

Cowboy Codes, Creeds, and Prayers

SOME WORDS ON BEHAVIOR FROM WESTERN HEROES LONG AGO ARE MORE RELEVANT — AND NEEDED — TODAY THAN EVER BEFORE.

By William C. Reynolds

THE WEST HAS LONG BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH bravery and pioneer spirit, with heading into the unknown to make a better life. The West continues to celebrate that cowboy spirit of adventure and entrepreneurial pursuits—efforts that require strong and principled citizens. So it fascinates me when I read or hear in the press that someone of influence—whoever they are—is acting “like a cowboy.” Nine times out of 10, the word *cowboy* is being used as a negative or a derogatory term describing improper or distasteful behavior. I have never understood this usage. The most polite and self-effacing individuals I have ever met made their living horseback or in the livestock business. It seems that to call someone a “cowboy” today—in some circles—is an insult. I can’t figure it out, and frankly I don’t waste a lot of time thinking about it. Rather, I believe we need to do more to learn from the legacy of behavior of true cowboys and Westerners. As Montana writer William Kittredge described, “They did the endless work, they took care, they were the people who invented our civilization, theirs was a tradition of civility.”

These principles became codes of conduct that many of our cowboy heroes of the past promoted and illustrated for us. Maybe it’s the times or the rapid globalization of society, but it’s difficult to see how we all wouldn’t be better off if we simply followed and practiced some of these simple rules of polite deportment. Maybe it’s just because we forgot some of them. But we shouldn’t. The world would be a much friendlier place if we all acted, say, a little bit more like a Roy Rogers or a Gene Autry. So what follows, saddle pals, is a reminder of cowboy codes, prayers, creeds, and rules from some of our favorite cowboy heroes. Use them and pass them along. We can all stand to be a little more cowboy. And that is a good thing.

GENE AUTRY’S COWBOY CODE OF HONOR

1. The cowboy must never shoot first, hit a smaller man, or take unfair advantage.
2. He must never go back on his word or a trust confided in him.
3. He must always tell the truth.
4. He must be gentle with children, the elderly, and animals.
5. He must not advocate or possess racially or religiously intolerant ideas.
6. He must help people in distress.
7. He must be a good worker.
8. He must keep himself clean in thought, speech, action, and personal habits.
9. He must respect women, parents, and his nation’s laws.
10. The cowboy is a patriot.



HOPALONG CASSIDY’S CREED FOR AMERICAN BOYS AND GIRLS

1. The highest badge of honor a person can wear is honesty. Be mindful at all times.
2. Your parents are the best friends you have. Listen to them and obey their instructions.
3. If you want to be respected, you must respect others. Show good manners in every way.
4. Only through hard work and study can you succeed. Don’t be lazy.



5. Your good deeds always come to light. So don't boast or be a showoff.
6. If you waste time or money today, you will regret it tomorrow. Practice thrift in all ways.
7. Many animals are good and loyal companions. Be friendly and kind to them.
8. A strong, healthy body is a precious gift. Be neat and clean.
9. Our country's laws are made for your protection. Observe them carefully.
10. Children in many foreign lands are less fortunate than you. Be glad and proud you are an American.

WILD BILL HICKOK DEPUTY MARSHAL'S CODE OF CONDUCT

1. I will be brave, but never careless.
2. I will obey my parents. They DO know best.
3. I will be neat and clean at all times.
4. I will be polite and courteous.
5. I will protect the weak and help them.
6. I will study hard.
7. I will be kind to animals and care for them.
8. I will respect my flag and my country.
9. I will attend my place of worship regularly.



THE LONE RANGER CREED

1. I believe that to have a friend, a man must be one.
2. That all men are created equal and that everyone has within himself the power to make this a better world.
3. That God put the firewood there, but that every man must gather and light it himself.
4. In being prepared physically, mentally, and morally to fight when necessary for that which is right.
5. That a man should make the most of what equipment he has.
6. That "this government, of the people, by the people, and for the people" shall live always.
7. That men should live by the rule of what is best for the greatest number.
8. That sooner or later... somewhere... somehow ... we must



settle with the world and make payment for what we have taken.

9. That all things change, but the truth, and the truth alone, lives on forever.

10. I believe in my Creator, my country, my fellow man.

ROY ROGERS RIDERS CLUB RULES

1. Be neat and clean.
2. Be courteous and polite.
3. Always obey your parents.
4. Protect the weak and help them.
5. Be brave but never take chances.
6. Study hard and learn all you can.
7. Be kind to animals and care for them.
8. Eat all your food and never waste any.
9. Love God and go to Sunday School regularly.
10. Always respect our flag and country.

ROY ROGERS' PRAYER

Lord, I reckon I'm not much just by myself,
I fail to do a lot of things
I ought to do.

But Lord, when trails are steep and passes high,
Help me ride it straight
the whole way through.



And when in the falling dusk I get that final call,
I do not care how many flowers they send,
Above all else, the happiest trail would be
For you to say to me, "Let's Ride, My Friend."
Amen.

TEXAS RANGERS "DEPUTY RANGER" OATH

1. Be alert.
2. Be obedient.
3. Defend the weak.
4. Never desert a friend.
5. Never take unfair advantage.
6. Be neat.
7. Be truthful.
8. Uphold justice.
9. Live cleanly.
10. Have faith in God.



A heartfelt tip of the 'ol Stetson to the folks at www.thecowboycode.blogspot.com for collecting these timeless words.