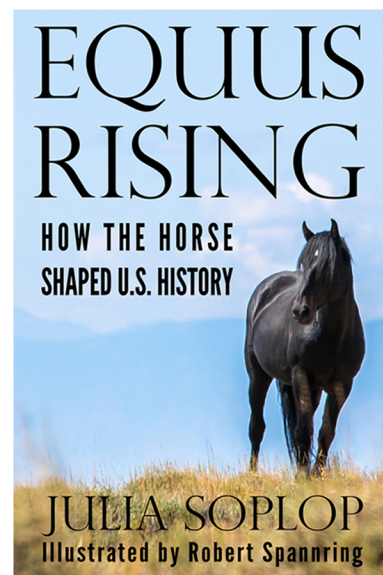


EQUUS RISING

HOW THE HORSE SHAPED U.S. HISTORY

Book description

Weapon. Legend. Energy source. Shaper of cultures. Center of controversy. Throughout U.S. history, the horse has served as one of the most powerful influences on the country's development. Beginning 55 million years ago with the evolution of the horse across the Great Plains, this story charts its extinction in North America, its reintroduction to the continent by the Spanish, and eventually, its profoundly consequential acquisition by the native peoples of the plains. From there, the story tracks the horse's incredible contributions—through warring and racing and hauling, through companionship and servitude and strength—across the broad arc of the country's next 300 years. Soplop employs the horse as a narrative thread not only to bind seemingly disparate events, but also to allow for the inclusion of figures often written out of traditional histories: women and minorities. Through a modern lens, she skillfully weaves together science, literature, and policy to trace the fascinating account of how one animal shaped the nation. Captivating illustrations by Montana artist Robert Spannring, interspersed with Soplop's stunning photography, add further depth. This book is for anyone interested in exploring an unconventional perspective on history—no horse knowledge required.



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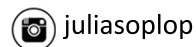
A fascination with animal behavior has led writer and photographer Julia Soplop around the globe. So, naturally, when her daughters started riding lessons, the horses' behavior immediately drew Soplop in. What began as a casual interest rapidly escalated into amassing a collection of horse literature; dashing around the country to photograph wild horses; and, ultimately, writing this book. Soplop's work has appeared in numerous publications, including *National Geographic Magazine Online*, *Design Mom*, *Skiing*, and the *Summit Daily News*. She is also the author of *Documenting Your World Through Photography*. She has a B.A. in French from Duke University and an M.A. in Medical Journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She lives with her family outside of Chapel Hill.

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Illustrator Robert Spannring



Robert Spannring has been a professional painter and illustrator for fifty years. Born and raised in Montana, he grew up sneaking away from school to draw landscapes and wildlife and explore what might be around the next corner. He has served as Artist-In-Residence at the Lake Hotel in Yellowstone National Park, and created interpretive dinosaur illustrations for the Museum of the Rockies' Special Museum Exhibits. Spannring has done illustration work for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition (of which he is a founding member), Defenders of Wildlife, the U.S. Forest Service, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the Montana Audubon Council, among others. His work has appeared in numerous museums and galleries in the West and in private collections across the U.S.

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Reviews

"*Equus Rising* is a compelling, concisely written, beautifully illustrated, important read for any horse or history enthusiast."

-Shelley Paulson, author of *Horses: Portraits & Stories*

"Well-written and well-researched, this volume fills a key niche in the science, politics, and literature of the horse."

-Chad Hanson, PhD, president of the Wyoming Mustang Institute and author of *Trout Streams of the Heart*

"Thoroughly engrossing...In this ambitious book about the powerful influence of the horse on U.S. history, Soplop delivers a gripping account...A fun and fascinating read..."

-*The Prairies Book Review*

Potential interview questions

Is *Equus Rising* just for horse enthusiasts and history buffs? Who is your intended audience for this book?

How did *Equus Rising* grow out of a homeschool project?

What role did your fascination with documenting animal behavior play in writing this book?

While you were doing book research, what personal connection to the wild horses of North Carolina's Outer Banks did you discover?

Why does a 19th century horse epidemic the book discusses give us hope for change after COVID-19?

What were some of the most surprising historical facts you uncovered in your research?

What do the many illustrations, photographs, maps, and sidebars bring to the story?

Why is it important to supplement the traditional history education most of us received with additional perspectives?

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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An enthralling, perspective-shifting history of the U.S.

New book reveals the horse as a shockingly influential player in the country's development

Pittsboro, NC, May 14— Years before the pandemic turned us all into homeschoolers, author Julia Soplop began homeschooling her three kids. Unimpressed by popular, archaic history books that offered little more than lists of dates, battles, and victors, she set out to write a unique perspective on U.S. history that combined her family's passion for horses with her lifelong fascination with animal behavior. The project evolved into the book she released today on Amazon, *Equus Rising: How the Horse Shaped U.S. History*.

"*Equus Rising* explains how the horse played crucial and ever-changing roles in the development of the U.S.," Soplop said. "But it also serves as an example of how we can view the past from innumerable lenses, and each one enriches our understanding of how this country came to be."

