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American Identity and the Wild West Show, 1880-1910

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AMERICAN IDENTITY AND THE WILD WEST SHOW
1880-1910

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of American Studies

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Susan Stark

2002

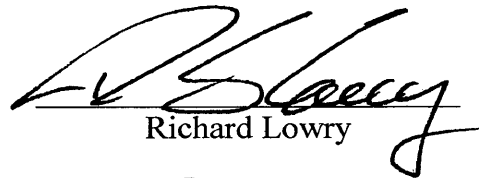
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts


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Approved, May 2002


Richard Lowry


Kim Phillips


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ABSTRACT

A quest to figure out why country music suddenly experienced so much popularity in Europe eventually sent me stumbling through numerous posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. As I looked at these poster advertisements and began to place them within historical context, several insights about the role of entertainment and its relation to main currents of thought in the nineteenth century began to emerge. From the start of Buffalo Bill's Wild West production in the 1870s up until its demise in 1910, his posters capitalized on the potent idealism of a western frontier in a way that uniquely captivated contemporary national and international audiences.

The representation of the West revealed in both his posters and historical accounts of the show, held a great amount of individual appeal. On its most basic level, individuals flocked to Buffalo Bill's Wild West production in the attempt to glimpse the last authentic relics of a fleeting phenomenon. More than any other show, Buffalo Bill's Wild West showcased America's disappearing Western frontier with real buffalo, frontiersman such as himself and Native Americans of legendary fame such as Sitting Bull. On another level, nostalgic images and ideal notions of a pure, vast Western frontier provided a sense of therapeutic escapism for individuals struggling with the rapid changes to their security, freedom, and identity and searching for reinvigoration in an increasingly impersonal urban society. Finally, the ambiguity of the west brought diverse groups together and enabled most audiences members to feel a part of something greater than themselves as the show highlighted the nation's past conquest over formidable obstacles.

More interestingly, this ambiguous projection of the American West extended bonds of unity far beyond the borders of the United States. Initial rave reviews of Buffalo Bill's first performance in England jump-started a similar enthusiasm for the Wild West show throughout Europe. As ordinary everyday European audience members witnessed enacted scenes of "civilized" Anglo-Saxon conquest over "savage" others or Native Americans, they recognized a shared bond of perceived racial superiority and technological advancement for perhaps the first time. This "amusing" portrayal catered well to late nineteenth century notions of Social Darwinism and Imperialism.

In light of these insights from an albeit different time period, I am inclined to believe that country music's recent surge in Europe may indeed tap into a more deep seated vein of Western idealism that first made its way to Europe over a century ago. As a venue of "novelty", escape, freedom, reinvigoration, and even a sense of empowerment, Western symbols and dance provide a similar function for an effete Europe. While this vein is destined to die as did Buffalo Bill's Wild West, as long as urbanization and alienation threaten individuality anything related to the West will always strike a subconscious chord.

RIGHT ON THE MONEY: "BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST" SHOW AND ITS
APPEALING AMERICAN IDENTITY
1880-1910

RIGHT ON THE MONEY: “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” Show and Its Appealing American Identity

In a time of rapid flux and strong contrasts, “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” show emerged as a much needed elixir for a variety of individuals at the turn of the twentieth century. This show offered a temporary balm of rejuvenation for societies struggling with the altered demographics of industrialization, along with threats to existing class structures, and worries of decadent ‘overcivilization.’ At the same time, countries seeking to expand their empires identified with the justification of ‘civilized’ conquest that could be witnessed in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West. Regardless of cultural differences, Europeans and Americans continually flocked to his show for over thirty years. Along the way, audiences, if but for a brief, enjoyable moment, rediscovered themselves, witnessed a representation of American identity, and acknowledged America’s potential within an international arena.

Buffalo Bill’s Wild West (1883-1911) stood apart from other forms of late 19th century entertainment by capitalizing on the American western frontier at a time when that frontier had reached virtual extinction and increasingly disparate, urban societies sought unifying images. Specifically, his show skillfully packaged mythic notions of American frontier into an internationally marketable product of western imperialism and conquest. The idealism of a malleable, expansive frontier proved effective in redefining cultural borders at home and abroad. By delineating clear borders between the civilized

expansion of white, industrial capitalism against the resistance of primitive, “savage Others,” Buffalo Bill’s Western frontier unified diverse Americans by emphasizing a Native American foe and it actually erased several of the borders that had once marginalized the United States in an era of European imperialism. On one level, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show symbolically reconciled the anxiety of urban modernization with a nostalgic representation of unambiguous combat between white and savage warriors set apart by a technological mastery of guns. On another level, particularly with performances in Europe like that of the 1887 London Exhibition, the show’s appeal lay in how it integrated the “Manifest destiny” of a continent already “conquered” by Anglo civilization with the more complex global politics of Anglo-European racial domination. In sync with world’s fairs, most notably the 1893 Columbian World’s Fair Exhibition in Chicago, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West played a key role in introducing the United States to the world and the world to the United States along legitimate unifying codes of racial and social hierarchy. By 1900, Americans shared a growing identification with the kind of national images produced by the Wild West show. Simultaneously, they became more willing to extend this notion of themselves beyond national borders as imperial contenders themselves.

In the absence of video recordings or current audience participation, a sensitive interpretation of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show and the role it played within turn-of-the-century societies would falter without the multi-dimensional advertising legacy that his show left behind. William Cody integrated posters, dime novels, and autobiographies into a “total package” that was Buffalo Bill the person and Buffalo Bill’s Wild West the show. As a result, this paper relies heavily on insights from primary sources like letters,

autobiographies, newspaper commentary, and most importantly, posters, to gain deeper insights into how Cody sold his show and what exactly he asked audiences to see.

Before examining these visual legacies, I try to root my interpretations of them with credible secondary accounts of the historical milieu from which these legacies emerged.

At times, this reversion between contextualization and separate primary source analysis may *appear* to be repetitious. Yet such an approach attempts to chart the evolution of

Buffalo Bill's intended imagery as it affected certain audiences and reacted to new experiences. It is important to keep in mind that while common themes did linger,

Buffalo Bill's Wild West was by no means a static production. In the end, I hope this method enables modern day readers to best understand the cultural and ideological

discourses in which his enterprise both engaged and reproduced during its thirty year existence.

I. INTRODUCTION OF THE ENTERTAINMENT CONTEXT FROM WHICH BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST SHOW EMERGED

“The Rise and Diversification of Leisure”

Buffalo Bill's Wild West emerged at a time when industrialization started to transform the social landscape in the United States and bring about more leisure opportunities. Certainly William Cody, the famous frontier scout, noticed such transformations during his Eastern performances in Ned Buntline's 1873 melodrama hit, "Scouts of the Prairie."¹ While in New York City, he likely witnessed several tensions in this urban environment. For one, increasing industrialization and mass production in the late nineteenth century created a need for cheap labor that, in turn, propelled a dramatic rise in more ethnically diverse immigration. This influx contributed to the greater gaps between rich and poor along with the rising class tensions that Jacob Riis, Jane Adams, and several union strikes so famously illustrated. Yet rapid industrialization created opportunities as well as a desire for leisure among all classes. Technological advances bred entertaining innovations like the 1888 Kodak camera and the 1891 movie camera by Thomas Edison.² More efficient production and greater revenue increased both the leisure time and the growth of elite and middle classes while at the same time fueling the need to consume surplus products. In relation to factory workers, mundane working environments fostered a hunger for entertainment to fill what was for many, a dreary and difficult existence; despite poor working conditions, the average worker's leisure time

¹ Joseph G. Rosa, Buffalo Bill and His Wild West: A Pictorial Biography. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989): 46.

² Robert L. Gale, The Gay Nineties in America: A Cultural Dictionary of the 1890s. (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1992): Introduction.

actually grew in the last quarter of the century.³ Finally, swelling urban populations created a prime market for entertainment.⁴ As Richard Butsch explains, “The expansion of rail lines, improvements in printing and advances in production technology combined with anxieties about social solutions, exhaustion, and degeneracy, provide a most opportune moment for marketing products linked to wholesome recreation.”⁵ All these factors, then, combined with an extended period of peace and prosperity, set the stage for a variety of profitable leisured pursuits.⁶

For those interested in recreation, a plethora of options awaited them by the turn of the century. In addition to more traditional pursuits like visiting, dancing, conversation, concerts, walking, riding, sailing, shooting at marks, fishing, hunting, and visiting saloons, technological innovations generated a love for more widespread sporting leagues where railroads and telegraphs helped spread the competitions.⁷ By the late 1880’s baseball had become a leading spectator sport; the first All-America football team along with basketball emerged, and in 1900, American athletes swept the Olympics in Paris with twenty gold medals.⁸ Improved transportation and communication also enhanced the popularity of stage entertainment by helping it reach wider audiences. More importantly, medicine shows, dime museums, minstrels, and vaudeville acts generally appealed across the class spectrum. In particular, P.T. Barnum’s many amusements filled

³ Andrea S. Dennet, Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1997): 8. ; See also Richard Butsch, ed., For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990): 14.

⁴ Thomas M. Inge, ed., Concise Histories of American Popular Culture (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1982): 380.

⁵ Butsch, 78.

⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁷ Inge, 376; See also George Speaight, A History of the Circus (London, UK: Tantivy Press, 1980): 135.

⁸ Gale, xviii; See also Butsch, 78.

a great void for “unsophisticated’ immigrant masses who enjoyed the cheap, comprehensible entertainment that he provided under moral guises worthy of middle class patrons. According to Andrea Dennet, his dime museums presented a recreation that could divert a heterogeneous audience and still support the industrial morality of hard work, temperance, and perseverance. These museums would host theater productions as well as an assortment of “edifying curiosities” like waxworks, menageries, paintings-- all for affordable prices.⁹ While minstrel shows were one of the first stage productions to avoid elitist notions of legitimate drama and reach out to more common audiences, vaudeville acts began to advocate widespread notions of patriotism in the 1890’s by traveling to both wealthy and less endowed districts.¹⁰ Further mainstream forms of entertainment, such as melodramas, also emerged at this time. These often poorly written plays could generally accommodate any time or character with a simplistic drama spiced with a bit of nostalgia.¹¹ A variety of emotional outlets for urban patrons, thus began the growing opportunities for a mass entertainment culture.¹²

“William Cody’s Emergence in Urban Entertainment”

When William Cody arrived in New York for melodrama performances, he likely did so with the belief that his favored western landscape had begun to vanish. Industrial ‘progress’ may have expanded entertainment opportunities, but it significantly reduced frontier wilderness life. Although increasing settlements had historically provoked heroic frontier battles against Native American threats, fourteen years after Custer’s Last Stand, Sitting Bull had been murdered at the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre--the frontier’s last

⁹ Inge, 381-382; See also Dennet, 2, 5.

¹⁰ Butsch, 17.

¹¹ Inge, 385.

major ‘battle.’ For William Cody, diminishing dangers along with improved railroad transportation and communications, made his varied jobs as a Pony Express Rider and a frontier scout eminently obsolete; by 1890 his frontier would be officially declared closed. Thus Cody continued in the direction of his previous off-season pursuits by guiding hunting expeditions for those elite Easterners seeking a bit of adventure in the West.¹³ However, Ned Buntline, an East coast melodrama producer, had already understood that as frontier life grew more rare, urban audiences would grow more interested. After repeated offers from Buntline, Cody agreed to perform in “The Last of the Great Scouts,” a play that Buntline reputedly whipped out hours before the show. While Cody’s actual performance failed to impress urban audiences, the originality of his person held great appeal.¹⁴ When Cody first attempted a Wild West show entitled the “Old Glory Blow Out” in Nebraska on July 4th 1882, conditions had ripened for performances that featured cowboy acts, buffalo hunts, and Indian fighting under the guidance of a well-known, virtuous frontier hero.¹⁵

From 1882 onward, William Cody, or “Buffalo Bill” as he was known in his performances, began to recognize the potential of his Wild West show. By the time he reached Madison Square Gardens in 1886, “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” performed before packed audiences. In a region far way from any western frontier, Cody’s Wild West had developed into an entertaining display of a disappearing epoch. The show began to the tune of “Yankee Doodle Dandy” with a grand processional of a Pawnee military

¹² Ibid., 381.

¹³ Rosa, 43.

¹⁴ Dr. Judd, “How Buffalo Bill First Gained Celebrity” Theater Magazine (1904): 173.; See also Rosa, 46.

¹⁵ Inge, 68.

contingent followed by Mexican vaqueros, Wichitas, cowboys, Sioux warriors, their chief, and finally, William Cody. Audiences witnessed a quarter mile horse race between a cowboy, an Indian, and a Mexican; a Pony Express dramatization; and a hundred yard race between two Indians: one on foot and the other by horseback. The excitement rose when Buffalo Bill reenacted his famous scalping of Yellow Hand, the Indian chief responsible for General George Custer's death. Fights between Indian and cowboys then ensued followed by feats of marksmanship by Johnny Baker and Annie Oakley. After watching some cowboy "fun time" with bucking ponies, William Cody took center stage as he displayed his renown shooting skills with a Winchester rifle and Colt army revolver. The Wild West ended with its biggest acts: The Attack on the Deadwood Stagecoach and The Attack on a Settlers Cabin.¹⁶ Little did Cody know just how this rough account of the West would later sow a multitude of interpretations and attractions.

¹⁶

Rosa, 87-88.

II. BUFFALO BILL'S DISTINCT APPEAL AMONG URBAN ENTERTAINMENTS

On the surface, Buffalo Bill's Wild West shared similar features with the contemporary American circus, yet it distinguished itself with instructional emphasis. Undeniably, the Wild West show exhibited a circus-like emphasis on equestrianism, acrobatics, and animal acts.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Buffalo Bill's publicity manager, John Burke, always insisted the Wild West be considered an exhibition rather than a show.¹⁸ Unlike circuses, his show appealed to diverse audiences not necessarily by integrating diverse elements under one roof, but by presenting a story. Buffalo Bill's narration of the West revolved around a plot that explained western history from the viewpoint of someone who had actually experienced it. Whereas entertainers like P.T. Barnum fashioned 'educational' narratives based on fabricated hoaxes, Buffalo Bill's Wild West did not seek to engage audiences in its deception. Rather, his show sought to provide a real life experience, even if vicariously, to white spectators who had never experienced the American West as Buffalo Bill had.¹⁹

“Capitalization on a Newly Emerging Mass Culture”

Buffalo Bill's Wild West's exciting rendition of western history found a comfortable niche in late nineteenth century culture. Laurence Senelick points out that the Wild West combined the tradition of diorama, parades, melodrama, minstrelsy, dressage, and rodeo with the conventions of nineteenth century ethnographic museums

¹⁷ Ibid., 141.

¹⁸ Inge, 67.

¹⁹ Dennet, 29.

and zoological gardens.²⁰ At a time when divisions between “high” and “low” culture remained obscure, this mix between education and entertainment held great appeal. P.T. Barnum often capitalized on this obscurity. For instance, he extended the exposure of Swedish opera star, Jenny Lind, beyond elite patronage. The Lecture Hall within his American Museum also featured Shakespeare performances like those of “Othello” and “Macbeth” to broad audiences.²¹ Not until the construction of the American Museum of Natural History in 1869, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1870, and the Boston Museum of Fine Art in 1876, could those who criticized a debased American culture led by the ‘middling of Barnumism’ triumph in these ‘high culture’ challenges to dime museums. By the turn of the century, culture would eventually bifurcate into clearer distinctions between high and low. Eventually, authentic objects went to real museums instead of P.T. Barnum’s collection, while amusement parks and circuses, not dime museums, displayed human oddities.²² Perhaps in concession to this transition, P.T. Barnum later donated his more valuable objects to educational centers like Harvard and the Smithsonian.²³ While this trend later affected Barnum, the more balanced or at least less objectionable mix of the two cultures in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, however, would remain undaunted by such cultural flux up through the turn of the century.²⁴

Despite serving as competitive “Goliaths” in the entertainment advertising industry, both Barnum and Buffalo Bill employed similar techniques to attract large

²⁰ Laurence Senelick, Gender and Performance: The Preservation of Difference in the Performance Arts (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992): 141.

