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## Acknowledgements

By

*Donald Chavez y Gilbert*

Thank you to everyone who helped me with this book, which, in the interest of the truth needed to be published. I want to thank my wife Quillon Dayton-Chavez for all her support and assistance in the completion of this book, particularly in her help with the book illustrations and work on livestock.

Thank you to the mothers of my children for blessing me with such wonderful kids. And, finally, thanks' go to my children, Leticia, Michelle, Larisa, Kera, Robin, Camlan, and little Helen for connecting me to my grandchildren, and the future.

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## Dedication

This book is dedicated to my father, Jose Epifanio Chavez IV, (born 03/21/1924), mother Helen C. Gilbert, (b. 07/06/1928 - d. 01/12/1995), and all our antecedents over at least the last 400 years who along with other survivors of the Oñate colonization party evolved and developed the most influential culture to shape modern America, the intrepid cowboy. By virtue of simply trying to make a better living suited to these American lands first as Spanish explorers then as ranchers and farmers living under the Spanish flag, the Mexican flag, and finally the U.S. flag, a way of life was transplanted, and reborn, the cowboy culture. The American West was born in what is our modern day Mexico and the state of New Mexico. In the United States, the Wild West began in the heart of New Mexico. Thank you mom and dad for connecting me to such a rich past. I am proud to carry on that tradition and legacy for our children and their children to enjoy in the far future at Terra Patre Farm in Belen, New Mexico and Father Earth Ranch in southern Colorado,

This dedication is however, most particularly dedicated to my vaquero father who was reared in a couple of unique circumstances. **First**, he is the last of the *original "saddle-born"* cowboys. That is to say, he is the last successive blood born generation of American cowboys still in the horse and wagon era with no modern industrialized alternative life style available. He was reared in the saddle out in the country because that was all there was available to poor country folk in rural Lemitar, and Polvadera, New Mexico. He and his family went to town and school on horses and wagons over dirt rutted trails which similar to the Camino Real, bordered most arroyos and waterways. Being born in the beginning of the 20th century was a time when the new technology of the radio and motorcar had recently been introduced into society and were catching on quickly in the cities particularly on the eastern seaboard, just as the television was around in my generation but not in every home until about the time we started school. As television sets were being introduced into our living rooms, steam driven trains were being replaced by diesel engines. **Second**, he is the last successive link in the unbroken chain of American born generations of cowboys who grew up first speaking the original (cowboy) language, Spanish - the 15th and 16th century dialect of the Spanish Oñate settlers, then learning English later. I enjoy conversing with New Mexican Hispanics from my dad's generation as they speak the uniquely preserved 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish dialect and accent of the first European American colonists, a linguistic phenomenon which first came to my attention when, as a young man, I went to school in Mexico and observed the giggling responses to my vernacular. New Mexico having been isolated all the centuries before his generation prevented the more modern Spanish from influencing their dialect. It is in Spanish like speaking in English to William Shakespeare or anyone from his time in history, uniquely different. This 16<sup>th</sup> century dialect will be gone with the last of my father's generation.

Indeed, he is the last and final link in the unbroken chain of, "...have to / no other choice," cowboys in this country who were born into the *original* cowboy culture and raised in the ranching and farming way of life when hardy, steadfast, self-reliant, independent cowboys did it all. With every generation to follow thereafter, like mine, country children would continue to be born into the cowboy and ranching life, but would all be forever distinctively different because they would all be born into a life where we no longer go to school on a horse, and have the modern world industrialized alternative life styles and high tech culture available to our families. The new cowboy generations would have it easier and consequently have opportunities to specialize in various aspects of ranching not heretofore available to previous generations since the Spanish and Portuguese

aristocracies during the middle ages/Golden Age lent itself to the specialist pursuits and interests of nobility. That is to say, that unlike my father's generation, these new generations could ride and work the ranch and farm on a horse but drive to town in the family pickup truck. Even our horses and livestock now ride to town in a trailer towed by a motor truck.

I have occasion to salute both my grandfathers for their historical inspirations in complimenting ways. My mother's father, Antonio Gilbert, (maternal grandfather), although he was killed by a train in Los Lunas, NM (according to newspaper accounts and my mother) in 1930 when my mother was a tender two years of age, inspired me through oral history as well as some historical documents for his pursuits as a civic leader and successful businessman in the shaping of the early history of our town of Belen, NM. In the case of my father's father, (paternal grandfather), Epifanio Chavez, I was fortunate enough to have spent some of my summers with him in Belen, NM and accompanied him on deer hunting trips as a young man. It was his influence on his farms in Polvadera, New Mexico and Belen where I watched, listened, and "hands-on" learned many aspects of farming and ranching. His many stories about the "olden" days of his youth before motor cars and the era of the Spanish Conquistadores planted a seed of pride and heritage, which took root when he passed away in 1973. Thank you grandpa for your sense of humor and all the oral history, which I commit to writing here.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

