

Nostalgia, Patriotism, and National Identity in Rodeo's Music: Wild West Shows, Cowboy Bands, and Early Rodeo's Musical Entertainment

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA Santa Barbara Sounding the American West: Nostalgia, Patriotism, and National Identity in Rodeo's Musical Landscape A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Music by Lauren Olivia Vanderlinden Committee in charge: Professor Scott Marcus, Chair Professor Stefanie Tcharos Professor Beth Levy, UC Davis Professor Jonathan Dueck, Canadian Mennonite University June 2022 The dissertation of Lauren Olivia Vanderlinden is approved. Jonathan Dueck Beth Levy Stefanie Tcharos Scott Marcus, Committee Chair May 2022 Sounding the American West: Nostalgia, Patriotism, and National Identity in Rodeo's Musical Landscape Copyright © 2022 by Lauren Olivia Vanderlinden

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co-parent, the coolest conductor, and for never rubbing it in when you beat me at Mario Kart.

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ABSTRACT *Sounding the American West: Nostalgia, Patriotism, and National Identity in Rodeo's Musical Landscape* by Lauren Olivia Vanderlinden In this dissertation, I utilize a mixed-methods approach consisting of ethnographic research, archival and historical work, media analysis, and virtual fieldwork to lay out the constellation of music, media, identity, and sport that defines rodeo in the twenty-first century. To accomplish this, I first outline a brief musical history of rodeo, beginning with Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows and ending with the present day, the first compilation of rodeo's musical history in print to date. I discuss the foundational relationship between rodeo and popular music that began with Wild West shows and continued throughout the twentieth century. This history reveals both a reliance on nostalgic whiteness as a foundational identity marker for audiences and the prevalence of military and hyper-patriotic influence in rodeo's inception as a sport. I further argue that the rodeo cowboy, increasingly the only "real" cowboy left in the United States as the proverbial frontier continued to disappear in the twentieth century, came to represent this nexus of influences and sentiments, both in the rodeo contest and in the music accompanying it. I also argue that country music, the genre most consistently associated with rodeo through its history, plays a particularly important part in how that identity has been constructed and maintained.

I also undertake a close analysis of the 2020 National Finals Rodeo as the central case study in this dissertation. Using a selection of the opening ceremonies, I argue that these rodeo rituals work to define a specific iteration of cowboy—and, by extension, American—identity that is rooted in patriotism and a willingness to act to protect (or use) individual or national freedoms. This is accomplished through visually collapsing the distinction between cowboy and soldier in rodeo media during opening ceremonies, and through the deployment of differing styles of music to incorporate audiences into the spectacle of the rodeo. The overlapping values and audiences between rodeo and

country make this ritual legible for participants, and both spheres' histories of patriotism and invisible, nostalgic whiteness link them together in a shared performance of the Old West that stakes a claim to a particular iteration of cowboy identity as the most authentic.

I further trace this thread of performativity in my final chapter to examine how the figure of the rodeo cowboy has continued to circulate in popular music more broadly, both affirming and contesting the rodeo cowboy's cultural relevance. To accomplish this, I discuss the subgenre I call rodeo country alongside recent manifestations of the Black West, known as the "Yeehaw Agenda," in popular music (Malandro 2018). I analyze multiple case studies to discuss how the symbols and trappings of cowboy identity are utilized by artists in both country and non-country genres to varying effects. Both types of performance serve to give us insight into how the cowboy figure maintains its relevance in the twenty-first century, and what alternative sets of values might be poised to infiltrate the sacred space of rodeo in the years to come.

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Chapter 1: Introduction There ain't nothing like a good, solid ride. I don't care where you are or who you are. It's just like music—smooth and perfect if you do it right. — Alonzo Pettie, a famous bronc and bull rider, in a 2003 interview with The Associated Press When I was young, Joe Johnston's 2004 epic Western biopic *Hidalgo* was one of my favorite movies. The film follows an American cowboy named Frank T. Hopkins, played by Viggo Mortensen in his first leading role post-*Lord of the Rings*, and his mustang *Hidalgo* in a sweeping story of conquest, grit, and Americana that spans multiple continents. The story begins in the 1890s American West, with Hopkins shown working as a performer in Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and as a dispatch rider for the United States government, but eventually Hopkins and *Hidalgo* travel overseas to compete in an endurance race called the "Ocean of Fire," an annual 3,000-mile trek across the Najd desert in Saudi Arabia. Of course, the race has been restricted to pure-bred Arabian horses and Bedouin riders, but Hopkins won't take no for an

answer and competes anyway, attempting to prove the superiority of the American wild horses that Hidalgo represents (and, by extension, the superiority of the American cowboy). Throughout the course of the film, he is set against numerous foes and antagonists, Middle Eastern caricatures of "bad Arabs" that were experiencing great popularity in the media in the period after the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003, who hate him because of his nationality and his lack of personal, generational wealth and status (Shaheen 2003). Ultimately Hopkins is victorious, though the race pushes both him and Hidalgo to their limits, and he wins the respect and admiration of the Bedouin riders over whom he triumphs. As a young person, I loved the film simply because I found it thrilling to imagine riding off into every corner of the world on grand adventures with a four-legged best friend. Looking back on it now, it's clear how it and other films like it from the same era worked to induct me and other young people into a particular way of thinking about and imagining the American West, the wild mustangs that run through it, and the cowboys who attempt to tame it. Hidalgo clearly highlights the way that the figure of the American cowboy has been mythologized in popular media both locally and abroad; Mortensen's Hopkins is quietly determined, proving repeatedly through his quick thinking and resourceful problem-solving that with a bit of grit and work ethic, he is capable of a great conquest that brings glory and honor to his nation and to himself. The film, produced by Disney, was marketed as a "true story," but many of the biographical facts and story beats emphasized in the film have since been debunked, including Hopkins' alleged half-Lakota blood, his time with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, and his status as a legendary endurance rider. And yet, much like Paul Bunyan—who may have existed but likely did not own a big blue ox—Hopkins has entered the American cultural mythology as a kind of legendary figure in his own right because of what he represents. Hidalgo lifts up these exaggerated facts about Hopkins as truth, telling the story of an American cowboy whose grit, determination, and innate courage make him victorious over an entire culture of non-white individuals whose lives are spent preparing for and competing in this race. Hidalgo and other films like it have found great commercial success because they capitalize on national myths about the American frontier, and they inform the way consumers like me imagine the Old West and its people. Popular culture shapes our collective understanding of history, often in subtle ways, and in turn contributes other peoples' perspectives to our cultural imagination of the past. Through such varied media as film, music, and fashion, the Old West continues to be relevant to our present day in the United States, and there is no site where it feels more immediately real than at the rodeo.

[Note: The Lakota tribe does not have any record of Hopkins' ancestry or any connection to his family, and have not publicly claimed him as a member. Additionally, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center has disputed Hopkins' claims to have performed with the troupe as his name does not appear in any of their comprehensive records, though they have found some evidence that he worked briefly for the Ringling Brothers Circus as a horse handler. Finally, he claimed to have won a Texas-to-Vermont endurance race, but there is no documented evidence that such a race was ever held, nor is there evidence that he really won the 400 endurance races he boasted of (Harrigan 2003, The Long Riders' Guild 2022).]

In this dissertation, I combine archival and historical sources, ethnographic research, and analysis of digital media to piece together the long history of music at the rodeo. Beginning with rodeo's early roots in Wild West shows and tracing trends and figures up to the present day, I lay out a complex

web of actors, contexts, and ideas that have circulated around of the realms of sport, country music, and military engagement across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Throughout this project, I argue that the core of rodeo's continued relevance and importance to individuals in the United States comes from its connection to a nostalgic and whitewashed view of the Old West, particularly for white folks who perceive their way of life as threatened, vanishing, or becoming obsolete at various points in U.S. American history. This nostalgia is embodied most clearly for competitors, producers, and audience members in the figure of the cowboy, which has changed very little over the last century. I suggest that the rodeo cowboy operates as a twenty-first century stand-in for the range-roaming cowboys of the Old West, representing a (white-bodied) place where American values of patriotism, individualism, and willingness to take action to defend individual or national freedoms are brought forward into the present. This complex nostalgia is paired with a deep sense of patriotism that emerges from rodeo's long history of engagement with the military, a relationship that has never been written about in academic scholarship and that continues to inform displays of pro-America sentiment in rodeos across the United States and the globe in the twenty-first century. I also argue for the importance of music as a vehicle for the circulation of these values, both within and branching out from rodeo. Country music is most closely associated with rodeo in recent years, but rodeo has always been musical, and this dissertation traces the differing relationships the sport has had with various genres across its history, ranging from brass bands to rock and metal, and from folk tunes to hip-hop. Within the rodeo, music has provided the sonic backdrop for individuals and institutions to purvey particular interpretations of cowboy and American identity, both during the contests themselves and during opening ceremonies or affiliated concerts. The musical and programmatic choices that producers make, as I discuss in later chapters, heavily influence the type of narrative each event carries, and thus the kind of individuals each event holds up as ideal. However, the cowboy figure is not isolated to rodeo, and I also examine the ways that markers of rodeo identity—including cowboy boots, hats, rodeo belt buckles, and branded denim—have circulated outside of rodeo through their presence in other genres of music. It is my hope that this project, which brings together sport and musical history with ethnographic study and the consideration of media circulation, can contribute to our understanding of how American identity and its often invisible whiteness continues to be constructed in the twenty-first century, particularly at a time when identity politics and the policing of history are such contentious topics.

In this vein, throughout this dissertation I will use the term "American" or "U.S. American" to refer to positions, peoples, ideas, and tropes that exist within the United States of America that fall within a constructed majority. I acknowledge that the Americas are extremely broad continents containing a vast range of peoples, languages, cultures, and histories, and that the United States has coopted the term "American," and I use it here simply to mirror the language my interlocutors and sources use. By exploring ways that a particular interpretation of the cowboy figure has become categorized as a United-States-specific "American" icon, I will also open up space for an analysis of the failures of this category for individuals, musics, and rodeos that span the American continents and beyond.

