

## **Riding into Place: Contact Zones, Rodeo, and Hybridity in the Canadian West 1900–1970**

Mary-Ellen Kelm

Volume 18, numéro 1, 2007

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/018256ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/018256ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

### ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

Kelm, M.-E. (2007). Riding into Place: Contact Zones, Rodeo, and Hybridity in the Canadian West 1900–1970. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 18(1), 107–132.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/018256ar>

### Résumé de l'article

Chaque année, la population se rassemble dans de petites villes de l'ensemble de l'Ouest canadien pour participer à des rodéos et à des stampedes. Même si, par le passé, de tels événements ont souvent été organisés en vue de promouvoir et de célébrer la collectivité non autochtone, les organisateurs tenaient à inviter les Autochtones. Et les Autochtones s'y rendaient en grand nombre. Cet article explore les façons dont les rodéos et les stampedes ont servi de points de contact entre les peuples des Premières nations, les Métis et les non autochtones. Il explore la raison pour laquelle les collectivités non autochtones invitaient les Premières nations et pourquoi les Autochtones acceptaient. Il examine la place des rodéos sur les réserves dans l'histoire du développement du rodéo dans l'Ouest canadien et montre à quel point ceux-ci attiraient les non autochtones. Il examine ensuite comment les interactions lors des rodéos étaient structurées par genre et par race, et comment de telles structures ont parfois pu disparaître. Finalement, il offre un aperçu de l'émergence du rodéo professionnel qui a rassemblé, probablement, tous les cow-boys de rodéo peu importe leur origine. Par la même occasion, cet article explore comment l'hybridité et la liminalité ont joué un rôle dans le développement du rodéo dans l'Ouest canadien et, par conséquent, dans les célébrations communautaires des villes et municipalités de la Colombie-Britannique et de l'Alberta.

# Riding into Place: Contact Zones, Rodeo, and Hybridity in the Canadian West 1900–1970<sup>1</sup>

MARY-ELLEN KELM

## *Abstract*

*Each year, people gathered in small towns across the Canadian west to participate in rodeos and stampedes. While these events were often organized to promote and celebrate the non-Native community, organizers were keen to invite Aboriginal people. And Aboriginal people flocked to them. This paper explores the ways in which rodeos and stampedes functioned as points of contact between First Nations, mixed-heritage, and non-Native people. It explores why non-Native communities invited First Nations and why Aboriginal people accepted. It examines the place of on-reserve rodeos in the development of rodeo in western Canada and the extent to which they attracted non-Native people. It then examines how interactions at rodeos were structured by gender and racialization, and how these structures were sometimes overcome. Finally, it offers a glimpse at the emergent community of professional rodeo which, reputedly, embraced all rodeo cowboys regardless of ethnicity. In so doing, this paper explores how hybridity and liminality played a role in the development of Western Canadian rodeo and hence in the community celebrations in towns and cities in British Columbia and Alberta.*

## *Résumé*

*Chaque année, la population se rassemble dans de petites villes de l'ensemble de l'Ouest canadien pour participer à des rodéos et à des stampedes. Même si, par le passé, de tels événements ont souvent été organisés en vue de promouvoir et de célébrer la collectivité non autochtone, les organisateurs tenaient à inviter les Autochtones. Et les Autochtones s'y rendaient en grand nombre. Cet article explore les façons dont les rodéos et les stampedes ont servi de points de contact entre les peuples des Premières nations, les Métis et les*

---

1 This paper began as a contribution to a panel in honour of Sylvia Van Kirk's work in fur trade and women's history. In the original paper I tried to make the connection between rodeo and that body of work by exploring the themes of hybridity, intersectionality, and liminality that were active in Van Kirk's work and that informed the analysis of rodeo here.

*non autochtones. Il explore la raison pour laquelle les collectivités non autochtones invitaient les Premières nations et pourquoi les Autochtones acceptaient. Il examine la place des rodéos sur les réserves dans l'histoire du développement du rodéo dans l'Ouest canadien et montre à quel point ceux-ci attiraient les non autochtones. Il examine ensuite comment les interactions lors des rodéos étaient structurées par genre et par race, et comment de telles structures ont parfois pu disparaître. Finalement, il offre un aperçu de l'émergence du rodéo professionnel qui a rassemblé, probablement, tous les cow-boys de rodéo peu importe leur origine. Par la même occasion, cet article explore comment l'hybridité et la liminalité ont joué un rôle dans le développement du rodéo dans l'Ouest canadien et, par conséquent, dans les célébrations communautaires des villes et municipalités de la Colombie-Britannique et de l'Alberta.*

**I**t happened every year. As June drew to a close, families from isolated ranches and reserves in British Columbia's central interior loaded up wagons with children and elders and drove to Quesnel, an historic entrepôt along the Fraser River. Merchants and townsfolk welcomed them with a celebration of Dominion Day by staging races, a barn dance, and a rodeo. In the surviving photographs from the early decades of the twentieth century, a remarkable conviviality pervades. Dakelh and Tsilquo'tin men and women pose in beaded gauntlets and furry chaps alongside non-Native cowboys from nearby ranches. Children, especially, were captured by the excitement. Looking back, Quesnel-area resident Jimmy Webster recalled how he hero-worshipped Native cowboy Henry Duchamps: "It didn't matter if he was an Indian or a White. He was a great man who you could only look to in awe."<sup>2</sup> For some, such as curator Faith Moosang, events such as Quesnel's Dominion Day Stampede reflect an aspect of Cariboo society as a place where, as one old-timer put it, "it didn't matter how much suntan you had on your skin."<sup>3</sup> In her book on Chinese photographer C.D. Hoy, Moosang concluded that the intimate social relations of small-town interior British Columbia mitigated the cultural prejudices and the emphasis on difference so commonly a part of settler regimes.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, the history of community events, such as rodeo, exposes a complex set of social relations between First Nations and settlers that emerged in Western Canada as a particular kind of contact zone.

---

2 Faith Moosang, interview by Jim Webster, 26 September 1998, in *First Son: Portraits by CD Hoy*, Faith Moosang (Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery and Arsenal Pulp Press, 1999), 141.

3 Captain Norman Evans-Atkinson, interview by Imbert Orchard, for *People in Landscape Series "The Old Miners" Aural History Programme* (Victoria: Public Archives of British Columbia, 1969) in *First Son*, Moosang, 139.

4 Ibid.

RIDING INTO PLACE: CONTACT ZONES, RODEO, AND HYBRIDITY  
IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1900–1970

We have become accustomed, in recent years, to the notion that Canada originated in such a contact zone.<sup>5</sup> An emphasis on contact as envisioned by Mary Louise Pratt creates an opportunity to, in her words:

foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A ‘contact’ perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized ... not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.<sup>6</sup>

Social relations in the contact zone can be surprising, atypical, carnivalesque, or they might be overdetermined by gendered, classed, sexualized, and racialized structures that emerge within them. Contact zones mark out territories within the grand narrative of nation-building and operate at the micro-historical level.

Rodeo in Western Canada, by virtue of its roots, its participants, and its structure, was an on-going contact zone wherein Native and non-Native people interacted. It was itself a hybrid event that encouraged the participation of newcomer men and women as well as Aboriginal and mixed-heritage people. But as events that, ultimately, were to represent settler community formation, they were structured in specifically gendered and racialized ways. Watching aboriginal, mixed-heritage, and non-Native participants negotiate through these structures offers opportunities to examine how rodeo, operating as a recurrent and itinerate contact zone, opened up possibilities for meaningful interactions between differing communities all of whom claimed rodeo as their own.<sup>7</sup>

---

5 One of the best indications of the penetration of that concept into Canadian historical thinking is: eds. Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale, *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005).

6 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 7.

7 This paper focuses principally on the period 1900–1970. Two significant developments have occurred since 1970 that are beyond the scope of this paper. First is the rise of professional Indian Rodeo — though it is part of my analysis elsewhere, I chose to keep the focus on rodeos at which Native, non-Native, and mixed-heritage people interacted. The second development is the negotiation of major television contracts for the coverage of rodeo. This change has had a number of implications, but, most important for my analysis, the interactive nature of rodeo as a community event is, in my opinion, severely limited as it becomes a televised sport. An analysis of this trend on the kinds of issues raised here is much needed but beyond the scope of this paper. Similarly, rodeos happen all across Canada and the United States and beyond. Though some of what I describe here in terms of community involvement would be true wherever rodeo occurs, I am principally interested in how rodeo and community relate in areas of the country where ranching, at least historically, was significant to the area's economy. Geographically, then, my focus is on southern Alberta, the Peace River Country, the southern and central interior of British Columbia, and the Chilcotin Plateau.