²¹ T.J. Jackson Lears, Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994): 266.

²² Bluford Adams, E. Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman & the Making of U.S. Popular Culture (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998): 2.; See also Dennet, 130.

²³ Dennet, 27, 90.; See also Lears, Fables of Abundance, 266.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

numbers of people. In democratic fashion, viewers generally paid the same low-priced entry fee. Lacking any hierarchical seating, rich, poor, immigrants, men, women and children even sat or mingled amongst each other in common appreciation of the Barnum or Wild West commodity. Moreover, by appealing to middle class values, both entertainers advertised moral entertainment that the whole family could enjoy.²⁵ At a Staten Island performance in 1886, for instance, Buffalo Bill gave a free lunch to 1,500 boys and told them to be good, learn all they could, even at night school and Sunday school. When he saw them later in life, he simply wanted them to tell him they had done all these things.²⁶ Once the curtains closed, both the elite and the common public could and did embrace the Barnum or Wild West experience by then consuming the same cheap souvenirs.²⁷

More importantly, Barnum and Buffalo Bill used similar methods to draw audience members deeply into their shows. Early on, Barnum introduced “What is it?” exhibits in his American Museum to encourage audience speculation that would make visitors more interactive participants. Buffalo Bill went a step further to encourage physical interaction with his show by allowing audience members to participate in the reenactment of his Deadwood Stagecoach attack.

Both entertainers also used broad-based media publicity to create a widespread recognition of their names. Barnum completely fabricated his own identity through quasi-autobiographies and a series of published letters describing experiences in Europe -

²⁵ Jonathon Martin, “The Grandest and Most Cosmopolitan Object Teacher: Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and the Politics of American Identity, 1883-1899,” *Radical History Review* (1996): 99. ; See also Adams, Chapter 1 “All Things to All People.”

²⁶ Cody, *Letters from Buffalo Bill* (Billings, MT: Foote Pub. Co., 1954): 21.

-all mostly based upon unfounded claims.²⁸ Once he created an interest in his mythical persona, P.T. Barnum then used parades, pageants, publicity stunts, advertisement interludes in plays, refreshment stands, understandings with certain paper editors, and exhibits to buttress his popularity and domesticate his name in the hearts of the American public.²⁹ Buffalo Bill likewise relied on legendary exaggerations of his past escapades in dime novels and quasi autobiographies like The Life of the Honorable William Cody (1879) and The Adventures of Buffalo Bill (1904) to popularize his image.

Unquestionably, Buffalo Bill's later autobiographies meant to fuel interest in his Wild West. At the end of his 1904 Adventures of Buffalo Bill, Cody plugs the show saying: "For it gives to the audience a real picture, with real characters, of a most exciting period of civilization in this country that never has existed before and that never will again."³⁰ To inspire his potential audience members, this autobiography even hypes his own virtue by laying out several of the characteristics make up a hero. Buffalo Bill appears as a young, innocent victim who rises to near impossible adversity with initiative, ambition, and courage.³¹ In the one incident in his book where Indians do not attack Cody and the scouts directly as savages "who never waited to parley, but killed whatever white men they saw soon as they came upon them," Buffalo Bill's autobiography justifies any aggression with a warranted reason. Because Buffalo Bill and other scouts noticed the print of a woman's shoe and "concluded that they had with them some white captive," they justify their ambush of an Indian tribe despite never finding a white woman long

²⁷ Phyllis Rogers, "'Buffalo Bill' and the Siouan Image." American Indian Culture and Research Journal (1983): 52.

²⁸ Adams, Chapter 1: "All Things to All People"

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁰ William Cody, The Adventures of Buffalo Bill, (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1904): 173.

after its defeat.” Buffalo Bill’s autobiographies also advertise his extraordinary, inherent skills in true heroic fashion. He claims to kill a panther at age eight and to know his environs well: “I understood them [Sioux tribes] too well to be deceived.”³² He scalps Yellow Hand with remarkable efficiency: “Jerking his war bonnet off, I scientifically scalped him in 5 seconds.”³³ After piquing public interest in his legendary feats Buffalo Bill could then prove his credibility by displaying his skills in Wild West shows and this believability is where his exaggerations excel over Barnum’s hoaxes. Once audiences noticed his marksmanship talents, they could more readily believe that Cody had indeed made a record of killing 69 buffalo as an employee of the Kansas-Pacific Railway.³⁴

“The Western Frontier Topic and its Therapeutic Appeal to Urban Audiences”

Yet above all, the topic of the West itself gave Buffalo Bill the greatest advantage over other forms of entertainment for the topic was supple enough to provide a unifying image capable of attracting a wide range of people. As previously stated, the need for more leisure pursuits arose, in part, from the benefits and challenges of an increasingly industrial society. Scholars like Jackson Lears specifically pinpoints the rapid changes brought about by corporate industrialization, urbanization, immigration, women’s rights, and labor unrest as the source of American bourgeois fears. In Gail Bederman’s opinion, those at the greatest risk in a more atomistic environment that fragmented notions of the self and challenged Victorian ideals, were white male clerical office workers.³⁵ The

³¹ Ibid., xv, 2, 5., 9.

³² Ibid., 74.

³³ Ibid., 80.

³⁴ Cody, Letters from Buffalo Bill, 9.

³⁵ T. J. Jackson Lears, No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920 (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1981): 37; See also Gail Bederman, Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995): 11, 13; See also Martin, 101.

“manly” virtues that Victorian society encouraged, such as self-restraint and self-determination, simply became too difficult to uphold in an increasingly complex economy and society.³⁶ Amidst these new problems, growing concerns about how to cope with the effects of industrialization and urbanization found expression in newly constructed terms like “overcivilization” and “neurasthenia”-- a disease that explained serious nervous behaviors specific to the late nineteenth century.³⁷ While these terms may have arisen from male bourgeois fears, feelings of helplessness and alienation percolated through all layers of society; many believed that the cures to these problems rested in therapy sessions and conspicuous consumption.³⁸ Nor did such anxieties confine themselves to American society as rapid industrialization caused several Europeans to experience similar socioeconomic changes and likewise fear the advent of overcivilization.³⁹ In a time of rising religious doubt and new insecurities, then, the West took on optimistic, dynamic, and forward looking connotations that instilled hope of self-improvement.⁴⁰ William Truettner suggests that, “nature, at least in an allegorical sense, was capable of providing whatever society required.”⁴¹ As a rugged, simple, uncharted, and conquerable environment, the West offered solace to even capitalists such as those who experienced the Panic of 1893 and felt baffled and defeated by economic forces they could not control.⁴²

³⁶ Bederman, 12.

³⁷ Ibid., 14.

³⁸ Lears, 10, 37, 55. ; See also Phillip Mitterling, “Buffalo Bill and Carrie Nation: Symbols of an Age,” North Dakota Review (1982): 63.

³⁹ Karl Beckson, London in the 1890s: A Cultural History (London, UK: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992): 45, 361.

⁴⁰ William H. Truettner, The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991): 32.

⁴¹ Ibid., 49.

⁴² Lears, Fables of Abundance, 109.

“Poster Advertisements of Buffalo Bill’s Therapeutic Frontier”

Just as several advertising agents noticed the social, political, and economic implications of this “neuresthasia,” Buffalo Bill used visual Western imagery to lure people into his Wild West arena.⁴³ Ever since the Civil War, advertising agents began placing a marketable value on promotional space and newspapers depended on advertising revenue to keep their prices low.⁴⁴ When the 1880’s ushered in further technological improvements, poster advertisements became bigger, better, and more important. Improved techniques enhanced the realism of posters and furthered their ability to capitalize on the dominant psychology of making yourself feel better, relieving pain, or improving one’s health.⁴⁵ By the late 1890’s, many manufacturers began to agree with views like that of a billposter advertiser who claimed: “It’s hard to get a mental activity with cold type, YOU FEEL A PICTURE.”⁴⁶ Recognizing the sentimental, subconscious potential of posters, many of the budding national manufactures began hiring advertising specialists.⁴⁷ Buffalo Bill’s Wild West was no exception. The show relied heavily on brightly colored posters and scattered them all over the towns he visited to attract mass publicity, engage viewers as imaginative spectators, and encourage the mass consumption of his spectacle. In his book, Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture, William Leach explains how department stores similarly relied on “color, glass and light”--the “visual

⁴³ Editor’s Easy Chair, “Buffalo Bill and His Wild West Show,” Harper’s Magazine (June/November, 1888): 797.; See also Dennet 30.

⁴⁴ Inge, 3, 242.; See also Lears, Fables of Abundance, 88-89.

⁴⁵ Speaight., 143. ; See also Charles Goodrum and Helen Dalrymple, Advertising in America: The First 200 Years (New York, NY: Henry N. Adams, Inc., 1990): 29.

⁴⁶ William Leach, Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1993): 42-43.

materials of desire” to help soothe the anxieties of the ‘Gilded Age’ while simultaneously fueling consumption.⁴⁸ Consequently, by virtue of their higher quality and more accurate representation, Buffalo Bill’s posters increasingly offered the most arresting account of his Wild West than his dime novel illustrations or newspaper ads.

As improved poster productions enabled an expansion of Wild West imagery, Buffalo Bill could take control of a historic West by transforming it into a mythic West open for therapeutic consumption. When Cody performed his legendary character in Buntline’s melodramas, he simply acted out western images that had preceded him. Yet when Cody formed the Wild West, he created a more dramatic spectacle through which he could personify his own western myth and capitalize on the ambiguities of frontier space. As his dime novel fame proved, public conceptions of a fairly undefined frontier gave Buffalo Bill the flexibility to redefine his legendary status through the juxtaposition of fact and fiction in a simplified environment capable of exaggeration. This ability becomes more apparent in an examination of his posters where many images of the frontier appear as distant, blurred, or void expanses. **(Figures 1, 8, 17, 21.5, 23, 25, 26, 32)** In essence, this type of frontier representation provides a generic stage for the more important western images that Buffalo Bill sought to dramatize within a malleable frontier setting. According to Jonathan Martin, the symbolic frontier of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West proved useful in a special way: it encouraged spectators to imagine themselves within a greater, more ideal experience. He claims that the frontier portrayal in the Wild West:

⁴⁷ Victor Margolin, *The Promise and the Product: 200 Years of Advertising Posters* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishers, 1979): 29.

⁴⁸ Leach, 9.

“conflated legend and fact, drama and history in a way that allowed spectators, as Americans, to imagine themselves as a nation. Mapping out the past, present, and the future of the United States, the show functioned as a symbolic universe that gave meaning and significance to a whole body of ideas about race, progress, civilization and American identity.”⁴⁹

Undoubtedly, identifying with a larger than life product offered temporary reprieve from a mundane or uncertain life. Annette Kolodny even mentions that the frontier lured many pioneers because it was a large space into which they could project their fantasies and thus cope with present realities.⁵⁰ Here again, a desire to enter into and believe in a mythical frontier that the Wild West spectacle made ‘real’ for viewers, led audiences to accept Buffalo Bill as a larger than life symbol of freedom, excitement, and heroism.⁵¹

Just as Europeans and subsequent emigrants looked to the New World as an unspoiled area that offered a fresh start to those frustrated by an increasingly effete society, many East coast city dwellers began to view the American West as either a place to escape the evils of industrial society or as a place to establish a simpler, more purified version of civilization.⁵² Because Buffalo Bill’s Wild West frontier lies at the hinterland of civilization, it holds appeal for those critical of modern changes; yet at the same time, it celebrates the process of civilization. Clearly, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West frontier resembles nothing of an effete society. In an 1898 poster advertising the sharp shooting skills of Annie Oakley and Johnnie Baker (**Figure 14**), evidence of a cultured domesticity upon which civilization defines itself is noticeably absent. As one of the few posters that

⁴⁹ Martin, 97.

⁵⁰ Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) xii.

⁵¹ Sarah Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business: A History of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1986): 128.

⁵² Kolodny, 11.

even contains a building, the tent-like abode in the background of this poster suggests a kind of primitive dynamism in its defiance of permanent, urban features. For instance, what might at first glance appear as a spinning wheel in the center of the tent was actually the bicycle that Annie Oakley used in her marksmanship performances.⁵³ Even more interesting, the fact that this seven foot poster is life-sized implies a significant function. For viewers who face this poster directly, the poster acts as the portal into a more removed wilderness setting through which ‘civilized’ spectators can vicariously transport themselves.

Once viewers enter into the visual world of Wild West posters that previously dotted William Cody’s contemporary landscape, they discover a rough environment that enlivens masculine men and empowers women in ways that seem contradictory to late Victorian ideals. To an extent, Buffalo Bill and his cowboy compatriots represent an uncultured, rowdy band in comparison to contemporary tastes. An 1884 poster advertisement of Buffalo Bill and the specific members of his cowboy ‘cast’ depict a sort of primitive masculinity. **(Figure 15)** For one, Buffalo Bill sports long unkempt hair in opposition to late Victorian fashions. Uncharacteristic of most poster and photographic portraits, cowboys such as Major Frank North, and Fred Mathews cast direct, aggressive gazes in ways that might startle contemporary viewers. Others, such as Blue Hall, Jim Lawson, Frank Powell, and Captain A. H. Bogardus, convey a rugged individualism that befits a more primitive environment. Despite these contrasts from urban ideals, several posters celebrate this rugged masculinity. Whether it be through a triumph over ‘savage’ Indians, bucking broncos, charging steers, or the extermination of buffalo, posters like

⁵³ Jack Rennert, One Hundred Posters of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show (New York, NY: Darien

those of **Figures 16 and 17**, create an excitement for brute, masculine daring.⁵⁴

However, Annie Oakley's direct, masculine gaze in a 1901 poster entitled "The Peerless Wing and Rifle Shot" may actually have drawn the attention of female viewers. **(Figure 18)** For late Victorian women dissatisfied by their domestic constraints, Wild West posters like the 1898 "Girl Lassoing" presented images of independent, strong women comparable in skill to their male counterparts. **(Figure 19)** More importantly, Buffalo Bill's Wild West backed this independent image with equal pay and a publicized support of women's rights within the Wild West production.⁵⁵ Yet in no way did the women of Buffalo Bill's Wild West posters threaten masculinity. As evident in the 1905 "Dance des Cowboys a Cheval" and the 1898 "Wild Rivalries of Savage, Barbarous and Civilized Races" women represent the partners or helpmates of cowboys. **(Figure 20)** The novelty of their deeds may evoke interest, but comparatively few women in these posters hold the spotlight. Nor do they exude the heroism of their male counterparts. As Senelick states, women appeared in the show but had little agency in the course of history. Annie Oakley never appeared in dime novels for it was up to the men to carry out the prerogatives of Manifest Destiny."⁵⁶ At closer examination, the 'masculine' characteristics of these Wild West performers actually even reveal "manly" notions of self-determination within a simpler, more primitive setting. Thus for men and women who either already represented these masculine traits or who felt trapped by domesticity, Wild West posters

House, 1976): 12.

⁵⁴ Clifford Westermeier, *The American 1890s: The Life and Times of a Lost Generation* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1966): 278. See also Mitterling, 65.

