

# “Agriculture: Rooted in Diversity” - A Course Model for Infusing Multiculturalism into the Curriculum



**James K. Wangberg<sup>1,2</sup>**  
**College of Agriculture**  
**University of Wyoming**  
**Laramie, WY 82071**

## Abstract

An innovative course was developed that infused multiculturalism into the agriculture curriculum and strengthened university general education core course offerings in diversity and cultural studies. The course facilitated interaction among agriculture and humanities students and dialogue across disciplines. Innovative aspects of the class included collaboration and multiple course listings among all multicultural programs offered by the various colleges. The course provided undergraduate students with opportunities to conduct independent research and utilize a wide range of museum, archival, and library resources. Opportunities to travel throughout the region afforded students insight into agricultural history and cultural resources. Student research led to the development of museum quality exhibits that are showcased in an event and public reception culminating the semester. Dissemination of student work continued after the course concluded in the form of traveling exhibits, loans to museums, displays in county extension offices, and prominent displays in university buildings and classrooms. Such showcasing of student work met the goal of increasing visibility of women and minorities in agriculture while enriching the diversity and cultural study components of the university curriculum.

## Introduction

The inspiration for this project was a workshop, “Infusing Multiculturalism into the Curriculum,” at the 2002 National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC), Winter Meeting, Washington D.C. The workshop leader, Dr. Cathleen T. Love, Professor of Agricultural and Extension Education, Pennsylvania State University, and co-author of an earlier article on this subject (Oltjenbruns and Love, 1998), began the workshop posing the question: How many of your college of agriculture buildings have images of minorities and

women on public display? Most of the workshop participants, primarily administrators and faculty leaders, could not answer affirmatively. Her point was to illustrate the unintentional message some agriculture colleges may send to our female and minority students and campus visitors about inclusion and exclusion by displaying photos of predominantly white males. The University of Wyoming, College of Agriculture building was lacking such images. Hence, it occurred to me that we could address this issue and achieve several educational objectives while pursuing the goal of creating a more welcoming environment in our college.

I wanted women and minorities to see their images and historical accounts of their contributions to agriculture when they are in the University of Wyoming (UW) agriculture building hallways, auditorium and classrooms. To do so created a greater opportunity for infusing multiculturalism into our agriculture curriculum. I took the opportunity to develop an innovative course, “Agriculture: Rooted in Diversity,” with the broad theme of making visible the experiences of women and minorities in agriculture. Beyond that principle goal were the educational objectives of giving undergraduate students opportunities to do independent diversity research and to create university wide linkages among agriculture, liberal arts and multicultural programs, thus enhancing the agriculture curriculum and reciprocating by giving greater exposure to agriculture among non agriculture students.

## Methods

Project planning began with support from a Wyoming Council for the Humanities (WCH) Planning Grant based on the following goals: a) to sponsor history of agricultural diversity theme events for dissemination across campus and communities statewide, b) to create a more welcoming learning and working environment in the UW College of

<sup>1</sup>Associate Dean and Director, and Professor, Office of Academic and Student Programs

<sup>2</sup>I wish to extend appreciation to the faculty planning and steering committees for their guidance in developing and delivering the course. Credit too goes to the participating colleges, departments and programs for enabling a strong interdisciplinary approach to instruction. I thank the excellent guest seminar speakers for their contribution to the class activities and public seminar series. The project would not have been possible without the grant support from the Wyoming Council for the Humanities, the University of Wyoming President's Advisory Council on Minorities and Women's Affairs, and the University of Wyoming American Heritage Center (AHC). Professional collaboration from the AHC staff and Mark Long, The Dark Room Frame and Photo, Laramie, WY was critical to student success. Special thanks are extended to the following individuals for their significant supporting instructional roles: Carol Bowers, Ed Munoz, Jack Preston, Phil Roberts, and Karen Williams. Lastly, I offer my special thanks and congratulations to all of my Ag: Rooted in Diversity students for being my experimental subjects and adding so much to the development of a strong learning community.

