



# Rodeo Queens and the American Dream

*Joan Burbick*

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## **Rodeo Queens and the American Dream** Joan Burbick

A bittersweet journey into the lives of women who have worked the rodeo circuit from the 1930s to today. . Rodeo has always been considered a supremely masculine sport, a rough and tumble display of macho strength and skill. But author Joan Burbick shows us the other side of rodeo: the world of rodeo queens-part cowgirl and part pageant princess-who wave and smile and keep the dream of the ideal Western woman alive. So who are the women behind the candy-red chaps, Farrah Fawcett curls, and rhinestone tiaras? Burbick traveled the backroads of the rural West for years, trying to find out. She interviewed dozens of queens, including rodeo royalty from the 1930s and 40s, women who grew up breaking wild horses, branding calves, and witnessing the sad decline of the ranching life. Stories from white and Native American rodeo queens in the 1950s and 1960s, the golden age of rodeo, reveal the conflicts over gender and race that shaped the rodeo and the Cold War politics of small Western towns. Finally, rodeo queens from the 1970s to the present describe a more fiercely commercial rodeo, driven largely by TV-ratings and sponsorships, glitter and hairspray. Illustrated throughout with wonderful photographs, this rich tapestry of women's voices echoes and challenges our clichs of the rural West. Their combined stories of fulfilled dreams and lost hopes reveal the tenacity of the myth of the American West, a place of muscled men, golden-haired women, relentless beauty and tragic limits.

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