⁵⁵ Katherine Derry claims that the Wild West provided an adventurous outlet for the "young lady of an otherwise staid Victorian era." Several cowgirls performed the same feats as men within the show. These cowgirls were "among the first of a growing subculture of derring-do women who...circumvent the public perception of a woman's place." Katherine Derry, "Corsets and Broncs: The Wild West Show Cowgirl, 1890-1920." *Colorado Heritage* (Summer 1992): 4,5, 12.

advertised an opportunity to celebrate and revitalize oneself through a repeated, vicarious association with the daring of cowboys and cowgirls.⁵⁷

Finally, Buffalo Bill's Wild West posters conveyed an urging to witness authentic relics of a rapidly disappearing West and to experience a 'reinvigorating' encounter with the last remnants of the American frontier. As early as the Wild West's first trip abroad in 1887, the frontier as Buffalo Bill had once known it vanished.⁵⁸ Whether through actual extermination or assimilation, both the buffalo and the Native American had become valuable relics by this time and Buffalo Bill played a real role in the extermination of both. Five years prior to 1887, William Cody had acquired the name Buffalo Bill for having killed over 4,000 buffalo; that same year the animals had reached virtual extinction. In two posters entitled "Je Viens" and "Here we are! Home again from foreign lands," William Cody invites spectators to view rare animals that he helped exterminate. **(Figures 8, 9)** An 1886 poster entitled "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" **(Figure 10)** depicts the Wild West as a museum where the authentic participants of a lost frontier are showcased. Offset by a majestic frontier wilderness, the grand image of William Cody is framed by a trophy-like dish around which mounted buffalo heads and pictures of famous Native America chiefs decorate this mantle in the form of conquered collectors items. The fact that many of the performers, like Bill Cody, Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, and Geronimo had actually participated in the very events the show dramatized, only heightened both the excitement and the educational value of the show. According to these posters, if consumers hoped to catch an authentic glimpse of this rapidly

⁵⁶ Senelick, 152.

⁵⁷ Martin, 102.

⁵⁸ Rosa, 120.

disappearing past and experience reassuring images of a ‘reinvigorated’ civilization, the occasional visits by Buffalo Bill’s Wild West supplied its only genuine, therapeutic representation.

“Evidence of Buffalo Bill’s Successful Promotion of a Mythical American Frontier and Its Contribution to American Nationalism”

Undeniably the Wild West’s clever presentation of the West, did make Buffalo Bill a household name.⁵⁹ One newspaper noticed his success in this endeavor early on. *The Hartford Courant* referred to the Wild West as the “best open-air show ever seen.” “He has, in this exhibition [of spectacle], out Barnumed Barnum.” Despite over 116 Wild West competitors within the show’s span, most simply could not compete with Buffalo Bill’s authenticity.⁶⁰ Nor could they, or even Barnum with all his publicity stunts, compete with Buffalo Bill’s connections. Thanks to previously successful hunting trips out West with elite patrons like the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia in 1872, Buffalo Bill’s list of friends spanned across Europe and on into the echelons of royalty.⁶¹ Buffalo Bill even boasted of his ultimate success when he confided to a friend in 1907 that the Wild West beat out the “Greatest Show On Earth” in terms of receipts and popularity and remarked, “It is quite an honor to knock the Barnum Circus out.”⁶² Evidence of his true success could be seen in later circus adaptations of Wild West themes like additions of cowboy whip cracking, sharp shooting, knife throwing and lassoing.⁶³ Most of all, Buffalo Bill’s personality and historic deeds won him the long-term respect of his

⁵⁹ Goodrum, 23-24.

⁶⁰ John Blair, “Buffalo Bill and Sitting Bull: The Wild West as a Media Event,” European Contributions to American Studies (1993): 263.; See also Adams, 3.

⁶¹ Cody, Letters from Buffalo Bill, 3, 11.

⁶² Sarah Blackstone, The Business of Being Buffalo Bill: Selected Letters of William F. Cody, 1879-1917 (New York, NY: Praeger Press, 1988): 39.

⁶³ Speaight, 150.

audiences. His poise, grace and willingness to meet with people of both high and low society after the show made him glow from an enduring reputation. In essence, his commodification of leisure tapped into a key marketing strategy: Simplistic, eye catching, uncontroversial, inclusive entertainment equates to financial gain.⁶⁴

Buffalo Bill, however, could not completely credit himself for the successful marketing of the Wild West motif. Without inspiring Ned Buntline “the father of the dime novel,” to base numerous dime novels around William Cody, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West may never have emerged.⁶⁵ Though several posters labeled William Cody as “President” of the Wild West, Major John Burke and Nate Salisbury technically conducted the show’s production. **(Figure A)** Burke met and befriended Cody while working as the advertising agent and general manager of his melodramas; he continued as the chief publicist for the Wild West show from its beginnings. As its vice president and general manager, Nate Salisbury organized the Wild West production brilliantly until 1895.⁶⁶ Just how indebted Cody was to Salisbury’s management can be seen in the lack of consistent profits prior to Salisbury’s commitment and following his death. In his personal life Cody squandered most of his profits on ambitious money pits like hotel investments and gold mines in Arizona, a coffee company, movie company, and ranches.⁶⁷ Despite confessing to a friend in 1912 how he longed for “The mountains and sage brush” --“ I cannot be truly happy away from there. Maybe we may meet out in our

⁶⁴ Butsch, 16.

⁶⁵ Dr. Judd, 173.

⁶⁶ Rosa, 94.

⁶⁷ Blackstone, The Business of Being Buffalo Bill, xix, 57.

glorious mountains again”-- poor management and massive personal debts would reduce Buffalo Bill to token appearances in various circus companies later on.⁶⁸

Thanks to a successful advertising team, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West images of the frontier spread a certain view of nationalism across the country. Admittedly, several dime museums had already promoted a sense of patriotism in order to boost self-esteem and encourage assimilation among immigrant workers in big cities. The 1884 Eden Musee in NYC, for example, created a \$10,000 display entitled “America Enlightening the World.” This display consisted of 22 wax figures dominated by a statue of Columbia who overlooks the world. Embannered with liberty and civilization and holding a torch of civilization, an Indian and Black woman crouch behind her.⁶⁹ With the exception of any Native American or African-American visitors, all immigrants—no matter how diverse--had the potential to identify with the superior, confident statue of Columbia. In this manner, middle class conceptions of nationhood could visually overcome internal ethnic divisions developing in American society. However, Buffalo Bill’s traveling Wild West show and its accompanying advertisement would bring a consistent view of nationalism to cities as well as the countryside.

In particular, Wild West posters drew several patriotic images from the nationalist propaganda promoted by several nineteenth century painters of the American West and they conveyed these images to broader audiences. In the words of the contemporary American Artist Union, art and nationalism make a powerful link:

“Pictures are more powerful than speeches. Patriotism, that noblest of sentiments, for it is a sentiment as well as a principal, and governs more in that capacity than in the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 62-68.

⁶⁹ Dennet, 47-48.

other, is kept alive by art more than by all political speeches of the land.”⁷⁰

From the early 1800’s onward, artists revived historic images of the West in an effort to define a unique American spirit. By mid-century, nationalist paintings and notions of America’s “Manifest Destiny” had become extremely popular among elite circles.⁷¹ Many of these paintings portrayed the West in terms of civilization’s conquest over savagery leading to the foundation of a moral nation. Emanuel Leutze’s 1862 “Westward Course of Empire Leads the Way” portrays this type of imagery on the walls of the United States Capital building.⁷² **(Figure 37)** Based on one of the lines of a famous poem under the same title as Leutze’s painting, “Time’s noblest offspring is last” alludes to America’s predetermined role as the bearer of a new civilization in North America.⁷³ Aside from the fact that many artists like Fanny Palmer **(Figure 38)** adopted the same “Westward Course of Empire” for their own characterizations, clearly the American West was THE nationalist topic of the nineteenth century.⁷⁴ Other common scenes from nationalist paintings were of pioneer caravans under Indian attack like Carl Wimar’s 1856 “The Attack on the Emigrant Train.”⁷⁵ **(Figure 39)** Buffalo Bill’s slightly varied, quality reproductions of these paintings would then extend such national images beyond elite viewing circles to where public spectators could admire them. **(Figures 21.5 and 28.5)**

⁷⁰ Truettner, 97.

⁷¹ Ibid., 68.

⁷² Ibid., 114.

⁷³ Ibid., 100.

⁷⁴ Ibid., viii, 91.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 167.

If, as Thomas Inge suggests, advertisement is “the story of a nation’s people” Buffalo Bill could not have created a more inclusive national image.⁷⁶ In a time of growing nativism and radical demographic changes, Buffalo Bill merged elites, middle class, working class, men, women, children, and immigrants into a western space made safe for American civilization and more representative of mass culture. For a brief moment, those who viewed the posters, attended the Wild West, and believed in America’s “Manifest Destiny” could feel on par with everyone else. Thus, by the time Buffalo Bill’s Wild West embarked for London in 1887, it had created a superficial veneer of nationhood in its protean stage through a budding form of mass media and mass entertainment—a veneer that heralded the potential strength of American civilization.

⁷⁶ Inge, 30.

III. THE IMPERIAL CONNOTATIONS ATTACHED TO NOTIONS OF 'MANIFEST DESTINY' AT THE 1887 LONDON EXHIBITION

When Buffalo Bill's Wild West entered an international arena, foreign praise buttressed Buffalo Bill's confidence in this brand of American nationalism. Often people jest that the United States and Britain are indeed two countries divided by a common language, yet this adage remains debatable in the context of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. The Wild West's arrival in the London Exhibition of 1887 went beyond simple profiteering. Buffalo Bill's Wild West took on significant diplomatic tones because it illustrated a shared racial language that unified Britain and the United States under a banner of Anglo-Saxon civilization.

"Buffalo Bill's Significance as a Cultural Diplomat"

From the minute Buffalo Bill's Wild West opened on May 6, 1887, the performance held diplomatic significance. The novelty of the show instantly captivated the attention of notable figures within British society. For one, praise of the Wild West given by both the Prince and the Princess, drew Queen Victoria from a seclusion prompted by her husband's death. Not only did the Queen attend the show in person, she also startled its performers when she bowed in respect to the American flag and demanded a second performance.⁷⁷ Propelled in part by the Queen's blessing and reunited with its own national symbol, the British public flocked to the Wild West. Most newspaper coverage of the American Exhibition in London likewise reserved its accolades for the Wild West show alone. American critics overseas responded to the attention granted the Wild West amidst a lackluster display of American agriculture and technology with the remark that Buffalo Bill's Wild West was the only "American"

feature within the American Exhibition.⁷⁸ In the absence of any presidential or government association with the exhibition, Buffalo Bill found himself adopting the role of cultural ambassador. His enthusiasm for the American West as well as his willingness to attend a variety of social functions made quite a favorable impression on royalty and other British dignitaries.⁷⁹

More enlightening than the amount of attention that Buffalo Bill's Wild West received, was the kind of praise bestowed upon it. Naturally, the pure excitement of this spectacle generated enthusiasm. In reference to Buffalo Bill's Wild West, one article commented, "We should therefore be grateful to our American friends for coming to the rescue, and planting in our midst the biggest pleasure-resort this country probably ever saw."⁸⁰ In many respects, the Wild West tapped into popular forms of entertainment already rooted in Britain. Considering that the modern circus began in London and that it traditionally placed a major emphasis on equestrianism and military feats, a Western show that featured shooting skills and battles on horseback held great appeal to British audiences.⁸¹

The unique qualities of the Wild West also drew interest. Most obvious, an authentic portrayal of the American West was extremely rare. In addition to viewing a form of entertainment that exhibited circus-like features, British audiences could observe a narrative of western expansion in the United States. They could, for example, see real

⁷⁷ Rose, 118, 120.

⁷⁸ *The New York Times*, May 11, 1887.

⁷⁹ *The Times*, November 1, 1887

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*; See also April 4, 1887.

⁸¹ Speaight, 25, 103.

products of the wilderness, such as American buffalo, for the first time. One American writer explained this novel appeal saying, “Mayfair in London is sated. It has exhausted every resource of costly luxury. It is jaded, and the sudden appearance of living Indians, and the life of the far West as it is actually seen, was an agreeable shock of surprise, and gave it real emotion.”⁸² This appeal came to no surprise for organizers of the Wild West. On a preliminary trip to England, Salisbury noticed that the abundant popularity of dime novels featuring Buffalo Bill and the Wild West gave British readers the chance opportunity to meet a dime novel hero in person.⁸³ Despite the fact that Mark Twain reiterated this appeal to Buffalo Bill after attending an 1886 New York performance with the observation, “Down to its smallest details, the show is genuine---cowboys, vaqueros, Indians, stage coach, costumes and all: it is wholly free from sham and insincerity...,” Buffalo Bill would still need to assert his legitimacy to new audiences.⁸⁴

In this area, Wild West posters aimed to both prove and secure Buffalo Bill’s image by relying on methods of authentication used in contemporary advertisements. Similar to W. K. Kellogg, Cody branded his legendary image with genuine signatures below his poster portraits. **(Figure 3)** While posters like “Hyomei Cures” highlight the signed endorsements of notable figures such as William Cody himself in order to establish the product’s credibility and to elevate it above competitors, Wild West posters rely on similar endorsements from United States generals. **(Figures 4, 5)** After the London Exhibition, when Cody’s signed image appears beside international dignitaries, it not only reflects authenticity and elevated status, it assures popular viewers that despite

⁸² Editor’s Easy Chair, 796.

⁸³ Sears, 5.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 7.

his high associations, Buffalo Bill is still ‘one of them’.⁸⁵ (Figures 6, 7) This type of advertising succeeded well enough to inspire a comment from the *Daily Telegraph* that Buffalo Bill’s Wild West should not be viewed as a show but as “an exact reproduction of the scenes of fierce frontier life vividly illustrated by the real people.”⁸⁶

Boasting ‘real’ Native Americans among its cast members added another trump card to the Wild West’s popularity in Britain. Nor did the symbolic implications of these performers go unnoticed by those who attended the American Exhibition in London. Reactions to the Native American performers varied. Immediately following the first complete performance of the Wild West in Britain, one newspaper article noted that the performers were “scantily clad” and that “with wild yells they swept around the enclosure like a whirlwind.”⁸⁷ Another reporter claimed that the show’s best features were the “Indian attacks on a stagecoach and one on a settler’s house.” He continued by stating that “These incidents, enlivened by piercing warwhoops of the Indians, afforded very interesting spectacles.”⁸⁸ The Queen’s own diary account revealed, “The cowboys are fine looking people, but the painted Indians, with their feathers and wild dress (very little of it) were rather alarming looking and they had cruel faces.”⁸⁹ However, while several reporters noted the ‘warwhoops’ and the apparent savagery of the performers, several others admired them. Mr. Gladstone may have politely referred to them as “dignified rather than communicative,” but another reporter offered the following praise: “Among them are men of the highest type of physical humanity, and apparently possess all the

⁸⁵ Margolin, 34-35.

⁸⁶ Rose, 120.

⁸⁷ *The Times*, May 6, 1887.

⁸⁸ *The Times*, May 12, 1887.

⁸⁹ Rose, 120.

traditional calm associated with the Indian character.” Chief Red Cloud received the highest of such remarks. Seen as handsome, dignified, and witty, many viewers considered him to be the prime diplomat among the show’s Native American performers.⁹⁰ Beyond mixed impressions, one British commentator acutely pointed out that Native Americans performed the symbolic role of the threat that had been tamed and would soon face extinction. Yet Buffalo Bill received no blame for any negative representation. *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* actually praised Buffalo Bill’s Wild West because “It is indeed the raw material of the Indian that is seen...But no one seems to hold sounder or humaner views of the Indian, or of the duties that we owe him, and the manner in which they should be discharged, than Buffalo Bill.”⁹¹

Here again, P.T. Barnum could not match the success of these unique qualities abroad. For one, Barnum and Bailey’s “Greatest Show on Earth” missed the opportunity of being America’s first cultural export to Europe by two years.⁹² When his circus did arrive in 1889, only lords, not royalty, attended these performances. Perhaps due to his less genuinely winsome personality or his more commonplace entertainment, P.T. Barnum did not offer pre-opening performances to royalty or “invited guests” as Buffalo Bill often implemented when he visited new countries.⁹³ Barnum’s circus did, however, reinforce British notions of American ingenuity in terms of the large-scale organization, efficiency, and impressive performance skills that Buffalo Bill’s Wild West had already introduced.⁹⁴ The unique advertising methods exhibited by these two traveling

⁹⁰ Ibid., 95.