Agriculture, sensitive to women and minorities, c) to enrich the college's educational curriculum and archives related to the history of women and diversity in agriculture, d) to expand the university curriculum and opportunities for interdisciplinary work in the humanities. Six specific educational objectives were identified to meet the above goals: 1) establishment of a course on the history of diversity in agriculture, 2) production of a collection of museum quality exhibits to be part of a traveling exhibit throughout Wyoming, and subsequent permanent mounting on College of Agriculture hallway, auditorium and classroom walls, 3) creation of an archive on the history of agricultural diversity, 4) sponsorship of semester-end student symposia to report on diversity in agriculture, 5) sponsorship of a project-ending campus and community symposium on Wyoming Agriculture: Rooted in Diversity), 6) publication of a book (a long term goal), Wyoming Agriculture: Rooted in Diversity, a collection of student research findings and archival photographs (after the model, *I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America*, Brian Lanker).

An interdisciplinary faculty planning committee, primarily comprised of humanities scholars was convened to collaborate on the development of the course. Committee members were recruited from every multicultural program on campus, African American Studies (AAST), American Studies (AMST), American Indian Studies (AIST), Chicano Studies (CHST), from the Departments of History (HIST), English (ENGL), Women's Studies (WMST), Family & Consumer Sciences (FCSC), and from the UW American Heritage Center (AHC). The planning committee met for a day-long retreat at the AHC to discuss the course philosophy and concept and to aid in the development of a course syllabus. A subgroup of steering committee members volunteered for additional roles in the course, including guest seminar speakers, workshop leaders, and class discussion facilitators. The majority of the planning committee members volunteered to continue as a course steering committee as the course project got underway.

Additional grant support was needed to meet remaining project goals and objectives. Significant new funding was awarded by the WCH Regular Grant Program and from two UW organizations, the President's Advisory Council on Minorities and Women's Affairs (PACMWA) and from the AHC. The College of Agriculture helped subsidize the effort with some in-kind staff and faculty support, supplies, and classroom facilities.

Cross listing the course under all multicultural program course prefixes and between the Colleges of Agriculture and Arts and Sciences was deemed critical to course success, enrollment and attention to diversity issues. Hence the course was available for credit in all of the participating academic programs offering greater potential for recruiting a diverse student body. The first time offering was piloted under senior and graduate level topics course numbers, consistent with university policy. An enrollment limit of 24 was

established to facilitate class discussion and independent research. The pilot offering was planned for the Spring 2004 semester, and if successful, repeated in Spring 2005. Two successful offerings would then warrant a proposal for a permanent course designation. The new course proposal was to be submitted concurrently with proposals for two special general education designations, diversity credit ("D" course) and cultural context credit ("C" course). These two course categories are among several special designations given to selected UW courses to fulfill the university general education core requirement in all majors. Courses so designated have greater potential for wide acceptance and significant enrollments.

Collaboration was also sought from outside the university in order to provide necessary resources in support of a major student project. Each student was expected to produce a framed and matted museum quality exhibit for public showings. The exhibit was to include a collection of photographs or copies from historical archives or personal collections, annotated with captions and brief essays that presented a cohesive theme relating to women or minorities in agriculture. The students were to have responsibility for exhibit content and design, but required a professional framer to construct the exhibit. A local framing company agreed to take part, serving as a professional resource to students and as a builder of the exhibits. Professional expertise for museum exhibit design and development also came from AHC staff during the semester.

Additional collaboration external to the university was acquired to support a guest seminar series embedded in the course. Selected individuals and agency representatives with expertise in diversity were invited to contribute seminars relating to the project theme. Guest speakers came from museums, historical associations, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the state archives, UW, other universities, and from the agricultural community. Speakers either donated their time or were compensated with grant funding. Varied campus and off campus venues and varied schedules for the seminar series accommodated public as well as university community attendance. Seminars were videotaped by UW Center for Teaching and Learning staff or documented by photo news journalists. The AHC was reserved as the site for semester culminating public receptions and exhibitions of student work, in part for its relevant mission to the historical aspects of the course, and in part for its premier status as the site for the university fine arts museum and historical archives and collections.

A standard course logo (Figure 1) was developed by a graphic designer in the College of Agriculture, Office of Communications & Technology and used on all course promotional materials including brochures, flyers advertising the course, web postings, and posters.