In recent years historians have come to analyze celebrations and festivals as sites of community formation. The work of Keith Walden, Elspeth Heaman, H.V. Nelles, Tony Bennett, and others have helped historians understand how such events produce the notion of an ordered public and shape that public into a nation.<sup>8</sup> At the same time scholars ponder questions about Aboriginal performers, how they deployed and commodified authenticity, identity, and history.<sup>9</sup> Aboriginal people, like other disenfranchised or marginalized people, used such events to claim a public presence, to intervene in dialogue about nation-building, and to put forward their own interests upon a highly visible stage.<sup>10</sup> Much of the work on Aboriginal participation has focused on singular events — the Chicago World’s Fair, the Quebec Tercentenary, a Royal Tour, the Jamestown Exposition — or on singular, articulate individuals.<sup>11</sup> These micro-

- 
- 8 Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Elspeth Heaman, *The Inglorious Arts of Peace: Exhibitions in Canadian Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec’s Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry Ortner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 139.
- 9 Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005); Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson, *Paddling Her Own Canoe: the Times and Texts of E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Cecelia Morgan, “Performing for ‘Imperial Eyes’: Bernice Loft and Ethel Brant Monture, Ontario, 1930s–60s,” in *Contact Zones*, ed. Pickles and Rutherford, 67-89; Larry Nesper, “Simulating Culture: Being Indian for Tourists in Lac du Flambeau’s Wa-Swa-Gon Indian Bowl,” *Ethnohistory* 50, no. 3 (Summer, 2003): 449; Paige Raibmon, “Theatres of Contact: The Kwakwaka’wakw Meet Colonialism in British Columbia at the Chicago World’s Fair,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 2 (June 2000): 157-90.
- 10 Heaman, *Inglorious Arts*, 259-310; Julie Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998), 138-60; Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999); Susan Roy, “Performing Musqueam Culture and History at British Columbia’s 1966 Centennial Celebrations,” *BC Studies* 135 (Autumn, 2002): 55-100; Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 13.
- 11 Raibmon, “Theatres of Contact”; Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*; Robert Cupido, “Appropriating the Past: Pageants, Politics and the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 9 (1998): 155-86; Wade A. Henry, “Imagining the Great White Mother and the Great King: Aboriginal Tradition and Royal Representation at the ‘Great Pow-wow of 1901,’” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 11 (2000): 87-108; Ian Radforth, “Performance, Politics and Representation: Aboriginal People and the 1860 Royal Tour of Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 84, no.1 (March 2003): 1-32; Frederic W. Gleach, “Pocahontas at the Fair: Crafting Identities at the 1907 Jamestown Exposition,” *Ethnohistory* 50, no. 3 (summer 2003): 419-45; Strong-Boag and Gerson, *Paddling Her Own Canoe*; Morgan, “Performing for ‘Imperial Eyes.’”

RIDING INTO PLACE: CONTACT ZONES, RODEO, AND HYBRIDITY  
IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1900–1970

histories and biographies have produced finely grained and detailed accounts revealing the extent to which performance is political.

For the most part the history of rodeo has not followed these particular trajectories. The literature, mainly American, has concentrated on the transformation of rodeo from Wild West Show-style performance into a multi-million dollar sport. From the early work of Clifford Westermeier to more recent studies by Krista Fredrickson and Michael Allen, these triumphalist accounts are replete with stories of rodeo heroes.<sup>12</sup> The work of anthropologists, such as Elizabeth Lawrence, Elizabeth Furniss, and Beverly Stoeltje, is more critical and examines how rodeo reiterates relations of power in the American west by replaying the agonistic struggles between man and beast, men and women, settlers and Aboriginal people.<sup>13</sup> In Canada and the United States, some significant attention has been given to the place of First Nations within rodeo, but few grapple with the relationships between First Nations and the various rodeo communities.<sup>14</sup> The rich historiography of performance combined with these histories of rodeo make a place for an examination of rodeo as a cross-cultural contact zone, a hybrid form of performance and sport that appealed to settlers as well as First Nations across the Canadian west.

Within this historiography there is a small but growing literature on Indian cowboys. The contradictory interpretations of Indian cowboys in this scholarship makes evident the multiple meanings possible of such hybrid characters. For some the Indian cowboy represents a continuation of Plains equestrian culture in a new context, one that expresses a unique relationship to animals, that demonstrates the value of family and community through performance and competition.<sup>15</sup> For others the structures of a racially-segmented society permit only limited Aboriginal engagement in public performances and Indian cowboys, these scholars argue, have emphasized their Indianness in ways that

---

12 Clifford P. Westermeier, *Man, Beast, Dust: The Story of Rodeo* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [1947], 1987 reprint); Kristine Fredriksson, *American Rodeo: From Buffalo Bill to Big Business* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985); Michael Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1998); Lynda Mannik, *Canadian Indian Cowboys in Australia: Representation, Rodeo and the RCMP at the Royal Easter Show, 1939* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006).

13 Beverly Stoeltje, "Rodeo: from custom to ritual," *Western Folklore* 48, no. 2 (July 1989): 244-60; Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, *Rodeo: An Anthropologist Looks at the Wild and the Tame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

14 Alison Fuss Mellis, *Riding Buffaloes and Broncs: Rodeo and Native Traditions in the Northern Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003); Peter Iverson, *Riders of the West: Portraits from Indian Rodeo* (Vancouver: Graystone Books, 1999); Morgan Baillargeon and Leslie Tepper, eds., *Legends of Our Times: Native Cowboy Life*. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998).

15 Ibid.; Mannik, *Canadian Indian Cowboys in Australia*.

support rather than subvert contemporary racialization.<sup>16</sup> But there is also a promising scholarship that is more comfortable with the ambiguity apparent in Aboriginal engagement with rodeo, seeing that engagement as, at least momentarily, destabilizing the dominant narratives of “the West.”<sup>17</sup> Such a scholarship moves forward the whole historical discussion of rodeo that has tended to structuralist interpretations emphasizing the reinforcing effect that rodeo has had on the ideologies of the North American west.<sup>18</sup>

Rodeo’s origins mark it out as a complex and hybrid phenomenon. Its roots are spread between the Wild West Show, the traveling circus, and local, ranch-based competitions of the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Embedded within its very language are deeper origins in Spanish horse culture, the haciendas of Mexico, and cattle ranches of the American southwest.<sup>20</sup> Equally resonant in rodeo are the horse cultures of the Great Plains First Nations where equestrian skill conferred status on men and the beauty of beaded tack demonstrated the talent of the women who made it.<sup>21</sup> Grafted onto these roots were certain expectations that rodeo was to include both cowboys and Indians. As Philip Deloria and L.G. Moses have shown, the Wild West Show defined authenticity by the presence of real people who had been involved in the events that were

- 
- 16 Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Cowboy in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992); see also R. Douglas Francis’ review of *Legends of Our Times: Native Cowboy Life*, *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 1 (March 2000): 129-30; Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History*; Jan Penrose, “When all the cowboys are Indians: The Nature of Race in All Indian Rodeo,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93, no. 3 (2003): 687-705.
- 17 Marilyn Burgess, “Canadian ‘Range Wars’: Struggles over Indian Cowboys,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 18, no. 3, <<http://www.cjc-online.ca/viewarticle.php?id=183>>, (viewed 8 January, 2008); Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2004); Mannik, *Canadian Indian Cowboys in Australia*.
- 18 Furniss, *Burden of History*, 180; Lawrence, *Rodeo*, 48.
- 19 Stoeltje, “Rodeo,” 244-60.
- 20 Ibid.; Lawrence, *Rodeo*; Weistermeier, *Man, Beast, Dust*; Fredriksson, *American Rodeo*.
- 21 Mellis, *Riding Buffaloes and Broncs*; Baillargeon and Tepper, eds., *Legends of Our Times*; Iverson, *Riders of the West*; Ian Dyck, “Does Rodeo Have Roots in Ancient Indian Traditions,” *Plains Anthropologist: Journal of the Plains Anthropological Society* 41, no. 157 (August 1996): 205-19; Glenbow Museum Archives (hereafter GA), RCT-120-1, audio recording with Vera Gully regarding Fern Gully; Evan M. Maurer, “Visions of the People,” in *Visions of the People*, ed. Evan M. Maurer and Louise Lincoln, (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of the Arts, 1993), 15-45; Louise Lincoln “The Social Construction of Plains Art, 1875–1915,” in *Visions of the People*, ed. Maurer and Lincoln, 47-59; Joseph D. Horse Capture and George P. Horse Capture, *Beauty, Honor and Tradition: The Legacy of Plains Indian Shirts* (Minneapolis: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2001), 50; Lil Evans, interview by Lorna Townsend, August 2003, Fraser Lake, B.C. tape and transcript in possession of author; Lucien M. Hanks, *Tribes Under Trust: A Study of the Blackfoot Reserve of Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), 79, 94; GA, Gooderham fonds, M-4350-vol. 1, photographs.

RIDING INTO PLACE: CONTACT ZONES, RODEO, AND HYBRIDITY  
IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1900–1970

staged.<sup>22</sup> Since many early rodeo promoters came from a Wild-West Show background, they could not conceive of an event that excluded Aboriginal participants. Guy Weadick, a veteran of the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch Wild West show, staged the early Calgary and Winnipeg Stampedes. Stastia and Jim Carry, who met on the Wild West Show circuit, brought traveling rodeos to British Columbia's interior and, in the 1930s when they settled for a time in the Peace River country, organized rodeos there.<sup>23</sup> Goldie St. Clair and Jake Yaegar, both old hands from traveling shows, ran ranch-based rodeos in Northwestern Alberta.<sup>24</sup> The connections between Wild West Shows and rodeo in the Canadian west were as direct as the people who organized them.