⁹¹ Editor’s Easy Chair, 798.

⁹² Sears, 3.

⁹³ *The Times*, May 9, 1890.

⁹⁴ Speaight, 108.

companies also amazed British citizens. A reporter from the *Globe* exclaimed, “I may walk it, or bus it or hansom it; still I am faced by the features of Buffalo Bill. Every boarding is plastered, from East-end to West.”⁹⁵ While spectators may easily have gained a sense of American self-sufficiency, ambition, pride, and boastfulness from P.T. Barnum, the complexities within Buffalo Bill’s Wild West were harder to read.⁹⁶

The imperial undertones in the Wild West captured much attention among British newspaper commentators. At the conclusion of the American Exhibition, a commentator remarked that meaningful steps had finally been taken “to promote a lasting friendship and peace between the two great English speaking nations...”⁹⁷ When Britain’s opposition leader in Parliament, Mr. Gladstone, “witnessed the progress of the arrangements and especially the Indian settlement” he expressed “great delight” with the Wild West show. Spurred by the frontier prowess he had seen, Mr. Gladstone lamented the veil of British ignorance that had obscured any notice of recent progress made by the United States. He stated: “Fifty years ago some admirable books were published, not by Englishmen, but by Frenchmen on the subject of American institutions. Since that time we had learned almost nothing about the United States.” In fact, by extending civilization across such a formidably vast wilderness, he boldly stated that the United States would “overshadow by the magnitude of their population, as well as by their territory, every other Anglo-Saxon race, and not only so, but every other State and nation in the world.” He continued by stressing that the United States would prove to be an

⁹⁵ Robert Bieder and L. Kossuth, “Marketing the American Indian in Europe Context, Commodification, and Reception,” *European Contributions to American Studies* (1993): 15.

⁹⁶ Speaight, 151-152.

⁹⁷ *The Times*, November 1, 1887.

important ally to Britain in the future.⁹⁸ Less conciliatory accounts, such as a concluding remark in *The Times*, attributed the advance of American civilization to common bonds of blood. The article emphasized that, “After all, the Americans and the English are of one stock. Nothing that is American comes altogether amiss to the Englishman.”⁹⁹

Another article focused on a common bond of conquest with the statement:

“Not only in the States, but in European colonies a process is going on which has doubtless been paralleled many times in the history of man--the disappearance of a weak race before a strong one. The hopeless struggle of the Indians to maintain their place in presence of the whites is well illustrated in the events of the last great Sioux war, in which Colonel Cody played a prominent part.”¹⁰⁰

As a final tribute to the diplomatic success of the American Exhibition and the Wild West Show, representatives from both countries set up a court of reparations soon after the exhibition with the goal of resolving economic obstacles between Britain and the United States.¹⁰¹ Thus in a variety of ways, an imperial reading of America’s West revealed a ‘positive’ cultural link that prompted efforts to improve international relations.

The imperial, racial dialogue through which Britain and the United States engaged, generally pivoted around the theme of civilization and its struggles against a ‘savage Other.’ One writer who praised the establishment of a court of reparations between Britain and the United States emphasized that:

“In the States and this country there is a population of a hundred millions of free people professing the Christian faith and in possession of the largest measure of political freedom, and the example of such a portion of the

⁹⁸ *The Times*, April 29, 1887.

⁹⁹ Rosa, 130.

¹⁰⁰ *The Times*, June 8, 1887.

¹⁰¹ *The Times*, November 1, 1887.

population of the civilized world must have a great influence throughout the world...”¹⁰²

In the minds of many British commentators who drew parallels from the American Exhibition, perceptions of civilization not only invoked a Darwinian reference to Anglo-Saxon progress, but it also emphasized moral legitimacy.

The kinds of reactions to Buffalo Bill’s portrayal of the American West reflect the attitudes of a country that had begun to approach the zenith of its empire. Those comments in support of civilized conquest resonate with Patrick Brantlinger’s belief in the “Myth of the Dark Continent.” His article entitled “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent,” argues that imperial ideology in Britain had strayed considerably from its altruistic, anti-slavery origins. After a successful drive to abolish slavery in Britain, attention had focused on the “barbarous” existence of slavery in Africa. As this scrutiny increased, and as economic speculation along with Darwinian notions gained popularity, perceptions of Africa began to darken. Soon, explorers, missionaries, and scientists sought to flood the continent with their enlightened values of industry and religion in order that Africa might become a more “civilized” trading partner.¹⁰³ In pursuit of this vision, men like David Livingston rose to national celebrity by the late nineteenth century because they projected interesting tales of interactions with Africans who were either “bewitched demonic savages” or “weak, pitiable, inferior mortals.” Livingston, along with other explorers and missionaries, popularized these images through the many adventure novels in circulation at this time.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Patrick Brantlinger, “Myth of the Dark Continent,” “Race,” Writing, and Difference Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 192.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 195.

By doing so, these enlightened activists contributed to an increasingly racial, imperialist ideology that favored the abolition of “savage customs” in the name of civilization. The ideology then ‘progressed’ into a scientifically rationalized notion of genocide.¹⁰⁵

Benjamin Kidd reveals this conceptualization in his *Social Evolution* (1894):

“The Anglo-Saxon has exterminated the less developed peoples with which he has come into competition... The weaker races disappear before the stronger through the effects of mere contact... The Anglo-Saxon driven by forces inherent in his own civilization, comes to develop the natural resources of the land, and the consequences appear to be inevitable.”¹⁰⁶

Ironically, Kidd’s quote marks a striking parallel to the previously cited comment in *The Times* about the inevitable extinction of Native Americans. What is important to note is that a rationalization of this kind was considered moral. However negative this Dark Continent Myth might seem, it projected a strong voice in British reactions to the American Exhibition and Buffalo Bill’s Wild West.

In this context, Buffalo Bill and his Wild West likely appealed to British audiences simply because his mastery over the frontier personified imperial virtues in the riveting style of Victorian adventure novels. Just as adventure narratives boosted Livingston’s fame, dime novels, as mentioned before, propelled Buffalo Bill’s legendary fame.¹⁰⁷ Originally entitled “Drama of Civilization” before heading overseas, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West program featured several extremely popular scenes of “savage war.” According to Slotkin’s “Frontier Myth,” the term signifies a form of violence that arises from ‘ineluctable political and social differences--rooted in some combination of ‘blood’

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 185.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 205.

and culture” and it makes coexistence between primitive natives and civilized Europeans impossible on any basis other than subjugation.”¹⁰⁸ Thus the drama of Buffalo Bill’s ability to conquer the wilderness and to ‘subjugate’ Native Americans symbolizes a feat of “progressive civilization” against its “savage threat.”¹⁰⁹ Continued contact with ‘savages’ makes Buffalo Bill’s character stronger and his heroism more legendary with each staged battle. Even in the popular enactment of “Custer’s Last Stand,” Buffalo Bill arrives to the scene late as if to suggest that his heroism alone could have prevented the massacre.¹¹⁰ Although no missionaries emerge in either Slotkin’s portrayal of the Frontier Myth or Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, the principle that violence and savage war bring about American progress conveys the “moral truth” of the frontier experience as a purifying experience.¹¹¹ Buffalo Bill’s show does convert the ‘savages’ into relatively tame performers; their role-play glorifies his image. Moreover, in the same way that Livingston walks a fine line between ‘savage’ and ‘civilized,’ interaction affords Buffalo Bill great knowledge of the ‘savage’ yet he refuses to manifest any darker characteristics of ‘primitive’ behavior. Paradoxically, this interaction makes Buffalo Bill more civilized and gives greater credibility to American frontiersman who experienced similar encounters. In an 1887 letter published to promote Buffalo Bill’s overseas venture, General Sherman commented:

“the English people will not construe your party as a ‘show’
but a palpable illustration of the men and qualities which have

¹⁰⁷ Richard Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America (New York, NY: Atheneum): 69.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 10, 67.

¹¹⁰ Blackstone, Buckskins, Bullets, and Business..., 20.

¹¹¹ Slotkin, 77.

enabled the United States to subdue the 2,000 miles of our wild Western continent and make it the home of civilization.”¹¹²

Certainly the spectacle of the production sparked much of the public’s attention in Britain, but newspaper commentary suggests that Sherman’s statement along with notions of the Frontier Myth, did not go unnoticed. Evidently, this kind of discourse on civilization was important to enjoying the show both at home and abroad.

“The Implications of the Exhibition for Buffalo Bill’s Portrayal of the Wild West”

Undoubtedly, the degree of success that Buffalo Bill’s Wild West achieved surprised all of those involved in the American Exhibition. According to its British Director General, Mr. J. R. Whitely, the American Exhibition had intended to “stimulate and extend” trade relations by familiarizing British visitors with those artists, manufactures, products, and resources uniquely representative of American life. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West on the other hand, would serve as an “adjunct” feature of the exhibition. Its primary function was to provide “amusements characteristic of the nation” and to “represent some exciting phase of Western life.”¹¹³ In the interest of promoting his local fame with an international resume, Buffalo Bill agreed to these conditions. Under the direction of Mr. Nate Salisbury, he signed a six month contract in return for a percentage of the exhibition’s proceeds.¹¹⁴

However, the Wild West acquired so much fame via interest from British royalty as well as visiting royalty from other countries, that the show continued on from other British cities to European countries long after the end of its contract. Soon after the completion of a British tour in August 1888, the Wild West debuted in Europe at the

¹¹² *The Times*, May 20, 1887.

¹¹³ *The Times*, January 15, 1887.

1889 Paris Exhibition. From France, Buffalo Bill's Wild West traveled to Germany, Spain, Austria, and Italy to finish in 1892; this cycle would begin again from 1903-1907.¹¹⁵ In fact, so successful was the show in Europe that it was not until it appeared at the Chicago Columbian Exhibition of 1893, when Buffalo Bill held major performances in the United States. The first ten years of Buffalo Bill's Wild West actually committed about half of its performances to European audiences.¹¹⁶

As the Wild West swept Europe by storm, the show managed to keep many of its traditional features intact while expanding both its repertoire and membership to include musical accompaniment, orators, and a series of scenes involving an International Congress of Rough Riders.¹¹⁷ These minor adjustments continued to sell America's West with equal flair, according to a statement in *The Times* that, "his 1892 performances in London" seemed to "have lost none of their power to please a mixed audience."¹¹⁸ The Queen continued to remain "in the best of humor, and appeared to be greatly interested in the many strange sights which she witnessed."¹¹⁹ By 1903, William Cody was still able to confide to his sister: "And what an opening. And what a success. No one ever received the applause and congratulations I have. The people of England have gone wild over the show."¹²⁰

The more he traveled and the more his fame soared, Buffalo Bill began to refashion his portrayal of the American West into a broader representation of American

¹¹⁴ Rosa, 94.

¹¹⁵ Blackstone, Buckskins, Bullets, and Business..., throughout.

¹¹⁶ Blair, 267.

¹¹⁷ *The Times*, July 14, 1890.

¹¹⁸ *The Times*, July 28, 1892.

¹¹⁹ *The New York Times*, June 30, 1892.

¹²⁰ Cody, Letters from Buffalo Bill, 58.

history.¹²¹ When the Wild West show finally returned home, its international acclaim had generated domestic anticipation to the point that proceeds from its six month stay at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair led to the greatest single season revenue in the show's history.¹²² His simple, entertaining, yet instructional narrative, appealed to Americans as much as it had to Europeans.¹²³ Yet for Americans, Buffalo Bill's Wild West no longer displayed images of patriotism in a limited regional or national sense: it defined American nationalism within the larger ethnocentrism of Western civilization. Through the Wild West show along with its numerous poster advertisements, this sort of message continued to register easily in the minds of even more diverse audiences regardless of their location, class, or literacy status.¹²⁴ One *New York Times* reporter at the Paris Exhibition exclaimed, "Wherever you go, you hear of nothing but Buffalo Bill."¹²⁵ At an 1890 Wild West performance in Verona, some unsuspecting American travelers also expressed surprise at beholding "posted on the very walls of the arena, where we had expected, perhaps, to see the marble busts of Roman Senators or Generals, the head of our very own American Buffalo Bill, sombrero and all." Finally, as a testament to the strength of culture appeal, Buffalo Bill often achieved greater fame in Europe and perhaps the United States than did the American president.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Slotkin, 75.

¹²² Blackstone, Buckskins, Bullets, and Business, 23.

¹²³ Slotkin, 82.

¹²⁴ Blair, 70.

¹²⁵ *The New York Times*, May 19, 1889.

IV. THE 1893 COLUMBIAN EXHIBITION AND BUFFALO BILL'S JOINT REPRESENTATION OF A NEWER NATIONALISM

The Wild West that returned from its first European tour abroad could not have fit more perfectly into the setting of the Chicago World's Fair. Nor could this 1893 Columbian Exhibition have better capitalized on more subtle notions of imperial nationalism already existent in contemporary American society. Perhaps prompted by the popularity of social Darwinism and fears of more ethnically diverse immigration into the United States, nativist ideology had begun to take political form at this time. Beyond urban ethnic lynchings like the notorious 1891 New Orleans mob attack on twelve Italians suspected in the death of a police chief, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act provided government backing for restrictionist policies.¹²⁷ While certain Americans sought to blockade corrupting ethnic elements, others tried to purify the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture through enhanced emphasis on patriotism and assimilation. Francis Bellamy, an editor of *Youth's Companion*, and William Harris, the United States commissioner of education, for example, joined efforts to inject the Columbian Exhibition with a powerful image of symbolic unity: as President Grover Cleveland ushered in the exhibition, masses of school children nationwide pledged their allegiance to the flag for the first time on Columbus Day.¹²⁸ Through means like these, the Chicago World's Fair tried to crystallize American nationalism and to celebrate international fraternity with other World Fairs. For a production whose international success had

¹²⁶ Sears, 6.

¹²⁷ Gale, Intro.

¹²⁸ Francis Bellamy actually wrote the Pledge of Allegiance for this event. Cecilia O' Leary. To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism (Trenton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999): 162.; See also Robert W. Rydell, Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000): 37.

already created a tighter sense of national image with its ethnocentric projections, the reinforcing space within the Chicago World's Fair strengthened an already robust Wild West.

“The Imperial Layout of the White City and Its Intentions”

To a large degree, the Chicago World's Fair succeeded in its patriotic goals. Midwestern businessmen not only proved they could beat out their New York competitors for the rights to host an exhibition, they drew national and international attention to American industry's prowess within a world market.¹²⁹ Both the architecture and the layout of the World's Fair clearly featured imperial aspirations. Virtually all of the buildings within the Fair's “White City,” the main area in which building exhibitions highlighted American progress, adopted facades resonate of European civilization. **(Figure 37)** Passing under their Roman arches or grandiloquent Renaissance entrances, visitors could marvel at the technological potential displayed within these buildings. Yet instead of Romans, Spaniards, British, or the French harnessing and wielding their technological know-how, innovation rests in the hands of Americans. Moreover, the sheer physical size of the exhibition propelled the Chicago World's Fair into and beyond the ranks of previously acclaimed fairs such as the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London and the 1889 Paris Exhibition.¹³⁰ As British commissioner Sir Henry T. Wood claimed:

“The Columbian Fair, had more perfectly realized this ideal of an international exhibition than any of its

¹²⁹ Robert W. Rydell, All the World's A Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1984): 41-42.

