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> SUBSCRIPTION RATES Per Year in Coke County ... \$35.00 Per Year Elsewhere in Texas ... \$40.00 Per Year Outside of Texas ... \$45.00

> > Wister.

Yorker

Eastern magazines and dime

store novels with wild frontier

tales. These stories entertained

post-Civil War audiences in

grimy, booming cities who were

fascinated by the land of

opportunity and adventure that

Then along came Owen

Wister was a well-heeled

Philadelphia gentleman who

became lifelong friends at

Harvard with another Easterner

from a wealthy family, a New

Roosevelt. Wister, like many

others, had been captivated by

Roosevelt's brief-but-legendary

time as a rancher in the Dakota

Territory, and the stories that

Roosevelt published in dozens of

magazine articles and several

books. Roosevelt suggested that

Wister start writing tales of

western cowboy life and they

were picked up by the popular

Harper's Weekly magazine. A

few stories were even illustrated

by Roosevelt's friend Frederic

Remington (yes, that Frederic

In 1902, Wister published a

full-length novel called "The

Virginian" and its dedication

page gave effusive praise to

Edward Jones[®]

Remington).

Theodore

named

seemed to abound "out West."



American Idol By James M. Decker It's high noon in the frontier town. A tall, handsome hero strides into the dusty street his outlaw nemesis where awaits. The two men draw. The outlaw is fast but the hero is faster. His aim is straight and true. The outlaws falls to the The townspeople ground. celebrate, but the humble hero needs no acclaim. He rides into

the sunset accompanied by a

beautiful woman that he loves. It is a familiar scene with countless variations on screen and in the printed word. They call it the "Western." Over the decades, it has brought fortune and fame to many: Zane Grey, Louis L'Amour, Tom Mix, Randolph Scott, John Ford, John Wayne, Howard Hawks, Sergio Leone, Clint Eastwood, and many others owe much of their fame to the Western. Ostensibly, the Western tells the tale of the American West: the hardships of the frontier, settlement of new towns, and "good" triumphing over both wilderness and evil.

But was it real?

Several essays back, I wrote of Teddy Blue Abbott's famous cowboy memoir "We Pointed Them North: Recollections of a Cowpuncher." Abbott wrote a rare first-person account of the cattle drive era and the fun. hardships, hard work, and general mundanity that he and other cowboys experienced. It was a striking contrast to much Western literature that predated Abbott's memoir that was published in 1939. Prior to that date, the Western canon had some shreds of reality but a whole lot of pulp fiction that bordered on outright fantasy. The golden era of the cattle drive lasted only a few years, but it has spawned over 150 years of stories that continue even today. It is a fascinating phenomenon that began with aspiring writers and looking-fora-quick-buck types who filled

Theodore Roosevelt himself. Set in Wyoming in the 1880s, it tells the tale of a cowboy hero whose name is never mentioned. The hero is tall, dark, and handsome. He faces down outlaws and he gets the girl. It is an enjoyable read, but if you have read many Westerns, it is nothing you have not read before.

And yet, those other Westerns exist BECAUSE of Wister's novel. It became a best-selling sensation and is considered the first modern Western novel. It was adapted to film five different times and loosely adapted into a popular television series. Grey, L'Amour, and all the others picked up their story formula from Wister's novel. The hero's gunfight with outlaw Trampas was the first known "showdown" in cowboy fiction.

I love Westerns. Just ask my teachers who objected to me reading Louis L'Amour novels in class. But I have a lot on my mind about the Western, the cowboy ideal, and the Western's influence, good and bad, on the concept of community. Is the cowboy hero a goal to which we should aspire? Or is he an idol that we worship to the detriment of our people, our community, and our own mental health? And is that partially Theodore Roosevelt's fault?

Stay tuned in the weeks to come. Because I find this topic to be critically important to my own understanding of rural America and to its past, present, and future.

James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator of the West of 98 website and podcast. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at westof98.substack.com and subscribe to West of -98 wherever podcasts are found.

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USDA proposes new 'Product of USA' label changes

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a proposed rule with new regulatory requirements to better align the voluntary "Product of USA" label claim with consumer understanding of what the claim means.

The proposed rule allows the voluntary "Product of USA" or "Made in the USA" label claim to be used on meat, poultry and egg products only when they are derived from animals born, raised, slaughtered and processed in the United States.

"American consumers expect that when they buy a meat product at the grocery store, the claims they see on the label mean what they say," U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said. "These proposed changes are intended to provide consumers with accurate information to make informed purchasing decisions. Our action today affirms USDA's commitment to ensuring accurate and truthful product labeling."

USDA's proposed rulemaking is supported by petitions, thousands of comments from stakeholders and data.

In July 2021, USDA initiated a comprehensive review to understand what the "Product of USA" claim means to consumers and inform planned define rulemaking to the requirements for making such a claim.

As part of its review, USDA commissioned a nationwide consumer survey. The survey revealed that the current "Product of USA" labeling claim is misleading to a majority of consumers surveyed, with a significant portion believing the claim means that the product was made from animals born, raised, slaughtered and processed in the United States.

USDA's comprehensive review shows there is a clear need to revise the current "Product of USA" label claim so that it more accurately conveys U.S. origin information.

Under the proposed rule, the "Product of USA" label claim would continue to be voluntary. It would also remain eligible for generic label approval, meaning it would not need to be preapproved by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) before it could be used on regulated product, but it would require supporting documentation to be on file for agency inspection personnel to verify.

The rulemaking also proposes to allow other voluntary U.S. origin claims we see on meat, poultry and egg products sold in the marketplace. These claims would need to include a description on the package of all

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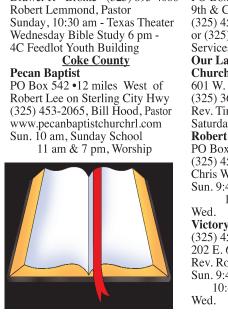
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