I also refer to the professional rodeo circuit throughout this dissertation either as "professional" or "mainstream" rodeo, meaning a rodeo context primarily populated and patronized by a constructed majority of individuals that most often fall within the identity categories of white, straight, masculine, and U.S. American. There are other rodeo circuits specifically devoted to individuals who do not fit

these categories—including Black, LGBTQ+, all-women, and Indigenous rodeo circuits. Those circuits have been written about beautifully by other authors, and though I discuss them in the literature review later in this chapter, and they are beyond the scope of this project.

Notes on Identity Throughout the process of writing this dissertation, I have repeatedly been called back to my many childhood memories of wanting to grow up and be a cowgirl. By the grace of my parents, I started learning to ride quite young, and being a "horse girl" who spent her weekends hauling hay, shoveling manure, and cleaning tack in central Wisconsin was a major part of my identity all the way up until college, when my lack of time, money, and transportation made it impossible to continue. For over ten years, I spent every waking moment dreaming about what it would be like to just hop on a horse, don my pink sparkly cowgirl hat, and ride off into the sunset. I attended countless local 4-H shows, county fairs, and rodeos, and even competed on leased horses. I have hours and hours of memories of sitting in the barns of the Winnebago County Fairgrounds while 2000s-era Tim McGraw and Toby Keith played over the grainy loudspeakers, clashing with the twangy strains of Merle Haggard drifting over the rows of stalls from someone else's barn boombox.

It never struck me as anything but normal that my equestrian experiences would be accompanied by country music; my mom, who'd grown up in rural Minnesota and had horses for much of her childhood, would always put on her country playlist when we would drive to the barn together on the weekends. I have such strong memories of looking out the window, watching green and gold fields of corn roll past my window while the twangy sounds of Kenny Chesney washed over me and the rich, musty scent of dirty boots, worn leather, and horse manure lingered in my nostrils. My grandfather, who passed in the fall of 2018, often alternated between singing mid-century country-western classics and flipping on the TV in search of old Western films when we visited, always trying to get me and my mom to sing or watch with him to bond over our shared love of horses and the proverbial frontier. Every barn I ever visited had their radios set to the local country station, and it was the soundtrack to the exercise rides and lessons of almost everyone I knew.

I never really learned to rodeo, and most of my equine education was the product of the local teacher's proclivity for Morgan horses and English riding, and yet my experience of the horse world was still deeply informed by country and cowboy codes. Even though I didn't grow up anywhere near the old Western frontier or on the rodeo circuit, I still learned to associate the sounds of country and the aesthetics of the cowboy with a sense of freedom, hard work, and the feeling of strength and self-sufficiency that working on a farm instilled in me. This stuck with me even when I no longer had access to the rural farmland on which I spent much of my childhood, and when I came to graduate school and began thinking seriously about research projects I was drawn to explore this phenomenon with an academic eye. Coming from a music department, the overlap between country, rodeo, and an American identity built on patriotism was too enticing to overlook—and the preteen version of myself, made fun of for being a horse girl by people whose music tastes encompassed "anything but country," couldn't resist the opportunity, either. In this dissertation, while the project may not have turned out to be what I had originally envisioned, I argue for the importance of analyzing rodeo and country music together as contexts where identity markers are invented, claimed, negotiated, and circulated among a wide range of audiences across centuries.

I open this introduction with this brief reflection on my identity because of how it has influenced not only my choice of topic, but also how I have approached it. This is done in the spirit of reflexive ethnography, wherein being attentive to the researcher's position in the field illuminates how "our shadows join with others, past and present, in a web of histories: personal histories, the histories of our academic field, and the histories of those we study" (Cooley and Barz 2008: 5). While my "field" was perhaps a bit less conventional and my interactions with interlocutors less intimate than for many ethnographers, I think it is still important to note how and why I chose to engage in this research. As described above, I come to this topic as an insider, doing research "at home" because of my own whiteness, my status as a listener of country music, and my equestrian background. I grew up around horses, cows, and arena dirt, and learned to sing by belting along with the Chicks and Carrie Underwood while I mucked out stalls and hauled hay bales. Being a horse person has always been part of who I am, and when the opportunity to pursue that interest academically came to me, I had no hesitation about galloping off into the sunset with this project. Had I been able to carry out my research as originally intended, spending much more time in the inperson field, this part of my identity would likely have been of service in opening some doors on the professional rodeo circuit. However, COVID-19's not-so-gentle nudge in a different direction instead allowed me to do a great deal more reflecting on the wider structural and historical ways that white patriotism has been baked into the concepts of the American frontier and cowboy identity.

While in many ways my own whiteness and enculturation in these spheres allowed me to occupy this insider position, it also made some things harder for me to see clearly. I have tried throughout this dissertation to be attentive to my own bias while also making it clear that not all country or rodeo fans are white supremacists, and any mistakes found within these pages are solely my own. The last five years have been host to great personal and national divisions within the United States, and while it has occasionally been uncomfortable to confront my own complicity with these structures of whiteness throughout this project, I have found it to be extremely rewarding and important work. I have felt a keen sense of responsibility as a white person to use my insider status in this arena to reveal what bits I can of whiteness's nearly invisible structuring presence in rodeo and country alike. In doing so I hope to have created space to engage in a deeper and more nuanced discussion on how we collectively and individually define American identity.

Research Methods and the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic Like many graduate students in the year 2020, I faced serious challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March of 2020, I was in the middle of preparing for my comprehensive exams. I had just finished my dissertation proposal, learned that my partner and I would be relocating to Illinois in the fall for his graduate program, and begun to plan for an exciting year of rodeo attendance and travel from the transportation hub of Chicago. The quick spread of COVID-19 across the globe almost seemed to laugh at my proactive planning, and for a while everything seemed to hang in limbo. My exams were taken remotely and defended over Zoom. I taught asynchronous and virtual classes and said goodbye to my incredible students in an email at the end of the year. I lost family, friends, and students to the pandemic in more ways than one. And in the background of all of this loomed the question of whether I would even be able to complete my dissertation research as proposed. Prior to the pandemic, I had attended several local rodeos and made the trip to the 2018 National Finals in Las Vegas, but the year of following the PRCA circuit that I had planned was increasingly looking like it would be out of reach as rodeos either

shut their doors for the season or proceeded to largely ignore COVID-19 precautions. I decided to take the summer to focus on our upcoming cross-country move and allow my brain some space to think about other possibilities, and when fall came I was no longer able to ignore the obvious: I needed to reformat my entire project.

This was not a decision I made lightly, and ultimately issues of funding, time, health, and my own lack of patience were the deciding factors in this change. I could have waited for the pandemic to end and then carried on with my research as planned, but I wasn't willing to put my life and career on hold for an undetermined period, nor was it a financially viable option for me to do so. Instead, I took inspiration from the amazing musicologists on my committee and in my graduate cohort and began to think more broadly about history. Doing this allowed me to identify with greater specificity the distinct lack of a documented musical history of rodeo, and inspired me to design this interdisciplinary project as a way to still utilize the in-person fieldwork I had already done and the virtual fieldwork I could do during the pandemic while making a real contribution to the field of rodeo history by putting as much of its music in one place as possible and identifying the historical trends and values revealed by that ordering. This is not the ethnography-forward project I intended to do, and in fact even conducting virtual interviews proved to be incredibly difficult as many of my potential interlocutors struggled with bad internet, a lack of technological fluency, or simple distrust of me as a person they'd never seen before and didn't know. Instead, my patchwork of methodologies—some interviews and fieldwork, yes, but also archival research, data organization, and analysis of media, charts, and marketing—provides a multi-faceted look at the way American rodeo and the figure of the cowboy have retained their enduring but malleable popularity and status in popular culture over the last hundred years despite the frontier all but disappearing. I return in the conclusion of this dissertation to the many avenues of future research that this dissertation provides a starting point for, including more detailed and geographically specific historical and ethnographic research.

When I began re-orienting my dissertation after coming to the realization that I would not be able to accomplish conventional in-person ethnographic fieldwork, I initially struggled to comprehend how I would be able to produce an acceptable work of ethnomusicology during a pandemic. Discussions of on-the-ground fieldwork as an all-consuming "rite of passage" (Johnson 1984), the only way to really know anything, had spooked me away from considering a fully virtual project before COVID-19 and only made the thought of that transition harder once it became apparent that this was my only option. However, digital and virtual ethnography is increasingly becoming commonplace in ethnomusicology and other social science disciplines; in their 2012 volume *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds*, Boellstorff et. al describe ethnography as "a flexible, responsive methodology, sensitive to emergency phenomena and emergent research methods" where "the choice of fieldsite and method should be based on the questions motivating inquiry" (Boellstorff et. al 2012: 6). Similarly, Timothy Cooley, Katherine Meizel, and Nasir Syed write about virtuality in fieldwork as a method that "lends itself to new ways of engaging well-worn ethnomusicological questions" about the value and purpose of fieldwork, the ways that humans relate to each other, and the role of communication in cultural practices (Cooley et. al 2008: 92). In my case, not only were considerations of my own and others' health and safety vital in making the decision to complete a mostly virtual project, but it is also true that if I were to take Cooley et. al's insistence that "fieldwork should happen where music happens" to heart, then my project required a virtual approach that could properly account for the digital circulation

of media, symbols, and ideas (Ibid.: 106).

Further, while my reliance on archives and historical sources might also initially seem somewhat outside the purview of traditional ethnomusicology, engaging with archival research and the production of archival materials has always been an important facet of ethnomusicological work. Recently, arguments have been made for the importance of developing more sustainable and ethical ways of engaging with archival research, recording, and preservation (Landau and Topp Fargion 2012, Topp Fargion 2009). Indeed, folk and country musics—cowboy music in particular—have often been embroiled in issues of archives and ethical archival practices, first through the work of the Lomax family in the early twentieth century and continuing with anthologies, preservationist ethnomusicology, and other recording projects into the present day (Fenster 1989, Filene 1991 and 2000, Slowik 2012). Pursuing archival research that looks at the history of music at the rodeo importantly situates these musical objects and practices not just within a broader historical context of American culture, but also within discourses on archiving, preservation, and ethnomusicology as a discipline. This project does not make preservation ethics or archival practice its central question, but through weaving historical sources into ethnographic and intertextual ones to trace patterns over time and geographic distance, I hope to have contributed to the growing body of literature in historical ethnomusicology that seeks creative and multivalent approaches to bringing history and ethnography together.