¹³⁰ Rydell, Fair America..., 33.

predecessors, because such a large proportion of the space was filled with foreign exhibits, which America provided the setting for the jewels.”¹³¹

Long after its completion, visitors near and far would continue to talk about the marvels seen at this fair.

“Buffalo Bill’s Incorporation of Dual Imagery at the Chicago World’s Fair”

Amidst these dual images of tradition and modern progress, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West thrived. By August of 1893, Buffalo Bill wrote to his sister that, “I am doing the business of my life.”¹³² Located in a space next to, but separate from both the White City and the Midway, a kaleidoscope of more cluttered, primitive, ethnic spectacles, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West nestled itself comfortably among these contrasts. Undeniably, the show skillfully advertised the more masculine, imperial goals exhibited in the Chicago World’s Fair. As in the case of the World’s Fair, “The spirit of gain broods over it, the business of making and selling is its chief concern.” Buffalo Bill’s Wild West recognized that “a world’s fair is international and, like commerce, is designed ‘to associate all the races of mankind.’” Both the Fair and the Wild West created images of unity that were enhanced with assertions of American connections abroad. In his opening speech, President Cleveland remarked, “We stand today in the presence of the oldest nations of the world and point to the great achievements we here exhibit, asking no allowance on the score of youth.” Then with the press of a button, he jump-started the mechanical operations of the World’s Fair that propelled American industry to a new frontier.¹³³

¹³¹ *The Times*, October 27, 1893.

¹³² Cody, Letters from Buffalo Bill, 43.

¹³³ *The New York Times*, May 2, 1893.

Although Buffalo Bill glorified America's old frontier, the American West, in a manner with which imperial viewers could identify, his Wild West also foreshadowed a "New Frontier" based on American imperialism. Even Buffalo Bill's biographical transition from that of a farmer, to a hunter/ Daniel Boone-like explorer, and then to the position of a soldier/commander, segues nicely with Slotkin's notion of a "New Frontier." Slotkin claims that more modern conceptions of frontier definitely took root in archetypal notions of "progress" vs "savagery" as the nineteenth century neared its end, but the characteristics of these two frontiers changed. In the way that enactments of "Custer's Last Stand" kindled nostalgic memories of an older, more individualistic frontier, Buffalo Bill's later introduction of a diverse, regimented International Congress of Rough Riders into the Wild West accommodated visions of a new, more militarized frontier.¹³⁴ Theodore Roosevelt voiced the clearest conceptions of this "New Frontier." His 'newer' outlook employed the terms of 'savage' and 'civilized' within a more rigid, radicalized construct.¹³⁵ For Roosevelt, the perceived interconnection between blood, character, and heredity ensured that members of the same "blood and racial spirit" became professional heroes who could successfully conquer new frontiers by virtue of more efficient, military organization.¹³⁶

This notion of New Frontier matches well with Bill Brown's description of United States imperialism at the turn of the century. He states that American imperialism by the time of the 1901 Pan-American World's Fair was "one built upon technological know-

¹³⁴ Slotkin, 80.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 102.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 115, 39.

how, labor management, diplomatic systems, and capital investment.”¹³⁷ Increasingly then, Taylorized efficiency--its mastery over technology, social organization, and production, rather than simple courageous acts of aggression-- accounted for Anglo-American expansion into lands “scantly occupied by barbarous races.”¹³⁸ As a frontier hero vitalized by a wilderness experience and an impresario of incredible efficiency, Buffalo Bill certainly had the potential to lead the kind of efficient civilization befitting of Roosevelt’s praise. In fact, Buffalo Bill’s past experience as a soldier and commander played out in his own organization of the Wild West. Within the show, Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley, and cowboys-- not Native Americans--displayed their mastery over gun technology. Battle scenes that frequently portrayed white victories likewise represented racial superiority. Between the shows, Buffalo Bill’s ability to organize a mixed company of over 200 performers along with the speed in which the show traveled, set up camp, and departed, left international viewers in awe of this efficient show machine as early as 1887. The model efficiency of his show had even inspired at least forty officers of the Prussian Guard to take notes of every detail of its performance while in Germany.¹³⁹

While images of efficient industrialization and conquest riveted audience attention, the pre-urban portrayal of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West also appealed to urban audiences struggling with the problems of industrialization and urban overcrowding.¹⁴⁰ This traditional appeal upheld the kind of exotic western nostalgia that had made novels

¹³⁷ Bill Brown, “Science Fiction, the World’s Fair, and the Prosthetics of Empire, 1910-1918,” Cultures of United States Imperialism Eds. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 141.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 152, 136.

¹³⁹ Blair, 267.

by Karl May so popular in Germany.¹⁴¹ Again, by virtue of basing his Wild West on western nostalgia along with the modern, technological progress of civilizations, his show freeze-framed the kind of dual imagery to which scholars like Lears address, at a point of exact equilibrium: a nostalgic reenactment of the conflict that brings about ‘civilized’ progress. Thus his show creates a fantasy of escapism that spectators often enjoyed along the Midway while at the same time rationalizing the kind of historical progress emphasized in the White City.¹⁴² In terms of imagery, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West replaced the many images of women in classical garb that served as guardians of progress in the White City with a strikingly different image: a virile, violent male, independent of domestic life.¹⁴³ Meanwhile the uncharted, expansive frontier land itself takes on the traditional feminine representation of abundant resources yet to be tapped by civilization. Thus depending upon what viewers wanted to see, two generally contradictory images could be enjoyed in a unified narrative of the West and consequently American history.¹⁴⁴

Tensions also existed concerning the traditional and progressive representation of Native Americans at the Chicago World’s Fair. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West faced serious objections from fair organizers who wished to portray Native Americans as assimilated citizens in contrast to wild heathens.¹⁴⁵ In the same year of the London Exhibition, Congress had passed the 1887 Dawes Act. According to Eric Cheyfitz, this act sought to civilize Native American tribes by turning them into property holders who would be

¹⁴⁰ Bieder, 18.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁴² Lears, Fables of Abundance, 40-42.

¹⁴³ Sears, 12.

¹⁴⁴ Lears, Fables of Abundance, 118.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 38-40.

educated in American schools.¹⁴⁶ To many, these policies of assimilation ran counter to Buffalo Bill's representation of Native Americans in his Wild West. Lester Moses, for example, cites several battles held between the Indian Rights Bureau and Buffalo Bill over his 'savage' depiction of Native Americans.¹⁴⁷ Ironically, however, by representing Native Americans as defenders against the onslaught of civilization, Buffalo Bill's Wild West actually provided one of the last venues where the 'authentic' culture of his performers was preserved. A comment to his good friend Mike Russell expresses this duality in a coherent way:

“And he [Commissioner of Indian affairs] says I can't have any Indians for my show. This same man came near bringing on an Indian war last fall by taking the beef hides away from Indians. Now he wants to keep the Indians prisoners on their reservations and not allow them to earn an honest dollar. The Indians are becoming restless cooped up on their reservations. And if they are not allowed some liberty they will sooner or later give our frontier people trouble.”¹⁴⁸

In the end, Buffalo Bill won this battle and he continued using Native Americans in his show. To a degree, then, Buffalo Bill's Wild West was allowed to serve as a living museum that held tribute to Native American resolve while at the same time glorifying the superiority of those who defeated them.

“The Success Derived from Buffalo Bill's Location at the Chicago World's Fair”

As a mediator between White City goals and Midway spectacles, Buffalo Bill's Wild West struck gold during its six month stay at the Chicago World's

¹⁴⁶ Eric Cheyfitz, “Savage Law: The Plot Against American Indians in Johnson and *Graham's Lessee v. McIntosh and the Pioneers*,” *Cultures of United States Imperialism* Eds. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993): 113. Nonetheless, from the time of its passage until its reversal in 1934, Native American tribes lost over 86 million acres of land.

Fair. When one reporter from *The Times* praised, “Her people have gathered together the ‘biggest show on earth,’” he did not refer to the Fair’s Midway.¹⁴⁹ His reference to the grandeur of the White City, however, overlooked the Fair’s greatest show of all. Perhaps due to its free admission or its overwhelmingly pedantic emphasis, the White City failed to match the profits of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West or even those of the Midway. An article from *The New York Times* states, “it was in the Midway rather than in the White City itself, that the true World’s Fair and cosmopolis is to be found. For the civilized world, or Christendom, as it used to be called, is too much of a muchness to offer much of an ethnic study.” Instead of walking for boundless miles in the White City or spending an inordinate amount of money for each of the shows on the Midway, a visitor could pay the low cost of a general admission fee to a Wild West show that reiterated the themes of the White City in the entertaining, more simple manner of the Midway. The same article mentions that just as the Midway appealed “with uproot directness and force to children of all ages and both sexes so too did the Wild West.”¹⁵⁰ While it is important to note that the Wild West’s time abroad would have already strengthened the show’s appeal upon return, one can not overlook the way in which this particular World’s Fair setting boosted Buffalo Bill’s popularity. The settings provided by the Chicago World’s Fair along with

¹⁴⁷ Lester G. Moses, “Wild West Shows, Reformers, and the Image of the American Indian, 1887-1914” *South Dakota History* 14 (1984).

¹⁴⁸ Blackstone, *The Business of Being Buffalo Bill*, 15-16.

¹⁴⁹ *The Times*, September 30, 1893.

¹⁵⁰ *The New York Times*, June 19, 1893.

several other fairs to which Buffalo Bill's Wild West adjoined itself in different cities, further strengthened this show's exposure.

In turn, the large percentage of American public who attended these fairs and witnessed the show had been more conditioned to accept the country's increasing imperial aims. Prior to the 1887 London Exhibition, United States foreign policy sought relatively isolationist measures. Within three years, the United States had entered into the European imperial arena. In 1890, America joined with Germany and Britain to establish a protectorate over Samoa. Not long after, a Samoan exhibit appeared along the Midway of the 1893 Chicago Fair.¹⁵¹ Ten years later, the United States intervened in a Venezuela-Britain boundary dispute, occupied Wake Island, created an Open Door policy for China, gained new territories from its victory in the Spanish-American War, and received a quasi-protectorate over Cuba along with permission to construct the Panama Canal.¹⁵² Overtly, Buffalo Bill's later Wild West performances would dramatize the imperial frontier as a logical extension of its previously emphasized continental frontier by incorporating enactments of both the 1898 Battle of San Juan and the 1900 Boxer Rebellion's Battle of Tien-Tsin.¹⁵³ These parallels certainly make one wonder just how much World's Fairs, amusement parks, and ethnological museums, paved the way for such expansion at least in the minds of the American public.

To the critical eye, however, the cultural connections promoted by World's Fairs tended to support superficial relationships. For one reporter in *The New York Times*, the Anglomania or more appropriately the "spreadeagleism" that World's Fairs and tourism

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Gale, Intro.

¹⁵³ Slotkin, 86.

helped create, oversimplified notions of blood ties. He states: “Hitherto the great bulk of American tourists who rush through Great Britain have not had time to study the inner character and home life of the people and have come back with a very superficial acquaintance of the customs and peculiarities of the Old Country.” He fears that these tenuous alliances feed off the ignorance caused by World’s Fairs promotions and warns against the detriment that this may have globally. He continues: “Added to this, there is a staunch feeling of relationship and, perhaps more particularly among the middle and lower classes, a determination against fraternal warfare, the growth of which Gladstone so nobly encouraged by the Geneva Convention.”¹⁵⁴ Thus it was his greatest hope that the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, with all of its comprehensive detail, would remove that layer of ignorance and teach Britons more about American merits beyond simple blood ties. If one takes into consideration the lackluster response to the White City’s edifying detail in comparison to the enthusiastic reaction to Buffalo Bill’s dramatization of a logical justification of these blood ties, the reporter may have left the fair somewhat disappointed.

¹⁵⁴ *The New York Times*, May 2, 1893.

V. SPECIFIC IMPERIAL THEMES SEEN THROUGH THE POSTER ADVERTISEMENTS OF BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST

An in-depth reading of Buffalo Bill's posters serves as perhaps the best way to show just how Buffalo Bill's Wild West complimented the imperial overtones of the Chicago World's Fair and to understand just how these sorts of imperial notions seeped into American consciousness. The indispensability of these poster advertisements for this purpose simply can not be ignored. In an 1895 letter to a friend he explained, "You have heard of Circus fights, have you not, Well they are lively affairs--the fighting is done in ink and paper....And newspaper advertisements, and billboards, and brainy men to write, and bill posters to work costs money. My share of the fight will cost me about \$15,000.¹⁵⁵ His annual budget for poster advertisements ranged anywhere from four thousand to a hundred thousand dollars.¹⁵⁶ Certain Wild West workers traveled two weeks ahead of the show to post anywhere from 6,000 to 8,000 posters in a single day for just a one day showing.¹⁵⁷ Billboard, a magazine of billposters, praised the quality of these poster advertisements with the following quote in its September 1, 1895 issue:

"The advent of Buffalo Bill and his Wild West aggregation on the 19th and 20th and the great crowds that thronged to see him with a glowing tribute to the posters, the press and popularity of this brave border hero. Nearly 100,000 pleased people patronized the performances and they were drawn there by the finest work in advertising ever witnessed."¹⁵⁸

Undoubtedly, such in-depth promotion and short-term saturation not only made a great impact, it also created a strong desire for the Wild West product. If, as Jonathan Martin claims, Buffalo Bill sold his own version of social stability, order, and progress in his

¹⁵⁵ Cody, Letters from Buffalo Bill., 43.

¹⁵⁶ Rogers, 51.

¹⁵⁷ Blackstone, Buckskins, Bullets, and Business, 50.; See also Rennert, 5.

Wild West show, our best access to that version comes now through the specific images into which its audiences bought.¹⁵⁹

“The Defense of Imperial Civilization in Buffalo Bill’s Posters”

Just as antimodernists provided outlets for turn of the century anxieties as opposed to an alternative hegemony, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West poster representations may have defied overcivilization even as they championed a faith in Anglo-American civilization and justified imperial conquest. Quite simply, these posters suggest that the United States needed “rough” masculine heroes. The 1894 poster entitled “Buffalo Bill to the Rescue” (**Figure 21**) represents a very clear example of victimization. In this poster, Buffalo Bill and a band of cowboys come to the rescue of an angelically highlighted couple who face a crude fate in the hands of heathen “savages.” As a formidable guardian of civilization, Buffalo Bill builds upon an aggressive masculine strength while still projecting a respectable “manly” character on par with the late Victorian ideals identified by Bederman as morality, independence, and bravery.¹⁶⁰ Again, Buffalo Bill’s ability to conquer buffalo and “savages” in a wilderness setting strengthens his character in a way that foreshadows the Rooseveltian ideal of an aristocratic Anglo-American masculinity, or new manliness in the Progressive Era. Invigorated by triumphs over dangers of frontier elements and yet not overcome by them, Buffalo Bill gains the skills necessary to act as vital leader within a progressive civilization.¹⁶¹ No poster could be more representative of this Moses-like role than the previously mentioned 287" x 112" “Westward, the Course of Empire Takes its Way”

¹⁵⁸ Rennert, 5.

¹⁵⁹ Martin, 94.

