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**WHEN THE HORSE CAME****Indians had dogs to pull loads; the Incas used llamas. Then Spaniards introduced the horse and transformed a way of life.**

In 1493, when Columbus made his second voyage to the New World, he made sure to stock his 17 ships with enough seeds, cuttings and domestic livestock to re-create the Iberian landscape he'd left behind, right down to the weeds. Similarly, when Hernan Cortes invaded Mexico in 1519 he burned his boats in true do-or-die fashion ..... but only after unloading enough cattle, sheep, goats, swine and horses to keep his men in food and transportation for a good long spell. There was nothing exceptional about this. None of the explorers traveled light, certainly not the Spanish, who went to great lengths to carry their world with them wherever they ventured.

The results of this cultural arrogance were profound: Turned loose in the Americas, European animals--horses, cows, sheep, goats, hogs and chickens--changed everything from eating habits to farming to the ecology of the land itself. Horses alone revolutionized hunting, transportation, communication and warfare. Long after the European dreams of empire crumbled, the barelegged ambassadors of that empire continue to shape our lives, from the rodeos of Montana to the Brazilian rain forests, where trees are falling so that cattle may graze.

Pre-Columbian Americans did not scorn animals. Montezuma kept a zoo so huge it took 300 keepers to maintain it. But they knew little of herding livestock, and they had never thought much about putting animals to work. Some North American Indians used dogs to pull small loads, and the Incas did the same with llamas. They raised the alpaca for wool and the guinea pig for food. Otherwise, their main source of meat was game (fish, duck, turkey, deer). The Aztecs were also fond of eating tadpoles, larvae, ants, worms, newts and lizards.

Within a century after the Spanish arrived on the mainland, hundreds of thousands of horses competed for grazing with herds of cattle in Argentina, and sheep cropped the hillsides of what is now New Mexico. As for hogs, they went everywhere, from Chile to

Nova Scotia. Once these animals got loose and became wild after a generation or two, the landscape was never the same. "They ate practically everything," says Alfred Crosby, author of "The Columbian Exchange." "The native American plants had not evolved to live with grazing animals, so they were eaten all up, and didn't recover. They were replaced by the weeds from the Old World that did evolve over many thousands of years with grazing animals. To this day, most of the weeds in the United States are of Old World origin."

While the Indians cannot have been too happy to see their vegetation trampled underfoot and gnawed to nothing, they were not blind to the advantages of domesticated animals. According to Crosby, "If it was their choice and to their advantage, the Indians adapted to these animals very quickly. Where there were relatively heavy settlements of Europeans, the Indians were allowed to and did quickly take up chickens and the smaller animals."

On the other hand, any Indian caught with a horse faced execution. As Herman Viola, author of "After Columbus," points out, "The Spanish knew that giving the Indians horses was like giving them guns." At first the Indians did not know what to make of these huge animals. The Aztecs called them deer. The Piegan Indians, mindful of their size and their relationship with their owners, called them elk dogs. But terror and mystification soon gave way to covetousness, and there was much to covet. In records of their battles, the Spanish noted, "After God, we owe the victory to the horses," and soldier and diarist Bernal Diaz recorded the name, pedigree, color, sex and qualities of every one of the 16 horses that came ashore with Cortes in Mexico.

The Spanish began breeding cattle in Mexico as early as 1521. Horse breeding began a decade later. By the end of the century, Mexican cattle herds of 20,000 were considered small. The number of free ranging horses in central Mexico was beyond counting. The story repeated itself on both sides of the equator. In 1619, a year before the Pilgrims landed in New England, the governor of Buenos Aires reported herds of cattle of more than 240,000 in Argentina.

Enterprises of such scale forced the Spanish to make ranch hands of the Indians. "The irony is that they let Indians be herders and blacksmiths," Herman Viola points out. "When the Spanish got driven out, they left behind not only their horses but driven out, they left behind not only their horses but Indians who knew how to deal with horses."