Literature Review: Rodeo, Ritual, and Identity This dissertation connects two distinct bodies of literature: works on rodeo and other sporting events, and works on country music. The first and most famous anthropological study of rodeo, Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence's 1982 *Rodeo: An Anthropologist Looks at the Wild and the Tame*, set the tone for much of the work on rodeo that would follow in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. In her monograph, Lawrence is broadly concerned with "the ways in which rodeo is used by ranching society—and by the population which shares that ethos—as a ritual event which serves to express, reaffirm, and perpetuate its values, attitudes, and way of life" (Lawrence 1982: 5). She relies on the work of anthropologists Edward Leach, Clifford Geertz, and Victor Turner, particularly their interpretive approaches to ritual as a symbolic realm; the sport of rodeo in this study represents the repeated playing out of frontier and expansionist rituals of domination and conquest, both over nature and over non-human animals. Just as the Balinese cockfights described by Geertz carry deep social meaning, so too does rodeo "[render] ordinary, everyday experiences comprehensible by presenting [them] in terms of acts and objects which have had their practical consequences removed and been reduced (or, if you prefer, raised) to the level of sheer appearances, where their meaning can be more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived" (Geertz 1974: 23). Rodeo orders particular themes "into an encompassing structure, presents them in such a way as to throw into relief a particular view of their essential nature. It puts a construction on them, makes them, to those historically positioned to appreciate their construction, meaningful—visible, tangible, graspable—'real,' in an ideational sense" (Ibid.). Any meaning found in these rituals is not simply present inherently in the performance, but rather comes into being through the presence of the right audience; in other words, the success of the ritual is entirely dependent on the identities and historical positioning of the spectators. Lawrence, like Geertz, reads rodeo as a sort of collective text where particular facets of rodeo's ethos can be read and interpreted by audiences, but in lieu of focusing on who exactly those audiences are, she instead focuses on what they "read"

from the event itself. In her study, she pays close attention to the way symbols play out in performance, eventually arguing that rodeo, at its deepest and most symbolic level, "[gives] assurance that there are still wild elements to tame while at the same time expressing ambivalence concerning the nature-to-culture transformation which is symbolized in the various events [of rodeo]" (Lawrence 1982: 11).

Most importantly for this dissertation, Lawrence's monograph explicitly ties the figure of the cowboy to the struggle with identity that is symbolized by rodeo's events. She argues that the cowboy "came to find his self-identity through being constantly at war with that portion of his universe which can be conceptualized as 'the wild'... Not only was there the willingness, which could be conceived of as arising out of necessity, to destroy any part of the wild that did not fit his [cultural] scheme, but beyond this, there came to be an active desire, as a force in itself, to do so" (Ibid.: 65). For Lawrence, the history of the American frontier cowboy, born of cattle ranching and dime novels alike, was intimately connected to a struggle for dominance and an impulse to destroy opposition. She also connects this to the idea of individualism and personal freedoms, where cowboys "rebelled against the work pattern of the civilized, industrial world they left behind," turning instead to the relative freedom that the frontier offered as a substitute where a man could live by his own rules and codes of honor (Ibid.: 66). All of these issues—freedom, individualism, violence—have maintained their relevance in rodeo's rituals well into the twenty-first century. While Lawrence's writing focuses on competitors over audiences, I pick up where her monograph leaves off to suggest that considering the shared markers of identity centered by rodeo and country music allows us to get a better understanding of that historical and cultural positioning that makes both audiences so susceptible to the ritual of rodeo and country performance.

While Lawrence's monograph is foundational to any academic study of rodeo, her text focuses primarily on ritual at the level of man versus beast, relying heavily on an interpretation of the nature-culture binary drawn from Sherry Ortner's, where culture is masculinized and valued over feminized nature, to analyze how rodeo plays out human domination in terms of wild versus tame (Ortner 1974). As a result, the identity centered by Lawrence's text is an invisibly white, masculine one, and while she discusses how the cowboy image came to be constructed through engagement with Wild West shows and cattle ranching, she is not attentive to the ways that race, gender, or nationality inflect either the cowboy or rodeo. In contrast to this, several recent publications have moved to explicitly center non-white and non-masculine perspectives on rodeo and cowboy identity (Barraclough 2019, Ford 2020, Scofield 2019, Wolman and Smith 2019). Both Elyssa Ford's 2020 monograph *Rodeo as Refuge*, *Rodeo as Rebellion* and Rebecca Scofield's 2019 *Outriders* move through a series of non-mainstream rodeo contexts to examine the ways that non-white, non-straight, even non-American individuals and groups utilize rodeo as a performance space where identity can be negotiated.

Scofield's book, which features chapters on cowgirls, prison rodeo, Black rodeo, and gay rodeo, argues that individuals in all of these settings not only resist a narrow definition of the cowboy but also use it to "strategically [deploy] complex notions like authenticity and heritage as a way to demand inclusion, but also, at times, exclude others" (Scofield 2019: 4). She takes a performance-oriented approach to considering identity in rodeo, building on a long line of scholars who take popular

performance as a realm for shaping regional and national identity (Deloria 1998 and 2004, Imada 2012, Jones 2015). For Scofield, rodeo performances represent a way for people who are marginalized in mainstream rodeo to "claim authenticity and demand greater inclusion in national mythologies, while also at times reiterating the inherently exclusionary aspects of these myths" (Ibid.: 5). As I discuss in Chapter Two of this dissertation, "us" versus "them" language has been historically key to how white rodeo maintains its boundaries and regulates the use of the cowboy figure within its performances; Scofield's work demonstrates how this linguistic strategy is also utilized in Black, gay, imprisoned, and feminine rodeo performance to police identity. Further, Scofield posits that rodeo performance can be analyzed as an "epistemology of the West: a specific way of knowing, or making others know, that one is western" (Ibid.). In other words, rodeo performances can tell us exactly what kind of ways of being count as Western for contestants, producers, and audiences alike. For this dissertation, I push Scofield's point further to argue that music is a foundational component of that epistemology and performance, both in how it imports cultural values and identities into rodeo through music as well as how the popular music that calls on rodeo codes and tropes exports Western ideology into popular culture at large.

Much like Scofield's monograph, Elyssa Ford's book is separated into chapters based on different rodeo contexts: Mexican charreada, Hawaiian rodeo, Indigenous rodeo, Black rodeo, and the gay rodeo circuit. Ford argues that all of these groups of people participate in rodeo "not just as sport but as a way to proclaim their right to the American past and to their American identity today" (Ford 2020: 1). Like Scofield, she considers rodeo to be a "site of cultural history," a place where the past is "performed, reproduced, and invented" (Ibid.: 3). In Ford's book, participating in rodeo is not necessarily about policing identity as it is in Scofield's text, but rather about finding space in a historical, national narrative through redefinition. For example, some participants feel comfortable with the gender roles inscribed so strictly onto rodeo, while others chafe at them and push back. Her chapter on charreada dialogues with Laura Barraclough's 2019 *Charros*, which chronicles contemporary charreada and how its competitors are utilizing the figure of the charro to engage with and challenge the American cowboy while negotiating masculinity, nationality, and Western authenticity. Similarly, Ford's chapter on Hawaiian rodeo and ranching culture reflects the discussion in David Wolman and Julian Smith's *Aloha Rodeo* of how paniolo's entry into rodeo completely upends popular conceptions of "cowboys and Indians" while complicating the way we conceive of identity, imperialism, and race (Wolman and Smith 2019: 3).

The unifying thread across all these rodeo contexts is a desire on behalf of participants to see their non-white, non-straight, or non-masculine identity reflected in history, and to then build a shared present through cementing and performing ties to historical authenticity. I suggest that this is possible in large part because of how deeply and thoroughly contemporary mainstream rodeo has constructed these connections in its own history. Both Scofield and Ford have noted that much of rodeo scholarship centers white folks, and this is true, but very few of those monographs have actively investigated how rodeo has come to be constructed as white beyond basic lip service to segregation in the era of rodeo's professionalization. In contrast, the collection of literature discussed in the above paragraphs is important in how it highlights the highly variable nature of contemporary and historical rodeo cowboy identity. Many of these texts have also hinted towards ways that rodeo performances by marginalized competitors have both changed and upheld the broader "epistemology of the West"

that rodeo represents (Scofield 2019: 5). In this dissertation, however, I work toward understanding the way that music is utilized and wielded by rodeo competitors and administrators who are not on the margins, but rather at rodeo's selfconstructed center. Doing so allows us to see the mechanisms by which the conventional cowboy icon is continually upheld and reinforced as authentic through entertainment and spectacle in professional rodeo, even as that icon may be sonically or performatively challenged in other spheres of popular culture by musicians, artists, and videographers. Because music circulates so widely, and through its sonic codes and lyrical content is so well suited for carrying moral and meaning, it provides a uniquely effective means for producers to add layers of complex narrative to any moment of the rodeo that line up with the kind of cowboy identity they are trying to convey.

I argue in this dissertation that at the 2020 National Finals Rodeo an idealized version of authentic cowboy identity is conveyed to audiences by highlighting connections between competitors and old-timey Americana through visuals and sounds rooted in nostalgic twentieth-century aesthetics and values. Many of today's rodeo cowboys have never ridden a range, but this fact seems to matter less now than adherence to Western social codes that are tied to nostalgia for a time when the range still existed. In professional rodeo, the historical and systematic violence that undergirds the idea of the Old West is sanitized by avoiding any explicit references to unjust or colonial violence against others. Instead, it is glamorized by highlighting the ritualized conflict between man and beast that so fundamentally characterizes rodeo events and by glorifying that struggle for victory through connecting it to similar struggles experienced by soldiers and law enforcement officers. Associating the cowboy figure with violence goes beyond simply acknowledging the frontier past he represents, however. In many ways, being a cowboy is about having the capacity for violence and struggle, but also for restraint.

Perhaps the most important theme that contributes to the reinforcement of these tropes in rodeo is the concept of cowboys being authentically Western because of their commitment to the idea of freedom. This manifests in many ways, but the most conventional connection comes in the popularly-cultivated image of the cowboy riding the open range, free to go where he wants and do what he wants with his trusty horse by his side. In the twenty-first century, however, that image is no longer accurate as barbed wire fences, railroad tracks, and federal range laws have thoroughly parceled out and privatized the West (Hornbeck 2010). Academic work on the increasingly prominent collegiate rodeo circuit also points out that the development of pre-professional rodeo indicates a changing demographic when it comes to rodeo cowboys of the twenty-first century; while some do come from rural backgrounds, now many professionals competing at the national level are university-educated and occupy different social positions than the cowboys of the nineteenth and twentieth century (Mahoney 2004, Theodori 2006 and 2007). Fewer and fewer cowboys actually work on the proverbial "range," and some rodeo competitors have never actually even worked with livestock on a ranch before entering the circuit for the first time (Branch 2018).