¹⁶⁰ Bederman, 17.

image.¹⁶² While Buffalo Bill gazes into the twilight of a vanishing frontier that he helped create, his chosen people-- represented by the nativity configuration on top of the rock--embark upon the process of civilization. **(Figure 21.5)**

More than his contemporary United States statesmen, Buffalo Bill and his Wild West posters conveyed a dignified image of Anglo-American conquest and civilization abroad. William Cody -- not American statesmen--conquered. Buffalo Bill's tall, attractive physique, his magnetic personality, heroic feats, and hectic schedule all embodied a growing emphasis in national advertising that focused on young, slim, strong, energetic Anglo-Saxon models.¹⁶³ Cody also represented himself as figure worthy of the high respect he received. Virtually every one of his poster portraits employs a technique that Michelle Shawn Smith credits to photographer Matthew Brady. In a mid-century project entitled "Illustrious Americans," Brady generally portrayed notable Americans in three-quarter profiles where subjects glanced "loftily" away from the viewers.¹⁶⁴ **(Figure 22)** To compliment portraits reminiscent of Roman busts, several Wild West posters depict William Cody in equestrian poses similar to commemorative statues of dignified statesman like those of Marcus Aurelius.**(Figure 23)** Just as many amusements like dime novels opened their doors to women audiences and suited themselves for family recreation, Buffalo Bill's images were not brutish; he defended families in many posters where he wards off Indian attacks on settler homes or caravans.¹⁶⁵ **(Figure 33)** In every way, Buffalo Bill represented a moral, masculine, gentleman worthy of being America's

¹⁶¹ Slotkin, 35.

¹⁶² Rennert, 9.

¹⁶³ Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 164.; See also Cody, *Letters from Buffalo Bill*, 17.

¹⁶⁴ Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999): 165.

cultural diplomat in Europe, or even more daringly, ‘the poster child’ of Western imperialism.

“The United State’s Technological Capabilities of Imperial Leadership”

Buffalo Bill’s Wild West posters also reflect a shared racial language in which Anglo-American conquest and technological superiority allow the United States to join the top echelon of world civilizations. No matter where Buffalo Bill’s Wild West traveled, Buffalo Bill conducted his show in environments where popular theories espoused by men like Charles Darwin, Francis Galton, and Herbert Spencer pervaded common dialogue.¹⁶⁶ On both sides of the Atlantic, publications, lectures, and world’s fairs, as demonstrated, charted human progress scientifically through graduated stages of “savage,” barbarous,” and “civilized” development.¹⁶⁷ Consequently, toward the end of the century, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West posters gradually convey an image where, in the words of Slotkin, the American frontier serves as a “Darwinian arena in which ‘races’ represent different principals of social organization and contend for *mastery*.”¹⁶⁸ Similar to a spatially hierarchical representation of different ethnic groups along the 1893 Columbian World’s Fair Midway, Buffalo Bill’s poster pennant (**Figure 24**) depicts an imperial ranking system within the Wild West production. Cowgirls, rough riders, and the United States cavalry reign in Buffalo Bill’s Congress of Rough Riders. Other riders like the Russian, German, French, Cossack, Arabian, Mexican and Japanese fall below in decreasing orders of development.

¹⁶⁵ Butsch, 16.

¹⁶⁶ Stephen Jay Gould, The Mismeasure of Man (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Co., 1981): 76.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Berkhofer Jr, The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978): 47, 52.

¹⁶⁸ Slotkin, 39.

His posters also represent hierarchical stratification in less explicit ways. Entitled “Wild Rivalries of Savage, Barbarous, and Civilized Races,” **Figure 25** presents a symbolically heteronormative Anglo-Saxon couple (likely Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley) heading a rowdy group of less civilized races. The fact that they are the only couple in this poster and that they, along with the lone cowboy to the left, are rounding up these races may indicate a desire to stabilize social order within a strict racial hierarchy. For one, the inferior races can not procreate, in other words they face possible extinction. Even within the show, foreign women seem invisible as only American cowgirls perform either on their own or with other cowboys. For another, this wild group of ‘barbarians’ shoulders a bit of Midwaysque carnivalization in which the thrill of mingling with the primitive and exotic offers ‘safe’ titillation. Yet at the same time, a show that mixes races also relies on conquest performances that maintain the kind of exciting but ‘comfortable’ hierarchical separation seen in this poster.

More interesting are the varied uses of red in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West posters. In **Figure 29**, the red wording instantly attracts the viewer’s attention in a manner similar to P.T. Barnum’s poster advertisements that emphasized spectacle. This red, however, also serves as a pointer that weaves the eye deep within the poster while it darts from the red accents of horse bridles, to headbands, to feathers, hats and finally to the cowboy shirts. In this context, the color red moves from that of a unifying device to one that takes on symbolic significance. In a performance that highlights civilized conquests over savagery, red connotations range from ‘redmen’ or Indian savages, to violence and bloodshed. As the ultimate male warrior within such conquest, Buffalo Bill himself often displays hints of red. Perhaps in line with Slotkin’s notion of manhood and

revitalizing conquest, the numerous poster portraits that paint Buffalo Bill with blushed cheeks (**Figures A, 1,2,8, 22, 23, 26**) may exhibit traces of this warrior symbolism.

An examination of several Wild West posters reveals that the possession and mastery of guns more than any other aspect, demarcate civilized development--a point that fits nicely with the technological marketing of World's Fairs. For some time, European countries had eyed gun manufactures in the United States. Samuel Colt's revolver, first invented in 1835, gained international attention at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London.¹⁶⁹ Thanks to Buffalo Bill's Wild West, the Winchester rifle became known abroad as the "Gun that won the West." Buffalo Bill even stated in the 1875 Winchester Company catalogue that: "I have tried and used nearly every kind of gun made in the United States, and for general hunting, or Indian fighting, I pronounce your improved Winchester the boss."¹⁷⁰ After the Civil War, dramatic technological improvements in both the design and manufacture of guns enabled many United States gun manufacturers such as Colt, Remington, and Winchester to join rank with major exporters abroad.¹⁷¹ Along with notions of strong blood ties, the Darwinian image of an ability to overcome "savage" threats with well-made guns helped foster the civilized status of Americans.¹⁷² In the 1889 poster already mentioned, (**Figure 25**) "Wild Rivalries of Savage, Barbarous, and Civilized Races," Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley, two figures famed for their shooting expertise, along with a holstered cowboy on the far

¹⁶⁹ Michael A. Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of National Gun Culture*. (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.): 380. Most of Colt's initial sales went to foreign markets--particularly those of Britain and Mexico.; See also Sears, 8.

¹⁷⁰ Sears, 9.

¹⁷¹ Bellesiles., 422, 432. Bellesiles claims that Civil War brought about two major innovations: metallic ammunition, and repeating rifles. By 1875, Winchester rifles had developed an extremely strong world market.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 8-9, 15, 335, 346, 429.

left, represent a “civilized” race herding a group of non-gun wielding “savages” and “barbarians.” Generally, Wild West posters such as the 1893 and 1902 “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West,” depict Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley, and cowboys with guns while Native Americans bear traditional weapons. **(Figures 26, 27)** Despite the fact that some posters place guns in the hands of other races, their mastery over those guns often appears to pale, so to speak, in comparison to the skills of ‘Anglo-American’ Wild West participants.¹⁷³

An 1898 poster **(Figure 28)** entitled “Marksmanship Foot and Horseback” singles out the Native American as an unarmed assistant. Meanwhile, Annie Oakley and Johnnie Baker demonstrate their superior marksmanship in the background. In an 81" x 27" 1898 stagecoach battle poster, Cody and his cowboys outrank their Native American opponents in gun quantity, variety, and skill. Notice that the one rifle-bearing Native American in this scene dramatizes his defeat at the hands of a more skilled opponent. **(Figure 28.5)** A London-made poster specific to American conquest over “savages,” the 1892 representation of Buffalo Bill by Alich P.F. Ritchie, symbolizes an Anglo-American mastery of civilized tools. Offset by a racially significant white background, the commonly defined tools of civilization: pistols, ammunition belts, bullets, and axes define Cody’s most prominent facial features.¹⁷⁴ After first focusing here, the eye wanders to Cody’s more external features like his buffalo goatee, snowshoe mustache, feathered mane, and tee-peed hat. Beyond the potentially racial, red/white color

¹⁷³ Ibid, 373. Although Native American tribes usually received older, cheaper models of guns, many tribes had long preferred guns over their own weapons. Plains tribes who frequently fought on horseback especially preferred the pistol.

¹⁷⁴ Some adds in the Wild West referred to the rifle as “an aid to civilization”. The bullet served as the “pioneer of civilization” because it had “gone hand in hand with the axe that cleared the forest, and with the family Bible and school book.” Rennert, 9.

symbolism, this ornamental use of Native American imagery reinforces a theme of successful conquest. **(Figure 29)**

The images of these Wild West posters likely grabbed the attention of viewers in the United States where national identity and gun culture had become increasingly interlinked. In certain respects, Cody and his mastery of guns personified a national symbol. Slotkin states that “savage wars” enacted between Wild West agents of civilization and Native Americans represented a “current event and a symbol of genetic strife from which the nation is born.”¹⁷⁵ A gun advertisement within the Wild West production particularly attests to the significance of a gun culture: “without the rifle-ball we of America would not be today in the possession of a free and united country and mighty in our strength.”¹⁷⁶ Specifically, gun possession allowed men to extend their masculinity.¹⁷⁷ In addition to serving as a testament to the technological mastery and efficiency of American cowboys, or even Anglo-Americans in general, the 1898 stagecoach battle poster shows how men, emboldened by guns, successfully protected innocent women and children. **(Figure 28.5)** Michael Bellesiles argues that gun manufacturers facing a surplus of guns in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century appealed to this moral need for protection in order to increase gun consumption in the United States.¹⁷⁸ As a useful tool for the defense of national moral values, guns also took on an imperial role when Cody later incorporated specific acts of United States

¹⁷⁵ Slotkin, 19.

¹⁷⁶ Rennert, 9.

¹⁷⁷ Bellesiles, 329, 430.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 437, 432.

imperialism into his Wild West frontier.¹⁷⁹ Given that guns could be found anywhere in American life after 1870 and that guns had become extremely affordable by the 1890's, the American public was increasingly willing to embrace the kind of gun imagery offered by the Wild West.¹⁸⁰

Despite this popular interest, Buffalo Bill's Wild West posters do not advertise guns directly. Although Cody's exact commercial relationship with gun manufactures is uncertain, advertisements within the Wild West production definitely promoted guns. One advertisement boasted that "for over twenty years the far-famed hunter and peerless Scout, Col. W. F. Cody, has used Winchester Rifles and Winchester ammunition."¹⁸¹ Several posters do indeed appear to feature Buffalo Bill with a preferred Winchester rifle in hand. **(Figure 30)** The fact that Annie Oakley actually performed promotional events for certain gun manufactures like Remington and that guns were central to her poster images, suggests that women in the Wild West also played a visible role in selling guns.¹⁸² Identifying specific brands of guns in these posters is difficult however. Exactly how and if participants within the Wild West benefited from gun advertisements remains even less clear. What is certain is that guns make a dominant appearance in Buffalo Bill's Wild West posters as well as his production.

"The Mixed Representation of Native Americans in Buffalo Bill's Posters"

Nor do Buffalo Bill's Wild West posters present Native Americans as easy targets. Instead, varied representations of Native Americans within these posters

¹⁷⁹ Rosa, 167-168. A re-enactment of the 1898 Battle of San Juan, for example, was quickly incorporated into Buffalo Bill's Wild West.

¹⁸⁰ Bellesiles, 443.

¹⁸¹ Rennert 12, See also Martin 104.

¹⁸² Bellesiles, 8, 441, 442.

strengthen the nationally symbolic notion of Americans as civilized victors of “savage wars.” Undoubtedly, many lithographers stereotyped Native American subjects in a manner similar to the character typing that Michelle Smith mentions in her book, American Archives. Smith explains how Francis Galton photographically superimposed the images of several criminals or races on top of each other in an attempt to identify the essence of a criminal or a race.¹⁸³ This effacing process literally dehumanized its subjects into a mass of nondescript “others.” When posters like **Figure 31** present cowboys as well-defined individuals who gun down indistinct forms from afar, they treat Native Americans as insignificant, dispensable obstacles. Other representations like the 1894 “A Prairie Pic-Nic” draw upon popular stereotypes that depicted Native Americans as childlike “savages” lagging far behind Wild West frontiersman in their “civilized” maturity.¹⁸⁴ (**Figure 32**) At the extreme end, certain posters link Native Americans with wild animals. Known for their skilled or ‘picturesque’ horsemanship and athletic feats on horseback, posters like **Figure 33** fuse the two into one ‘wild beast.’ Portraits of Buffalo Bill, meanwhile, almost always appear atop a tamed, statuesque steed. (**Figures 2, 23**) In the same way that Buffalo Bill skillfully harnesses wild buffalo and horses, so too does he harness the Native American performers within his Wild West.

However, another common stereotype, that of the “Noble savage,” can be seen in several Wild West posters. In the 1899 “Congress of American Indians,” the warriors represent many of the attributes that Robert Berkhofer associates with the “Noble savage” stereotype. Particularly in the case of the graceful and ‘picturesque’ horsemen, the warriors “exhibit a great calm and dignity in bearing,” they appear “brave in combat,” and

¹⁸³ Smith, 162-163.

fairly “modest in attitude.”¹⁸⁵ **(Figure 33)** Unlike some other battle scene posters, “Congress of American Indians” also depicts Native Americans as formidable opponents. This varied representation in Wild West posters has a dual purpose. While the image of a childlike or nondescript “savage” justifies Native American extermination, or assimilation into American culture, the “Noble savage” glorifies the conqueror. As personal letters from Buffalo Bill and stories in his autobiography reveal, Buffalo Bill’s affection for quality horses just as easily translated into an appreciation for his Native American performers.¹⁸⁶ If Native American tribes had been incredibly easy to conquer, Buffalo Bill’s deeds would be neither legendary nor heroic. Threatening opposition strengthens his manhood and more importantly Native Americans provide the benchmark for white performance. Without them, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West may not have fared much better than a low-rate circus performance. Yet because frontiersman had already successfully triumphed over their indigenous foes, Native Americans could be ennobled in the Wild West production. Both the statuesque portraits of the 1898 “Medicine Man” and the 1902 poster of “Chief Iron Tail” present tamed Native Americans who are displayed as strong, majestic, benevolent, handsome, and dignified. **(Figures 34, 35)** “The Death of Chief Iron Tail” and its poster replications evoke a nostalgic appreciation for the courage of these vanishing Native Americans as well as nostalgia for a vanishing period in American history. With every repeated performance of valiant fighting and noble deaths, Native American Wild West performers allowed those at home and abroad to review what had been considered a significant chapter in American history. By virtue

¹⁸⁴ Gould, 120.

¹⁸⁵ Berkhofer, 32.

¹⁸⁶ Cody, Letters from Buffalo Bill, See also Cody, The Adventures of Buffalo Bill.

of this repeated performance, Native Americans within Buffalo Bill's Wild West symbolized the formation of American identity. Without the resistance, the eventual conquest, and the domination over this "Other," the United States would theoretically lose its high standing image among civilized countries. As brave, worthy opponents, William Cody considered Native Americans as part of America and thus American.

(Figure 36)

Ironically, Buffalo Bill would actually take on a role similar to the Native American performers in his Wild West as he got older. Buffalo Bill's Wild West maintained its popularity after the 1895 death of its invaluable manager, Nate Salisbury, by eventually combining operations with James Bailey from the Barnum and Bailey circus. When Bailey died in 1907, Buffalo Bill's Wild West faltered under subsequent incompetent management. On top of this downfall, Cody's overly speculative investments continually placed him in vulnerable financial situations. Despite wishing to retire long before 1917, massive debts forced Cody to postpone his retirement and to perform within circuses. As part of Gordon Lillie's "Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West and Great Far East," for example, Cody not only lost control of his image but the credible strength of his performance subsided as Midwaysque Hindu magicians, Madagascar oxen cavalry, and other pure spectacles enveloped him.¹⁸⁷ In fact, Buffalo Bill's Wild West may have expanded the horizons of American audiences beyond their borders so well that the American West alone no longer held great appeal. Beyond this reality, however, traces of Buffalo Bill's impact could be found long after his final performance.