**Results and Discussion**

The “Agriculture: Rooted in Diversity” course and embedded public seminar series were piloted for two semesters and then gained university approval as a regular course offering. Concurrent approval was granted to list the course as meeting “D” and “C” general education core requirements, effective Spring 2006. The cross listed, three credit courses were approved at the senior level and share a common number in eight departments/programs.

**Course structure and content**

The principle theme for the course is making visible the experiences of women and minorities in agriculture. Several aspects of the course are unique or tailored to facilitate independent study and undergraduate research along this theme. First, it is offered in a three hour block, once a week, rather than the traditional three one hour class meetings a week. This was done to accommodate more in-depth and lengthy class discussions, to provide suitable interaction with guest seminar speakers after their presentations, and to create greater windows of opportunity for students to investigate archival material and primary sources at the AHC, a time consuming process not fitting within normal class scheduling. Also the intent was to free blocks of time in student schedules as an incentive to work independently. Less time is devoted to class meetings in the latter half of the semester in favor of independent investigations at the AHC, university library, and at local or regional museums and archives.

Many student research projects entailed oral histories, so blocks of free time enabled travel for interviews.

Regular student colloquia were scheduled within the class times and throughout the semester to promote student discussion among one another and with the faculty team about their research progress, challenges, and to share experiences. Periodically assigned readings also served to inform these colloquia. Selected readings always related to diversity issues and helped inform student research and stimulate discussion and debate, typically facilitated by a faculty team member with the appropriate subject expertise. For example the Chicano Studies Program Director guided the discussion about Latinos in agriculture readings. Examples of particularly provocative and beneficial readings included Iberlin and Romtvedt (1995), Jensen (1994), Sachs, (1996), Valdés (1990), Western (2002). The criteria for selecting assigned readings were centrality to the course theme, relationship to the seminar topics, level of scholarship, and provocative nature. Adding to the provocative aspect of certain readings was the diversity of students enrolled in the courses, something fostered by the multiple course listings. For example, agriculture students, while not always unanimous in opinion, nevertheless frequently aligned themselves on issues differently than the humanities students, such as themes relating to women in agriculture and challenges to “western myths.” Hence the conversation among students was enriched by their diversity of personal experience and own academic cultures.

There was the opportunity to hear points of view not often expressed within one's own familiar environs and comfort zone, a critical aspect of a liberal education.

**Class Enrollments and Diverse Student Body**

Had the course been offered under one prefix, such as agriculture, there would have likely been a predominance of students majoring in an agricultural discipline, hence narrowing the academic and personal culture of the course. The multiple prefixes however served to attract students from a variety of majors and probably contributed to a greater ethnic, racial, and religious diversity than would have otherwise been achieved. The first semester offering totaled 11 students, seven females and four males. All students had different majors and represented four different colleges (Agriculture, Arts & Sciences, Education, Undeclared) and the Honors Program. While racial, ethnic, and religious diversity are not always readily apparent or easily measured, the following helps illustrate the degree of diversity represented within a relatively small class. One of the males was of a religious persuasion quite uncommon in the state of Wyoming. One female was in an