Ensuring authenticity by including Aboriginal people in stampedes did not come easily, however. The Canadian government was staunchly opposed to Aboriginal people performing ceremonial dances and going to stampedes. Department of Indian Affairs officials put forward an amendment to section 49 of the Indian Act in 1914, which prohibited ceremonial dancing off-reserve and required that any Indian going to a stampede received the consent of the Indian Agent to do so.<sup>25</sup> In response stampede organizers lobbied hard against government prohibition of Aboriginal participation in events. Guy Weadick recruited R.B. Bennett and James Lougheed to pressure Chief Inspector of Indian Affairs Glen Campbell to tour reserves and promote Aboriginal entries to the early Calgary Stampedes.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century the townspeople across the west from Winnipeg, Manitoba, to Invermere, British Columbia, all pressed the Department of Indian Affairs for permission to invite local Aboriginal people to their events, each indicating that it had long been the custom and that their events would suffer from the absence of their Native neighbors.<sup>27</sup> For local committees, such as Pincher Creek in southern Alberta, a truly authentic event required First Nations presence. As the *Lethbridge Herald* opined in 1921: "When one goes to a celebration at Pincher

22 Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*; L.G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883–1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

23 GA, Stastia and Jim Carry fonds, M8468.

24 "Many Famous Rodeo Men Will Attend the Yeager Rodeo— Sports July 9-10th," *Peace River Block News* (19 June 1941).

25 Katherine Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremony on the Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 149-50.

26 Ibid.; E. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 169-70; Calgary Stampede Archives (hereafter CSA), CS 99.106, box 1, Calgary Exhibition Minutes, Meeting of the Directors of the Calgary Industrial Exhibition, February 15, 1911; GA, Blood Agency records, M1788, box 13, file 99, July 17, 1912; Hugh Dempsey, *Tom Three Persons: Legend of an Indian Cowboy* (Saskatoon, Sask.: Purich Publishing, 1997), 37.

27 Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), Department of Indian Affairs (hereafter DIA), RG 10, vol. 3827, file 605111-4B July 3, 1933; Ibid., RG 10, vol. 3827, file 60511-5, letters range in date from 1915 to 1935.



Creek, it is expected that Indians will be very much in evidence. This is due to the fact that Pincher Creek is an 'old-timers town' with Indians very closely connected to its early history."<sup>28</sup> Rodeos expressed community values, identity and history, and some settler towns saw the presence of Aboriginal people as integral to their sense of themselves.

Small town rodeo organizers sought to include Aboriginal people in their events for material reasons as well.<sup>29</sup> From the late nineteenth century onward, Aboriginal people on the Plains and Plateau recognized that non-Natives were fascinated by their ceremonies and their material culture. Reserve communities, always struggling financially, found that inviting local settlers in as tourists could raise some much needed cash. In 1898 the Blackfoot (Siksika) staged a successful fair displaying crops and stock and putting on races.<sup>30</sup> In 1914 an Indian Agent wrote his superiors in Ottawa arguing that it was hard to enforce the laws suppressing the sun dance when settlers were paying to attend.<sup>31</sup> By the 1920s reserves were hosting their own stampedes; indeed the history of on-reserve and all-Indian rodeos goes back to this period.<sup>32</sup> The Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer who attended the stampede on the Kootenay reserve at Tobacco Plains, B.C. in 1928 reported that it was well-run and well-attended by Native and non-Native people.<sup>33</sup> Clearly, if small-town rodeos were going to compete financially with these successful ventures, they had to make sure that Aboriginal people felt welcome at their events and did not simply stay home and stage their own.

In order to encourage Aboriginal entries, some rodeo committees found it necessary to proclaim their openness to all. The Lethbridge organizers of a rodeo in 1935 advertised that Guy Weadick was putting on their show and that: "Weadick's slogan known wherever cowboys gather is, 'A square deal to all, no color, residence or nationality barred. It's open to the world, come and get it.'"<sup>34</sup> Also in 1930s Alberta, Macleod Stampede organizers made a point of advertising that, at their stampede, Indian and white would compete against each other for prizes in the premier events.<sup>35</sup> The need to say that their events

---

28 *The Lethbridge Daily Herald* (6 June 1921), 8.

29 LAC, RG 10, vol. 3827, file 60511-5, RCMP report on the Bragg Creek Stampede, 6 September 1923.

30 GA, Horseman's Hall of Fame, M2111, box 3, file 21, "First Blackfoot Fair ... To be held at the Blackfoot Reserve, 28 September 1898. \$125 in Prizes."

31 GA, Blackfoot Agency records, M1785, box 13, file 98.

32 Canadian Museum of Civilization Archives (hereafter CMCA), Vol. 95-0103, John Left Hand, interview by Morgan Baillareon, July 1993, Calgary, Alta.

33 LAC, RG 10, vol. 3827, file 60511-5, RCMP report on rodeo organized by Johnny Star on the Tobacco Plains reserve, 30 June 1928.

34 "Old Timers Will Hold Picnic July 21 On Site of Fort Kipp," *The Lethbridge Daily Herald* (24 June 1935), 7.

35 "Historic Macleod Prepares for Annual Stampede," *The Lethbridge Daily Herald* (26 June 1939) 8.

RIDING INTO PLACE: CONTACT ZONES, RODEO, AND HYBRIDITY  
IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1900–1970

were colorblind indicates, of course, that many were not. Rodeo participants quickly learned which towns put on fair events and which favored some entrants and not others.<sup>36</sup> But this rhetoric of fairness, bolstered eventually by the transformation of rodeo from a performance to a sport, created a space of expectation that later professional cowboys, both Native and non-Native, exploited.<sup>37</sup>

Organizing committees also tapped into a little-documented set of social relations in rural Canada, namely, the persistence of intermarriage between white men and Aboriginal women. Scholars of British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan have revealed that the first wave of male ranchers, police, and other settlers in the Canadian west often took Aboriginal partners, producing families of mixed-heritage children.<sup>38</sup> Northwest Mounted Police, stationed in what became southern Alberta, attended dances on reserves, flirting with the young women they met there. Some Mounties made more lasting attachments, marrying into refugee Lakota communities.<sup>39</sup> Some men came to see their role as assimilative and wrote proudly of their positive influence among the First Nations they lived with.<sup>40</sup> In British Columbia's Okanagan Valley, a substantial minority of the population in the 1870s was mixed-heritage and it seemed as though a new hybrid society was emerging.<sup>41</sup>

But the arrival of new emigrants from Britain and Canada brought such unions into disrepute. Not all cross-cultural relationships disintegrated, but all felt social pressure.<sup>42</sup> Henry Bigby Shuttleworth, son of an English aristocrat, found that he could not obtain a teaching position in British Columbia's Similkameen Valley at the end of the nineteenth century because of his contin-

---

36 Dempsey, *Tom Three Persons*, 56-7; Kelly Moffitt, interview by author, October 2007, Burnaby, B.C., interview notes in possession of author; Hector Stewart, interview by author, July 2003, Quilchena, B.C., tape and transcript in possession of author; CMCA, Vol. 95-0478, Larry Hodgson and Todd Buffalo, interview by Morgan Baillargeon, n.d.

37 Fredriksson, *American Rodeo*, 83; Allen Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 7.

38 Shirley Louis, *Q'sapi: A History of Okanagan People as Told by Okanagan Families* (Penticton, B.C.: Theytus Books, 2002), 12; see also Leonard Lethbridge, Harold Thomson, and Thelma Poirier, "At Wood Mountain We are Still Lakota," in *Legends of Our Times*, ed., Ballargeon and Tepper, 125-33.

39 Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1997), 173-5.

40 Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), 102-3.

41 Ken Mather, *Buckaroos and Mud Pups: The Early Days of Ranching in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Heritage House, 2006), 64.

42 Sylvia Van Kirk, "Colonized Lives: The Native Wives and Daughters of Five Founding Families in Victoria," in *In the Days of our Grandmothers: A Reader in Aboriginal Women's History in Canada*, ed. Mary-Ellen Kelm and Lorna Townsend, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 170-99.

ued marriage to a Native woman. Others lived in a kind of polygamy, setting up their Aboriginal families in separate housing when they brought home new white wives to the main ranch house. Many, however, put aside their Aboriginal families so completely that subsequent generations of the white side of the family denied all knowledge of the Native side of the family bearing their name.<sup>43</sup> Sarah Carter argues that for the prairies the new elites who arrived after 1885 were intent on building a new society rooted in white ascendancy. Across the Canadian west treaty-making, reserve allocation, and the articulation of settler society as distinct from First Nations created, by the turn of the twentieth century, a racially-segregated present and a wide-spread amnesia about the region's hybrid past.<sup>44</sup> Yet complete disavowal was not possible. For one thing, intermarriage did not cease entirely. Writing in the 1970s anthropologist John Hall noted a number of ranchers on the Chilcotin Plateau were married to Tsilquo'tin women, including Leonard Palmantier, one of the founders of the Williams Lake Stampede. Moreover, even in those regions where intermarriage declined, descendants remained.<sup>45</sup> Many of these people distinguished themselves in rodeo. The connection between ranching and rodeo was an obvious vehicle. Boys provided an important labour force for their rancher fathers or grandfathers, and some became well-respected cow bosses, such as Joe Coutlee of the Douglas Lake Ranch, or Antoine Allen of the Gang Ranch in British Columbia. Not only did these ranches have their own informal competitions, but they also sponsored rodeo contestants who competed in the name of the ranch. The skills involved in rodeo were also well-respected by the Native communities in which many mixed-heritage children were raised. In Alberta, Tom Three Persons, legendary Kainai cowboy, had a non-Native father. The Gladstones, a multi-generational rodeo family and leaders in Aboriginal political life, were descended from a Scottish interpreter for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and a Cree woman. Both were adopted into the Kainai [Blood] First Nation in 1920.<sup>46</sup> The Wood Mountain Rodeo of the 1920s and 1930s drew together the Lakota community with those families of Lakota women who married non-Native ranchers.<sup>47</sup> The history of rodeo is replete with names of families of mixed ancestry. Families such as the

---

43 Mather, *Buckaroos*, 69; Jean Barman, "Lost Okanagan: In Search of the First Settler Families," *Okanagan History* 60(1996), 8-20.