This reality is one that the NFR's opening ceremonies work to veil, choosing instead to maintain a grip on authenticity by highlighting connections between competitors and oldtimey Americana through visuals and sounds rooted in nostalgic twentieth-century aesthetics and values. Sociologist Beverly Stoeltje, building on the work of scholar Américo Paredes, suggests that the "longing for a past when

men were engaged in a struggle for something they considered noble and worthy"—i.e. the freedom that the American West represented— was key to how the figure of the cowboy became a fabricated folk hero (Stoeltje 2012: 54). Paredes tied this nostalgia to the concept of machismo, noting that in the United States an "artificial and grotesque" manliness emerged and continued to grow throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century because of a burgeoning sense of nationalism (Paredes [1967] 1993: 223-234). He suggests that in the United States, "machismo betrays a certain element of nostalgia; it is cultivated by those who feel they have been born too late. The North American macho acts as if the Wild West had never come to an end" (Ibid.: 234). Stoeltje connects this idea to a heritage-focused idea of nationalism, where in looking back at the past, individuals construct a sanitized perspective that "glamorizes it, removing the danger, disease, and death, and creating unity in the present" (Stoeltje 2012: 52).

The Wild West was dangerous in many ways, though it is difficult to definitively quantify the violence of the period due to both sources prone to exaggeration and the overrepresentation of criminals in Western movies, tv-shows, and dime novels. Regardless of the proliferation of inter-personal violence in the 1800s, death and disease were rampant as medicine continued to develop, and the colonial violence of expansion was (and still is) widespread and deeply traumatic for Indigenous people (Sánchez and Pita 2021). Further, rodeo's roots in Wild West shows reveal that the concept of a "Wild West" in the first place is a partially constructed one; indeed, folks like Buffalo Bill and other early Western entertainers "helped 'tame' the American West, metaphorically revealing a 'wild' West in need of control" (Masterson 1990: 13). Through creating and populating a vast, wild land ripe with the possibility of violence, the cowboy has always been positioned to occupy the role of the reluctant hero by defending that imagined landscape.

Associating the cowboy figure with violence goes beyond simply acknowledging the frontier past he represents, however. In many ways, being a cowboy is about having the capacity for violence and struggle, but also for restraint. The idea of engaging in a struggle only for "something they considered noble and worthy" suggests that any violence that might ensue in such a struggle is reluctant; they might prefer a quiet life of solitude and freedom, but when something needs fixing, the cowboy is compelled to act (Stoeltje 2012: 54). As Stoeltje and Paredes suggest, this idea of necessary violence, rooted in the impulse to protect and expand, has its basis in cultures of masculinity from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Americas. Specifically, scholars have discussed the many ways that physical violence was a key part of building a concept of masculinity built on a "culture of honor" where honor "equates with the strength and power of a man to enforce his will on others... In this culture, a man has to be ready to strike back at all times" (Moore 2014: 31). It is not necessarily a natural proclivity for violence that spurs action, but the necessity of protecting one's honor. Indeed, as the figure of the cowboy developed throughout the twentieth century, honor and the capacity to do what's right became central to the values attributed to that cultural icon.

[Note: Indeed, many scholars have suggested that the Wild West was not very violent, but rather that a mixture of things contribute to our perceptions of it as such, including (a) an overreliance on fictionalized accounts of the West, (b) the sensationalized nature of much news media from that time period, and (c) an overreaction by New Western historians devoted to overturning the erasing impetus of the Frederick Turner's frontier thesis and highlighting instead the historical violence done

to marginalized groups (Benson 1998, DiLorenzo 2010, Dykstra 2009).]

The existing literature on rodeo makes it clear that rodeo's history, rituals, and continued place in U.S. American society are tied up in complex discourse around what makes someone an authentic cowboy. Recently, in an interview with Nevada Colwell and Steve Goedert for the NFR Extra podcast, professional bareback rider Kaycee Feild discusses the widespread performance of "cowboy manners" in rodeo as being tied to an appreciation for the history of the sport and those who have competed before them: I think part of it [("the cowboy way")] is young guys really respect our elders, and the champions that have come and gone, and I also think that our culture, the Western culture which is probably the most patriotic culture there is... [is the] backbone [of that]... they know right from wrong, and they know it in their heart, and just because there's a lotta wrong going on right now doesn't mean it's okay. I think cowboys are just... y'know, I don't know if that's hard-headed or what it is, but they respect who they are and what life is really about, and I think the mannerism is kind of all in that. (Feild 2021: 20:57).

In just a few sentences, Feild has made explicit the link for him—and other rodeo competitors—between patriotism, Western identity, and an appreciation for the past. Cowboy authenticity, for these athletes, does not rely on riding the range in the twenty-first century. Instead, a commitment to upholding historic Old West values is foregrounded, perhaps because it is attainable for most twenty-first century cowboys in a way that roaming the range is not. We have shifted from a concept of freedom that indexes the territorial vastness of the Western frontier to one that emphasizes a perspective centering national and even Constitutional freedoms. Feild's quote above illustrates, too, that the ability to distinguish "right" from "wrong" is important, and implies that a real cowboy will stand up for what's right because they "know it in their heart." In this dissertation, I argue that this idea of Western authenticity—and patriotism—is a central premise of the rodeo in the twenty-first century.

Literature Review: Sports, Music, and the Self This project also contributes to recent literature on music and sports. Considering music and sport together opens up a realm of representation that has attracted several scholars in recent years, many of whom have examined how sport produces and regulates particular kinds of bodies and identities (Armstrong and Young 1999, Bateman 2014, Hammond 2011, Jack 2013, Kytö 2011). Beyond the obvious similarities between music and sports in terms of how both regulate the movements and actions of participants, in the context of nationalism the synergy between music and sport as governing practices can construct, contest, reinforce, and negotiate individual and group identity. Sports scholar Ken McLeod argues that "sports and popular music are most firmly linked in their common appeal to the body and its pleasures by means of both participation and spectatorship," and indeed the unifying locus of the body is where identity is most clearly expressed in sports (McLeod 2011: 1). Anthropologists Noel Dyck and Eduardo Archetti take this idea further, positing that sport and dance both represent "techniques of the body" (Mauss 1973) that allow space for the production, reproduction, and contestation of identities but also function as "penetrating analytical vantage points from which to apprehend the taken-for-granted arrangements and assumptions of social life" (Dyck and Archetti 2003: 2).

For rodeo, national identity is the umbrella beneath which other identity categories fall, and a U.S. American identity that reifies a nostalgic shared past is central to the patriotic project of rodeo. Many sports scholars have argued that competitive sports represent opportunities for spectators and athletes alike to identify with their nation socially, ideologically, and in their bodies (Buchanan 2002, Hammond 2011, Schoonderwoerd 2011). In her work on Bulgarian soccer culture and nationalism, ethnomusicologist Donna Buchanan has argued that both music and sport are "powerful forms of cultural performance that possess the ability to generate national sentiment, and even to transform that sentiment into prescriptions for nationalist action" (Buchanan 2002: 24). Rodeo operates in a very similar way, utilizing music to infuse the sporting event with a nationalist ethos predicated on nostalgia. It is not an altogether different attitude from the one that drove Donald Trump's 2016 "Make America Great Again" campaign, and indeed the messages of both rodeo and Trump's campaign rely on the same nostalgia for an American past that was somehow more authentic, more free, than the America we live in now. Further, they both posit that only through direct action can that imagined past be recovered, reclaimed, and remade in the present.

In this dissertation, I argue that professional rodeo makes use of music and media to narrow its lens onto a single interpretation of the way these identities intersect, often obfuscating all other perspectives. Rodeo competitors and audiences alike are offered the chance to experience what it means to be a true, patriotic American, but only if they believe in the authenticity of the image being embodied in the arena before them. The figure of the cowboy, so fundamentally different now from what it was in the nineteenth century, retains a historical authenticity that is entirely dependent on the participants' willingness to let their nostalgia for an imagined past color the way they interpret rodeo events and performances. The cowboys and cowgirls in the arena likewise represent a history that can still be accessed by contemporary audiences and competitors through engagement with rodeo, allowing them to "[bear] the nation in their bodies" just as capoeira dancers or Bulgarian soccer players do (Buchanan 2002: 24). Music and sport work together in rodeo's past and into its future to provide audiences with a narrative that feels continuous, both incredibly real and yet also always calling back to an era where times were simpler. Musicologist Beth Levy has argued that the Wild West and its associated figures were historically a "natural and strategic choice for projects both romantic and modern, individual and communal, nostalgic and progressive" (Levy 2012: 2), and I further argue that this tension between past and present is an important part of contemporary rodeo's continued success.

Chapter Summaries In order to understand the contemporary constellation of music, media, identity, and sport that defines rodeo in the twenty-first century, first the history of that entanglement must be made explicit. Chapter Two of this dissertation lays out a brief musical history of rodeo, beginning with Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows and journeying all the way up to the present day. This dissertation marks the first time this full historical narrative has been collected into one place in print, and for this reason I elected to focus in this chapter on some of the biggest names and trends found at each period in rodeo's history. First, I discuss the foundational relationship between rodeo and popular music—at the turn of the twentieth century, this meant brass band music, vaudeville, and ragtime—that began with Wild West shows, noting how these shows laid the foundational for professional, competitive rodeo in later years through their mythologization of the Old West and their musical Othering of nonwhite performers. This trend continued throughout the twentieth century in a

variety of ways, from heavy reliance on famous white country-western performers like Merle Haggard and Gene Autry to the gradual incorporation of more diverse genres in the last thirty years, though only as themed one-offs and never the main, unmarked event.