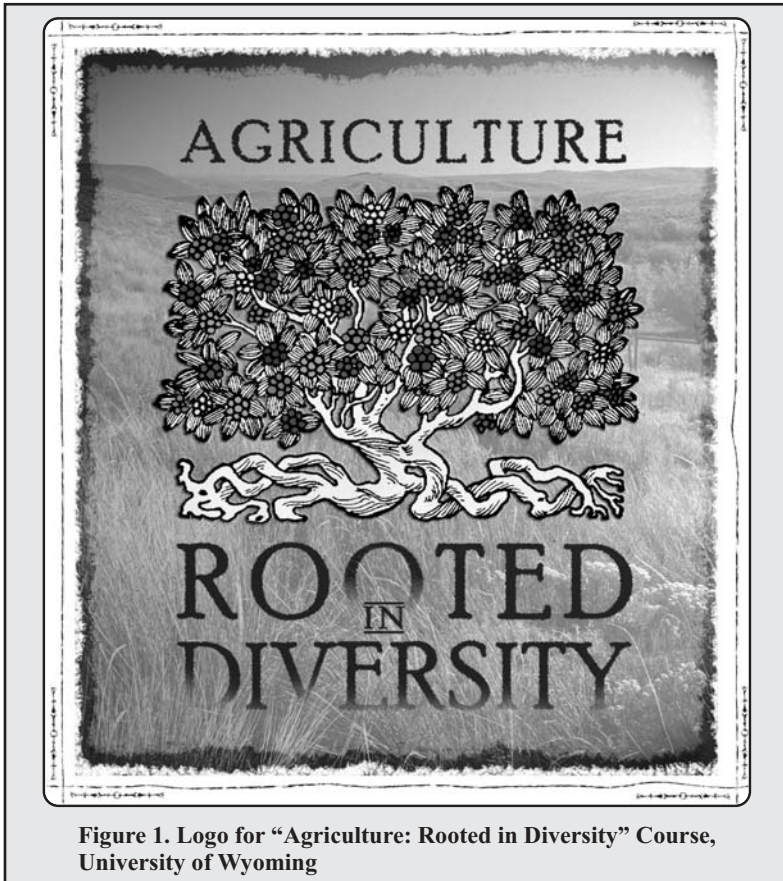


Figure 1. Logo for “Agriculture: Rooted in Diversity” Course, University of Wyoming

interracial marriage. Two students, male and female, were Hispanic and one female was a non-traditional student. The second course had 15 students enrolled (11 females and four males) from two colleges (agriculture and arts & sciences) and five majors; less diverse academically but equally diverse in personal backgrounds and interests to the first class. The small enrollments are attributed to the newness of the course and to the fact that the course was not required in any degree program. All students enrolled for personal interest and could use the course as a free elective only. Now that the course is adopted by the university and meets two general education requirements, future enrollments are expected to be significantly greater and more diverse. One baccalaureate degree program, Agroecology, has announced plans to list the course as a requirement, guaranteeing a greater demand beginning Spring 2006. Enrollment caps are being changed from 24 to 42 for 2006 in anticipation of larger registrations and a second instructor is to be included to maintain the desired student: faculty ratio.

### Student and Course Activities

Scheduled class meetings and the blocks of free time enabled various educational activities. In-class activities included guest speaker seminars, student colloquia (as discussed above), historical research orientations and workshops, student updates and oral presentations on research, and end of semester project presentations and public exhibition.

Seven or eight guest seminars were scheduled each semester spanning a wide range of diversity topics (Table 1), most were advertised campus wide and in the local community to encourage public attendance. Average attendance at the first year public seminars was 40 to 50 and all attendees were asked to submit written evaluations, compiled later for the WCH records. In year two, written evaluations of seminars and seminar speakers were required only from the enrolled students. Some of the second year seminars were not open to the public, respecting the speaker's wishes or to create a safer climate for discussion over sensitive issues. The seminars helped students develop research questions, provided contact and content information for their projects, and stimulated dialogue. The seminar series also increased visibility for the course and sponsoring agencies.

Early in each semester special orientations and workshops on historical research and museum techniques were provided by AHC archivists and a graduate teaching assistant (Masters candidate in history, farmer, and founding director of a farm and ranch museum). These workshops provided students with instruction on accessing primary sources (letters, diaries, government and agency records, and photos from historical archives). Instruction on appropriate

**Table 1. Topics and Speakers for the 2004 and 2005 University of Wyoming "Agriculture: Rooted in Diversity" Seminar Series.**

#### 2004

Wyoming Agriculture in Historical Perspective: An Overview. Phil Roberts, Associate Professor - History, University of Wyoming.

Sheep and Txiustus: Basque Immigration in Northern Wyoming's Ranching Community. David Romtvedt, Associate Professor - English, University of Wyoming and State of Wyoming Poet Laureate.

Fertile Ground for Gender Analysis. Katherine Jensen, Professor - Sociology and Women's Studies, University of Wyoming.

Agriculture and Latino Community Development. Ed Munoz, Assistant Professor - Criminal Justice and Director of Chicano Studies, University of Wyoming.

"Let Them Eat Chickens!" African Americans on the Ranching Frontier. Todd Guenther, Director, Pioneer Museum, Lander, WY.

American Indian Land and Uses, William Gribb. Professor - Geography & Recreation, University of Wyoming.

Jewish Farmers. Carl Hallberg, Archivist, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne, WY.

Daikon, Watermelon, and Peanuts in Park County. Patricia Wolfe and Carolyn Takeshita, Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, Powell, WY.