44 Carter, *Capturing Women*, 5.

45 Williams Lake Library (hereafter WLL), Biographical files: Leonard Palmantier; John L. Hall, "Ethnic Tensions and Economics: Indian-White Interaction in a British Columbia Ranching Community," *Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 1, no 2 (Winter, 1980): 186.

46 GA, M4211, file 18, Fred Gladstone, interview by Charles Ursenbach, 4 June 1975; Iverson, *Riders of the West*, 54-5.

47 Lethbridge, Thomson, and Poirier, "At Wood Mountain We are Still Lakota," 131-2.

RIDING INTO PLACE: CONTACT ZONES, RODEO, AND HYBRIDITY  
IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1900–1970

Gottfriedsons,<sup>48</sup> the Richters,<sup>49</sup> the Palmantiers, and the Allisons dominate the sport of rodeo in British Columbia.<sup>50</sup> Okanagan Kenny McLean, described in the National Film Board production *Hard Rider* as “part Indian, part Scottish ... a real Canadian going down the road,” was a star on the professional circuit in the 1960s and 1970s, while Peace River country rodeo watchers admired Johnny Napoleon, an Iroquois-Métis rider in the same period.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps rodeo was one place where dissonant Native and white ancestries were harmonized by the pleasures of playing in and watching a mutually-loved sport.

Yet rodeo did not evade the segregating tendencies of settler society that scholars of both British Columbia and Alberta describe. For all the rhetoric of open participation and the presence of Native, non-Native, and mixed-heritage people, rodeos, particularly in the era before professionalization in the 1940s, were visibly structured along gendered and racialized lines. Organizers staged events that limited entry by race and gender. The Pincher Creek Natal Day celebration in 1921, for example, included along with a bucking contest and a 1/2 mile dash, a squaw race, a ladies saddle race, and an Indian race.<sup>52</sup> Indian races were common and some rodeos, such as those in 1930s Dawson Creek, B.C., included a breed race, for half-breeds.<sup>53</sup> Some drew on stereotypes of savagery to promote their Indian events, as when the *Lethbridge Herald* promised “an honest-to-goodness race when the red men cut loose,” because “the Indian

---

48 “Competitive Achievement: Gus Gottfriedson,” *The Cowboy Times: Official Program of the Kamloops Cowboy Festival* (March 2001), 5; “Pre Rodeo Doings: ‘Bandits’ Ride Into Town and Hold Up Store,” *The Kamloops Sentinel* (29 June 1955), 1; Louis, *Q’sapi*, 104; “Cowboys Have a Rough Time,” *The Kamloops Sentinel* (3 July 1950), 6; “Rodeo,” *The Kamloops Sentinel* (2 July 1960), 6.

49 Mather, *Buckaroos*, 75; Doug Cox (in conjunction with the Keremeos Elks Lodge no. 56), *Rodeo Roots: 50 years of rodeo in the Similkameen and Okanagan* (Penticton, B.C.: Skookum Publications, 1988).

50 Bill Cohen, *Stories and Images About What the Horse Has Done for Us: An Illustrated History of Okanagan Ranching and Rodeo* (Penticton, B.C.: Theytus Books, 1998), 25, 26, 52; Cox, *Rodeo Roots*; Gottfriedson family, interview by author, August 2005, Kamloops, B.C., tape and transcript in possession of author; LeBourdais family, interview by author, June and August 2005; tape and transcript in possession of author; Museum of the Cariboo-Chilcotin, A Cowboy, Ranching and Rodeo Museum, Williams Lake, B.C. (hereafter MCC), Ranching and Rodeo exhibit, Storyboard 34, (viewed May 2000).

51 Josef Reeve (director), Wolf Koenig and Robert Verrall (producers), *Hard Rider* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1972); Dorothy Calverley, “The Napoleon Thomas Family — The Oldest Recorded Old -Timers,” Dawson Creek Archives <<http://www.calverley.ca/Part 04 - OldTimers/4-002.html>>, (viewed 19 July 2006); Gary Oker, interview by author, December 2003, Fort St. John, B.C., tape and transcript in possession of author.

52 “PC Veterans Have Big July 1 Program,” *The Lethbridge Daily Herald* (13 June 1921), 8.

53 South Peace Historical Society Archives, MS 049 2001.041, Fall Fair & Rodeo Programs (1938); for other small towns with Indian races, see “Bucking Horses to Invade Vulcan,” *The Lethbridge Daily Herald* (20 June 1921), 8; “Cardston Is Not Overlooking 1<sup>st</sup>: South Town Prepared Elaborate Program for Dominion Day,” *The Lethbridge Daily Herald* (21 June 1921), 8.

“races ... are always for blood.”<sup>54</sup> The Williams Lake Stampede ran a squaw race for Native women and many rodeos in British Columbia featured “klootchmen” races, similarly assigned for Native women contestants.<sup>55</sup> The Macleod Jubilee in the 1920s held tipi races and travois races for Aboriginal women and combined ethnographic display with competition.<sup>56</sup>

In the early years of rodeo there were also roughstock events for women. The press at the time indicates that these events were exceedingly popular with the crowds. At the 1912 Calgary Stampede, Lucy Mulhall, Hazel Walker, and Goldie St. Clair earned high praise for showing how “many of the opposite sex extend themselves to the limit in this art.”<sup>57</sup> By 1923, however, Calgary Stampede organizers eliminated women’s roughstock events, though women continued as performers of trick riding or roping. In 1920s Williams Lake, on the other hand, women’s races and roughstock events were still a source of pride, as promoters crowed in the Stampede’s program: “The girls must not be forgotten either and we don’t mind telling you that they lack neither beauty nor the ability to top off a bronk like the best of the punchers.”<sup>58</sup> Across the west women did not willingly fade away from rodeos, but by mid-century, for the most part, the only events open to women at most rodeos were barrel-racing and goat-tying, events that some argue are not particularly masculine.<sup>59</sup>

Calgary organizers racialized their Stampede by deploying Aboriginal people as performers, dressed according to the rules in “buckskins, beads and feather headdresses,” calling upon them to appear in the parade, on the grandstand, in street displays, and in the Indian village.<sup>60</sup> Throughout the twentieth century First Nations lead the parade not, in the eyes of organizers, to show their primacy but to show their passing. As the *Herald* wrote, “Representing the six tribes, the Blackfeet, the Bloods, the Sarcees, Piegans, Crees and Stonies, they did honor to the dignity of their race, in this, an age that is slowly but surely witnessing the passing of the redskins.”<sup>61</sup> The parade portrayed the organizers’ intent to show that the region had moved from aboriginality to

54 “Race Program for Friday,” *The Lethbridge Daily Herald* (21 July 1921), 14.

55 BCA, A.D. Kean papers, MS 2456.

56 LAC, RG 10, vol. 3827, file 60511-5, 8 May 1924, “Macleod Jubilee One Big Stampede, Pageant and Carnival.”

57 Mary Lou LeCompte, *Cowgirls of the Rodeo: Pioneer Professional Athletes* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 76.

58 WLL, Stampede box 1, Program, Williams Lake Stampede, 1927.

59 *The Cardston News* (26 July 1945), 1; *The Kamloops Daily Sentinel* (1 May 1970), 9; Lawrence, *Rodeo*, 110, 120.

60 GA, Canadian Professional Rodeo Association, M707, box 23, file 153; Indian events, 6 July, 1929; GA, Philip Godsell fonds, M433, box 15, file 118, Indian Village, prizes, 1 July 1957; *Ibid.*, file 119, Revised [rules] Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Indian Events on the Exhibition Grounds, 10 July 1960.

61 *Ibid.*, file 114; GA, M707, box 23, file 158; *Calgary Daily Herald* (5 September 1912), 2.

RIDING INTO PLACE: CONTACT ZONES, RODEO, AND HYBRIDITY  
IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1900–1970

whiteness. Nakoda (Stoney), the Kainai (Blood), Siksika (Blackfoot), and the Tsuu'tina (Sarcee) were major attractions at street displays in the business district and the Indian Village.<sup>62</sup> In both locations in 1925 judges gave prizes for the best display awarding \$2.50 for the “Oldest Indian in full Indian dress” and \$15 for “Blackfoot Indian mounted.”<sup>63</sup> Outside observers determined authenticity and chastised judges who awarded any adaptations to what was considered accurate ethnographic exhibition.<sup>64</sup> The ordering of the parade, the emphasis on display, and the spatial segregation of Aboriginal people underscored the difference between cowboy and Indian.