¹⁸⁷ Inge, 71.

VI. THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF BUFFALO BILL'S IMPERIAL COMMODIFICATION

From an economic standpoint, Buffalo Bill's Wild West left behind concrete examples of successful advertising. Just as visitors to Barnum's dime museum took home souvenirs of their museum experiences, so too did Wild West spectators.¹⁸⁸ In the wake of his Wild West performances, 'Codymania' flooded British and European markets with a desire for products of the American West.¹⁸⁹ Interestingly, this consumption would particularly play itself out among young children. Wayne Gard's reflections on the Wild West and its 1911 visit to his hometown, comments on the fact that "Cowboy and Indian" games with their Western accouterments had become a popular childhood pastime by that time and would continue to be so in future decades.¹⁹⁰ According to Butsch, games and toys act as material tokens of certain ideologies; they play a significant role in shaping individual personality and cultures. Thus it is as if the ownership of a cowboy hat enables its owners to take part in or to consume western culture.¹⁹¹ Inge even claims, "Games, toys, and play serve many functions, not the least of which is to help cope with a chaotic, violent, and even dangerous world."¹⁹² Several games like George Parker's 1883 Game of Banking which emerged in the Gilded Age, or those games commemorating the Chicago World's Fair, appear to convey such intentions.¹⁹³ In this sense, re-creations of the Wild West among its younger audiences served as a rite of passage that ritualized the main images of this production long after its

¹⁸⁸ Dennet, 35.

¹⁸⁹ Slotkin, 75.

¹⁹⁰ Wayne Gard, "A Tale of the Old Days: Buffalo Bill Comes to Town" Southwest Review (Winter 1984): 58.

¹⁹¹ Butsch, 17.

¹⁹² Inge, 154.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 147, 150.

viewing. With this in mind, Martin's assumption that, "William F. Cody did his bit for advancing the American transition to a consumption-oriented culture, a culture that would offer the commodified symbolism of the consumer mentality as the answer for social problems," contains a great deal of truth.¹⁹⁴

The fact that many Americans still recognize the name of Buffalo Bill attests to the cultural legacy of his Wild West production. In the words of Sarah Blackstone, "Much of the information about the Wild West has been lost or forgotten, but the images it creates, the characters introduced, and the interest it sparked, have become an important part of the European image of America and of the American image itself."¹⁹⁵ Granted, whenever history is transformed into entertainment, it experiences distortion.¹⁹⁶ Yet several historians have noted that the mythical frontier displayed in the Wild West had a far greater impact on public conceptions of the American West than Frederick Turner's more academically popular, and less conquest-oriented accounts of frontier life.¹⁹⁷ Historians also credit Buffalo Bill's Wild West for bringing about the popular Sioux image that appeared in Wild West movies and that dominate current public perceptions of Native Americans.¹⁹⁸ Certainly, then, Buffalo Bill, in a similar vein to P.T. Barnum, influenced culture as much as culture shaped him.¹⁹⁹

While the degree to which culture determines politics can not be determined with a measuring stick, Buffalo Bill's Wild West may have held political ramifications as well. In the eyes of culture theorist Anthony Giddens, "people create and yet are created by

¹⁹⁴ Martin, 120.

¹⁹⁵ Blackstone, Buckskins, Bullets, and Business..., 134.

¹⁹⁶ Dennet, 146.

¹⁹⁷ Slotkin, Introduction.

society: structure provides the meaningful context by which action is possible even as it constrains it.”²⁰⁰ When one considers that culture does influence mindsets, one might contemplate the role that culture plays in democratic societies. As concrete examples of political influence, Buffalo Bill’s persuasion and his surrender of property rights helped create the Shoshone Dam. He also encouraged people to settle barren land by increasing irrigation systems in various western locations. Buffalo Bill’s political appeal also reached a point where Arizona constituents had been willing to elect him as their Senator until troubles with his Wild West show kept him from running.²⁰¹ Even the kind of artwork upon which Buffalo Bill based certain posters, could create political changes. Thomas Moran’s “The Grand Canyon of Yellowstone” captivated Congress so much that it appropriated \$10,000 to purchase the land.²⁰² In this context, it is not hard to imagine that Buffalo Bill’s Wild West did its part culturally to strengthen political ties with Europe and increase domestic acceptance for imperial interventions.

Perhaps more than P.T. Barnum, Cody should be recognized for his advertising merits. While Cody preserved the Wild West through his production, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West posters secured that preservation. In a time where the conservation efforts of John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt spoke for the need to preserve a frontier culture in danger of extinction, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West posters performed an important function.²⁰³ Teddy Roosevelt had commented on the work of Frederick Remington by saying, “The soldier, the cowboy and rancher, the Indian, the horses and cattle of the plains, will live in

¹⁹⁸ Rogers, 43, 53. Contrary to what one might imagine, dime novels tended to represent the Algonkain image of Native Americans as opposed to that of the Plains tribes.

¹⁹⁹ Butsch, 7.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 7.

²⁰¹ Cody, Letters from Buffalo Bill, 45, 71.

[Remington's pictures] and bronzes, I verily believe for all time."²⁰⁴ As a medium, posters likewise preserved Buffalo Bill's Wild West legacy. According to Therese Heyman, "Posters communicate, invite action, and build consensus."²⁰⁵ Indeed, Wild West posters communicated a need, encouraged the consumption of western goods, and established a dominant image of the Wild West that surpassed other frontier images in popular culture. Wild West posters fueled a desire to view civilized, but not overcivilized, heroes act out valiant deeds amidst the challenges of a wilderness frontier. Furthermore, in a time when William Cody's spectacle can no longer be seen, his posters comprise the most vital, permanent visual testament to the themes of an even more visual Wild West production. Similar to poster representations of movies at the cinema today, remaining Wild West posters once advertised and continue to display the essence of a greater, more transient drama.

The relatively consistent, large, and repeated images among Buffalo Bill's Wild West poster collection helped build a lasting consensus. Referring once again to Heyman, posters "reflect, magnify, and even alter American culture."²⁰⁶ Because so many posters highlighted Buffalo Bill's image, they reflected the wide-spread popularity of dime novel legends while at the same time, their arresting, high quality prints magnified the legend.²⁰⁷ Even the dominant size of Buffalo Bill's posters and billboards in comparison to other advertisers, structurally reinforced this amplified image.²⁰⁸ Buffalo Bill's Wild West posters also left behind a visual imprint long after the

²⁰² Truettner, 251.

²⁰³ Gale, Intro.

²⁰⁴ Truettner, 287.

²⁰⁵ Therese Heyman. "Posters American Style," Internet exhibit.

²⁰⁶ Heyman, Internet exhibit.

production left town. By lingering for about two months until the wear and tear from outside elements brought them down, Wild West posters reiterated what had been seen in the production. Posters, then, comprised the vital final step for internalizing the product and shaping how it was perceived and remembered.²⁰⁹ If not for this function, Buffalo Bill may have been remembered as circus pawn who no longer wielded control over what audiences witnessed in his later performances.

In several ways, Buffalo Bill's Wild West bridged cultural, spiritual, social, and international gaps through its successful advertisement of America's Wild West. This ability, however, does not make Buffalo Bill's Wild West historically unique. Other forms of entertainment, particularly that of Walt Disney movies and theme parks, have managed to achieve similar functions for mass audiences worldwide. In the movie Pocahontas, Native American characters once again personify dual roles between "noble savage" and "savage" for the purpose of both justifying and glorifying American conquest--John Smith being the strong, handsome, civilized Anglo-Saxon male and Pocahontas representing a civilized attraction to, yet control over, the exotic, primitive female. Above all, Disney productions reflect and influence cultural perceptions with an appealing form of escapism that soothes anxieties.

What makes Buffalo Bill's Wild West singularly unique is its novelty. This production packaged an appealing representation of a patriotic American history and presented it to an unprecedented broad-based audience. The production benefited from Cody's ability to make friends with European royalty and it thrived within various

²⁰⁷ Martin, 94.

²⁰⁸ Rennert, 4.

²⁰⁹ Rogers, 51.

World's Fair settings. Finally, its expansive, imperialist imagery embraced existing tensions, contrasts, and anxieties of the late nineteenth century. In this respect, Buffalo Bill's Wild West left contemporary entertainment rivals behind. Thanks to the high quality posters he used to advertise a production that in turn advertised nationalism, scholars today have the ability to delve into nineteenth century mindsets in a manner of which Henry Adams might approve. By stressing its unique significance to American identity and communicating this interpretation on a wide variety of planes, Buffalo Bill's Wild West permanently linked Western images to popular constructions of national identity both at home and abroad. This ability to bridge elitist concepts of Anglo-Saxon superiority with mass consumption, appealed to audiences at a time when they sought something genuine and reassuring with which to identify. It is a combination of these complex feats that enabled Buffalo Bill's Wild West to unite regions into nationhood and nations into notions of "Westernhood"; it has made Buffalo Bill a household name even in homes today.

GALLERY OF ILLUSTRATIONS
Figure A – Figure 37

ALL ROADS LEAD TO

**BUFFALO BILL'S
WILD WEST**

AND
**CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE
WORLD**

HOW TO GET THERE FOR 5 & 10 CENTS

AT **AMBROSE PARK**
39TH STREET
SOUTH BROOKLYN

ALL ELEVATED STEAM, STREET & MOTOR CARS
& FERRIES, CONVENIENT WITH PLACES
WHERE FARE IS ENOUGH YOU TO LAND DIRECT AT CAMP

EXCURSION STEAMERS FROM ALL PORTS

**2
PERFORMANCES
DAILY** AT 3 PM
AT 8 PM

**RAIN OR
SHINE**

GENERAL ADMISSION
50 CENTS
COVERED GRAND STAND
SEATING 20,000

WHERE WE ARE

Springer Lithographic Co., NY, 1894

Figure A



1898 Enquirer Job Printing Co., Cincinnati OH

Figure 1

1899 THE CODY CALENDAR

1899

1899 JANUARY 1899						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

1899

1899 FEBRUARY 1899						
		1	2	3	4	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28				

1899

1899 MARCH 1899						
		1	2	3	4	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

1899

1899 APRIL 1899						
				1		
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

1899

1899 MAY 1899						
1	2	3	4	5	6	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

1899

1899 JUNE 1899						
		1	2	3		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

1899

1899 JULY 1899						
				1		
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

1899

1899 AUGUST 1899						
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

1899

1899 SEPTEMBER 1899						
				1	2	
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

1899

1899 OCTOBER 1899						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

1899

1899 NOVEMBER 1899						
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

1899

1899 DECEMBER 1899						
				1	2	
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

1899

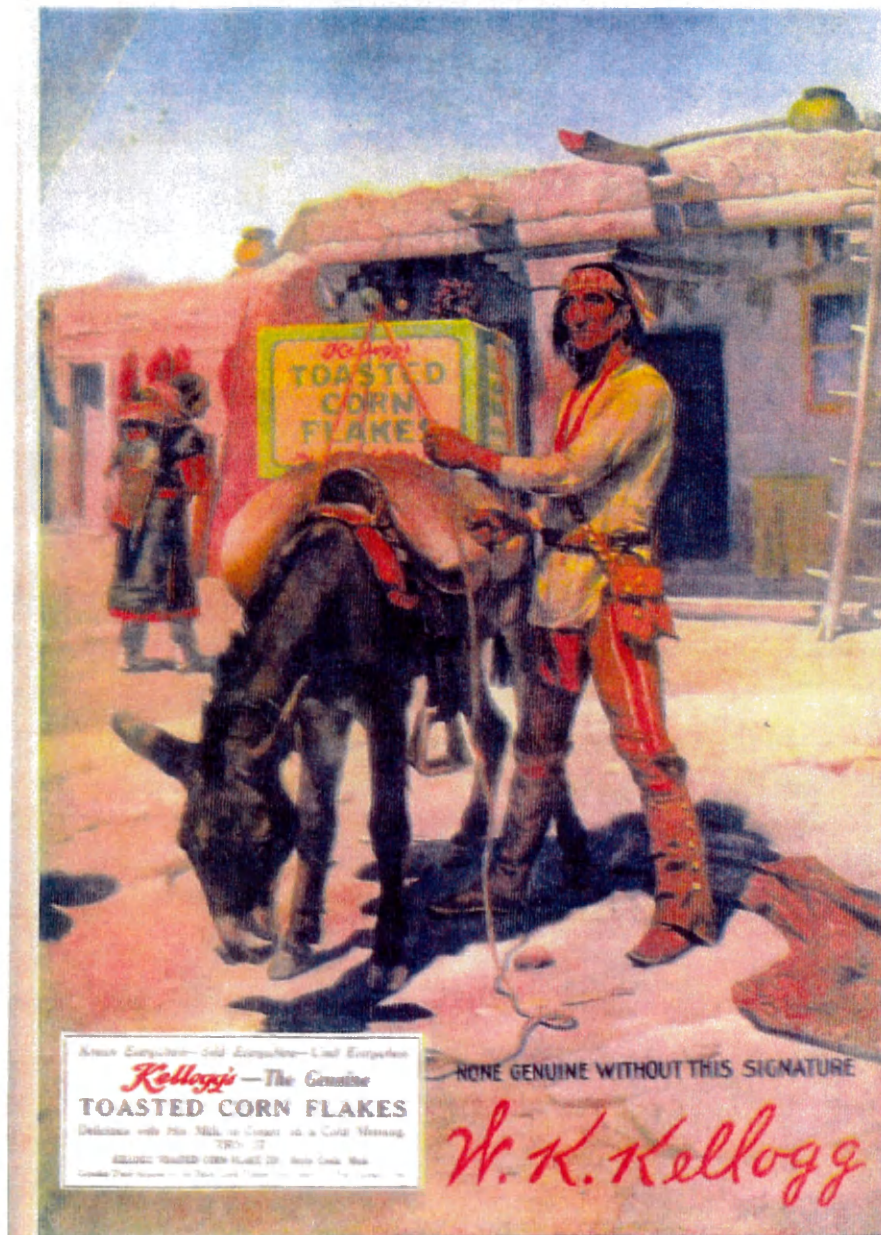
THE ZODIAC OF ROUGH RIDERS

BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD

THE DATE MARKED THUS INDICATES THE DAY BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST AND CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS WILL EXHIBIT IN THIS CITY.

1898 Enquirer Job Printing Co, Cincinnati OH

Figure 2



Miller, Ernestino G., ed. *The Art of Advertising: Great Commercial Illustrations from the Early Years of Magazines*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1980.

Figure 3

HYOMEI CURES
 COUGHS, COLDS, CATARRH, BRONCHITIS, CROUP & CONSUMPTION.

HYOMEI
 KILLS THE GERMS

Just Breathe it

The only remedy endorsed by the U. S. Health Report.

We guarantee to refund the money in all cases where Hyomei does not cure.

A HYOMEI OUTFIT
 You can insure yourself against coughs and colds during the coming winter by purchasing a Hyomei Outfit.

The only advertised remedy ever used by regular physicians.

Five days' treatment and medical advice sent free to any sufferer.

A HYOMEI OUTFIT
 Sold by all druggists or sent by mail.
 Complete Outfit, \$1.00. Trial Outfit, 25c.
 THE K. E. BROTHER CO., INC. CHICAGO, ILL.