This discussion of musical inclusion and exclusion lays the groundwork for later chapters, where I discuss how contemporary rodeos work to perform specific manifestations of cowboy and American identity. It also reveals the prevalence of military and hyperpatriotic influence in rodeo's inception as a sport. I argue in this chapter that the rodeo cowboy, increasingly the only "real" cowboy left in the United States as the proverbial frontier continued to disappear in the twentieth century, came to represent this nexus of influences and sentiments, both in the rodeo contest and in the music accompanying it. The cowboy identity put forth by rodeo throughout this time period remained remarkably consistent despite changing times and political contexts, and its assumed whiteness, rurality, and pro-military attitude have all become baked into the contemporary iterations of the cowboy that the rest of this dissertation analyzes. I also argue that country music, the genre most consistently associated with rodeo through its history, plays a particularly important part in how that identity has been constructed and maintained across the twentieth century.

Chapter Three builds on this history to compare the ways that historically-informed ideas of nostalgia, authenticity, and patriotism have come together in both rodeo and country music to influence the way that individuals in both spheres have engaged with the process of identity-making in the twenty-first century. I first examine rodeo's recent history of involvement with the U.S. military, discussing the international military rodeo circuit for the first time in academic scholarship as well as examining the American military rodeo circuit and the professional rodeo's dedication to supporting United States troops with fundraisers, international tours, and dedicated opening ceremonies and events. Many rodeo competitors both past and present have been involved in the military, as far back as the ex-military individuals working in Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows, and I will discuss in my fourth chapter how deeply themes of pro-military propaganda and patriotism have been embedded in the most recent professional rodeos via their opening ceremonies. I also explore the way that country music has become a bastion of pro-military sentiment in the twenty-first century; historically, country singers have often engaged with the struggle and trauma of war, with country songs even being used as military recruitment tools in the 1950s, but after the events of September 11th, 2001, country took on a much more overtly jingoistic tone in its portrayal of patriotism. This sharpening of topical focus, as well as country's already established tendency to lift up narratives of white, working-class, conservative Americans, led to it fitting naturally with rodeo's emphasis on nostalgia for the Old West.

Chapter Three also deals with some recent controversies in the country and rodeo spheres that share the same root tensions because of how they highlight shared values and interpretations of identity. I discuss public backlash to the National Finals Rodeo's 2020 many production decisions related to the COVID-19 pandemic—most rodeo-goers who were active on social media protested any concessions made to the pandemic—alongside some other recent controversies around the acceptability of blackface performances at events and diversity on rodeo committees. In a similar vein, I also unpack some of country's more recent scandals, including the blacklisting of The Chicks for their anti-war comments in 2003, their subsequent re-entry into the genre with Beyoncé at the 2016 Country Music Association Awards, singer Morgan Wallen's highly-publicized use of the n-word, country singers'

flouting of COVID-19 protocols while on tour, and Lady Antebellum's appropriation of Black blues singer Lady A's name and the resulting legal fights that continue at the time of this writing. I discuss these controversies not to shine a negative light on rodeo or on country music, but rather to demonstrate how these highly contentious events in recent years highlight the similarities in audiences, values, and methods of communication in both arenas.

My fourth chapter contains the bulk of my ethnographic work, and relies on the connection between rodeo, country music, patriotism, and cowboy identity established in the previous two chapters to undertake a close analysis of the 2020 National Finals Rodeo. I examine a selection of the opening ceremonies, which begin each night of rodeo for ten consecutive days, with an eye for how they work together to create a gradually deepening narrative for audiences. Each opening ceremony on its own contains a carefully-curated mix of music, video, performance, and ritual that holds meaning for audiences, producers, and competitors in the arena. I argue that these rodeo rituals work to define a specific iteration of cowboy—and, by extension, American—identity that is rooted in patriotism and a willingness to act to protect (or use) individual or national freedoms. This is accomplished through visually collapsing the distinction between cowboy and soldier, as in the ceremonies where new Marines are sworn in on the arena dirt or in videos where Texas Rangers and rodeo competitors complement each other, and through the deft deployment of differing styles of music to incorporate audiences' emotions and bodies into the spectacle of the rodeo. The overlapping values and audiences between rodeo and country make this ritual legible for participants, and both spheres' histories of patriotism and invisible, nostalgic whiteness link them together in a shared performance of the Old West that stakes a claim to a particular iteration of cowboy identity as the most authentic.

My fifth and final chapter picks up this thread of performativity, turning away from the sport of rodeo to instead examine how the figure of the rodeo cowboy has continued to circulate in popular music outside of the sporting context. To accomplish this, I discuss two different musical contexts with an eye for how rodeo cowboy values are attached to fashion and other visual markers of identity in popular music, which can then either be reaffirmed or subverted through performance. First, I examine a subgenre I call rodeo country, made up of country singers who are personally connected to the sport of rodeo, usually as (ex-)competitors or rodeo queens. These singers explicitly engage with fashion items that, for them and for fans of rodeo and country alike, represent particular personality traits or values, including Stetsons or cowboy hats, boots, belt buckles, and Wrangler jeans. They use these visual markers of rodeo identity to comment on their own determination, grit, and work ethic, and conversely re-ascribe those values explicitly back to those fashion items.

In contrast to this reaffirming subgenre, where the singers' authenticity and validity in the country sphere is not a question, I also discuss recent manifestations of the Black West, known as the "Yeehaw Agenda," in popular music (Malandro 2018). The American West was always a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural place, but that history has been whitewashed so thoroughly that when non-white folks claim cowboy identity in the twenty-first century they are often met with racist backlash and controversy. In Chapter Five, I analyze two different cases of Black cowboy identity appearing in popular music to discuss how the symbols and trappings of cowboy identity are utilized by artists in other genres. Rapper Megan Thee Stallion has made extensive use of Western aesthetics in her music videos and performances, and her recent collaboration with Los Angeles crew the Compton

Cowboys for her Apple Music Awards performance represents a sharp contrast to the conservative, nostalgic atmosphere where cowboy aesthetics normally appear, even as the underlying message of work ethic and grit remain the same. As her performance took place fully under the rap genre's umbrella, no one protested her use of cowboy aesthetics. In contrast, Lil Nas X's country-trap hit "Old Town Road" was met with intense controversy because of his Blackness and his initial Billboard chart categorization as a country artist. Both Lil Nas X and Megan Thee Stallion represent equally authentic embodiments of the contemporary Black West, and they utilize the same visual markers of cowboy identity that rodeo country musicians do, but the identity politics of popular music genres caused those performances to be received very differently, revealing unspoken assumptions about whiteness in both country and rodeo. Both types of performance also serve to give us insight into how the cowboy figure maintains its relevance in the twenty-first century, and what alternative sets of values might be poised to infiltrate the sacred space of rodeo in the years to come. Chapter 2: Rodeo's Musical History

cw: racist terminology, descriptions of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism

[The Wild West] is the best and most valuable object lesson in the history of our common country ever conceived or carried into magnificent, colossal and effective execution by the genius of man. It pictures faithfully, because the actors in this great drama of civilization are not mimic artists, but are the veritable heroes of the real conflict waged to proclaim civilization and freedom from Ocean to Ocean, and from Gulf to Gulf. Truth is stamped upon its every act and illuminates its every illustration. — 1895 program for Buffalo Bill's Wild West

Rodeo has been musical since its earliest days as a sport. From its beginnings in the Wild West shows that proliferated at the end of the nineteenth century to singing cowboy Gene Autry's heavy hand in the early commercialization of rodeo, music and sound have been integral to the way that the sport has formed and developed over the twentieth century. Despite this, music has often fallen to the background in academic considerations of rodeo's structure, impact, and relevance throughout history. A few publications have touched briefly on music's historic presence in rodeo, though it seldom receives more than a mention (Allen 1998, Keillor 2002, Levy 2012, Turnbull 2016). However, attending any sort of rodeo today will clearly illustrate how profoundly music has permeated every aspect of the show and how it conditions spectators' responses, from pre-rodeo entertainment to music that occurs during events to affiliated concerts that take place once the rodeo is over. In order to understand these contemporary events, however, it is necessary to provide an overview of the key historical contexts that created them. In this chapter, I lay out the musical foundations of rodeo in the last century, paying particular attention to what each set of genres and historical contexts show us about the kinds of values that are brought to rodeo through music. Wild West shows, cowboy bands, singing cowboys, and popular music all come together in this chapter to give us a clearer look at what constitutes the musically imagined West for rodeo audiences and producers alike throughout the twentieth century. Throughout this chapter, I specifically argue that rodeo and the military have been entwined since the beginning of rodeo's history because of the way both soundscapes evoke connections to a particular brand of U.S. American patriotism, where defending (and exercising) personal and national freedoms are of the utmost importance. I also suggest that examining rodeo's musical history gives insight into the ways in which "restorative nostalgia"—Svetlana Boym's term for

a nostalgia that attempts to reconstruct some elusive distant home or shared past under the banner of authentic "truth and tradition"—operates as a critical feature of the American rodeo throughout its long history (Boym 2001: xviii). Even in its earliest days, newly forged from the remnants of Wild West shows in the early twentieth century, rodeo's appeal largely lies in the way it invites its spectators, competitors, and administrators to participate in a collective act of imagining an Old West where freedom could be found in every river bend and open plain. Music, as an active agent in the process of making knowledge, plays an important role in defining this collective history and giving form to the identities produced by rodeo's symbolic performances.

In the ritualized and embodied performances of cowboy identity that underpin rodeo, a particular romanticized narrative of the American West is made real for its participants. That narrative is brought to active life in the figure of the cowboy in myriad ways through rodeo performances, and music's complex nexus of nostalgia and authenticity in the rodeo context helps to define and mythologize a white-washed and larger-than-life cowboy figure. When this figure is taken up and circulated in performances at the rodeo and beyond, it becomes a fluid place where issues of inclusion and exclusion are negotiated throughout history. This chapter also emphasizes the role played by cowboys in rodeo administration and production to note that the very individuals for whom rodeo's imagery really matters are often the ones driving the development of that imagery. Boym writes that "fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future" (Ibid.: xvi). In the case of rodeo, this is reflected in how music informs present portrayals of cowboy identity, built on imagined figures from the past, while also contributing to the ways those performances are embodied and carried into the future by participants and spectators, shaping rodeos to come. The cowboys who run rodeos have always been both personally and professionally invested in rodeo's narrative, and they make use of the way that rodeo speaks to markers of identity both on a national and a deeply intimate level to reinforce their own worldviews while also adapting them to a changing cultural climate throughout history.

