone. Roughly translated, the sign reads, "The cluster of Grapes, many sided, parti-colored, divers, through living, begets one grape (CLC 261)". Such is the message in Lonesome Dove: no one person may be able to bear the burden of heroism, but an unexpectedly large number of small souls contribute small acts of heroism, pulling human history across its brief moment in time. What appears to be a death knell to heroism is better interpreted as a liberation.

McMurtry's themes are hardly Western-specific. In one of the more subtle accomplishments of the story, McMurtry also frees the period of Frontier settlement from the burden of being our great American story, "our Trojan war...our Arthurian Cycle (Athearn 255)". In the process of linking the West with its past, he links it with the present, and all attendant lessons on the value of the little guy.

The shift at first plays like another challenge to the Western myth. When Call and McCrae are told in San Antonio to "broom yourselves off,(McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 351)" as though they are common cowboys instead of heroes, McCrae bloodies the bartender's nose as a lesson in respect. But he realizes that his days as a hero are numbered:

> We'll be the Indians, if we last another twenty years," Augustus said. "The way this place is settling up it'll be nothing but churches and dry-goods stores before you know it. Next thing you know they'll have to round up us old rowdies and stick us on a reservation to keep us from scaring the ladies (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 358).

McCrae ponders the possibility that their accomplishments amount to little as well. He asks Call, "Does it ever occur to you that everything we done was probably a mistake?...We killed off most of the people that made this country interesting to begin with (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 349)".

During his search for Lorena, McCrae learns exactly what visitors to Texas have meant when they said the buffalo has disappeared. He rides along side "a road of buffalo bones

stretched far across the plain ((McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 473)". He is shocked. He is also moved to making an observation on human geography: a chapter involving Native Americans was ending, one involving settlers and cattle was about to begin.

> What he was seeing was a moment between, not the plains as they had been, or as they would be, but a moment of true emptiness with thousands of miles of grass resting unused, occupied only by remnants - of the buffalo, the Indians, the hunters (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 474).

McMurtry opens the lens of perspective even wider, as the deaths on the journey begin to mount. Comforting Newt, McCrae explains:

> It's mostly bones we're riding over, anyway. Why, think of all the buffalo that have died on these plains. Buffalo and other critters too. And the Indians have been here forever; their bones are down there in the earth. I'm told that over in the Old Country you can't dig six feet without uncovering skulls and leg bones and such (McMurtry, Lonesome Dove 474).

DREAMS WORTH HAVING

McMurtry cuts a broad swath: settlers did their best, under trying circumstances, during a period that was unique to our nation's history but not necessarily to the history of mankind. And still the agenda is not complete. He not only couches the destructive side of the Frontier process in forgiving terms, he is boldly supportive of the myths and

dreams settlers embraced. They may have been unrealistic and unattainable. But at the time, they were what got the settlers through. Lorena wants to get to San Francisco, Gus and Call want their one last adventure, Clara looks ahead to when her own daughters will marry. Seduced though settlers may have been by hucksters and opportunists, they needed the dreams that were designed to lure: "Fantasy provided part of the fiber that helped them survive the severities that the land put them to (McMurtry, The New Republic 37)".

In a sense, McMurtry creates a brotherhood that encompasses dreamy-eyed settlers and today's Western-hip yuppies. "The dream of the West as a place of freedom and opportunity has retained its energy and vitality all the way through the twentieth century, in defiance of hugely altered conditions, and also of a huge mass of negative fact," McMurtry observed (McMurtry, The New Republic 36). Some modern Western novelists and film makers may see this as irrelevant. But in Lonesome Dove, it drives McMurtry's muse. The novel's cheerful swagger and its loveable characters validate the modern love affair with the West even as McMurtry reshapes the myth. The epic grandeur plays as a much needed rationale: Western myths were necessary then, and they're necessary now.

"Need" is precisely the word Robert G. Athearn employs (Athearn 189) when describing the American - and even European - appetite for the Western genre of film and novels. Assuming that classic Western themes have been useful primarily as an

escape mechanism, Athearn quickly ticks off the 20th century phases that might suggest a need for escape: rampant industrialization, ever-worsening urban poverty, a suffragette movement that created a market for macho nostalgia, a Depression, world wars, McCarthyism, hippies who challenged **everything**, war in Southeast Asia, racial tension (177-185). The myth has been updated, its themes of pristine landscapes and unreal heroics may have been "exhausted," but the myth still serves the need, Athearn concludes.

Lonesome Dove, a Western story carefully fashioned to eliminate what was foolish and highlight previously unrecognized strengths, stands as license to continue believing in myths, to grab comfort against the severities the land will put us to. To McMurtry, extinguishing the Quixotism not only is pointless and dull, it is dangerous: "Consider what happens (at the end of Don Quixote) when the crazy old Don surrenders his fancies and lets the tough little realist have his way (McMurtry, The New Republic 38)".

BUT WHY MCMURTRY?

Frederick Jackson Turner's biographer, Ray Billington, is sure that if Turner had not come up with his Frontier thesis, someone would have (Billington 72). That is how powerfully the themes of individualism, the promise of the agrarian life, had entered the American cultural identity by the late 1800s. Perhaps the same can be said of McMurtry's Western perspective: one that revises the old but avoids laying blame,

one that acknowledges but does not sustain a dominant sense of loss and failure. If not McMurtry, then someone else would have seen that America needs a Western story that is grand and exhilarating.

