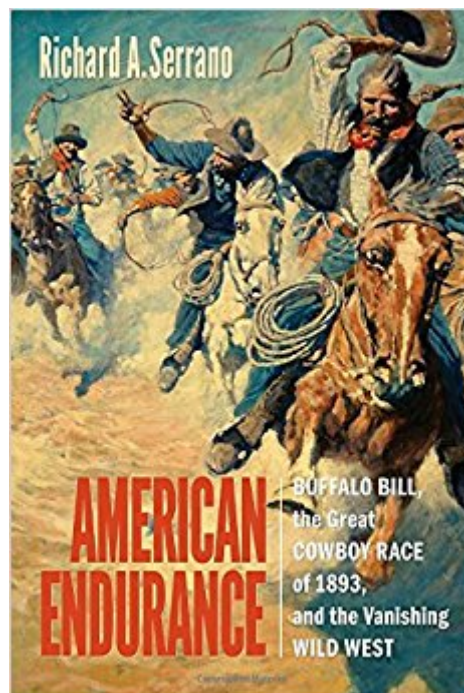




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# American Endurance: Buffalo Bill, The Great Cowboy Race Of 1893, And The Vanishing Wild West



## Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author Richard A. Serrano's new book *American Endurance: The Great Cowboy Race and the Vanishing Wild West* is history, mystery, and Western all rolled into one. In June 1893, nine cowboys raced across a thousand miles of American prairie to the Chicago World's Fair. For two weeks they thundered past angry sheriffs, governors, and Humane Society inspectors intent on halting their race. Waiting for them at the finish line was Buffalo Bill Cody, who had set up his Wild West Show right next to the World's Fair that had refused to allow his exhibition at the fair. The Great Cowboy Race occurred at a pivotal moment in our nation's history: many believed the frontier was settled and the West was no more. The Chicago World's Fair represented the triumph of modernity and the end of the cowboy age. Except no one told the cowboys. Racing toward Buffalo Bill Cody and the gold-plated Colt revolver he promised to the first to reach his arena, nine men went on a Wild West stampede from tiny Chadron, Nebraska, to bustling Chicago. But at the first thud of hooves pounding on Chicago's brick pavement, the race devolved into chaos. Some of the cowboys shipped their horses part of the way by rail, or hired private buggies. One had the unfair advantage of having helped plan the route map in the first place. It took three days, numerous allegations, and a good old Western showdown to sort out who was first to Chicago, and who won the Great Cowboy Race.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

At the end of the nineteenth century, as electricity became widely available and cable cars and

trolleys replaced horses, Americans swarmed to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair to see the wonders the future held. Amid the roar of the machines and gadgets on display arose a different sound: the clatter of hooves. Nine cowboys raced across the country toward a competing Chicago fair held by Buffalo Bill Cody, hell-bent on proving that Wild West ways still mattered in this strange new world. This is a plain good story, and it's what history is all about." Winston Groom, author of *El Paso: A Novel* "This is a brilliantly researched and written ode to the end of the Old West and of the men who refused to give up the reins on a distinctly American era. Serrano is a consummate storyteller, keeping this one galloping on course across the plains and down the dusty trails of the West to the cobblestone streets of the new urban America. This is a book that entertains as much as it educates." Michael Connelly, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Wrong Side of Goodbye* (A Harry Bosch Novel) "A marvelous retelling of an all-but-forgotten incident in the closing of the American West. Serrano writes history as it should be written" driven by a powerful narrative and packed with vivid detail. Outstanding." John Jakes, author of the North and South trilogy "American Endurance, the thrilling story of the Great Cowboy Race of 1893, is deeply researched and written with wit and enthusiasm, both a celebration and an elegy for the Old West and the cowboy. Serrano packs an encyclopedia's worth of history, folklore, legend, and reporting into this narrative of a publicity stunt that marked the closing of the frontier and the flourishing of show biz in America. It is a stirring account told with verve, authentic detail, and affection." Robert Morgan, author of *Lions of the West* "The Great Cowboy Race of 1893 is the basis for a gripping narrative of an event little known to the public or even Western historians. Building on profiles of the individual players in the story, Serrano expertly captures the essence of the Great Plains in the years immediately following the closing of the American frontier." Robert M. Utley, former chief historian, National Park Service, and author of twenty-one books on the history of the American West