Similar racialized structures characterized other stampedes as well. While the Indian camp at the Williams Lake Stampede was not a staged Indian village, but rather an informally segregated campground, it nonetheless came to represent nostalgic views of Native life. As one Cariboo old-timer remembered it:

I thought the Indian campfires at night along the hillside above the grounds were beautiful. It was truly fascinating to see the pockets of dancing light ringing the oval, lighting the brownfaces which grouped near the tents. They seemed like an echo of another time and another place when our native people pursued a more simple way of life, free of the problems brought by a new civilization.<sup>65</sup>

Williams Lake also staged a battle re-enactment, an uncommon event in Canadian stampedes. Here racialization was key as Indians burned to the ground a make-shift Hudson's Bay Company fort and attacked a stage-coach. Meanwhile, white cowboys rescued the stagecoach's female occupant, thus emphasizing both the racialized and gendered stereotypes of the Wild West Show.<sup>66</sup> Williams Lake also offered both white and Indian Stampede queens for much of the twentieth century and its dance hall, known as a “place where you can let your hair down,” was called “Squaw Hall.”<sup>67</sup> Like the Calgary Stampede, events, performances, and displays were all structured to emphasize difference, a difference that was overlaid with others dichotomies: past versus present, masculine versus feminine.<sup>68</sup>

*Being* at a rodeo, however, was often a much more complicated experience. Just as rodeo reflected the hybridity upon which much western Canadian society was founded, so too did it reveal a tendency towards boundary-crossing that was inherent in much western Canadian life, particularly in ranching. In

---

62 James H. Gray, *A Brand of its Own: The 100 Year History of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede* (Saskatoon, Sask.: Western Producer Prairie Books), 66.

63 GA, Horsemen's Hall of Fame, M2111, box 3, file 27, “The Stampede Rule book, 1925.”

64 GA, M433, box 15, file 116, Tom Hall to Philip Godsell, n.d.

65 WLL, Stampede box 1, interview with Ollie Matheson, clipping, n.d.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., rodeo program, clipping, n.d.; MCC, “Squaw Hall,” (viewed May 2000).

68 Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, 179.

British Columbia, where colonial officials intentionally allocated small reserves so that residents would have to work for wages, Aboriginal men and women found work on the cattle ranches of the southern interior and the Chilcotin Plateau. The Douglas Lake ranch in the southern interior relied on the labour of Nlakapamux families, like the family of rodeo announcer George Saddleman, whose father worked long hours as a cowboy and whose mother was a camp cook. Though ranch employment declined during the twentieth century, particularly with mechanization of hay harvesting, cowboys were often Aboriginal on British Columbia cattle ranches.<sup>69</sup> In the Chilcotin, Aboriginal cowboys were nearly the only source of labour and ranchers valued their skills on horseback and with stock. Long-standing relationships between ranchers and Tsilquo'tin cowboys bred familiarity and friendships.<sup>70</sup> Whereas government officials hoped that such wage labour would encourage Aboriginal people to leave their reserves permanently to assimilate seamlessly into non-Native society, Aboriginal people, instead, maintained their own stock, horses, and cattle on reserves, investing cash earned in wages in property that increased their status as Aboriginal leaders. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the ability of Aboriginal people to move between the two worlds of ranching and reserves subverted the intentions of government officials.<sup>71</sup>

In Alberta where reserves were larger, reserve land itself, as well as Aboriginal labour, facilitated the non-Native ranching industry. Keith Regular's work clearly demonstrates the integration of reserve and non-Native economies where cattle and labour did not respect the boundaries designed to segment Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal inhabitants.<sup>72</sup> Here income earned by raising and selling cattle, farming wheat, or working for wages was integrated into reserve economies of status and redistributed wealth. Kainai ranchers and, later, farmers, assembled impressive horse herds, purchased memberships into sacred societies, supported those less fortunate, and employed others. Raising cattle and horses on Siksika reserves in the first half of the twentieth century allowed Siksika ranchers to live up to obligations to support the elderly, the sick, and to employ young men.<sup>73</sup> While government officials in Alberta may have hoped

69 CMCA, V97-0088, George Saddleman, interview by Leslie Tepper, August 1996, Quilchena, B.C.; CMCA, V97-0088, Linley family, interview by Leslie Tepper, August 1996, Quilchena, B.C.

70 Hall, "Ethnic Tensions," 186.

71 Louis, *Q'sapi*, 16; CMCA, V99-0327, Virginia Baptiste, "Legends of Our Time," Osoyoos Indian Band; Cohen, *Stories and Images About What the Horse Has Done for Us*, 4.

72 Keith Regular, "'Trucking and Trading with Outsiders': Blood Indian Reserve Integration into the Southern Alberta Economic Environment, 1884-1939, A Case of Shared Neighbourhoods," (Ph.D. diss., Memorial University, 1999).

73 Esther Goldfrank, *Changing configurations in the social organization of a Blackfoot tribe during the reserve period (the Blood of Alberta, Canada)* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1966), 32-3; Lucien Mason Hanks, *Tribe under trust: a study of the Blackfoot Reserve of Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), 66, 73.

RIDING INTO PLACE: CONTACT ZONES, RODEO, AND HYBRIDITY  
IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1900–1970

for self-sufficient and isolated reserve economies, Aboriginal cowboys were visible reminders that policies that reified difference between Native and non-Native remained unsuccessful.

Aboriginal cowboys in British Columbia and Alberta did not live lives that conformed to the racially segmenting discourses of the day and their involvement in rodeo reflected that. They entered cowboy events as well as rode in the parade, participated in street displays, and stayed in the Indian Village.<sup>74</sup> Nakoda leader Johnny Left Hand was a prominent rodeo cowboy, one of eight chosen by Canadian government officials to travel to Australia in 1939; but he also entered and won prizes for his tipi at the Calgary Stampede and Banff's Indian Days.<sup>75</sup> And if reportage from small town newspapers across British Columbia and Alberta is an indication, non-Native audiences cheered on Aboriginal cowboys. Many Aboriginal and mixed-heritage names appear in the daily reports of stampede events.<sup>76</sup> Whether at local events or at the Calgary Stampede, readers of the *Lethbridge Herald*, for example, followed the careers of Frank Manyfingers, Tom Three Persons, Jimmy Wells, Gordon Crowchild, and Joe Fox, among others, in stories that dramatically depicted rodeo events and emphasized the bravery of the men involved:

Joe Fox, 23-year-old Stony Indian from Morley Alta., displayed a fighting heart as he rode "Calamity Jane" to second place in the Canadian cowboys' bucking horse with saddle contest. He was taken unconscious from the ring. His horse fell on top of him after five jumps. When the mean bronk [*sic*] got up, Fox was hanging head down from the stirrup, Calamity Jane dragged Fox 15 feet and kicked him in the face. But Fox came back a few minutes later to put up a daring ride on "Joker" in the North American bucking, with saddle, event.<sup>77</sup>

Such press hints at some of the reasons so many Aboriginal and mixed-ancestry men entered rodeo. So much of what had supported Aboriginal masculinity was altered in the era of reserve allocations, residential schools, and Canada's emergent welfare state. Indian Agents, from Kamloops to Macleod, argued that "the cowboy life" provided an important vent for Aboriginal men, particularly in the years after leaving residential school.<sup>78</sup> As the image of the cowboy became increasingly masculinized during the twentieth century, the rodeo cowboy, whether he was the reckless hellion of amateur events or the well-groomed

74 LAC, RG 10, vol. 7557, file 1120-1 C11545, 1942.

75 CMCA, V95-0103, Chester Bruised Head, Charlie Bear, and John Left Hand, interview by Morgan Baillargeon, n.d., Calgary, Alta.

76 "Cardston Fair Big Financial Success," *The Cardston News* (19 August 1926), 1.

77 "Indian Rider Gives Thrill," *The Lethbridge Herald* (12 July 1939), 11.

78 Canada, Department of Indian Affairs, Kamloops Agency, *Annual Report*, 1913, John Smith, Agent.



family man of the professional circuit, was a figure of stature.<sup>79</sup> Rodeo offered opportunities for Aboriginal and mixed-heritage cowboys to make money and connections beyond the reserve, build political careers, improve the lives of their families and communities through their involvement with rodeo. Hugh Dempsey, for example, wrote of Tom Three Persons that rodeo opened up the world beyond the reserve to him, helped him make contacts that assisted him financially, made him a hero in both small town Alberta and on reservations on either side of the international border.<sup>80</sup> He wrote:

The ceremonies at Fort Macleod and on the Blood Reserve after the 1912 Calgary Stampede clearly showed that Three Persons could easily move between two cultures. Basically he was an Indian, Blackfoot being his first language, but rodeo offered him a chance to follow a path into a wider world. When he was at home, he was exposed to poverty, domination of the Indian agent, residential schools, and primitive farming methods as a way of life. When he travelled, he experienced the friendship of white cowboys, arenas, parades, fancy clothes and the adoration of fans. They were different worlds, but he was equally at home in both.<sup>81</sup>

Lynda Mannik argues that the opportunity to expand their horizons, to represent their communities, and to demonstrate that they were more than “wards of the state,” motivated the Aboriginal cowboys who travelled to Australia in 1939. They, too, were prominent and well-respected men.<sup>82</sup> In British Columbia, rodeo organizers of the 1950s and 1960s, the Gottfriedsons of Kamloops and Secwepemc Dave Perry, mentored young Aboriginal men as rodeo athletes, stock contractors, and promoters.<sup>83</sup> In some cases it is clear that rodeo success and economic/political leadership for Aboriginal cowboys were mutually supportive. In an interview in the 1970s Fred Gladstone credited rodeo with giving him an education, in which he met people in all walks of life.<sup>84</sup> When Gladstone, as a reserve resident, needed a co-signer to for a business loan, a non-Native rancher provided it.<sup>85</sup> Rufus Goodstriker translated rodeo fame into an elected position on the Blood council and later into the

---

79 Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination*, 7-9, 30-4; GA, Canadian Professional Rodeo Association (hereafter CPRA), M7072/385, “The Rodeo Cowboy.”

