Real men

The introduction to Cathy Luchetti's *Men of the West: Life on the American Frontier* touches on the definition of "manliness". In her introduction Luchetti assumes that all of these Western men were alike and studies their shared traits: Their environment, their habits, their violence, and their motives for seeking the Frontier.

In the time and place Luchetti describes, men dominate the world. Most importantly, the men act like each of them owns the world. They are arrogant and don't take their surroundings into consideration. In the text they are described as vandals: "*As they forged their way across the country, the results of their heedlessness was seen in diminished herds of buffalo, grass cropped rootless, and streams deeply muddied.*" They don't feel the need to be cautious. Their other characteristics are their energy, their weapons and their youth. Men of the West are someway between a tyrant and a hero, and above all they have no obligations to anyone but themselves.

Their attitude shaped the world they lived in, which wasn't always a peaceful place. American soil was tough and it was difficult to make it on your own, which of course all American men did because they were individualists. Perhaps because of all these frustrations, there was often a loss of control. Bars crowded with wasted men and cigarettes were like an epidemic. The social life of the West swung between partying and churchgoing.

In between these two things was violence. Fights and quarrels were a consistent part of American settlers' life. They happened whether people were drunk or sober. Meanwhile the so-called "savages", the Indians, "*displayed skills of diplomacy and peacemaking more refined than those of the "civilized" whites.*" However, the Indians were driven back and in the battle for land, the white men won. This was due to their ruthlessness and their conviction that they were in the right.

Morals were strong in the American man's brain. Of course, these morals weren't always the same as the law. "*While actual laws were routinely broken, unwritten "codes" remained inviolate. Women should not be hurt or killed, killings should be justified, hospitality in the*

wilderness was demanded..." Luchetti describes. The men felt that their morals were above the law. As always, they were the rulers of their own world and anything that stood in their way had to go. That is why there was so much violence in the West – it was just another aspect of the men's individualism.

America made individualism possible. It cultivated it. Everyone knew this and that is what drew the men to the new continent. It was a new world and anything was possible for them. The men who went to America went knowing they would have to make it on their own, and they knew that they were going away from everything they knew. That is why they went. The West attracted resourceful, strong men.

Resourceful and strong are qualities belonging to the classic American cowboy. The cowboy is the hero version of the American man in the West. The cowboy symbolizes everything the Western men appreciate. He is brave. He is often outlawed but he saves people, so he is not exactly a bad guy. Except for his horse, he is always alone. Cowboys are likable and okay to tell stories about to children because they aren't greedy. Other classic American characters like Gatsby are rich, but not the cowboy. Still he represents the American dream because he has taught himself how to make it on his own. He doesn't need anybody's help.

Luchetti writes about the first Americans, the men of the West, and tries to define them. They are "real men" who are strong and violent, outlawed and protective, self-reliant and individualistic. This is not just an American view on men – this role has existed as long as humans have. Primitive as it may be, it has lead to a great development in civilization. And one of the greatest countries in the world.