**BOOKLIST** Long-distance horse races were popular in late-nineteenth-century Europe, and American ranchers had long boasted that the western bronc was sturdier than European breeds. But the 1893 race Pulitzer Prize-winning Serrano (*Last of the Blue and Gray*, 2013) chronicles took place mainly because a hoax-prone Nebraska reporter told the eastern press that a 1,000-mile cowboy race from the town of Chadron to the Chicago World Fair was set to occur. The finish line switched to Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West show, which ended up across the street from the Chicago Exposition. And nationwide disdain, backed by legal threats in objection to the potential mistreatment of horses, drove down the number of race entries to nine. Yet the race was run, and the Humane Society commended the riders for treating their horses well. Serrano captures the race's underlying significance as an attempt to reaffirm the

drive and majesty of the Old West in the face of Chicago's celebration of modernism. With a clear, compact style and colorful characters, Serrano's account of this fascinating chapter in American history has wide appeal.

**WILD WEST MAGAZINE** Some stories practically tell themselves. The saga of the Great Cowboy Race of 1893—a 1,000-mile odyssey on horseback from the gumptious frontier town of Chadron, Neb., eastward across the Great Plains and Corn Belt to the bright lights of big-city Chicago—is one such story. It bridges the Old West and the modern era, bringing together chapped cowboys and bowler-wearing dudes, saddle horses and streetcars, Wild West showman Buffalo Bill Cody and prophet of the closing frontier Frederick Jackson Turner. It has all the elements of a natural page-turner without the need for embellishment. Still, it doesn't hurt to have a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer at the reins. Newspaperman Richard Serrano does his frontier forebears proud.

**RICHARD A. SERRANO** is a former reporter for the Kansas City Times and was a longtime Washington correspondent for the Los Angeles Times. He has shared in three Pulitzer Prizes for coverage of the San Bernardino terror attacks, the Hyatt Sky Walks disaster in Kansas City, and the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles. His most recent book is *Last of the Blue and Gray: Old Men, Stolen Glory, and the Mystery That Outlived the Civil War*.

The closing of the frontier, the end of the Indian Wars, the taming of the cowboy culture, and the birth of the modern machine-based era happened almost simultaneously near the end of the 19th century. Stories about these momentous events have been the focus of scholarship and popular culture ever since. Richard Serrano provides a very well-researched and entertaining contribution to the history of this inflection point by exploring the larger meaning of the once famous, but now nearly forgotten, Great Cowboy Race of 1893 (1000 miles from Chadron, NE, to the World's Fair in Chicago). This race was created by boosters of the small Nebraska town and inspired by the World's Fair's promise to showcase wonders to come in the new century. It gained fame when Buffalo Bill Cody supported it as a demonstration of the power and virtue of the western culture glorified in his hugely popular Wild West Show. He gambled that the riders would demonstrate the immortal superiority of cowboy horsemanship and western horses (and they did). So during the summer of 1893, the inflection point between the past and future was there in the few yards of dirt separating the World's Fair and Cody's adjacent show grounds. With Cody's support, the race became famous and hundreds of cowboys wanted to enter. But the fame also attracted attention from humane societies and others who viewed cowboys as

barbarians who abused animals and humans. Influential people knew little about cowboy culture, but they were so horrified by the race concept that they convinced several state Governors and many local officials to threaten race participants with arrest and jail terms. This discouraged most prospective riders, and only nine showed up for the start – most carrying guns to discourage interference. Cooler heads prevailed, and a compromise provided for humane society representatives to meet the riders regularly to examine the horses and ensure that only fit horses would be allowed to continue. The race went on with each rider taking two horses. Most riders finished on their healthiest horse, though there seem to be credible allegations of widespread cheating. But whatever the riders did, no horses were harmed (other than temporary fatigue or lameness), and the riders themselves made most of the decisions to stable a horse when it shouldn't go on. The humane society representatives praised the cowboy horsemanship and condition of the horses along the way and at the finish. Serrano encapsulates the theme of his history with this wonderful paragraph about the start: “But while they could not know it then, they were racing for something far more meaningful. Not for individual glory, but for the immortality of the Old West itself, to help ensure that the West would be remembered as young and hopeful and forever vast, a wild and boundless outdoors where a man on a racing, hooves-pounding, heart-galloping broncho symbolized one of America's greatest virtues: endurance. It was a last desperate dash across the country before a new century and new nation pushed the Old West aside. While this book provides an interesting new perspective on important American history, this reviewer also approaches it as a keen participant in the modern version of endurance racing on horseback (see [aerc.org](http://aerc.org)). Modern riders race over distances of 50 to 100 miles in one day or 50 miles/day for up to five days. Horse welfare is a central value, and the humane society checks invented for the Great Cowboy Race have been formalized into regular race pauses where certified veterinarians terminate the race for any horse that is not fit to continue. So the tradition of superb cowboy horsemanship exemplified by that long-ago Cowboy Race are being carried by modern riders, though very few have ever herded cattle. Tom Bache