Horse theft was a sometime thing for the better part of two centuries. But in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, when Indians in New Mexico rose up and slaughtered their Spanish overlords, they captured a sizable herd of horses. The offspring of this herd were rapidly dispersed across the Southwest and the Great Plains. "The thinking is," Viola says, "these Pueblos got horses and traded them to their neighbors, and also traded the knowledge of how to deal with horses. Within 100 years, maybe less, horses ranged from upper Mexico to Canada. As a result, you had what amounted to a golden age for certain Indian tribes." No tribe scorned horses, Viola says, and in a few cases the acquisition of these animals effected a thoroughgoing transformation of Indian life.

"Certain tribes, like the Cheyenne, had been village Indians at one time--they were agriculturists," Viola says. "But when the horse came along, they quit being farmers and became cowboys."

The horse and the rifle created a genuine cultural revolution for the Plains Indians, who had previously been small in number and inefficient hunters to boot. "They would,, stampede buffalo off cliffs, Crosby says, "but that's no way to make a living." Horses and guns made them much more proficient hunters, and the tribes flourished. As a result, the

Anglo conception of the Indian on horseback is also "their conception of themselves," according to Crosby. "A lot of them have claimed that horses have been here forever and ever."

In fact, the heyday of the Plains Indians lasted only about half a century, roughly from 1780 to 1830. But even after that, when the westward migration of Europeans had begun driving Indians off their land, the Indian and the horse remained closely linked. Indeed, the Indian wars that followed the American Civil War were mostly cavalry campaigns on both sides, and it was then that the Indians earned their reputation as the finest light cavalry in the world.

It is not surprising, therefore, that today certain tribes nurture an atavistic love of horses. Viola recalls a recent conversation he had with a Crow named Harold Hill. He asked Hill if horses are still so important to Crow people. "He looked at me like I'd hit him, and he said, 'Herman, a Crow man would no more want to be seen riding a sorry-looking horse than he'd want to have disobedient children. You just take my case. A good son-in-law deserves a good horse. Last Christmas, I had the kids over for Christmas dinner, my daughters and their husbands. And I told the men, 'Go look under the Christmas tree, there's an empty bridle there for each of you. When spring comes, you go to the herd and pick out your horse.' That's what horses mean to Indians. They may not be able to own them, they may not be able to ride them, but they still value them as a gift from the Creator."

North and south of the equator, the story of the Indian encounter with horses runs along similar lines, just as gaucho and cowboy cultures roughly mirror each other. The same is true of ranching. "Everything we learned about ranching, Viola says, we really inherited from the Spanish." Even now, almost 100 years after the closing of the range, an American ranch is a near perfect knockoff of the Iberian model, from the horses and cattle right down to the corrals, the saddles, the lingo (la reata became lariat and vaquero became buckaroo), even the architecture. Squint at a ranch house and its outbuildings, and you can see a Spanish villa, courtyard and all.

Ranch culture and horse culture-the culture of the West --continue to guide the American imagination. We still measure the power of our cars and lawnmowers in terms of their horsepower. And while Canada's cops now drive squad cars, they still call themselves the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. More generally, a lot of people still sing "Don't Fence Me In" as if they mean it. According to Deb Bennett, a scholar at the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of Natural History, that impulse comes straight from south of the border. "Anglos build fences," she says. "Mexicans, or any other Hispanics, never build fences. Indians don't either. It took about 200 years after the conquistadors came to Mexico before anyone did a land survey. Land was not held in little squares like Anglos do it. Wherever you took your herd, that's where you had your ranch. So if you ask, 'How did we get the Marlboro Man?'-those washed-out blue eyes gazing out to the horizon, drinking it all in--give the credit to the Mexicans."

PHOTO (COLOR): Remington's romantic view of Indian warfare, 1908

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Cattle changed Indian diets

PHOTO (COLOR): Native American horse pipe

PHOTO (COLOR): Ranch culture

PHOTO (COLOR): Sioux cowhide dance shield

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Crossing the Atlantic

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Hogs altered the landscape

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By Malcom Jones JR.

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