Beginnings: Wild West Shows, Cowboy Bands, and Early Rodeo's Musical Entertainment

As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, rodeo as a sport was partially inspired by the Wild West shows that were so popular throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While there were several shows touring the United States and elsewhere at any given time in this era, the most famous of these is Buffalo Bill's Wild West, a show led by Buffalo Bill Cody in various forms from 1883 to 1913. Buffalo Bill's Wild West toured around the United States as well as abroad, spreading a carefully curated image of the American West as it did so. Much academic literature has been devoted to Wild West shows in general, and to Buffalo Bill's career in particular, and these works have shown that frontier entertainment had wide-reaching implications for the way that American and international audiences conceived of the proverbial Wild West and the mythologized individuals who populated it (Deahl 1975, Kasson 2000, Laegrid 2014, Levy 2012, Reddin 1999, Rydell and Kroes 2005, Warren 2005). In this section, I will explore the musical components of these shows that have set the stage for contemporary rodeo's musical context.

[Note: While Buffalo Bill's Wild West only ran during these years, Buffalo Bill Cody found formal employment in popular Wild West entertainment beginning with an 1872 show called The Scouts of

the Prairie, produced by Ned Buntline in Chicago. In 1874 he worked on a new play called Scouts of the Plains, before founding the Buffalo Bill Combination in 1874, a performing troupe that toured for ten years before the founding of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. After the show went bankrupt in 1913, Cody cycled through a few other employment opportunities before dying in poverty in 1917 (Fees).]

Despite the scholarly attention paid to the show as a whole, comparatively little work has been done on what Buffalo Bill's Wild West would have sounded like. In his dissertation, American Studies scholar Michael L. Masterson argues that music played a vital role in the Wild West's operation as a vehicle for expressing the American expansionist ethos, while also teaching specific historical perspectives and values (Masterson 1990: 55). Archived show programs, newspaper clippings, and letters show that although multiple kinds of musical performance took place before, during, and after each show, the so-called Cowboy Band was the most prominent. Made up of brass and wind instruments, standard for the popular bands of this time period, they were directed by band leader William Sweeney and dressed in traditional cowboy attire. They played a variety of songs from popular entertainment catalogues of the day, including instrumental versions of opera arias, ragtime hits, waltzes, and more, and indeed programs for these shows often contained advertisements from music publishers whose catalogues were being tapped (Masterson 1995). In 1995, Masterson drew on his extensive research into the show's musical history and produced an album entitled *Wild West Music of Buffalo Bill's Cowboy Band*, performed by the Americus Brass Band and directed by Dr. Masterson. The track listing for this album can be found in Appendix A, and it illustrates the Cowboy Band's versatility with respect to genre, ranging from Handel to military marches to European and American folk tunes.

Several important trends become apparent in examining the music of Buffalo Bill's Wild West: first, patriotism and military sounds have been incorporated into the spectacle of the Wild West from its beginning; second, Buffalo Bill's Wild West show provided a fertile ground for turning the American West into an imaginary place both at home and abroad; and third, issues of identity (particularly race, gender, and class) have seldom been as stable as they appear on the rodeo or Wild West show stage. The first of these trends is manifest in the opening sounds spectators would have heard when attending Buffalo Bill's Wild West: the Cowboy Band gathering together to play "The Star-Spangled Banner." This practice was not established within American sports more broadly until well into the twentieth century, though there are records of the song being played at some baseball and basketball games in the late nineteenth century; some suggest that Buffalo Bill's show spreading the practice across the United States and abroad contributed to the song's installation as the national anthem in 1931 (Ferris 2014, Masterson 1995). The playing of the future national anthem functioned to frame the show in a patriotic light just as it welcomed and enfolded spectators into a shared mythology of Americana. The song's wartime history and connotations—poet Francis Scott Key wrote the lyrics in 1812 after witnessing the British attack on Fort McHenry in Baltimore—also inspire feelings of national pride in conquest and protective violence that will be reinforced in the spectacle that follows it. Masterson argues that hearing "The Star-Spangled Banner" in this fashion caused audiences to "mentally suspend real time" to become actors in the pageantry of the American West, allowing themselves to identify with the heroes of the arena (Masterson 1990: 56-57). As the fourth chapter in this dissertation argues, this framing device continues to function in this exact way in twenty-first century rodeo, where opening ceremonies and patriotic pageantry incorporate audiences actively into

the contest playing out in the arena before them.

Patriotism also colored the sounds of Buffalo Bill's Wild West through the prolific military soundscapes that undergirded many of the recreated battles and historic vignettes that made up the show. Not only do battle marches and military airs occupy a significant space on the Cowboy Band's program (see Appendix A), but so do the loud, raucous sounds of cheering and shouting interrupted by musket and cannon fire. Music and warfare have been intertwined for millennia, and that history is far too extensive to cover in this dissertation, but particularly within the United States band music has a long history of being utilized during war to heighten morale, regulate movement and strategy, and serve ceremonial functions. As military bands began to see less actual combat moving into the twentieth century and their ceremonial functions increased, bands' repertoire also adjusted to include a wider range of popular songs of the day while retaining a body of martial music. The Cowboy Band leader, cornet player William Sweeney, knew these genres and sounds well; he was hired by Buffalo Bill in 1883 after spending 10 years serving in the United States Army on the Western frontier, and the music he programmed for the Wild West correlates with these trends (Conrad 2016). Alongside the sounds and smells of gunfire and explosive cannons, the music of this show brought to the fore the military history of expansion and violence that goes hand in hand with the making of American legends and icons.

[Note: See "The Star Spangled Banner" in the YouTube playlist for an example of what this would have sounded like. See also "The Passing of Red Man" and "Offenbachiana" in the YouTube playlist for an example of the kind of music the Cowboy Band would have been performing at this time. Interested parties might begin with Newsome 1998, Riley and Brucher 2013, and Sullivan 2017.]

When it came to creating the iconic cowboy, specifically, Buffalo Bill's Wild West utilized more than military and patriotic sounds to craft this figure. Musically, the Cowboy Band also participated in acts of sonic whitewashing and racial stereotyping, appropriating non-white popular music genres and pairing them with exploitative casting and representations of non-white actors. Various iterations of Buffalo Bill's entertainment complex included white and Black cowboys, Mexican vaqueros, Argentinian gauchos, Indigenous horsemen, Russian and Ukrainian Cossacks, and even Berber-speaking riders from the Middle East (Rogers and Seefeldt 2010). In 1893, Buffalo Bill changed the title of his show to Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World to reflect this varied makeup, but also to index a particular kind of masculinity; riders from around the world were included to bind them together in a "brotherhood of manly international riders" but also to highlight the superiority of the (white) American cowboy, who "stood as the finest image of manliness" (Ibid.). While the performances included actors of many ethnicities, the white cowboys were centered in displays of victory and domination. In other words, Buffalo Bill's Wild West was in some ways radically inclusive for the time, but only to serve a larger purpose of reinstating rough-and-tumble whiteness at the top of the masculine hierarchy it presented to audiences. Beyond the visual components of colonizing narratives, where white actors repeatedly achieved victory over non-white actors, this was partially accomplished through curated use of non-white musical genres. This spoke to the way popular culture at the time whitewashed and appropriated the products of non-white artists more generally in a process of "mining the musical resources of minority populations" intended to help "[solidify] a national identity based on frontiers of cultural exchange," which resulted in the nostalgic

softening of the violent process of empire (Levy 2012: 19). Two striking manifestations of this practice are in the coon songs and indigenous melodies arranged and deployed by the Cowboy Band during Wild West shows. Coon songs, so titled for the slur ("coon") meaning "Black person," represented a genre that presented racist stereotypes of Black people and Black music that were extremely popular among white audiences throughout the nineteenth century, especially on the minstrel show stage. These stereotypes often portrayed Blackness as wild, sexual, and primitive in nature, especially in the context of jazz and ragtime, and these caricatures found purchase both at home and abroad (Latham 2002, Thompson 2018). Programs from the Wild West's active years tell us that Buffalo Bill's Cowboy Band regularly performed coon songs, ragtime songs, early jazz pieces, and other pieces of music that were taken from contemporary Black musical traditions in their pre-show concerts, but almost never during the main show. Isolating the music of Black people to pre-show entertainment and diversion separated it from the more conventionally white music that played during the reenactments themselves.

[Note: Readers interested in learning more about the history of minstrelsy in the United States might begin with Eric Lott's *Love And Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993) and William J. Mahar's *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (1999).]

Much like the inclusion of non-white riders and reenactors in Buffalo Bill's Wild West, sonic inclusion in these shows was exploitative, and the end result was to reify whiteness as the most ideal social category while reinforcing the message that America would always emerge victorious in its various exploits of conquest and imperialism.

Indigenous songs too had a place in Buffalo Bill's Wild West, though at first glance a very different one than Black musics. Indigenous horsemen and actors played a big role in many of the acts in the Wild West show, and indeed one of the central themes of each show was "cowboys versus Indians," as historic battles between various white and Indigenous groups of people were reenacted as one of the main events. Also present in most shows were various presentations done by Indigenous people of their horsemanship, marksmanship, or dances. Publicity materials often represent Native performers as fulfilling the "noble savage" or "vanishing Indian" role, but those same photos and illustrations were often accompanied by comments by the performers themselves. These comments, alongside other primary sources, have allowed scholars to argue that Native performers were more than hired actors in these shows, and that in fact they made use of Wild West shows to assert their own opinions, viewpoints, and messages about what mattered to them (Black Elk 1952, McNenly 2014 and 2015). And yet, many accounts of Wild West shows throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggest that indigenous performers were frequently mistreated while the roles they played in the arena continued to spread misinformation and reinforce the popular racist notion that Indigenous people were savage, violent, and in need of taming or domestication (Allen 2015). Indigenous music, unlike the Black musics arranged by the Cowboy Band that were already integrated into popular culture in the U.S., was also utilized to further caricature Indigenous actors in Buffalo Bill's Wild West. It usually appeared in two forms: first, actual Indigenous songs sung, played, and danced by Indigenous people, though curated by white showrunners; and second, arrangements of "Indian-sounding" songs by the Cowboy Band that functioned as sonic markers of colonialism and

conquest (Masterson 1990). Audiences responded with confusion and wonder to the actual indigenous singing and playing, utilizing racist terminology and expressions of Othering to convey their feelings. One Philadelphia reporter, responding to a performance led by a Sioux man named American Horse, described what he heard as "a chorus of unearthly howls" (Philadelphia Inquirer, 1886). Another reporter indicated distaste for a performance of "Nearer My God to Thee" by a group of Sioux singers, who performed the song in their own language: the timbre used was one "that would make a buzz saw shudder" (The Morning Journal, 1886). This language compares Sioux vocality to the sounds of either animals or tools, and contributes to the dehumanizing effect of such performance contexts.