80 Hugh Dempsey, interview by author, August 2003, Calgary, Alta., tape and transcript in possession of author.

81 Dempsey, *Tom Three Persons*, 53.

82 Mannik, *Indian Cowboys*, 54-60.

83 Gottfriedson family interview; Pete, “Duke” LeBourdais, interview by author, June and August 2005, tape and transcript in possession of author; CMCA, E99.5, B665, file 6, part 6, “Joan Perry file.”

84 GA, M4211, file 18, Fred Gladstone, interview by Charles Ursenbach, 4 June 1975.

85 Ibid.

RIDING INTO PLACE: CONTACT ZONES, RODEO, AND HYBRIDITY  
IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1900–1970

establishment of a culture camp and ranch for youth.<sup>86</sup>

Aboriginal and mixed-heritage women also benefited from participating in rodeos, despite that fact that they were often excluded from the more active rodeo events. Observers praised women's beadwork and they walked or rode in the parades dressed in finery.<sup>87</sup> The prizes awarded to Aboriginal participants in the best-dressed categories all reflected the fine work of the women who made the clothes.<sup>88</sup> Katie Three Persons was a renowned seamstress and the fact that Tom Three Persons repeatedly won in the best-dressed category at stampedes across southern Alberta was due to her skill and flare with design.<sup>89</sup> The money earned in these contests and in the sale of handiwork was an important supplement to the meagre resources available to women on reserves.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Métis women, such as Marie Rose Delorme Smith, competed for prize money at the Calgary Stampede, innovatively fusing Métis and cowboy styles to produce buckskin gloves that were much sought after by the settlers of southern Alberta. Marie's non-Native husband, Charley Smith, recognizing the possibilities bought her a brand new sewing machine, which prompted her to exclaim: "I thought then that the whole wide world was mine."<sup>91</sup> As Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine point out, in the 1960s when the average family income was seldom over \$3000, earning \$500 at the Calgary Stampede through the sale of handiwork, prizes for their costumes as well performances was a significant financial contribution. Over the course of the twentieth century, families jealously guarded their place in the Indian Village or the exhibition grounds of small town rodeos.<sup>92</sup> Participants in the Calgary Stampede's Indian Village in recent years can cite long genealogies of mothers and grandmothers who, simultaneously, made the Indian Village a success, made a handy income selling moccasins, bead and quill work, and began, in some cases, large scale

---

86 Hugh Dempsey, interview by author, August 2003, Calgary, Alberta, tape and transcript in possession of author.

87 For example, see "Brilliant Weather Greets Fortieth Anniversary Fair," *The Kamloops Sentinel* (10 September 1935), 1, 5; Gloria A. Young and Erik Gooding, "Celebrations and Giveaways," in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 13: Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 2001), 1011-25.

88 GA, M707, CPRA, box 23, file 153; for example, GA, M433, box 15, file 118, Indian Village, prizes, 1924; *Calgary Herald* (10 July 1935), 14.

89 Hugh Dempsey interview by author, August 2003, Calgary Alberta, tape and transcript in possession of author.

90 Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind*, 140.

91 GA, Marie Rose Smith fonds, M1154, file 4, Marie Rose Delorme Smith, "Eighty Years on the Plains," 111, cited in Sherry Farrell Racette, "Sewing for a Living: The Commodification of Métis Women's Artistic Production," in *Contact Zones*, ed. Pickles and Rutherford, 37.

92 Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine, "Some Reflections on Nearly Forty Years on the Northern Plains Powwow Circuit," in *Powwow*, ed. Clyde Ellis, Luke Eric Lassiter, and Gary H. Dunham (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 32.

production of Aboriginal manufactured goods for a world market.<sup>93</sup> While traditional styles remained significant to Stampede organizers, Aboriginal women themselves readily experimented with new forms and competitions.<sup>94</sup> In the 1970s Pauline Gladstone Dempsey organized a fashion show highlighting Aboriginal women's clothing design.<sup>95</sup> As Sherry Farrell Racette argues, the clothing produced by indigenous women was an important source of income, a means of self-expression, and a way of claiming the power of representation.<sup>96</sup> Within the confines of gendered and racialized structures of rodeo, there were ways of accruing power and place for those who were otherwise marginalized in the Canadian west.

Repeatedly, throughout the twentieth century, people who described what they saw at stampedes across western Canada noted not so much what remained of rodeo's racialized and gendered categories, but what breached those categories. Despite all the structures designed to keep Indians in their place, cowboys in theirs, and men and women competing separately, these boundaries were notably porous. If difference is key to colonial discourse, then the movement between categories opens up both the categories and the structures that fix them to scrutiny.<sup>97</sup> The various instances where Native and non-Native people crossed the internal boundaries of rodeo that were intended to separate Indians and cowboys, and men and women are significant points of permeability. Take, for example, the mock battle scene enacted at the Williams Lake Stampede. Displays at the Museum of Rodeo and Ranching History in Williams Lake told visitors, "Local natives didn't always care to participate in the 'Indian' Events which had more to do with fantasy than fact and so as often as not, the participants were 'whites' dressed up as 'Indians.'" In fact, it was local white cowboys who attacked and burned the Hudson's Bay Company fort and rescued the captives in the stagecoach.<sup>98</sup> A respected school teacher and her friend, a government office worker, dressed up one year to compete in the Williams Lake Squaw Race, the latter donning a horse-hair wig in order to look the part, while the audience, aware of the ruse, cheered them on with "Go Darky Go!"<sup>99</sup> Such crossings share much with carnival and probably worked more to under-

93 CMCA, V96-0459, Morgan Baillargeon, various interviews with Indian Village participants at the Calgary Stampede, n.d. (1990s).

94 GA, Philip Godsell fonds, MS 433, Philip Godsell to Tom Hall, 16 September 1959.

95 GA, Pauline Gladstone Papers, M7740, box 4, file 10, 1973-8.

96 Racette, "Sewing for a Living," 42.

97 Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 20; Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 3, 5, 7.

98 MCC, Storyboard # 10, (viewed May 2000).

99 WLL, Stampede box 1, "Those Cariboo Stampedes by Bill and Joyce Graham," clipping, n.d.

RIDING INTO PLACE: CONTACT ZONES, RODEO, AND HYBRIDITY  
IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1900–1970

score rather than subvert the divisions they breached, just as the many individuals who were made honorary chiefs at the Calgary Stampede and who donned feather headdresses participated in a long-standing cultural trend of gaining authenticity by “playing Indian.”<sup>100</sup>

Of much more significance than these gestures of cultural transvestism were the more casual crossings where people had the chance to move beyond racial categories. It was these crossings that alarmed Indian Affairs officials. As H.M. Helmsing, the Indian Agent in the Kootenays in 1922, concluded about a stampede he witnessed:

I had no idea ... the extent of the freedom granted to the Indians, putting them on the level of the white man among white men and giving them the opportunity for taking the privileges they took .... For instance, white men of supposed good standing and white women of similar class were to be seen arm in arm with Indians of the opposite sexes at the dance in the evening and the dancing was continued until away late in the morning so you can picture for yourself the effect these conditions would have on the natives.<sup>101</sup>

Rodeos across western Canada permitted such interaction and one might wonder not only about the effects this had on First Nations but the effects it had on non-Native people. Perhaps they lost, at least for a moment, the sense of difference that was supposed to mark them separate from their Native neighbours. Casual interactions between Native and non-Native people were common. As a little girl Ollie Curtis was drawn to the Indian encampment at the Williams Lake Stampede and joined in the dancing and the lahal games.<sup>102</sup> Years later, in the 1960s, barrel-racer Gwen Johannson camped in that same campground discovered a Native girl entering her tent, unable to find her own in the darkness. It never occurred to Johannson, she says, to do anything but allow the child to stay the night, a move, she feared, would be frowned on today.<sup>103</sup> Even Squaw Hall started off as an example of segregation breached. Originally, Aboriginal people were not allowed to go to the dances put on by the Williams Lake Stampede committee, so they built their own makeshift dancehall, dubbed Squaw Hall. But the dances there were better, more fun, and gradually non-Native Stampede-goers starting turning up.<sup>104</sup> As the twentieth century progressed and off-reserve economic opportunities for Aboriginal people dwindle

---

100 Phillip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

101 LAC, RG 10, vol. 3827, file 60511-5, 27 December 1922, H.F. Helmsing, Indian Agent, Kootenay Agency.

102 WLL, Stampede box 1, interview with Ollie Matheson, clipping, n.d.

103 Gwen Johannson, interview by author, September 2002, Hudson's Hope, B.C., tape and transcript in possession of author.

104 Joan Palmantier Gentles, interview by author, April 2003, Williams Lake, B.C., tape and transcript in possession of author.

dled in rural British Columbia and Alberta, as the politics of difference took centre stage, Indian and white worlds became increasingly segmented. Rodeo was one place where more casual encounters could take place and where, because of its own hybridity, rodeo provided a common ground where people could slip the racial categorizations in which they lived.