***By the late Raphael Chavez***

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Donald Anthony Chavez y Gilbert, MSW, LISW

Donald Chavez y Gilbert proudly carrying on Hispanic traditions is a descendant of the first American cowboys tracing several of his grandparents to the Oñate colony and the founders of most of the towns of the Rio Arriba and Rio Abajo. Native of Belen, New Mexico, father and husband, Mr. Chavez received his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at UNM, 1973, and Master of Social Work, at the University of Michigan, 1974. He was employed in many capacities as a Social Worker with the State of New Mexico, College of Santa Fe, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Los Lunas Schools, and self-employed as a Belen real estate investor, and rancher. A long time Chicano activist, children's rights activist, and father's rights activist, he more recently became a student of history and preservationist of Hispanic culture. Chavez is one of the founders of the Belen Founders Day organization, and an avid proponent of the *true* history of the American South West, and the American Cowboy. A friend to all, he has spent his life advocating and striving to help the innocent, underprivileged, economically disadvantaged, and oppressed. Change is not always welcomed, and for the trodden toes to accomplish these changes, he makes no apologies. He, his wife Quillon and family own and operate Terra Patre farm, in Belen & Polvadera, NM and Father Earth ranch in southern Colorado. See more about Terra Patre at the end of this publication.

- Licensed Clinical Social Worker 30yrs +
  - Master of Social Welfare – University of Michigan 1974
  - Bachelor of Arts – Psychology (major)/Spanish, (minor) - University of New Mexico 1973
  - Cowboy History Consultant & guest appearance on the History Channel series on Cowboy Tech, 2004
  - Cowboy History Consultant and guest contributor to National Geographic.com, 2003
  - Albuquerque Tricentennial Entrada 300 board member/organizer 2006
  - Fatherhood History Anchor and President, National Congress for Men and Children, 1990, Washington DC, and Father representative/member to the US Commission on Interstate Child Support
  - Belen Founders Day Com Charter member and president 1998
  - History Anchor and Founding President, Dads Against Discrimination, New Mexico 1984, and Fatherhood representative/member on New Mexico Commission on Child Support and Child Custody, 1985
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# COWBOYS - VAQUEROS

## Origins Of The First American Cowboys

*Donald Chavez y Gilbert*

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### Chapter 1

#### Introduction

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The cowboy legend in these United States of America, albeit romanticized and fictionalized to suit the illusions of some book authors and Hollywood movie producers, is well documented. This book endeavors to focus more on the origins of cowboys, who and where these men came from in actual historic artifact and ancient archive centered information, than on who cowboys have become in recent times. While telling the truth about the evolution of the American cowboy, it is hoped that the myths and misunderstandings of American cowboy history will be put to rest, or at the very least, be put in proper perspective.

Most writers have derived their descriptions of the various aspects of cowboy life and history from the personal experience of cowboy authors and illustrations of the 1865-1935 eras. For the very reason that the actual history of the American cowboy has been so distorted and misrepresented in legend, literature, and presentation within the entertainment industry, this book will concentrate on the very etiology and evolution of the American cowboy, beginning with the prehistoric prerequisite conditions which encouraged this culture to specialize itself in one part of the world and continuing with the reintroduction of the horse in the Western Hemisphere through Mexico by Hernan Cortes in 1519. The first prehistoric horses on the American continent became extinct. This book will also endeavor to condense and compile many volumes of in-depth research into an informative, concise and accurate compilation of facts on this subject. In an effort to steer away from inaccurate colloquialisms, and regional slang references as Richard E. Alborn, puts it, "often local terms, such as 'Texan' or 'Santa Fe'..., do not stand up as consistent definitions of unique regional types. At the same time, illustrations by cowboy artists may reveal more about their creative imagination in combining...cultural environments than about the actual historical usage..." Here, the focus is on accuracy and the preservation of factual history. The very inspiration for this book derives from an effort to correct the plethora of misinformation I found in school libraries. For example, the book, *Once In The Saddle*, by Laurence I. Seidman begins chapter 10 with the sentence, "Cowboys, at first were mainly Texans, veterans, black men and Mexicans." This misleading statement is at the least an unfortunate error of ignorance or at most a willful effort to shift credit for the invention of the cowboy away from the Spanish and Mexican Vaqueros in favor of the southern and eastern Americans, who arrived in the West well over two hundred years after the first Vaqueros (Spanish cowboys). So as not to perseverate with my own penchant to overcorrect the record I offer an excerpt from an independent source of support for my conclusions. The late Lawrence Clayton in his chapter on the cowboy in the book, *Vaqueros, Cowboys, and Buckaroos (2001)* provides a historical overview of the American cowboy as follows:

"This uniquely American figure (the cowboy), did not begin in America. He had his origins in the Old World. His principal antecedent was certainly the vaquero, who had seen centuries of development in Spanish North America before Anglos and their black slaves moved into the eastern United States."