[Note: Using this type of language to refer to Indigenous musicking has been part of North American colonization since the 1400s, when missionaries and colonists used dehumanizing words to justify their brutal colonialism to themselves and audiences at home, to displace contemporaneous fears and beliefs about witchcraft onto indigenous people, and to reinforce colonial racial hierarchies that placed white colonizers on top (Bloechl 2004, Porterfield 1992, Ochoa-Gautier 2014, Tomlinson 2013, White 2015).]

On the other hand, band leader Karl L. King, who took over the Cowboy Band in 1914, followed a popular trend in classical music of the late nineteenth century and tried to fit indigenous tunes into Euro-American band contexts. As Jamake Highwater puts it, "sometimes it seems possible that composers have done a better job of ripping off the Indian than the military. Everyone from Dvořák to John Alden Carpenter has attempted to capture the redman in a musical cage, compounded of notes and bars forged in western Europe" (Highwater 1982: 3). By containing Indigenous musical themes within the bounds of a EuroAmerican band, band music's superiority is asserted smoothly over Indigenous musicking, and its contrast with the "coarse" sounds of Indigenous singing maintains both parts of the "noble savage" stereotype (The Morning Journal 1886).

It is clear that, throughout Buffalo Bill's Wild West, these borrowed musics did not appear as they did in their original contexts. The Cowboy Band, in arranging things for brass band and for the particular setting of the Wild West, whitewashed these sounds by smoothing out their "rougher edges," forcing them to fit into white Euro-American tuning systems, genre conventions, and concert settings. Just like in rodeo of the twentieth century and beyond, the dichotomy of wild versus tame or civilized is at play here (Lawrence 1982). Whether referring to the wilderness of the U.S.'s Indigenous people, perceived to be slowly vanishing from a modernizing West, or to the hyper-sexualized primitivism of Black folks and jazz, Buffalo Bill's Wild West sets up non-white individuals as both temporally distant, locked in a nostalgic past to which we can never return, and also yet very present as foils against which the white U.S.-American cowboy can be held up as ideal. Much attention has been devoted to the predominant feeling at the turn of the century among white men (a feeling that has continued to gain traction into the twenty-first century) of fragility and precarity related to the feminization of the workforce, particularly paired with the industrialization and privatization of the West that relegated working men to smaller and smaller parcels of land. Protecting and glorifying a white masculinity tied to freedom and conquest, then, became one of the Wild West's more important ideological goals. In Cody's version of the Wild West, the white cowboys always came out on top, and the black, Mexican, Indigenous, and foreign rough riders were wild but containable—present, but only to be looked at as

relics of the past.

[Note: The lack of Mexican songs or influences in Buffalo Bill's Wild West's musical repertoire is a striking omission, especially considering the degree to which the show itself was indebted to charreada. This may have been an attempt to distance the show from the still popular (and older) charreada, ignoring Mexican charros' claims to being the "original cowboys" (Barraclough 2019) by simply excluding them from the musical narrative. Also: Bederman 1995, Higham 1970, Warren 2003.]

None of these trends were isolated to Buffalo Bill's Wild West, nor did they disappear when it concluded. As the show toured internationally, it spread its curated perspectives on America's frontier as well as stereotypes about the people who occupied it (Kasson 2000, Laegrid 2014, Reddin 1999, Rydell and Kroes 2005, Warren 2005). While Wild West shows were experiencing the height of their popularity at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, early rodeos were already taking place throughout the Western United States as a way for ranch hands and rural cowboys to cling to a way of life that was quickly disappearing (Fredriksson 1985, Westermeier 2005). Where Wild West shows emphasized reenactment, rodeos instead used the language of authenticity; Wild West performers were actors, where rodeo competitors were cowboys. Even though big-name rodeos today like Cheyenne Frontier Days, held in Wyoming, and the Pendleton Round-Up in Oregon were already developing into larger entertainment events, their framing as sporting events where real cowboys competed for real glory cemented their eventual superiority over their more overtly theatrical counterparts. And yet, early rodeo shared many commonalities with Wild West Shows. The programs for the first years of Cheyenne Frontier Days reveal significant organizational similarities; the souvenir program for its first celebration in 1897 lists events that include horse races, Pony Express reenactments, a "sham battle" featuring U.S. troops, bucking horses, and staged scenes from a mythic journey to the West that involved a holdup and vigilantes (Cheyenne Frontier Days 1897). The program also details the presence of several military bands from Cheyenne, Wyoming and Greeley, Colorado, that provided music during some of the larger events during Frontier Days, as well as some Sioux performers who "gave a fine war dance in the old-time Indian fashion" (Ibid.). Just like Buffalo Bill's Wild West, the frontier soundscapes presented here included the sounding of the bugle at the start of battle reenactments, "the discharge of numbers of guns fired as if at an enemy" (Ibid.), and vaudeville acts to provide additional popular entertainment (Cheyenne Frontier Days 1901).

Once the pinnacle of entertainment, Buffalo Bill's Wild West's nostalgic recreation of scenes from the Old West was losing its popularity by 1911 in favor of the more authentic rodeo contests. Indeed, Buffalo Bill Cody found himself at odds with Cheyenne Frontier Days in 1911. Newspaper editorials detail Cody's plans to put on several shows in towns around Cheyenne during Frontier Week, despite being asked to change his schedule so that folks would not have to choose between attending the Wild West show or the rodeo (Cheyenne State Leader 1911a). The organizers of Frontier Days were worried about attendance, and chose to emphasize the perceived differences between Cody's show and theirs to hopefully boost attendance at their event. The Cheyenne State Leader newspaper reported, "The visit of Colonel Cody's show to this section at the Frontier celebration period will have the effect of enabling the public to observe the difference between the real thing and the showman's

weakly imitation" (Cheyenne State Leader 1911b). Cody eventually agreed to take his show elsewhere during Frontier Days, but his deference to them makes the message clear: by 1911, Wild West shows had lost their monopoly on authenticity, and rodeo's emphasis on work and "real" cowboys was partially responsible for that.

Frontier Days, like other burgeoning rodeos of the time, incorporated the reenactments, entertainment events, and sonic and visual whitewashing of shows like Buffalo Bill's Wild West as they began to shift in emphasis from play to sport. As Wild West shows began to gradually go out of business in the 1910s, rodeos were poised to pick up where folks like Buffalo Bill Cody left off, and they began to expand quickly throughout the United States both in size and popularity. Some events that later became rodeo staples had their roots in shows like Buffalo Bill's. For example, bulldogging—a timed event where cowboys launch themselves off a galloping horse and wrestle a running bull to the ground by its horns—was developed by Black cowboy Bill Pickett, a former Wild West performer, in the early 1900s and is still one of the foundational events of rodeo in 2021. Further, some scholars credit Buffalo Bill's Wild West show as a key factor in bringing rodeo to the United States in the first place through its highlighting of good horsemanship and showcasing the roping skills of the vaquero tradition and charreada, a type of Mexican rodeo (Gustafson 1988, Rangel 2013). However, by the time rodeo was professionalized in the 1930s the athletes who competed at its top levels were almost entirely white. Just as Buffalo Bill's Cowboy Band sonically bounded and whitewashed the Wild West cowboy, so too did early rodeo quickly erase its multi-ethnic origins in favor of highlighting the white cowboy figure due to influences from popular culture and its purveyors, including Gene Autry.

[Note: Very little information about the ins and outs of the rodeo circuit in the 1910s and 20s is currently accessible, and a deeper dive into this period of rodeo history would require extensive archival research beyond the scope of this dissertation. We know that the term "rodeo" was slowly gaining traction throughout this period, and that a firm concept of the sport did not coalesce until its professionalization in the 1930s.]

Gene Autry: Commercializing Rodeo, Performing Patriotism

Before World War I, rodeo in the United States largely ran parallel to the Wild West shows that toured at the same time. There was overlap in both events and contestants, and many cowboys and cowgirls were able to cobble together a decent living by competing and performing on both circuits. As Wild West shows faded into oblivion in the early 1910s, rodeo competitors turned to popular culture's representation of the cowboy for inspiration in how they styled themselves, and ultimately clarity about who was included under the moniker of rodeo cowboy. Previous to this transformation, the cowboy image was largely crafted through late-nineteenth century, silent films, dime novels, and Wild West shows. But as the twentieth century progressed, the singing cowboy of Western films and television rose to prominence, embodied most of all in the actor, singer, and rodeo producer and performer Gene Autry beginning in the 1930s. Gene Autry's influence on rodeo is particularly significant because of how he encouraged theatricality and spectacle, incorporated specific kinds of music into his and other rodeos, and emphasized patriotic display the rodeo event. As later chapters will show, the tone he set for rodeo has developed into a more extreme version of this early pageantry, and has since become industry standard.

Singing cowboys as a filmic archetype first developed in the 1920s, with the earliest perhaps being the country performer Carl T. Sprague, who gained notoriety through performing the cowboy songs he grew up on in Texas. Like many other singing cowboys who would soon populate the silver screen, Sprague grew up on a farm and knew his way around a ranch. The songs he was raised with fit well into the earliest days of the emerging country-western genre, which was commercializing and becoming popular with the advent of widespread recording technology in the 1920s, and relied largely on both Southern and Western folk and regional songs (Malone 1968). As the 1930s arrived, Western films

[Note: See "When the Work's All Done This Fall" in the YouTube playlist to hear Carl Sprague sing. Country music's long and many-named history will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter. The Lomaxes, who are largely responsible for the enduring popularity of cowboy songs in the early 20th century, will be discussed in Chapter Five of this dissertation.]

coming out of Hollywood got hold of cowboy songs and brought them into the limelight, highlighting them as a valuable genre in and of themselves. This sudden increase in popularity moved the cowboy song away from folk culture, instead aligning it more closely with popular music tastes of the time that included crooning and swing. The topics of the songs remained the same, however, focusing on the life and trials of men working in the rural West. Scholars of Western films and cowboy songs have often argued that generically, Westerns take as their central task "defining the nation by circulating generative myths about the formation of the nation and its national character," or in other words: "who or what is an American" (Kalinak 2007: 25). I argue in Chapter Four of this dissertation that rodeo takes as its central goal the same exact mission, though while Westerns explore this question through a variety of characters and perspectives the rodeo almost exclusively centers the cowboy icon as the last remaining vestige of the Old West.

