

## The Poor, Lusterless Life of Brazil's Buckaroos

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For over 100 years, Brazil's cowboys have earned a living and shaped a culture with their bare hands and sweat. The life of a cowboy in Brazil is not for the timid.

It is an intense existence filled with hard work on long, hot days. To herd cattle in the Midwest of Brazil is to live.

Brazilian cowboys lead simple lives. Most had a father or relative who was one. They do not regret passing by other opportunities, because their life is handed to them at a young age.

Cowboys, or peões as they are known in Portuguese, begin training very young. They accompany their elders until the day comes when they start the ride to herd beef cattle with other peões.

Most cowboys live their entire lives on the same ranch. As part of their pay, housing on the grounds is provided at least that's how it works on the many ranches of renowned Porto Murtinho Fazendeiro, Nelson Cintra.

On Nelson's ranches, cowboys like Rivalino receive a monthly salary based on skill and performance. They also receive housing in general living quarters, or in a small two-room house if they have a family. When they need medical care, all they need to do is ask, and the boss will normally pay.

This is not a bad life, considering the economic situation in Brazil. A small and wealthy elite still controls most of the land and resources, and much of the population continues to live in poverty.

In rural areas there is no middle class. Most of the simple shacks of rural laborers lack water supply, sewerage, and electricity, unless they are lucky enough to live on a ranch.

Brazilian society displays vast inequities between rich and poor, leaving a huge economic barrier. Despite economic progress, the situation in Brazil is that of a profound schism between the haves and the have-nots.

Those who become cowboys in Brazil live a simple existence, but are grateful for whatever little they have. They work hard during the day and play hard at rodeos at night, an occasional respite.

However, much of the rural population — especially cowboys and their families living on ranches — lack access to educational, social, and financial resources which could dramatically improve their position in life.

Being a Brazilian cowboy is not a revered profession. It's not envied or sought after by many. There is even a stigma attached to it by some who see cowboys as uneducated, illiterate, and socially inept.

It may be true that most don't receive an education past elementary school, if at all. And they rarely leave the ranch for excursions to the city. You can almost count on never seeing a cowboy visiting a museum.

But when we look at the beef surrounding us in supermarkets and restaurants, we can begin to appreciate these cowboys for dedicating themselves to their profession, day in and day out.

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