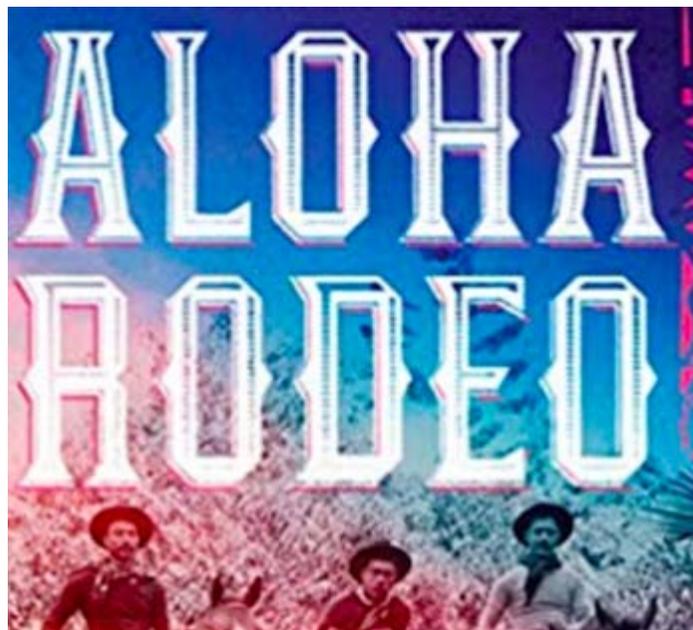


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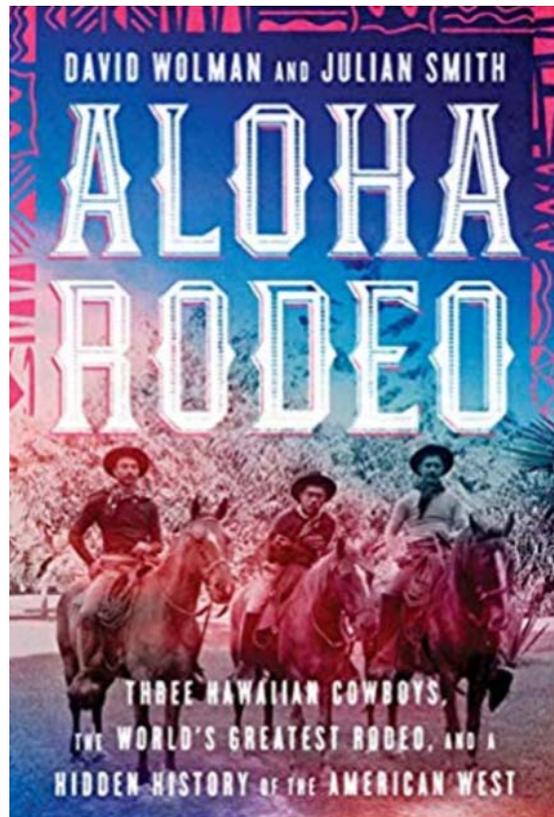
# Aloha Rodeo

## *How Hawaiians Showed up and Showed Off in 1908 at the Biggest Rodeo in the World*

June 5, 2019      Michael Giltz

Just as the Wild West was beginning to fade from view, Americans began to celebrate it like never before. Buffalo Bill Cody traveled the world, staging everything from Custer's Last Stand to a stagecoach holdup with actual cowboys and Indians in tow. And rodeos proved increasingly popular as a way to punctuate a Fourth of July celebration and give cowboys a chance to compete for money and blow off a little steam.

Perhaps the biggest rodeo of them all was Cheyenne, Wyoming's Frontier Days celebration. It quickly steamrolled into an attraction that drew people from all over the country. But publicity stunts never hurt, so they urged cowboys from every country in the world to travel to Wyoming and go head-to-head against the best steer-ropers in the world.



No matter who showed up, local boys almost always won the most prestigious events. So in 1908, when some pint-sized Hawaiians arrived from the almost-mythical island of which the U.S. had just seized control, people generally met them with polite curiosity or derision. Who were they kidding?