This connection between the cowboy figure and national identity in rodeo exists in large part because of Gene Autry's position as public representative of the singing cowboy figure alongside his extensive involvement with and love for rodeo. Autry, an accomplished country singer and crooner, made his career in film and television portraying (according to Johnny Cash's song "Who's Gene Autry?") "a handsome man on a big fine stallion goin' about, doin' good," who was "an image of justice and goodness and purity" (Cash 1978). Autry's many roles helped to curate a very specific view of the singing cowboy as a hardworking man with grit and determination, but one who was clean-shaven, respectful, and used music in a calculated way to perform acceptable shows of emotion (Kalinak 2007). Musicologist Stephanie Vander Wel has further argued that Autry worked within the confines of Depression-era gender trouble to "[infuse] the heroic stance of the cowboy with effusive expressions" (Vander Wel 2012: 209), both upholding and subtly questioning dominant gender roles of the day. Musically, Autry and others—notably singing cowgirl Patsy Montana—combined the rhetoric of authenticity granted by cowboy songs' folk roots with the new popular and mass-mediated idioms of Tin Pan Alley and swing music, crafting a glamorous and Hollywood-tinged version of the Old West that still had limited room for negotiation (Ibid.). In an era where both white masculinity and rurality were fragile and contested, Autry's sensitive glorification of the white cowboy struck a chord with listeners across the Depression-era United States that continues to ring true in many ways today.

[Note: For full lyrics, see Appendix B. Also see "Daddy, Who's Gene Autry?" in the YouTube playlist to listen along with the song.]

When Autry turned to rodeo in earnest in the 1940s, he brought the swirling nexus of the singing cowboy's public image with him. Autry's first big rodeo performance was at the 1933 World Championship Rodeo at the Chicago World's Fair, and after that he began to tour on the rodeo circuit with increasing frequency. Rodeos all over the country would book Autry to perform as their show's entertainment headliner, a point of continuity with the earlier Wild West shows that featured musical acts before, during, and after shows. He brought glitz and glamor to the rough-and-tumble rodeo, and brought a degree of both popularity and authenticity through his well-established role as the preeminent singing cowboy of Hollywood. Autry, however, was also inspired by rodeo competitors; reportedly after attending the Colonel W.T. Johnson Rodeo in Dallas in 1936, Autry was so taken with the brightly-colored shirts worn by the bronc riders there that he incorporated this aesthetic into his own attire (George-Warren 2007: 158). The embroidered, piped, pearl-snap shirts so strongly associated with the singing cowboy and the Old West today was born of this inspiration, and Autry wore shirts like these for most of his career to symbolize his authentic connection to the cowboy identity he performed (see Figure 1).

[Note: See "Gene Autry – Back in the Saddle Again" in the YouTube playlist to listen to one of Gene Autry's most famous songs.]

Figure 1: Gene Autry, sporting a typical Western shirt, alongside his horse Champion. © 1950 by CBS

As Autry's touring career picked up speed, he became the first country-western performer and entertainer to perform at the prestigious Madison Square Garden Rodeo in 1935, and at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo in 1942. Houston in particular considers itself deeply indebted to Autry for the current success and historical trajectory of their rodeo. In fact, Autry headlined the Houston rodeo from 1942-1945, from 1947-1948, and again in 1955. His popularity drove attendance higher each year, and he also reportedly worked behind the scenes in its early years to help ensure the rodeo's success (RodeoHouston 2021). More importantly for the professionalization of rodeo, all of this

[Note: See "Gene Autry at Fort Madison Rodeo 1940's" in the YouTube playlist for an example of the type of show Gene Autry put on at smaller rodeos.]

sparked a desire in Autry to put together his own rodeo program in 1941, which he named Flying A Ranch Rodeo.

That year, Autry acquired property in Oklahoma where he set up his rodeo company, and he purchased a string of rodeo stock with the intent of making a name for himself as a stock contractor and rodeo producer (George-Warren 2007). However, by the end of 1941 the United States found itself embroiled in the second World War, and Autry enlisted almost immediately. His deployment was delayed due to his filming schedule, alongside complications with his requested commission to serve as a pilot, and the Flying A Ranch Rodeo was able to make its premiere at the Houston Rodeo the same year he headlined as their entertainment act for the first time, on February 6, 1942. His act reportedly included "a spectacular homage to the Wild West show, with actors... masquerading as

such heroic American horseman as Buffalo Bill, Teddy Roosevelt, Davy Crockett, and Kit Carson" (Ibid.: 203). The show was a huge success and very popular with audiences, though casting working Hollywood actors to play rodeos proved an unsustainable practice in future years. Aside from the inclusion of musical entertainment, Autry's Flying A Ranch Rodeo made its mark on rodeo at a pivotal point in its history several other ways: by excluding female competitors, and by inviting militant patriotism into rodeo's heart.

Before Autry became involved with rodeo, women's roles were already heavily restricted in most mainstream shows after the 1929 death of cowgirl Bonnie McCarroll, who was crushed beneath a bronc at the Pendleton Roundup. That same year, the Rodeo Association of America (RAA) was formed, an all-male, all-cowboy organization who found in McCarroll's death the excuse they needed to curtail women's participation in the more dangerous rodeo events. The RAA also developed the existing points-based championship system that still persists today, where cowboys' monetary winnings are converted into points that count towards a year-end total, which then determines champion titles. Of course, not every rodeo ascribed to these standards in the RAA's early days, but most did. The Madison Square Garden Rodeo featured a cowgirl bronc riding contest up until 1941, but when Gene Autry's influence was flexed over the rodeo sphere, taking charge of Madison Square Garden and programming at many other large rodeos, that event came to a swift and decisive end (George-Warren 2007: 203). Women had nowhere left to compete in rodeo except as invited barrel racers at male-only rodeos, and this is a trend that largely continues in professional rodeo today. In this way, Autry effectively finalized women's excision from rodeo and relegated them to glamorous (and safe) contests of horsemanship as rodeo queens and ranch girls. While Autry may have invited questioning of gender roles in his films and musical performances, he certainly did not in the way he organized his rodeos.

[Note: In an attempt to combat this exclusion, the Girls Rodeo Association (GRA) was eventually founded in 1948 after a calf-roping rules dispute at a local, non-sanctioned rodeo. The GRA organized to help find women a place in rodeo after their near-complete exclusion at the hands of producers like Gene Autry. They persisted for decades, eventually becoming the still-operating Women's Professional Rodeo Association (WPRA) in 1981. The WPRA has continued to work with the PRCA to ensure that women's barrel racing is a standard event at PRCA rodeos even if it is not an official PRCA event itself. The WPRA also hosts its own rodeos, with such events as bronc riding, bull riding, team roping, and calf roping open to female competitors, but most WPRA members choose to avoid WPRA rodeos because the purses are so much smaller than those available at PRCA-sanctioned rodeos.]

Autry's persistent focus on patriotism after enlisting in the Air Force represented another significant shift in rodeo's culture. While the singing cowboy icon already had associations with Americana and the Old West through its aesthetics and musical lineage, Autry utilized his position as a public figure to close the distance between nostalgic reenactment and love of country. This tone first became associated with Autry when in 1940 he began producing a weekly radio show called Melody Ranch, a variety show that was based on the entertainment act Autry performed when he toured rodeos. Each 30-minute episode would include adventure stories, interspersed with musical interludes and the occasional guest star. However, after Autry took his oath of enlistment in July of 1942, Melody Ranch

began to change its tune. The show's name was changed to Sergeant Gene Autry, and the musical material veered away from Western tunes and popular music to instead focus heavily on military songs, Air Force tunes in particular, and the dramas turned from the Western frontier to the war front (George-Warren 2007). Autry's show leaned into this war-time patriotism so heavily that not only did the show actively encourage listeners to join the service and buy war bonds, some episodes went so far as to issue warnings to "any enemies who might be listening" (Ibid.: 204) that the United States was going to win the war, no matter the cost.

Extending Autry's reach overseas and further cementing his role as a patriotic and iconic American figure, deployed servicemen were provided with transcripts of the show, and after Autry was honorably discharged from the Air Force in June of 1945, he and his USO troupe went on an eighty-five-show tour of the bases in the South Pacific where they performed for nearly a million GIs (Ibid.: 220). Autry and his troupe were on Tinian when the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, on Saipan when the second was dropped on Nagasaki three days later, and on Iwo Jima on August 14th when Truman announced Japan's surrender (Ibid.). His proximity to such important historic events helped tie his image so thoroughly to patriotic, pro-military sentiment that even though he did not actively pursue military involvement later in life the associations stuck. Autry's rodeos also always included a Cavalcade of Great Americans at the conclusion of each show, a patriotic parade which "highlighted the western nature of the nation's pantheon of heroes" including George Washington, Theodore Roosevelt, Davy Crockett, and myriad others (Childers 2010: 356). This cavalcade formed a bookend with the opening national anthem that framed the rodeo spectacle, reminding audience members that Sergeant Gene Autry was a patriot, and they should be too.

The 1930s and 1940s were formative years for professional rodeo because of the governing systems and regulations put in place by entities like the Rodeo Association of America. However, Gene Autry's hand also weighed heavily on the way rodeo events were structured as entertainment events. When we consider how rodeo has turned into a massive, commercialized industry that supports thousands of professionals each year and generates millions of dollars in revenue, Autry's part in turning rodeo from competitive sport into big

[Editorial note: The source text extracted from the eScholarship PDF ends here, mid-sentence, at the point where the web fetch was truncated. The dissertation continues for many more pages (through Chapters 2-6, References, and Appendices A-C, per its table of contents above) but that additional text was not present in the retrieved source file.]