#### 2005

Sheep and Txiustus (encore presentation from 2004).

From Lincoln to Bush, Living Martin's Dream. Taylor Haynes, Rancher and Trustee, University of Wyoming.

Soldiers of the Field: Race, Ethnicity, and Labor in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1946. Jerry Garcia, Visiting Professor - History, Michigan State University.

Germans from Russia. Gladys Wyatt, Harrisburg, NB.

Women Carrying the Load. Katherine Jensen, Professor - Sociology and Women's Studies, University of Wyoming.

Agriculture on the Wind River Indian Reservation. Antonio Pingree, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Ft. Washakie, WY.

Agriculture in Ghana. Richard NtiAsare, Visiting Professor, College of Law, University of Wyoming.

protocol and techniques for collecting oral histories was also provided.

Activities outside of class included student travel to state and regional museums, libraries, state archives, and oral history interviews via telephone or in person. Student experiences with oral history, a new endeavor for most, were particularly satisfying for the student and aided in the quality of the project outcomes. For example, one student researching the lives of Japanese Americans at Heart Mountain, a WWII internment camp, was personally moved by the oral history. This student had a lengthy phone interview with a 90+ year old male camp survivor, who now lives in California. The conversation had a profound impact on the student. He characterized the overall educational experience as "life changing." Another student

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was inspired when interviewing a Stepp family descendent. The African American Stepp family made a significant mark in the early Wyoming frontier and agriculture.

Each student was reimbursed for travel expenses within the confines of grant agreements and provided recording equipment and transcription costs for compiling data. As was expected, the amount of support per research project varied, some students requesting no grant funds and others being reimbursed a few hundred dollars. Late in the semester all students spent significant time interacting with the professional framer on exhibit production.

All of these activities contributed to the completion of semester ending student exhibits (Table 2). In 2004 all exhibits were required to be matted and glass-framed. In 2005 alternative exhibit styles were permitted. Students could present their research in any format readily viewed by the public. Four students chose alternative exhibit formats: two as websites, one as a book, and one as a creative piece of art. Draft term reports, exhibit text, photos, and layout design were submitted at pre-assigned intervals during the semester so each student could receive feedback from the instructor, faculty team, and peers. Students presented brief oral reports about their research and displayed exhibits as works in progress. This generated considerable feedback from peers, adding to the sense of academic community in class, and inspired improvements and new ideas among exhibit authors. The periodic assessment also lessened the high risk aspect of grading, as grades on each term report and exhibit draft were calculated into the student's final grade, reducing the pressure to produce and perform at the final exhibit presentation. The final exhibition was a three hour event at the AHC. The first two hours were for formal student oral presentations to the class, faculty team and AHC staff. The last hour was reserved for a public reception and exhibition of student work. A gala like atmosphere, with food, drink and media coverage, created a significant culminating event (Figure 2).

### Dissemination of Results

The culminating public exhibition was the first step in disseminating student research results. Most students assigned their exhibit copyrights to me, authorizing future showing of their work in various public venues. The 2004 exhibits were immediately incorporated into a statewide traveling exhibit, "Barn Again", by the Wyoming Council for the Humanities and were on public viewing in summer 2004. Eight of these 11 exhibits were later mounted in a newly renovated classroom in the agriculture building, fulfilling one of the stated project goals to make visible images of women and minorities in our building. An exceptionally fine exhibit, "Germans from Russia in Western Nebraska and Eastern

Wyoming" by C. Speckner, was permanently loaned to the Farm and Ranch Museum, Gering, NB where it is on current display. Another exceptional exhibit from the 2005 course, "Stepp'n Up: An African American Family in Wyoming" by S. Utz, was permanently loaned to the American Black West Museum, Denver, CO. Further dissemination of Utz's research is expected, as he and the AHC are now collaborating on a journal article detailing the results of his archival and oral history research.