In the *Equus Rising*, Soplop employs the horse as a narrative thread not only to bind together seemingly disparate events, but also to allow for the inclusion of figures often written out of traditional histories: women and people of color. The book offers an approachable, engaging read for adults and teens interested in exploring history through an unconventional lens—no horse knowledge required.

Captivating pen and ink illustrations by Montana artist Robert Spannring, along with Soplop's stunning photography, add depth and visual interest.

"*Equus Rising* is a compelling, concisely written, beautifully illustrated, important read for any horse or history enthusiast."

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Born and raised in Montana, Robert Spannring has been a professional painter and illustrator for fifty years. He has provided illustration work for numerous organizations, government agencies, and publications. His work has also appeared in many museums and galleries in the West and in private collections across the U.S.

A digital press kit and high-resolution image files are available at www.juliasoplop.com/press

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EQUUS RISING

**HOW THE HORSE
SHAPED U.S. HISTORY**



JULIA SOPLOP
Illustrated by Robert Spannring

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6

THE COMANCHE

Around 1680, the arrival of the horse transformed the Comanche perhaps more fully than any other Native American nation. They quickly became some of the most skilled horsemen—arguably *the* most skilled horsemen—in the world, and used their abilities to overtake the southern Great Plains.

Prior to acquiring the horse, Comanche culture had not changed much in the thousands of years since their ancestors crossed the Bering Land Bridge into North America.¹ If they had been strong warriors, they would likely have fought for a more hospitable place to call home than the Wind River area of modern-day Wyoming.

They were hunter-gatherers who lived off what they could find, including rodents. They also hunted buffalo on foot by lighting fire to the grasslands and chasing them over bluffs. These inefficient hunting techniques meant they had little time to spend developing a cultural life, such as making pottery, weaving baskets, or assembling intricate clothing.

They never planted crops. They used the dog travois. They did not have any central leadership over the separate bands that totaled around five thousand people.

They eked out a living and survived.

And then the horse arrived. The Comanche acclimated to the horse so rapidly and intensely that their culture began to revolve almost exclusively around its use.²

They became expert buffalo hunters on horseback. No more setting fire to prairies. No more chasing buffalo on foot, hoping a few might end up at the bottom of a gorge. Now they could train a fast horse to gallop beside a buffalo and stay with that specific animal while a hunter dropped the reins and gored it with a fourteen-foot lance or shot it with arrows.³

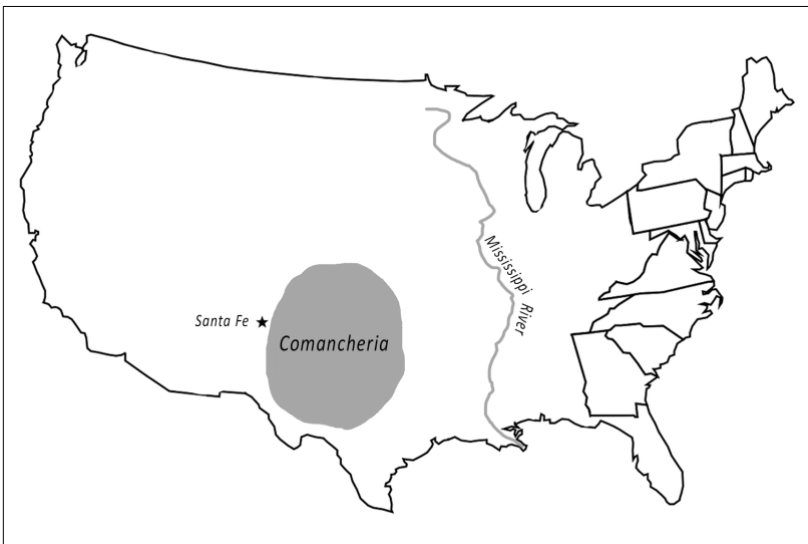
Their culture depended heavily on buffalo for food, shelter, and clothing. Becoming efficient hunters meant the Comanche no longer had to devote all their time to hunting. Now they also had something worth fighting for: the plains that held as many as sixty million buffalo.⁴

The Comanche borrowed their basic riding culture from the Spanish but took their horsemanship skills to a significantly higher level. Thanks to the horse, they soon transformed into talented mounted warriors, and by the late 1600s began to push out other nations to take control of the prized southern plains.⁵

By 1750, the Comanche had established a territory that extended through much of Texas and portions of New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma.⁶ They expertly and violently patrolled and guarded this territory, known as Comancheria, against encroachment from neighboring native peoples, as well

as Spanish and other European settlers.

They started their children riding young. By four or five, Comanche kids had their own horses.⁷ Boys immediately began training to master a variety of skills and tricks to prepare them to be warriors, such as learning to pick up fallen fellow warriors off the ground at full tilt with the sweep of an arm and ride them to safety.



Approximate boundaries of Comancheria in 1750. (Original thirteen British colonies are outlined).