Movement between categories was not without its tensions. When talking about rodeo, Native people often balance their experiences as valued participants with experiences of discrimination. Despite rodeo's assurances to the contrary, it was always possible to encounter prejudice, to find a rodeo committee, a judge, fellow contestants, or local townsfolk who objected to Aboriginal people succeeding at the sport. When Tom Three Persons won the Canadian bucking championship at the first Calgary Stampede in 1912, many non-Native people celebrated along with him. The Governor General and the Prime Minister sent telegrams of congratulations and the town of Macleod, adjacent to the Blood reserve, minted a medal of honour. But soon it was rumoured that Pat Burns, who had put up extra money for the bucking championship if a Canadian won it, withdrew his offer in the face of Three Persons' victory. Then nasty gossip circulated — that Three Persons had been bailed out of the drunk tank to ride that day, or that the horse he rode, the famed Cyclone, was tired by the time Three Persons mounted him. Though Guy Weadick and the people of southern Alberta vigorously defended Three Persons, these stories still circulate, indicating that for some Albertans an Indian should not be a cowboy.<sup>105</sup>

It may be that these contradictions have to do with the multiple interests rodeo served within settler society. Town elites put on rodeos to promote their towns, to attract the attention of tourists, settlers, and investors, to articulate a history that was grounded in the marginalization of Native people. As mentioned above, many towns encouraged the attendance of Aboriginal people, but some envisioned using First Nations only as colourful spectacles. Jan Penrose argues that it was Calgary's business elites who were shocked by Tom Three Persons' success and who wished to downplay it. They conflicted with Guy Weadick whose years with Miller Brothers 101 Ranch Wild West Show had put him in contact with Aboriginal cowboys and who, therefore, was comfortable with rodeo as an emergent sport "open to all."<sup>106</sup> Small town elites shared with Calgary businessmen a desire to use rodeo to celebrate local settler accomplishment and appointed judges from their own class who may have looked for local non-Native young men to award prizes to, especially in the roughstock events that were

---

105 GA, Horseman's Hall of Fame, M211, file 89; Ibid., Guy Weadick fonds, M1287, box 1, file 24; Ibid., CPRA, M707, box 22, file 145; Ibid., M1788, box 26, file 207; Dempsey, *Tom Three Persons*, 46; Penrose, "When All the Cowboys are Indians," 698.

106 Penrose, "When All the Cowboys are Indians," 698.

RIDING INTO PLACE: CONTACT ZONES, RODEO, AND HYBRIDITY  
IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1900–1970

emblematic of western triumph over nature.<sup>107</sup> Such practices prompted some Aboriginal cowboys to conclude that rodeo was a “white man’s life. An Indian will compete in a rodeo, but he will never be given the prize money.”<sup>108</sup> Examples abound that would support such a conclusion. For example, Tom Three Persons and Roy Longknife were repeatedly disqualified at the Harlem Montana 4th of July of celebrations in 1913 so that local boys Alf Watkins and Loren Tolbert could win.<sup>109</sup> Some small town rodeo committees were so corrupt that they offered Native cowboys money to be bucked off.<sup>110</sup> The great Aboriginal cowboy Henry Shuttleworth, from the southern interior of British Columbia, wrote to the Canadian Cowboy Contest Association in 1931 to complain that the Williams Lake Stampede’s “one idea seems to be to give their local riders all the prize money whether they win it or not.”<sup>111</sup> Cowboys generally found judging to be capricious when judges were local notables and not veteran cowboys.<sup>112</sup> But, just as in Calgary, businessmen relied on organizers to run rodeos and these organizers had much to lose if their rodeos were thought to be unfair.<sup>113</sup> Thus, the declarations by rodeo promoters such as Guy Weadick, Addison Day, and Herman Linder that their rodeos were colour-blind. In regions where, arguably, the best cowboys were Native, rodeo organizers made sure that they had Aboriginal judges precisely to ensure fairness. The committee at Stuie on the Chilcotin Plateau appointed Tsilquot’ in Chief Squiness and Haida Reverend Peter Kelly as judges at their 1932 stampede.<sup>114</sup> Fair judging continued to be an issue for rodeo, though professionalization imposed some standardization and training. In the meantime, Aboriginal cowboys came up with their own strategies.

As a prominent Kainai man, Tom Three Persons mentored young cowboys and he shared his love of rodeo as well as his experience of capricious judging. On Three Persons’ urging generations of Kainai cowboys, including Chester Bruisehead, Frank Manyfingers, and Fred Gladstone, turned from roughstock to timed events because “there was too much human judgment” in the riding events to ensure that Aboriginal cowboys would be treated fairly.<sup>115</sup> But calf

---

107 Furniss, *Burden of History*, 166.

108 Adolf Hungry Wolf, *The Blood People: a division of the Blackfoot Confederacy: an illustrated interpretation of the old way* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 234-5.

109 Dempsey, *Tom Three Persons*, 56-7.

110 GA, M1788, box 26, file 207, 4 August 1913.

111 WLL, Stampede box 1, Henry Shuttleworth to Guy Weadick, 15 May 1931; for more on Henry Shuttleworth (son of Henry Shuttleworth, mentioned earlier), see <<http://www.cowboypetry.com/photowk3.htm>>, (viewed 8 January 2008).

112 Cliff Faulknor, *Turn Him Loose! Herman Linder, Canada’s Mr. Rodeo* (Saskatoon, Sask.: Western Prairie Producer Books, 1977), 38-9.

113 Hall, “Ethnic Tensions,” 198.

114 BCA, Tommy Walker Papers, MS 2784 box 24, file 13, 9 July 1932, Program Stuie Stampede.

115 GA, M4211, file 18, Fred Gladstone, interview by Charles Ursenbach, 4 June 1975; Dempsey, *Tom Three Persons*, 57.

roping and other timed events, such as steer wrestling and steer decorating, required capital. Unlike rough stock events where rodeo organizers provided the stock and in some cases, the saddle, calf-roping demanded a well-trained horse as well as a skilled rider and roper. So calf-ropers, steer wrestlers, and steer decorators had to own and transport their horse to events, severely limiting the geographic range of the rodeo cowboy if he did not have access, certainly by the post-war era, to a truck and horse-trailer. While the transition to timed events may have ensured a modicum of protection from unfairness, it was not a move possible for all cowboys. Desire to create a non-discriminatory space for all Aboriginal cowboys prompted experienced and established Native cowboys to put on their own rodeos on ranches and reserves. The Nakoda staged a rodeo on their reserve in 1925, a tradition that renowned Aboriginal cowboy Johnny Left Hand continued into the 1950s.<sup>116</sup> The Kainai held their own rodeo, open only to Aboriginal contestants, in the 1930s.<sup>117</sup> Kamloops Indian Reserve hosted a rodeo beginning in the 1920s. By mid-century the Palmantiers started one at Riske Creek, B.C., and the Stelkia family did the same in the Similkameen Valley in the 1960s.<sup>118</sup> In the 1950s Kainai cowboys Rufus Goodstriker, Floyd and Frank Manyfingers, Ken and Tuffy Tailfeathers, and Fred and Horace Gladstone established the Lazy-B 70 Rodeo Club to encourage young Aboriginal cowboys by providing them a non-discriminatory space in which to train and learn to compete. In 1962 the All-Indian Rodeo Cowboys Association formed eventually becoming the Indian Rodeo Cowboys Association in 1967, again, to provide competitive rodeos that would be unmarred by racism.<sup>119</sup> Prominent cowboys also led the way in professional rodeo, making inequity much more difficult to sustain. As one Merritt, B.C., cowboy put it:

I think the one that really kind of opened the doors for Native cowboys was Kenny McLean, when he became the world champion. And he had a rough time gettin' there. Because him bein' a Native and that. He told me that he had to be twice as good, just in order to measure up to get the same marks as the guys he was competing against. Until pretty soon they had to give it to him, because there wasn't no way that they couldn't. He was the top guy and they couldn't ignore it no more. They couldn't sweep it under the carpet or nothin' because he was there. And after Kenny won the championships that was a real boost. Y'know for a lot of the people.<sup>120</sup>

---

116 LAC, Department of Indian Affairs, RG 10, vol. 3827, file 60511-5, 7 July 1925; GA, CPRA, M7072/25, 6 March 1953.

117 "Stampede at Blood Indian Reserve," *High River Times* (23 June 1938), 3.

118 Cox, *Rodeo Roots*, 46.

119 Baillargeon and Tepper, *Legends of Our Times*, 200.

120 Hector Stewart and Hank Charters, interview by author, July 2003, Quilchena, B.C., tape and transcript in possession of author.

RIDING INTO PLACE: CONTACT ZONES, RODEO, AND HYBRIDITY  
IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1900–1970

Finally, having Native men, such as Secwepemc Dave Perry and Fred Gladstone from the Kainai Reserve, put on rodeos and act as judges helped dampen discrimination in rodeo as it emerged as a professional sport in the middle decades of the twentieth century.<sup>121</sup>

One way that rodeo handled difference was by re-crafting it to situate rodeo cowboys in solidarity with one another and in opposition to those outside the community. The professionalization of the rodeo through the formation of cowboy organizations in Canada and the United States went a long way to creating a new community for rodeo cowboys. In Canada the organization first known as the Cowboys Protective Association and later the Canadian Professional Rodeo Association (CPRA) made an effort to include Aboriginal cowboys in their ranks by establishing two Indian representatives (one for British Columbia and one for Alberta) on their executive.