Three Latino in agriculture theme exhibits from 2004 and 2005 have been committed to the UW Chicano Studies Program for a traveling exhibit in the making. Three other 2005 exhibits relating to either women and rodeo or to American Indians and rodeo have been permanently mounted in a high traffic hallway opposite the UW Rodeo Team office. One 2005 exhibit highlighting a remarkable biography of a woman from Cody, WY has been gifted to the UW County Extension Service Park County Office, Cody, WY for greater visibility in that northern Wyoming community. Another exceptional exhibit on Asian Americans, creative for its artistic design, was given to the UW Multicultural Programs Office for prominent display in a student union showcase. High quality exhibits on women homesteaders and children on the farm are displayed in the central foyer and main hallway of the agriculture building, disseminating historical information about two populations that have been largely invisible. The "Children on the Farm: Two Faces of 1920's Child Labor" research project was previously presented in a 20 minute PowerPoint by student T. Jedd in the 2005 UW Undergraduate Research Day. Remaining student exhibits have also found permanent public display sites.

Media attention accelerated the dissemination of the project and student accomplishments. The College of Agriculture Office of Communications &



Figure 2. Public Exhibition of Student Research, "Agriculture: Rooted in Diversity" Class, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, April, 2005

Technology staff prepared media releases announcing seminars and the AHC receptions and were often on hand to photograph events. Photos and stories were incorporated into the university's website. A prominent university periodical, *UWYO Magazine* included a feature article about one of the seminar speakers. The *College of Agriculture magazine, Reflections*, and newsletter, *Agademics*, have also featured stories about the class and the seminar series. One seminar, presented by UW Trustee Taylor Haynes, a Black American, resulted in significant publicity and recognition of the project, when the university president, on behalf of the Board of Trustees made a special presentation before the Deans Council noting the innovation and successes of the "Agriculture: Rooted in Diversity" project.

Lastly, the project concept and first semester's outcomes were disseminated to an international audience after acceptance of a paper by the 29th International Improving University Teaching (IUT) Conference, Bern, Switzerland (Wangberg, 2004).

## Summary

A new course, "Agriculture: Rooted in Diversity," was initiated in summer 2003 as a mechanism for infusing multiculturalism into the University of Wyoming agricultural and university curriculum. It was also seen as an opportunity for increasing cross-disciplinary faculty and student collaboration, expanding a dialogue about diversity issues across campus and in communities, and creating a learning environment for independent undergraduate research in a subject area not necessarily familiar to the students. Now in its third year, the project has successfully met its primary goals. The primary student products (museum quality exhibits) are on public display in university buildings, classrooms, county offices, and regional museums, providing continual testimony to the project's effectiveness, and bringing visibility to women and minorities in agriculture. They also serve as models for future student projects and contribute to campus and public education regarding diversity. To use an agricultural metaphor, this course may now be a seed for expanded course offerings, more diverse student enrollments and other diversity projects in the College of Agriculture.

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**Table 2. Topics and Authors for the 2004-2005 University of Wyoming "Agriculture: Rooted in Diversity" Student Exhibitions.**

### 2004

Germans from Russia in Western Nebraska & Eastern Wyoming. Caren Speckner.

Home on the Range: Mexican Shepherders in Wyoming. Liliana Hernandez.

Keeper of the Flock. Laura Buckingham.

A Century of Cowgirls at Work and Play. Enya L. Borgman.

Cowboys are Black Too. Tana Stieg.

Migrant Mexican Children in Agriculture. Richard J. Gonzalez.

Basque Country. Tiffany Reed.

Henry Altman and his Hereford Minyan. Barnett G. Sporkin Morrison.

Hutterites. Patricia M. Kelsey.

Behind Barbed Wire: Agriculture at the Heart Mountain Relocation Camp for Japanese Americans. Lee Krusa.

Women in Agriculture: Myth and Reality. Krystal D. Park.

### 2005

The Re-creation of Cowboys and Indians. Curtis W. Heimbeck.

Cowboys and Indians. Cassie M. McMillan.

Stepp'n Up: An African American Family in Wyoming. Scotty D. Utz.

Children on the Farm: The Two Faces of 1920s Child Labor. Theresa Jedd.

Proving Up: Female Homesteaders on the Agricultural Frontier. Elizabeth Davis.

Eastward Expansion: The Japanese Immigration Experience Through Agriculture. Jessica M. Mangus.

Wyoming Cattle Women's Influence on the Wyoming Beef Industry. Jacque Wright.

Caroline Cameron Lockhart: The Cowgirl of the West. Nikki Simpson.

Rodeo Cowgirls. Crystal Rivers.

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