

L.A. Times Article rebuttals.

From: Polly and John Aulton,

I read Bobbie Lieberman's article with amusement. As children we grow up with "tales" of the Old West. That is if we are fortunate. Was Jesse James shot? Or did he live to a ripe old age? Are all the tales of Wyatt Earp true or did books and movies exaggerate his exploits? How about Butch and Sundance? Do we really know the full facts of any of these western figures? Probably not and we probably never will. They are great yarns and have contributed to the myths of the "Old West".

In the settlement of the west Frank Hopkins would appear as a minor character. As such facts would be exceptionally hard to verify. Lots of myth and folklore surround the major characters. It would be no different with Mr. Hopkins.

Could a Spanish Mustang have run this type of endurance race? You betcha. They can and do make endurance runs on a regular basis; exceeding the abilities of their Arabian brothers and others. The scenario depicted in John Fusco's upcoming movie is quite plausible. He has consistently depicted the Mustang in believable situations, with lots of action and in a crowd-pleasing fashion.

Could Hidalgo be a Wild West tall tale? Maybe. Then again, maybe not. Who really knows? Certainly not Ms. Lieberman and certainly not I. DO I believe Ms. Lieberman has a hidden agenda with her piece? Possibly. That said, maybe you should consider asking a guest commentator to present the flip side of the Frank Hopkins coin.

Paula Aulton
Stilwell, Oklahoma

From: Elly Foote

"This is a true story! I know. I was there!"

So speaks the lead character in Oscar nominated Spirit, Stallion of the Cimarron, written by John Fusco.

Did anyone object to a cartoon horse making such a statement?
Anyone?

Or did you, like me, accept as legitimate the poetic license taken by the screenwriter to allow his character to personify the threat to freedom posed by the advancing settlement of the west; his right to weave a story about a Native American boy and a mustang stallion who find each other in captivity and regain freedom together.

Why then the fuss over Hidalgo, the story of a man and a mustang horse who together attempt the impossible? A movie that had not even yet been released? Why are we suddenly pre-judging a film by a screenwriter with a body of work that includes the controversial Thunderheart, the story of FBI murder on the Lakota reserve? A story bravely told of a truth that is hard to look at. And a case of art turned reality with the

arrest in Vancouver, B.C., Canada, yesterday of one of the FBI men involved in the brutal murder of the Lakota Native that was fictionalized in the movie.

So who is attacking the movie Hidalgo and why?

The reason may not be as noble as the detractors would have you believe. It is a publicity stunt. Plain and simple.

The movie Hidalgo is being targeted to create controversy in order to generate sales for a series of print-on-demand books, including a just released book bearing the same title as the movie Hidalgo.

By biting the same hand that they are begging to feed them, the detractors of the movie are simply trying to cash in on a share of the profits by relentlessly attacking Disney, the movie, the screenwriter and anyone else in their path.

And so, who am I to speak?

Between 1969-1973 my husband and I rode horses 24,000 kilometers up the three Americas, including one hundred days across the longest and driest desert on the earth, the Atacama of Chile.

The details of our ride form part of the database of The Long Riders Guild. Which is just that: a database, not a member association as the O'Reilly's would have the public believe.

There is a book out: *Riding Into The Wind on Horseback out of Patagonia* – for details please go to www.ridingintothewind.com. Our family runs a horse ranch in northwest B.C. We log with horses, we have a summer horsemanship program that draws students from all over the US and Canada and we breed, train and sell quality horses. For details go to www.stables.com.

I have been aware of the Hopkins research since early on and I was recruited by the O'Reilly's as an expert witness. Like the author of your story, at first I swallowed their arguments hook, line, and sinker.

However the research has turned into a campaign that is vicious and entirely self-serving, and entirely off the mark according to numerous rebuttals on the IMBD message boards to postings by the various synonyms of the O'Reilly's and their Long Riders Guild.

I would have assumed that a publication such as yours would have taken a more professional approach. I can only trust that you will follow with a look at the other side of the story.

Sincerely yours,
Elly Foote

From: Nanci Falley

Regarding Ms. Lieberman's article about Frank Hopkins and his horse, Hidalgo, and the Disney movie Hidalgo, maybe I'm missing something, but it seems to me that the article is aimed at destroying what might just be a super good movie. As far as I know, no one who has recently written about Mr. Hopkins or his horse/s was alive when he was walking this earth, and so we have to depend on the writings that were left to us by Mr. Hopkins and others in his era. The Old West is one of those periods where mythic figures flourished, both human and equine, and a lot of what happened went largely undocumented until later. So what? My goodness, people, it's a movie!

So many movies out there are garbage and when we are presented with one that we can actually go see and enjoy and root for the hero, well, to me that's a good thing. This particular movie had my personal stamp of approval simply because the subject is a horse hero and that horse is a Mustang or Indian Pony. I am looking forward to seeing the movie when it is released and to cheering on the hero when he wins the big race.

Whether that race is fact or fiction makes no difference to me, what matters is that Hidalgo probably did exist and he is finally getting the recognition he deserves.

Go Hidalgo! Go Disney!

Sincerely,
Nanci Falley
President, American Indian Horse Registry, Inc.

From: Angelique Midthunder

I am writing to address your article "Long Trail of Lies" from yesterday's paper F4.

