

## EXPLORE 3. Debunking the myth

TB → p. 39

### Who is the 21st century cowboy?

As America has changed, so have our heroes. By the 1960s, as social revolutions forced conversations about gender, race, politics, and morality, the Western genre was wrestling with the meaning of heroism and villainy—and how and to whom both personae were ascribed<sup>1</sup>. The outlaws, bank robbers, and ruffians<sup>2</sup> who used to be the villains became the protagonists in films like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *The Wild Bunch*. Suddenly, audiences were cheering for the man in the black hat as he kicked open the saloon doors—his motives had become as relatable<sup>3</sup> as the sheriff's.

While these “revisionist Westerns” flipped the tables on the Hollywood heroes and villains, the new antiheroes were still almost exclusively straight<sup>4</sup> white men. Americans of any other identity didn't see themselves reflected in the wide-open spaces of the Western plains. But both American society and the Western kept evolving and expanding our notions of who gets to be a worthy<sup>5</sup> hero. In the past couple decades, Westerns have told the stories of gay men (*Brokeback Mountain*), black men (*The Hateful Eight*), women (*Meek's Cutoff*), and young girls (*True Grit*), among others.

theatlantic.com, 2018



▲ Calamity Jane movie by Terry Miles, 2024.

1. attributed 2. violent people 3. reconnaissable 4. hétérosexuel 5. digne

### WAY 1

1. a. Look at the poster and read the title and the source. Guess what the document might be about.

b. Tick and justify your choice(s).

This text might be:

- ☐ an article about western movies.
- ☐ an article about the evolution of the representation of cowboys
- ☐ a movie review about Calamity Jane.

2. a. Read the document and underline in red all the words related to the cowboy lexical field in the first paragraph.

b. Read the second paragraph, underline in blue the word related to a change and in yellow the new characters that have appeared in the western movies in the past couple decades.

c. Identify the way cowboys were depicted till the end of the 20th century, even in the “revisionist westerns”.

**3. Focus** on the evolution and **find out** about the elements in the grid:

Changes that appeared in the 1960s	Changes that have appeared since 2000
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

**4. Read** again and **focus** on the word “revolutions” (I.2). **Tick** the elements that were part of these revolutions. (Several possible answers.)

☐ gender   ☐ race   ☐ standard of living   ☐ technology   ☐ politics   ☐ morality   ☐ economy

**5. Recap** the main ideas of the document. You can use the following words:

*change – evolve – heroes – villains – wrestle – identities – reflect*

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## WAY 2

**1. Look at** the poster and **read** the title and the source. **Deduce** the nature of this document and its content.

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**2. Read** the document and **identify** two major lexical fields, **underline** in two different colours a few examples for each.

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**3. Focus** on the evolution and **find out** about the two periods of changes and their specificities:

Changes that appeared in .....	Changes that have appeared since .....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

**4. a. Explain** this sentence “the western genre was wrestling with the meaning of heroism and villainy”.

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**b. Explain** this sentence “Americans of any other identity didn’t see themselves reflected in the wide-open spaces of the Western plains.”

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**5. Sum up** what you understood insisting on the different steps of the evolution.

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