



How cattle ranchers created a shared culture and political power in the years following World War II

Cow Talk

Work, Ecology, and Range Cattle Ranchers in the Postwar Mountain West

By Michelle K. Berry

The image of western ranchers making a stand for their “rights”—against developers, the government, “illegal” immigrants—may be commonplace today, but the political power of the cowboy was a long time in the making. In a book steeped in the culture, traditions, and history of western range ranching, Michelle K. Berry takes readers into the Cold War world of cattle ranchers in the American West to show how that power, with its implications for the lands and resources of the mountain states, was built, shaped, and shored up between 1945 and 1965.

After long days working the ranch, battling human and nonhuman threats, and wrestling with nature, ranchers got down to business of another sort, which Berry calls “cow talk.” Discussing the best new machinery; sharing stories of drought, blizzards, and bugs; talking money and management and strategy: these ranchers were building a community specific to their time, place, and work and creating a language that embodied their culture. *Cow Talk* explores how this language and its iconography evolved and how it came to provide both a context and a vehicle for political power. Using ranchers’ personal papers, publications, and cattle growers association records, the book provides an inside view of how range cattle ranchers in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana created a culture and a shared identity that would frame and inform their relationship with their environment and with society at large in an increasingly challenging, modernizing world.

A multifaceted analysis of postwar ranch life, labor, and culture, this innovative work offers unprecedented insight into the cohesive political and cultural power of western ranchers in our day.

Michelle K. Berry is Assistant Professor in Gender and Women’s Studies at the University of Arizona. She is the coauthor, with Emily Wakild, of *A Primer for Teaching Environmental History: Ten Design Principles*.

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