I belong to a Native American family (Nakoda Sioux). Although the Hopkins name may not be famous, the story of the half Indian who took his pinto mustang across the ocean to race in the big desert has been told to children of the northern plains tribe for generations.

Furthermore, as a horseman myself, Hopkins writings speak to me as truth. A few times, when having difficulties training my own 2-year-old Spanish Mustang, I have turned to Hopkins' articles for guidance. His detailed information on mustang intelligence and behavior has proven to be an invisible resource.

Your journalist Bobbie Lieberman claims to be an endurance rider. One who, I am certain, competes on an Arabian. Why else would she set out to defame the legend of a mustang that championed overseas? She has written an entire article, based on very little research, *with an agenda*. Not once did she mention that the author of the film, HIDALGO, John Fusco, is a two time winner of the Western Heritage Award for his research and authentic quality of the "based on a true story" films he is known for writing (i.e., Young Guns, Thunderheart, The Babe). Neither did she mention that the main source

of her information, Chuchulaine O'Reilly, is Muslim, with a record of drug trafficking in the Middle East.

I am appalled that the Times, a paper known for its integrity, would allow such an ignorant piece of "journalism" to take up an entire page.

If there is a "long trail of lies" it was written by Bobbie Lieberman.

Angelique Midthunder

From: Chris Ellis

Is Ms. Lieberman attacking Frank Hopkins or simply starting a schoolyard argument that "my horse is better than your horse"? It could be a little of both. Is it the fault of Frank Hopkins that the few records we have of his exploits were of his own biography? So he had a professional writer working on it for him that was of "questionable origin and motive", so there are gaps in the timeline, so there may be some embellishment along the way – it is a story about the Wild West, a part of Americana. The Spanish Mustang community may not be able to refute every one of Ms. Lieberman's accusations due to the gaps in the written record, but the fact that the story is a falsehood is merely based on those same gaps.

Most of the animosity I felt while reading the article seemed to be directed at the "breed war" itself. How could "[a] plucky mustang." "compete against the world's finest Arabian Horses on their own ground [?]" It was cleverly buried in her attack on Hopkins and her slew of "experts" who within a month determined that this event, the Ocean of Fire race, did not occur. Lieberman herself admitted it was Linda Merims' belief that these events were false, and her credentials are that of an equine history buff – big deal.

John Fusco may have a passion in uncovering the true merits of the Spanish Mustang, but is there anything wrong with putting forth a story, although it may have been embellished for the effect of Hollywood, that shows the world how talented these horses truly are? Everyone knows the beauty of the Arabian horse and their reverence by their Bedouin owners who allowed them to sleep in their tents, but not many know of the contributions of the Spanish Mustang for outwitting the U.S. Cavalry and keeping the Indian Wars going for so long, at such a high cost to the American Government. We don't like talk about the misdeeds of the American Government in decimating a people and their horses; it's just bad publicity. And yet that aspect can be documented.

It seems to me that Ms. Lieberman is upset that there might be a profit to be made in a Wild West Tale by the Walt Disney Company and the Breyer Animal Creations Company. Well, honey, it happens every day. I would think you would be used to it by now. Just raising negative publicity at this time will only pique the interest of more individuals and promote the attendance of people that may have let this movie slip by.

I do appreciate Ms. Lieberman's inclusion of Frank Hopkins' contributions to preserving the Spanish Mustang, as that too can be completely documented as well. According to Ms. Lieberman, John Fusco summed it up when he stated, "Hopkins still lives as legend... no matter what the truth is." It just goes to show you that the American people love a good story, and if a smattering of truth can be added in, all the better. You haven't popped my bubble Ms. Lieberman, I ride Spanish Mustangs, and I know what is possible when you sit astride one.

Sincerely,
Chris Ellis

From: George Schaefer

After reading the above named story, I have one question. Are you going to print the "other side of the story"? I'm sure Mr. Fusco would be more than happy to write his side for you.

It is apparent to me Bobbie Lieberman, an Arabian owner and endurance rider, is obviously printing her opinion. How about some facts about the Spanish Mustang. The real issue here is not about Frank Hopkins, but about the Spanish Mustang. People Like Ms. Lieberman and other people in the Long Riders Guild will tell you that it is not about the horses. They will tell you they admire the Spanish Mustang. But the bottom line is they can't stand the Spanish Mustang and what he represents. It would be politically incorrect for them to say, "we can't stand those tough little horses." But the truth is the truth. They know how tough the Spanish Mustangs are. In endurance racing the AERC is the main governing organization. The winner of the AERC Jim Jones Award (the Stallion with the most accumulated miles in a season) for the past four consecutive years has been a Spanish Mustang. Not an Arabian! Sure the Arabians win the sprint races, but they can't do what Don Funk's horse Geronimo has done. The movie Hidalgo is about a 3000-mile race not about a 100-mile weekend event.

So instead of attacking the truth, which is; that Spanish Mustangs can go and go, they are tough as a pine knot, they don't cost a years wage, they represent American Heritage, and they are getting all the attention, is more than Bobbie Lieberman, the Long Riders Guild et al can handle. They must resort to attacking what is questionable: Frank Hopkins. Truth is truth; it is about the Spanish Mustang, and American Treasure.

With kind regards,
Your fellow mustanger,
George Schaefer