Professionalization set certain limits on rodeo. If towns wanted their events to be part of the professional circuit, they had to guarantee their prize money up front, at least for the four main events which, in 1946, were saddle bronc riding, calf roping, steer decorating, and brahma steer riding. They also could only have judges who had received CPRA approval.<sup>122</sup> In return CPRA-sanctioned rodeos were guaranteed they would get the best riders as they competed for points towards championships in the various events. The results of professionalization were not entirely positive for small towns. Many rodeos relied on entry fees too much to be able to guarantee up front prize money. They were left with a choice — carry on as amateur rodeo or cancel their events. Many folded. For those that went professional, the costs of running the four main events meant that rodeos could no longer afford to run a range of contests specifically set aside for women or Aboriginal people. When amateur events ran alongside professional ones, these tended to attract the largest number of contestants, provided an exciting spectacle for audiences, and gave the rodeo a unique local stamp — an event such as the Mountain Race at Williams Lake or the Omak Suicide Race. Professionalization affected competitors too. While amateur riders could enter professional rodeos, if they won more than \$100 (in 1946, for example) they had to take out a membership in the CPRA or face being blacklisted. Entry fees for professional events were standardized and, in most cases, increased. Competition was fierce and the cost of competing rose as professional cowboys traveled a rodeo circuit that spanned Canada's western provinces. These financial exigencies pushed many local and part-time cow-

---

121 GA, CPRA, M7072/257, Denis Culling, rodeo secretary of the Falkland Rodeo to the Canadian Rodeo Cowboys Association, 8 November 1967; *Ibid.*, M7072, box 7, file 46, Dave Perry submitting prize list of his rodeo organized at Ashcroft, 8 June 1960, to the CPA for approval, 3 June 1960; CMCA, E99.5, B665, file 6, part 6, Joan Perry file; GA M4211, file 18, Fred Gladstone, interview with Charles Ursenbach, 4 June 1975.

122 GA, CPRA, M7072/6, 1946.



boys out of the professional rodeos.<sup>123</sup> Women appear to have had no place, though they were not officially excluded; they went on to form their own organization, the Canadian Barrel Racers Association in 1957.<sup>124</sup> For men, amateur, independent, and reserve rodeos offered opportunities to compete and by the middle of the 1960s many of these also included barrel racing for girls and women.<sup>125</sup>

On the other hand, professionalization created a new rodeo community, a community of cowboys and their families who traveled the rodeo circuit, or in their words, “went on down the road.” This community was itself a sort of mobile contact zone where Native and non-Native cowboys travelled together and grew to see one another as family. This cross-cultural community of rodeo is the focus of the National Film Board’s *Hard Rider*, which follows Okanagan cowboy Kenny McLean on the rodeo circuit. Rodeo riders talk about the integration of the rodeo community as it travelled together from rodeo to rodeo. Fraser Lake rancher and calf-roper Bill Evans grew up in the Okanagan Valley just a few miles from the Colville Indian Reservation in Washington State. For much of his time rodeoing, he travelled with Aboriginal friends and because they moved from town to town, following the rodeo circuit, his connections were with that multi-racial group. If there was conflict, he said in an interview just before his death in 2004, it was with the local townspeople who wanted to mix it up with the rodeo cowboys. His wife, Lil, part Colville First Nation who lived off-reserve for most of her life, took the opportunities of traveling on the rodeo circuit to visit relatives in the Indian encampments. Al Byer, an organizer of high school rodeo in Merritt, B.C., expressed a similar ethic:

The local native kids traveled with anybody. I mean there was no such thing, as concerns [about] if you’re native or if you’re white, or whatever. It was just strictly there to help each other. And that’s one big thing about rodeo that I’ve

---

123 For example, the Macleod Rodeo Association asked for dispensation from the CPRA to reduce their entry fees in 1945 and 1946 from \$10 (as set by the CPRA) to \$7.50, precisely because some of the best local riders were from the Blood reserve and many believed that a \$10 entry fee would deter these men from entering. GA, CPRA, M7072/5, 29 May 1945, Macleod Rodeo Association to CPRA.

124 GA, Canadian Girls Rodeo Association, M7703.

125 CMCA, E2000.3, B684, file 2, Nicola Valley Rodeo, Championship Program 1993; Terry Cook, interview by author, December 2003, Dawson Creek, B.C. tape and transcript in possession of author; GA, CPRA, M7072/2, exchange of letters between Blair Holland, secretary, Cowboys Protective Association to the Taber Board of Trade, 28 April and 14 May 1945; *Ibid.*, M7072/5, letters between Macleod Rodeo Association and CPA with approval of prize list, 29 May 1945; *Ibid.*, M7072/4, letters between various small town rodeos and CPA re new rules, spring and summer 1945; *Ibid.*, M7072/7, letters between High River rodeo committee and CPA, spring and summer 1947; *Ibid.*, M7072/8, Gus Gottfriedson was Indian representative in 1947; *Ibid.*, M7072/10 and M7072/13, letters from rodeo organizing committees regarding the restrictions placed on them if they want to continue as professional rodeo.

RIDING INTO PLACE: CONTACT ZONES, RODEO, AND HYBRIDITY  
IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1900–1970

always found. And you'll even see it today even in your pro circuits. Cowboys get down and help their fellows competing against them. They'll help set them up and tell them if they've had that animal out bucking at that event they'll explain to the guy just exactly what that horse or bull is gonna do, and it's just a great comradeship as far as I'm concerned with rodeoing.<sup>126</sup>

While travelling on the professional circuit, camp became home and some remember it as a safe place for families of any ancestry. Upper Nicola barrel racer and horse trainer Joan Perry Gottfriedson remembers it this way:

And the rodeo itself, the non-native and native got along really well. You camped out and all your kids played with each other, and you weren't afraid that someone was gonna run off with your kids, or you know, what's happening nowadays. It was good. You brought your kids up, you worked with them, and you were with them all the time."<sup>127</sup>

Part of this mobile, liminal community of rodeo, is expressed through a kind of genealogy that included Native and non-Native influences. Bill Evans credits Secwepmc rider Alex Dick for introducing him to saddle bronc competitions.<sup>128</sup> Barrel racer, former "Indian princess," and rodeo judge, Joan Palmantier Gentles, recognizes Chilcotin rancher Mike Isnardy for the help he gave her getting starting in barrel racing. Al Byer recalls that the team of Dave Perry (Secwepmc) and Gary Hook (non-Native) were responsible for much of the rodeo organizing and stock contracting in the southern interior of British Columbia after the war.<sup>129</sup> Participants in rodeo remember themselves as crossing the divides of race and gender producing a new community in the process.

Rodeo, however, was not some idyllic never-never-land where the sexism and racism of twentieth century western Canada did not exist. Rodeo was heavily gendered and racialized. Until the rise of barrel-racing and the gradual acceptance of women into roughstock events late in the century, rodeo, moving away from its roots in the Wild West Show, gradually excluded women. Moreover, professional associations of rodeo cowboys in Canada and the United States tried to re-craft the image of the rodeo cowboy from a flamboyant ne'er do well performing exhibitions, to a hard-working, dedicated athlete competing in a sport and supporting a family. Professionalization worked, on one hand, to exclude women and amateur or part-time competitors and, on the other, to create an elite community of professional cowboys who travelled the

---

126 Al Byer, interview by author, January 2002, Merritt, B.C., tape and transcript in possession of author.

127 Gottfriedson family interview.

128 Bill Evans, interview by Lorna Townsend, August 2003, Fort Fraser, B.C., tape and transcript in possession of author.

129 Al Byer interview.

circuit from March to November. Rodeo, shorn of its explicit references to the past, was visually segmented from other stampede events, such as the Indian village.<sup>130</sup>

But rodeo was also place of contact where the nature of participants' interactions was not over-determined by the structures of race and gender. To recall Pratt's definition of a contact zone, rodeo was a space of the "improvisational" where "copresence, interaction and interlocking understandings and practices [exist] within radically asymmetrical relations of power."<sup>131</sup> At rodeos Native and non-Native people could link arms at the barn dance (much to the horror of the Indian Agent), participate in the small scale economy of handicraft sales, compete against each other in the arena, drink together behind the stands (even in an era where such conviviality was punishable by law), visit the Indian Village, travel together, raise children together on the road of the rodeo circuit. Rodeo, by virtue of its own ethic of "open to all," complicated the recurrent staging of difference by lauding skill above race and, eventually, gender. Rodeo did not change the nature of "Indian-white" relations, but it did create a fissure within the edifice of that structure. For those who earned money that the Indian Agent could not touch, who made friends and business partners across racial lines, for those who came to know Aboriginal people in ways that defied the ideology of the day, rodeo was a significant challenge to the prevailing order. It is for this reason that so many First Nations and non-Natives remember the rodeos of the Canadian west with fondness and humour.

\*\*\*

**MARY-ELLEN KELM** is the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Peoples of North America in the History Department at Simon Fraser University. She recently edited with Lorna Townsend, *In the Days of our Grandmothers: A Reader in Aboriginal Women's History in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

**MARY-ELLEN KELM** est titulaire de la chaire de recherche du Canada sur les peuples autochtones de l'Amérique du Nord au département d'histoire de l'Université Simon Fraser. Elle a dirigé récemment avec Lorna Townsend le recueil d'articles intitulé *In the Days of our Grandmothers: A Reader in Aboriginal Women's History in Canada* (Presses de l'Université de Toronto, 2006).

---

<sup>130</sup> Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 65.

<sup>131</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7.