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The first cowboys in Texas pre-dated the U.S. Civil War by many, many years. Long before the 1830s, in the area we now call the State of Texas, Mexican cowboys known as *vaqueros* worked with cattle. The [Bullock Museum tells us](#): “*Vaqueros* owned their horses, saddles, and ropes and what they did with them would shape the history of Texas ranching.” James Walker (1819-1889), an English artist who also worked in America, painted this scene of a Mexican *vaqueros* roping a steer, circa 1830s. Click on the public-domain image for a better view.

Between 1867 and 1887, people in America [moved west](#). The Civil War was finally over, the South was being “reconstructed” and there was “free land”—for some people—available in America’s vast-and-open western spaces.

Who were the western-movers ... those individuals who picked-up stakes to begin new lives in areas west of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers?

Native-Americans were among the first to “move west,” but that was not by choice. The “[Indian Removal Act](#)” of 1830—the federal government’s method of forcing Native-Americans of various tribes to leave their ancestral lands and move to “Indian Territory”—caused a great deal of suffering along the “Trail of Tears.”

Civil-War soldiers, from both sides, also moved West. Because of their battle experience, these men knew how to use guns.

Black men from the South, who were slaves at the beginning of 1865, were free men before the end of that year. The [13th Amendment](#), which was ratified on December 6th, guaranteed they would never be slaves again. Some of those men headed west, too.

Among the possible jobs, for migrating westerners, was work as a cowboy. Why was that?

Centuries before the Civil War, European settlers—particularly Spaniards—brought cattle to the “New World.” At first those cattle were more important for their hides and tallow than for their meat. By the time of the War Between the States, however, [cattle in Texas](#) and Florida were important food sources for the Confederacy.



Some Texans, who left their homes to fight for the South, let their cattle “roam free” during the war years. By mid-1865, those freely roaming cattle had multiplied into huge herds.

There wasn't much of a market for 5 million head of stranded cattle in the economically crippled South. In the industrialized North, however, people were more than slightly interested in purchasing the meat.

But ... how would the owners of millions of Longhorns get their cattle to buyers in the North? Enter ... the cowboys.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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Media Stream



Texas Longhorn

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Texas Longhorn

This image depicts a Texas Longhorn.



"Texas Beyond History"—at the University of Texas, Austin—tells us a bit [more about Longhorn cattle](#):

Longhorn cattle, a hardy hybrid of Spanish criollo stock and English cattle, thrived on the Texas plains and prairies, giving rise to the occupation known as "cow hunting."

Such cattle were able to "thrive" even after their Texas owners left the State to fight, for the Confederacy, during America's Civil War.

When the surviving owners returned, they found their Longhorns had multiplied, significantly, giving them product to sell to buyers in the Northern and Eastern parts of America.

Image online via University of Texas at Austin's "Texas Beyond History."

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Texas-Longhorn>

Lassoing and Branding Calves in "The Old West"

W.A. Rogers created this illustration—"Lassoing and Branding Calves"—which appeared in the October 2, 1880 issue of *Harper's Weekly* (at page 638).

This drawing, and several others which Rogers created at about the same time, resulted from the artist's trip to the American West which he made in 1879.

By 1882, William Allen (W.A.) Rogers was known as a Western artist, but that isn't why *Harper's Weekly* hired him. The company needed an effective artist to replace Thomas Nast, who was best-known for his effective political cartoons.

Rogers, also, was an effective political cartoonist. After a German torpedo sank the *Lusitania*, in May of 1915, the U.S. Navy used one of Rogers' drawings as a recruitment poster. Its title? "Only the Navy Can Stop This."



Click on the top image for a great view.

Image, described above, online via the Library of Congress.

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