Just received my copy! And being the direct descendent of one of the cowboys in the race (Josiah Gillespie, my great great great gramps), I had to of course skim straight to his sections. I have to say that I am thrilled at how he is portrayed in this book. I even learned some new stuff! I am ecstatic to finally have such a wonderfully detailed account of this race in my library. It's really a fun chapter in US history that not many know about. I've already started recommending it to the rest of

the Gillespie side of my family.

Imagine living during a time when the United States before industry and mass developments occurred within the wide-open wilderness also known as the frontier. Writer Richard A. Serrano turns the clock to that time, although, it may sound clichéd and a line from the campfire song “Home on the Range” “when the deer and the antelope played” as well as what inspired afternoon movie and television westerns and all the familiar traits and at times stereotypes of the rugged cowboy that always rode or had his horse by his side until the end but also considered the bandits and rebels. Indeed, a time that was a reality of the historical past and titled for the book *American Endurance: Buffalo Bill, the Great Cowboy Race of 1893, and the Vanishing West*. And Serrano attempts to revisit that memorable period. Most of the information that he has compiled within his narrative are from the voices of the past, oral histories and the interviews conducted and preserved in the National Archives and various magazine and journal articles, pamphlets, and publications in Nebraska, Iowa, and Illinois when the race took place. *American Endurance* sets the stage with one of the last races in cowboy history and their last stand or at least last presence within the public’s eyes that stretched thousands of miles from Nebraska to Illinois ending up at the most symbolic expositions of the late 19th century Chicago World Columbian Exposition of 1893. And the setting would not be complete without Serrano reasserting what bridged the bridge between the past, the Wild West to a modern present that was on the horizon without mention of Historian Frederick Jackson Turner’s address at the American Historical Association with his thesis “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” It is fortunate that one of the earliest modern inventions to be created in the 19th century, photography, and amazingly during this period and several photos are included in the book. One of the interesting photo insets in one of the chapters called “The Vanishing Cowboy West” shows the two encounters of how the American West was now near a mere relic of the past, within the Nebraskan Panhandle near Big Springs sits on the side of the road but on opposite sides, an automobile and a Conestoga wagon drawn by two jackrabbit mules, the photo is circa 1912; one of many examples that showed and Serrano suggests that horses as a means of transportation was ending. And to accompany that sentiment, one of the most iconic figures of this period William Frederick Cody AKA Buffalo Bill who attempted to revive and present a period and a way of life that forever would become romanticized, a spectacle, and nostalgia never to return again in its original form. There is no doubt that Buffalo Bill lived and breathed the frontier and who most capable to recreate it for exhibition and performance, and one in which is interestingly explained in

the chapter "Buffalo Bill Goes to the Fair." Through out the book there are constant examples and reminders of names and faces that were a part of the cowboy past in addition to Buffalo Bill, the entire of crew of cowboys that performed twice-a-day at the Chicago Exposition, former leaders from the Oglala Lakota chief Red Cloud, and Steely-eyed John Berry who was not a cowboy but participated in the race out of protest, he was a railroad surveyor. The book provides a backdrop to history, especially this time period when inevitable transition took place but did not allow the American West to completely disappear within the mindset and memory of those that lived through it and were not willing for it to be forgotten. A recommended book for readers that have a fascination or curiosity of this part of American history that offers an understanding of time and place. One note, it appears due to limited space, the sources that Serrano used are included, and with patience contains a window of information for further reading and delving into for more insight.

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