That's the story of Aloha Rodeo, by David Wolman and Julian Smith, an intriguing anecdote spun out into an amiable, if padded, book. Turns out those Hawaiian paniolo (as they called their own cowboys) were ringers. Hawaiians had been roping and herding cattle in the wild surf and on the dangerous volcanic slopes of Hawaii long before the U.S. even laid claim to the West, much less began cowboy-ing on the plains.

If you'd just picked up cricket last week, you'd hardly expect to best the British, would you? That was the unwitting attitude of the "real" cowboys of Wyoming. Not knowing the long and colorful history of Hawaiians and cattle, the attendees just watched in amazement as the three competitors from the U.S.'s newest territory whupped all comers.

One problem for the book? Like the cowboys of legend, the Hawaiian competitors Ikua Purdy, Jack Low and Archie Ka'au'a were men of few words. We hear precious few accountings of the events at hand from them. When they do speak, they do so tersely and unremarkably. Worse, in terms of drama, the competition itself lacked suspense and ended quickly. They came, they mostly won, and then they went home.

Wolman and Smith do honorable work filling out the story. They give a detailed history of cattle on the island of Hawaii and the history of rodeos in the U.S. But when they describe the train route the Hawaiians took, and detail seemingly every sight they might have seen along the way, you sense their urgent need to turn an interesting tale into a book-length work.

Perhaps we need to embrace the nonfiction novella, that rarely-used option for stories longer than a magazine article but shorter than a 300-page book. Barring that, it would have been better if the authors took a cue from their taciturn heroes and wrote a long Aloha Rodeo article that left us hankering for more, rather than a book that squeezes out every angle from a fascinating but brief event. Real cowboys get the job done quickly and then slip away.

**(William Morrow; May 28, 2019)**

Tags: Aloha Rodeo, David Wolman, Julian Smith

← Ali! Ali! Ali!

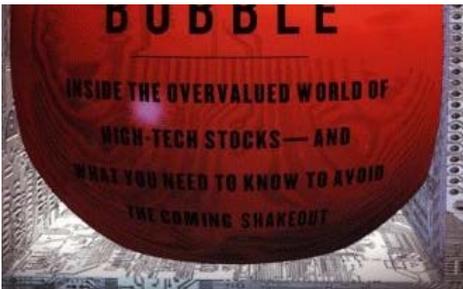
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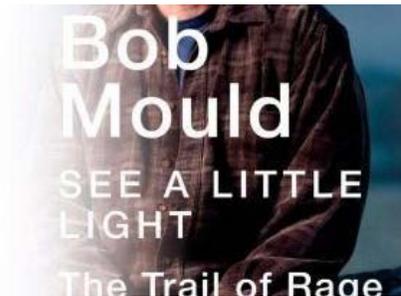
Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in New York City covering all areas of entertainment, politics, sports and more. He has written extensively for the New York Post, New York Daily News, New York Magazine, The Advocate, Out, Huffington Post, Premiere Magazine, Entertainment Weekly, BookFilter, USA Today and the Los Angeles Times. He co-hosts the long-running podcast Showbiz Sandbox.

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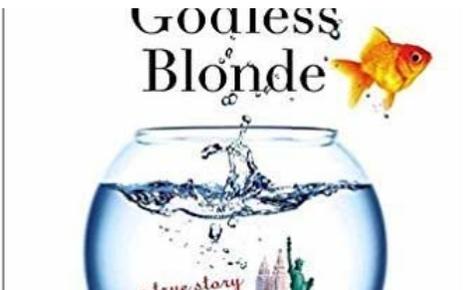
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February 2019  
January 2019  
December 2018  
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October 2018  
September 2018  
August 2018  
July 2018  
May 2017  
February 2016  
May 2015  
February 2015  
January 2015  
December 2014  
November 2014  
March 2014  
December 2013  
September 2013  
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January 2013  
December 2012  
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November 2011  
September 2011  
June 2011  
May 2011

March 2011

May 2001

March 2001

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August 2000

July 2000

June 2000

February 2000

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October 1999

September 1999

August 1999

July 1999

June 1999

May 1999

April 1999

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