



Welcome to our November book Historians!

Our November meeting is a week later than usual on Tuesday, November 13 at 6:30. Our book is *Cattle Kingdom: The Hidden History of the Cowboy West* by Christopher Knowlton, published in 2017. Knowlton is a writer for *Fortune* magazine, a former New Yorker who lives in Wyoming, so you can expect to learn about the

financial impact of cattle and the meat packing business. And Knowlton does tell us how the innovations of the Gilded Age and the technological improvements that went along with these innovations changed an industry. But the fascination in reading this book lies in the details of the social life and times of the cowboys themselves. Primarily, these cowboys were young men because, as Knowlton tells us, "The job of a cowboy entailed an astonishing number of ways to get hurt or killed." The story is told through the eyes of the young men who were both investors and ranch owners: a British aristocrat, a French nobleman, and Teddy Roosevelt. The cowboy era only lasted two decades, but the influence of this culture is still with us today.

Knowlton tells the story of a boom and bust economy, the greatest agricultural expansion in American history. And the effects of this industry were felt around the world as investors in Scotland and England and the global market for beef affected the cattle industry as much as the weather and the skill of the cowboys who drove the cattle. This is also the fascinating story of the paradox that is the United States. On the one hand, the myth of the cowboy has endured as the symbol for the lone individual following his own path toward the American dream. At the same time, the cattle industry was a place where multiculturalism flourished because no one cared where you came from. If you had the requisite skills, you could earn your place in this world. This was one of the few places where former slaves could find respect and acceptance. Multiculturalism and rugged individualism, boom and bust economies, globalization and American innovation are themes that resonate today. And all of these issues are intertwined in the cattle industry. Much of our identity as Americans grows out of this era. Why and how? These are the questions which *Cattle Kingdom: The Hidden History of the Cowboy West* attempts to answer.

Because we live in Texas, we assume that we know a lot about the cattle industry. The fascination in reading *Cattle Kingdom* is that Knowlton introduces us to many elements of the industry and its effect on post-Civil War America that you and I have never considered. For example, in politics, numerous presidents have adopted the cowboy brand: Teddy Roosevelt, LBJ, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush to name a few. Why? What other facts about the effects of the cattle industry surprised you? Pay particular attention, as Knowlton does, to the economic and innovation changes that the cattle industry brought about. As Knowlton points out, there is a reason that Cheyenne, Wyoming, at the end of the Goodnight-Loving Trail, was the richest city in the world, per capita. From the trail to the slaughter house to meatpackers to Delmonico's in New York, the cattle industry was a sophisticated and intricate span of operations. How did it work? How do these innovations in operations still affect industry today? What about automation? Refrigeration? Conservation of the land that was needed for the cattle to graze and fatten on the way to market? Consider all the ways that the cattle kingdom was big business. What surprised you?

Altogether, *Cattle Kingdom* by Knowlton is a fascinating book about an industry that changed America, American industry, American culture, and even our foreign policy. After all, there is a reason that European politicians often accuse us of acting like "cowboys." Round up all of those little doggies of facts and come prepared for a regular rodeo of interesting vignettes as we meet on Tuesday, November 13 at 6:30 to discuss *Cattle Kingdom: The Hidden History of the Cowboy West* by Christopher Knowlton. I look forward to a fun exchange of "did you know" with all of you!

Donna McBride