Oddly, though, McMurtry is not the logical choice for this accomplishment. The author may accuse modern revisionist historians of throwing the baby out with the bath water by calling their work "Failure Studies." But McMurtry, too, has found the accounts of Western historic icons wanting. In the 1960s, he earned himself a name as the bad boy of Texas letters for challenging conventions about Texas Rangers. Conventional wisdom held them as heroes. In an essay, "The Texas Rangers," McMurtry pointed out that they served the state in its hour of need, but they were violent men whom historians had glamorized (CLC 260).

Nor are his characters often part of such an optimistic landscape. His Texas novels, The Last Picture Show, its sequel, Texasville, or Horseman Pass By deal with dissatisfied, lonely characters whose emptiness directly relates to the death of an era, most often the death of the heroic West (CLC 260). "I realize that the place where all my stories start is the heart faced with the loss of its country, its customary and legendary range," McMurtry has written (CLC 263). This trend is as evident **after** the publication of Lonesome Dove as before. The narrator of Anything for Billy, a post-Pulitzer piece that appeared to digest some unused

research for Lonesome Dove, looks over the regulars at the Greasy Corners saloon and muses: "The dime novelists might portray gunfighters as a confident, satisfied lot -I've been guilty of that myself - but the truth is they were mainly disappointed men (Sanderson 70)".

Streets of Laredo, the sequel to Lonesome Dove, turns to the territory of dark ambivalence touched on only lightly in Lonesome Dove. In it, McMurtry turns most of the heroism over to women characters and slowly whittles away Call's vitality. Never a master of life's emotional rewards, the robotic Call is reduced first by the loss of his eyesight and steady hand - to old age and arthritis - then the loss of his leg, mobility and independence.

McMurtry's appreciation of absurdity, his flare for dramatic action and his ever-surprising depictions of strong women have always put him in a different category from the Wisters, the Greys and the L'Amours. But why is Lonesome Dove in a category separate from McMurtry's other work?

The answer appears to be the same Billington found when asking what about Turner made him the natural source for the Turnerian thesis. Turner, born in 1861, was from the West - Wisconsin. "Fred Turner lived close to the hither edge of the wilderness during his boyhood years. He also lived in an emerging society, plastic and rapidly changing, as were the societies near all frontiers (Billington 25)". The town was a composite of ethnic types. The streets of his hometown,

Portage, were often filled with immigrants on their way to a pioneer experience on free lands in northern Wisconsin or the prairies of Illinois. Near his town, Winnebago and Menomonee Indians clung to their tribal lands. They were considered "worthless savages" who should be banished (Billington 12). The far West, in the newspapers of his 1870s and 1880s youth, was providing the battlefields for endless Indian wars.

> Occasionally happenings nearer home reminded him that civilization was still in its swaddling clothes: a hunting party formed to track down wolves that were ravaging the country-side, vigilantes organized to aid the sheriff in capturing an overambitious horse thief. The wilderness was not quite subdued, and young Turner felt its influence (Billington 10).

During the time in the early 1890s when Turner was collecting material for his thesis, all had changed. The nation felt its vastness shrinking, its resources diminishing, the hearty individual was unionizing. The "twin serpents (Billington 73)" of industrialization and urbanization pressed from the East, and the West was becoming increasingly less able to balance the American perspective with goodness and purity. Writers and intellectuals attacked the American myth in "a moment of doubt (Billington 74)", a situation that parallels the post-Vietnam version of both modern day life and the Frontier story.

Turner wove a grand and endearing portrait of American heritage precisely because he could not reconcile his intellectual observations with his faith.

> This was an emotional reaction, not a rational one. His reason told him that the Garden was gone forever. ...But his heart told him that life in the Garden had been good; this was the rural land that he knew and loved, as did many of his contemporaries. When Turner wrote of the frontier he was recapturing a segment of the past to which he belonged, and glorifying that segment for a later generation who could never know its blessings (Billington 75).

McMurtry, born in 1936 to a cattle family, saw Texas in transition to an oil state - the loss of country and customary range already noted. These are McMurtry's roots, the roots of his contemporaries, and the roots from which most of his characters grow.

Lonesome Dove began from a different germ, a different generation. The novel grew, McMurtry wrote, "out of my sense of having heard my uncles talk about the extraordinary days when the range was open. In my boyhood, I could talk to men who touched this experience and knew it, even if they only saw the tag end of it. I wanted to see if I could make that real, make that work fictionally (CLC 259)."

The difference between revisionist works, including McMurtry's, and McMurtry's Lonesome Dove is in the ghosts from bygone days. If the Frontier experience is viewed solely from the modern perspective, as McMurtry accuses the Failure Studies scholars of doing or as he has done in some of his own stories, then, yes, the West is a story of loss and destruction. But put one generation in between - that one

voice of what was there, who heard other voices of what was - and the template is reshaped, deepened.

As with Turner's frontier thesis, Lonesome Dove represents resolution of the emotional and the rational. McMurtry takes new perspectives, but allows the voices he heard to speak, the voices of men who found appeal that could not be resisted in a life that was otherwise hard.

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Gail Hinchion Mancini is a free-lance journalist from South Bend, Indiana who teaches journalism at Indiana University South Bend.