Merriam Webster's 1986 Intermediate Dictionary defines a cowboy, cowpoke, or cowpuncher, as "one who tends cattle or horses, especially a mounted cattle ranch worker." Most Americans and probably anyone who has had a television for any period of time, let alone any real ranching experience, conceivably has some mind's eye vision of who and what a cowboy is. As we near the end of the 20th century it should be a safe bet that now that the job description of a cowboy is seemingly not so narrow, and, after five hundred years of evolution in the Americas, the definition of a cowboy is probably a measure wider in scope than Webster's definition, than it was one to five hundred years ago.

Certainly, the original cowboy, the Spanish vaquero, more closely fits Mr. Webster's definition of a cowboy, although the mounted vaqueros who drove up to a half million sheep 1,800 miles from New Mexico to

Chihuahua, Mexico, every year certainly would have taken exception to Mr. Webster's definition. Similarly, in this century there are many variations on the original cowboy lifestyle. Men and women (cowgirls) would insist that even though they rope, drive and tend Zebras or Kangaroos rather than cattle and sheep, or although they engage in such activities only on weekends, that they are as genuine a cowboy as they come. In Lapland, cowboys herd reindeer instead of cattle. Cowboys of Australia call themselves "drovers," and they work on a "station" rather than a ranch. At the other extreme, if you have never even mounted a horse but you sport cowboy boots, hat, and wear a big western buckle on the belt that holds up your blue jeans simply because you are proud of Americana and the distinguished culture of the old and new west, then I must borrow the old maxim that imitation is the best form of flattery. I like the way cowboy poet Baxter Black put it:

*"I've overheard people compare the abilities of trick ropers, bronc riders, horse trainers and veterinarians to those of the working-for-wages cowboy. That he is not as accomplished in their individual skills as they are. They seem disappointed. I remind these folks that he is not a professional cowboy. He just does it for a living."*

The most worrisome thing that Baxter Black's quote brings to my mind is the shrinking number of all around ranch hands or '**just does it for a living**' lifestyle cowboys that are left these days and what the future may portend for the "all-in-one cowboy." I believe that there will always be cowboys. The problem is that like so many other career areas, it has become so specialized that the original generalist cowboy who had to do it all is definitely on my endangered species list. The cowboy and cowboy culture are strong and have always adapted, and as a function of evolution. There is on the other hand no shortage of new world cowboys, the cowboy specialist; from the Rodeo cowboys, trick riders, horse trainers, veterinarians, cowboy entertainers, cowboy poets, riding instructors, exercise riders, ferrriers, groomers/boarders, livestock brokers/promoters, and the list goes on. No doubt, there are in sheer numbers more cowboys now than there have ever been in the past. They are just looking less and less like those first "all-in-one cowboys" who were brought here to stay in 1598. Nonetheless, the cowboy culture is such a long integral part of America's history and identity that unless you are an original four hundred year old Spanish Vaquero, then you like all the others who came after the original Spanish vaquero, you are an "add-on" to the ever-changing cowboy culture of this country. How did it happen; what was so special about the cowboy culture that throughout its' journey through time, following invasion after invasion, despite new governments and new places, cowboy culture has invariably conquered every one of its conquerors? Even today after the American takeover of Spanish America and the 1848 conquest over Mexico the cowboy(vaquero) formerly unknown to English speaking Americans has again won the culture war, maintaining his lifestyle, equipage, and technology, adapting once again by greeting you with "howdy stranger," as well as "que hubo amigo." **The most important elements to remember which have preserved and traversed the cowboy from those ancient beginnings in the Iberian Peninsula (distinguishing himself from all the other agrarian/pastoral peoples in the world [similarly raising livestock]) over the ages and across the oceans are his genius for adapting his methods and technology to overcome changes, his rugged enduring tenacity to keep on keeping on, and his affinity for musical esthetics, baroque tradition interlaced with his undying spiritual devotion to his Catholic savior, Jesus Christ.** The components for inventing the cowboy could have never materialized from a passive, status quo oriented, faint of heart people, debil, and conforming to the ways of the invaders and dominant immigrants. Those people, having long since relinquished their salient cultures and unique persona into the greater aggregate, have quietly, benignly, blended and melted into all the remaining cultures of today. The upper class cowboys, the Caballeros were formerly known as defenders of good, champions of the weak, Spanish noblemen and aristocratic equestrians (also known as knights in shining armor). In America, except in the large haciendas and estancias, where the big rancheros, (alla en el rancho grande), were well healed, most cowboys evolved into what we now picture as enigmatic, mostly unknown, underpaid, overworked ranch hands who endured severe rigors of the job and climatic extremes of the seasons with the livestock they tended, for the enjoyment of an adventurous, open-ended, individualistic lifestyle. That lifestyle is commonly renowned as that of the American Cowboy.

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