One of the most impressive skills they developed was to slide over and hang off one side of the horse by their feet, using the horse as a shield while shooting arrows at an enemy from under the animal's neck—all at full gallop.⁸

Comanche women were excellent riders and owned their

own horses, as well.⁹

No one in the region could match this level of skill: not the settlers; not the military; not most other native peoples except perhaps the Comanche allies, the Kiowa. For starters, white settlers were not even attempting to live out in the open, treeless, waterless plains the way the Comanche had learned to do with their horses. And anyone who attempted to encroach on Comancheria, with their rudimentary Kentucky rifles that required dismounting to discharge, found themselves sorely overpowered by Comanche, who could unleash twenty arrows on horseback in the time it took to shoot and reload a rifle.

The Comanche understood horses meant power and were unwilling to let others wield that power over them. To increase their own supply and deplete the Europeans and other Native Americans of theirs, the Comanche became expert horse thieves. A Comanche warrior might acquire a hundred or two hundred horses. A chief might acquire fifteen hundred.¹⁰

Comancheria pressed up against Spanish settlements of the Southwest, and the Comanche regularly raided them for horses. Sometimes they would simply scare off entire horse herds, known as stampeding, just to relieve their foes of them. Many of these horses would become wild. Sometimes the Comanche went on specific missions to steal prized war or buffalo horses to add to their own herds.

They would also take white captives during these raids, either to enslave or later sell for ransom. But no one could compete with these horsemen to retaliate the raids. Parties that tried to search down the Comanche across the plains for

retribution for horse stealing or kidnapping often found themselves relieved of their own horses and left to die of thirst or starvation in the middle of the grasslands.¹¹ Hardy horses meant the only chance of survival on the parched, endless plains.

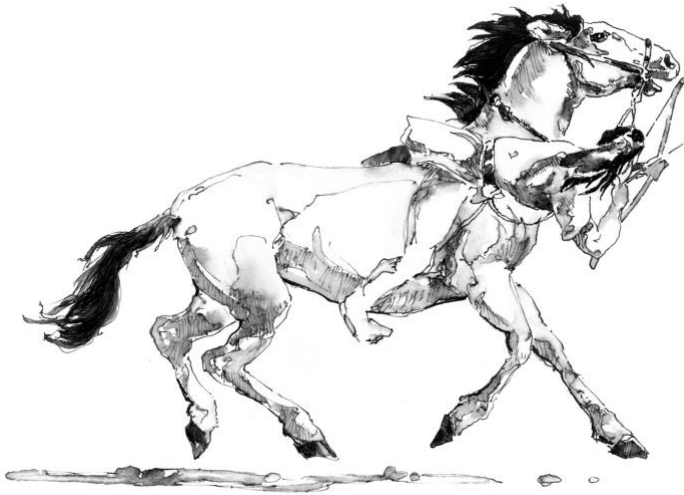
Time and again, the Comanche depleted the Spanish settlements of horses to the point that the Spanish had to order thousands from breeding ranches in Mexico to replenish their stocks. When the Spanish became desperate, the Comanche would sell the Spanish back their own horses.¹² The Comanche bragged they only allowed the Spanish to continue living nearby so they could serve as their horse breeders.

For decades, the Comanche made annual trips into Mexico to raid ranches for even more horses, trailing them back to Comancheria to increase their herds and use for trading.

They would also capture wild horses and were known to be able to break a mustang in a couple of hours, though not gently.¹³ They would often wait until a wild horse was weakened after a winter of little food, then chase it down, rope it, and choke it to the ground until the animal stopped struggling. Then they would slacken the lasso around its neck, let the animal stand, slowly approach it, stroke its face, and breathe into its nostrils. They would then slip on a simple bridle around the lower jaw, climb on, and take a ride.

The Comanche had such a tight hold over Comancheria that they relentlessly beat back the Spanish, eventually forcing them out of the territory. They managed to keep everyone else—French, English, and eventually Americans—from meaningful

settlement of the southern Great Plains until the late 1800s. Although the U.S. had already acquired the land west of the Mississippi in name by that time, the government soon understood it would never actually control that land unless it could subdue the Horse Nations. In the Southwest, doing so meant trying to figure out how to remove the Comanche from the position of power they had earned through their incredible use of the horse. Comanche territory was the last region of the country the U.S. military would bring under its control.¹⁴



NOTES

¹ (Facts in next four paragraphs.) S.C. Gwynne, *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 27-28.

² Ibid, 33.

³ David Philipps, *Wild Horse Country* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017), 52.

⁴ Hope Ryden, *America's Last Wild Horses* (Guilford: The Lyons Press, 1970), 167.

⁵ Gwynne, *Empire of the Summer Moon*, 35.

⁶ (Facts in paragraph.) Ibid, 59.

⁷ (Facts in paragraph.) Ibid, 33-34.

⁸ J. Frank Dobie, *The Mustangs* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 46.

⁹ (Including facts in following paragraph.) Gwynne *Empire of the Summer Moon*, 32-34.

¹⁰ Ibid, 32.

¹¹ Ibid, 61.

¹² (Facts in remainder of paragraph and the following.) Dobie, *The Mustangs*, 64-68.

¹³ (Facts in paragraph.) Ibid, 84.

¹⁴ Gwynne, *Empire of the Summer Moon*, 40.