Miller, Ernestine G., ed. *The Art of Advertising: Great Commercial Illustrations from the Early Years of Magazines*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1980.

Figure 4



1887 A. Hoen + Co. Baltimore MD

Figure 5



King of the Belgians

King of Sweden

King of Greece

H.R.H. Prince of Wales

Buffalo Bill

Genl Lord Wolseley

King of Saxony

King of Denmark

W. E. Gladstone

John Bright M.P.

Distinguished Visitors to Buffalo Bill's Wild West, London, 1887.

1888 A. Hoehn + Co. Baltimore MD

Figure 6



Distinguished Visitors to Buffalo Bill's Wild West, London, 1887.

1888 A. Hoen & Co., Baltimore MD

Figure 7



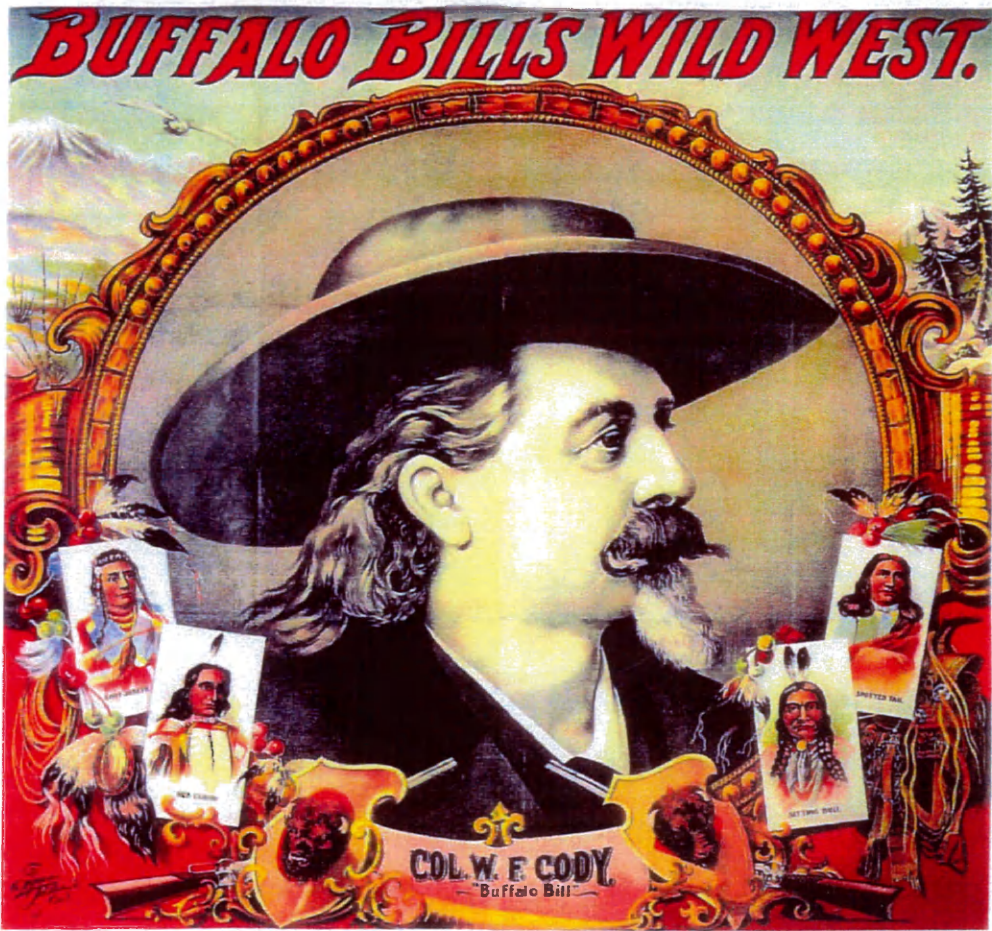
1905 Weiners, Paris.

Figure 8



1908 Strobridge Lithographic Co.
Cincinnati OH

Figure 9



1886 A. Hoen + Co. Baltimore, MD

Figure 10

2d SILVER BENEFIT.

McClellan Opera House,

One Night only.

Saturday Evening, April 3d.

THE ONLY AND ORIGINAL.

BUENA VISTA BOLL

HON. W. F. CODY,

Late Chief of the Scouts of the U. S. Army,

and the ALAMOOTH COMBINATION
in his great Sensational Drama, entitled,

“The Prairie Wail”

Introducing the Western Scout and Darling Hero,

Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys.

A Genuine Band of Pawnee Indians,

Under Pawnee Judy, Jay Chief and Interpreter.

24 First Class Artists.

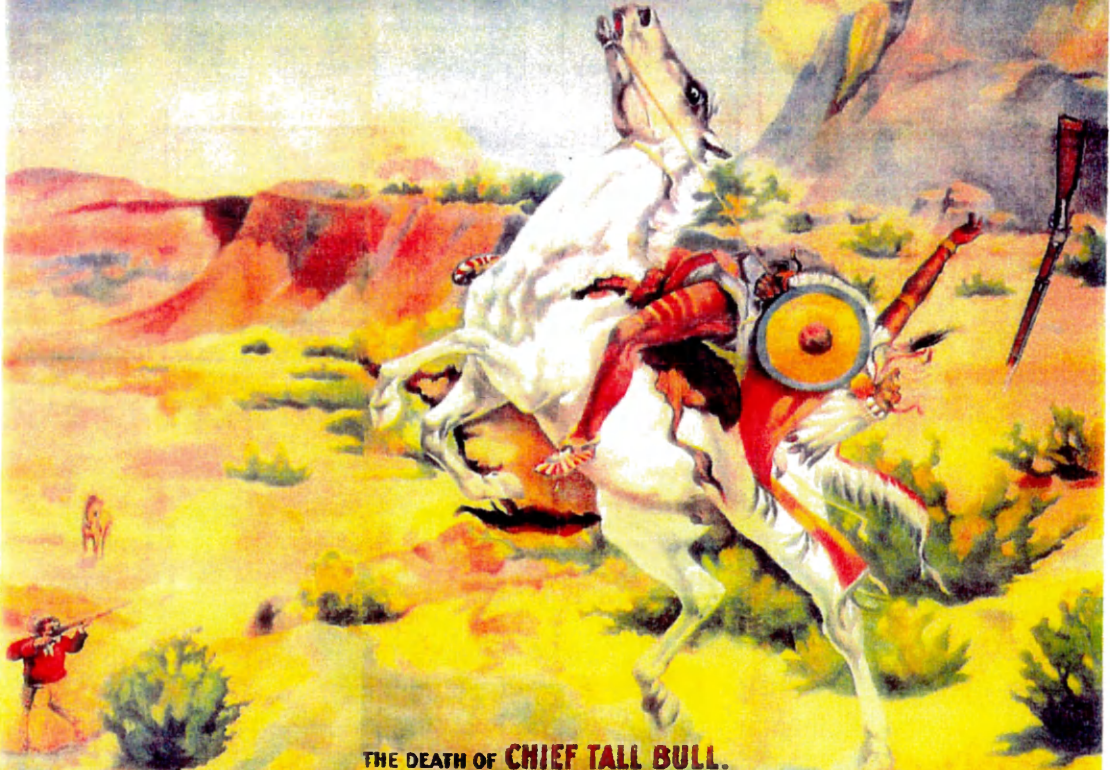
New and Beautiful Scenery

Mr. Cody's "Prairie Wail" will give an exhibition of fancy Horse Showing, including his ride in twenty different positions, in which he is acknowledged pre-eminent. Prices of admission as usual. Reserved seats, one dollar, to be had at Forbes & Stronberg's.

Call Number:

Figure 11

BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST



THE DEATH OF **CHIEF TALL BULL.**
AN ACTUAL HISTORIC EVENT AT THE **BATTLE OF SUMMIT SPRINGS,** IN WHICH COL. W.F. CODY ("BUFFALO BILL")
AS CHIEF OF SCOUTS SUCCEEDED IN ENDING THE EARTHLY CAREER OF THAT HOSTILE REDSKIN.

1909 Courier Lithographic Co., Buffalo N.Y.

Figure 12



George Catlin
Buffalo Chase, Sioux Indians, Upper Missouri, 1861/1869
Paul Mellon Collection
1965.16.10

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1898 Enquirer Job Printing Co.
Cincinnati OH

Figure 14



1884 Forbes Lithographic Co Boston MA

Figure 15

BUFFALO BILL'S
WILD WEST

AND CONGRESS OF
ROUGH RIDERS
OF THE WORLD

AMUSEMENTS DES COWBOYS

© 1905 Chaix Paris

Figure 16

• BUFFALO BILLS WILD WEST.



1885 Forbes' Lithographic Co. Boston MA

Figure 17

ANNIE OAKLEY

A SPECIAL FEATURE
WITH

BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST.

THE WILD WEST IN A DIABLO
TRINIDAD, COL. SEPT. 10 1898.

A NEW WAY OF SPLITTING ACROSS
WITH A REVOLVER.

THE PEERLESS WING AND RIFLE SHOT

1901

52

Sayers, Isabelle. *Annie Oakley & Buffalo Bill's Wild West*. New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1981, p. 71.

Figure 18



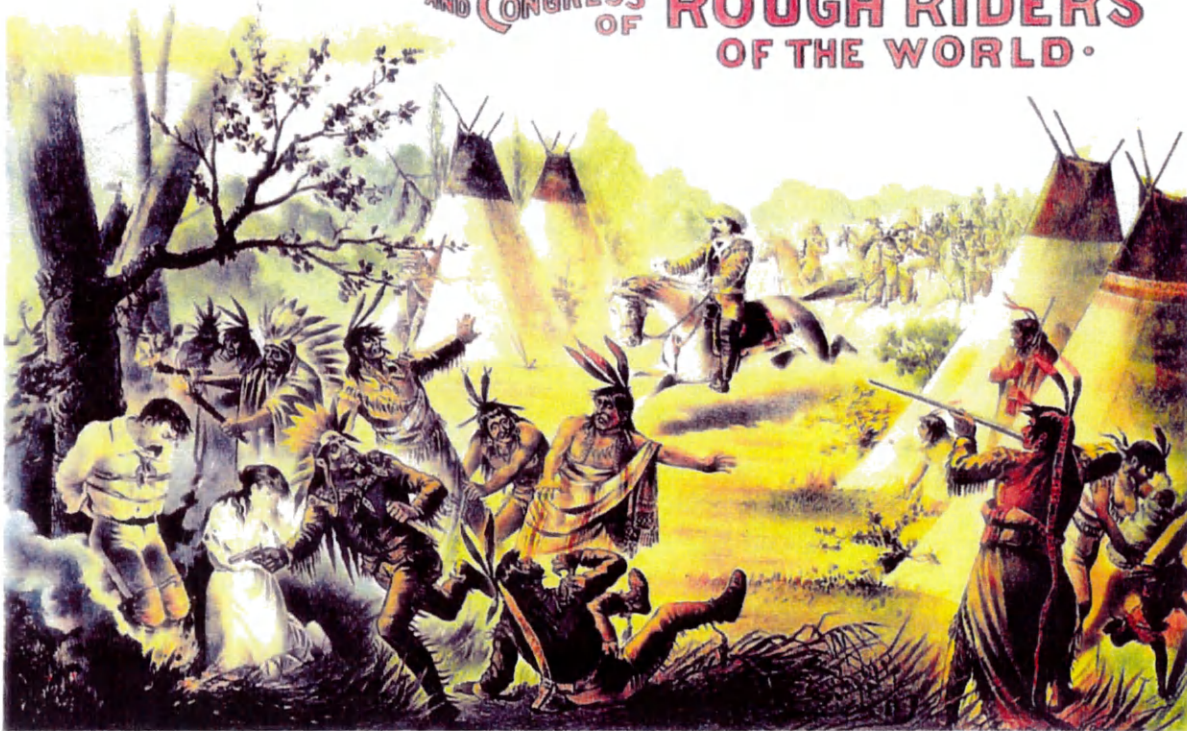
1898 Enquirer Job Printing Co Cincinnati OH

Figure 19



Figure 20

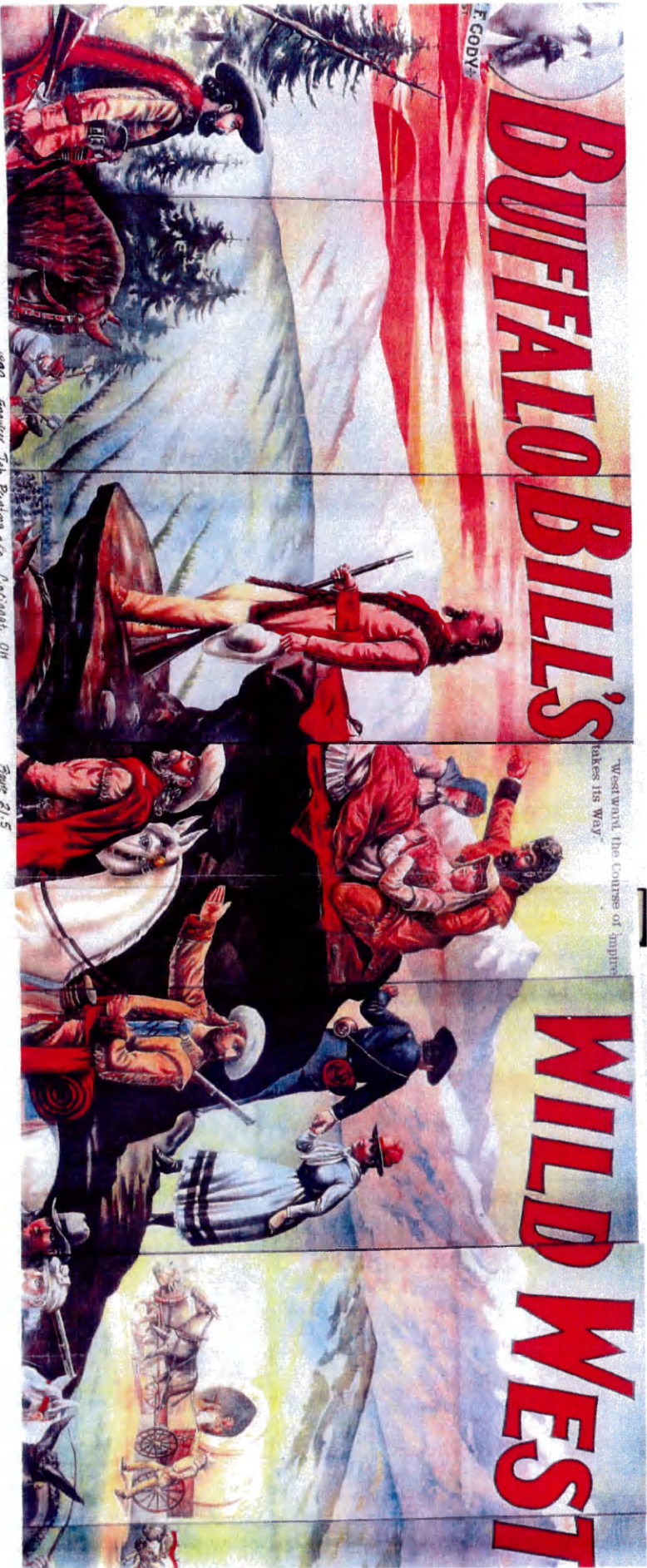
BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST
AND CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS
OF THE WORLD.



BUFFALO BILL TO THE RESCUE.

A. Hoen and Co., Cincinnati, OH, 1898

Figure 21



1898 Enquirer Tab Printing & Co. Cincinnati, OH

Page 21.5



1888 A. Hoen + Co. Baltimore MD

Figure 22



Weiners, Paris, 1905

Figure 23



1907 Courier Lithographic Co., Boston MA

Figure 24

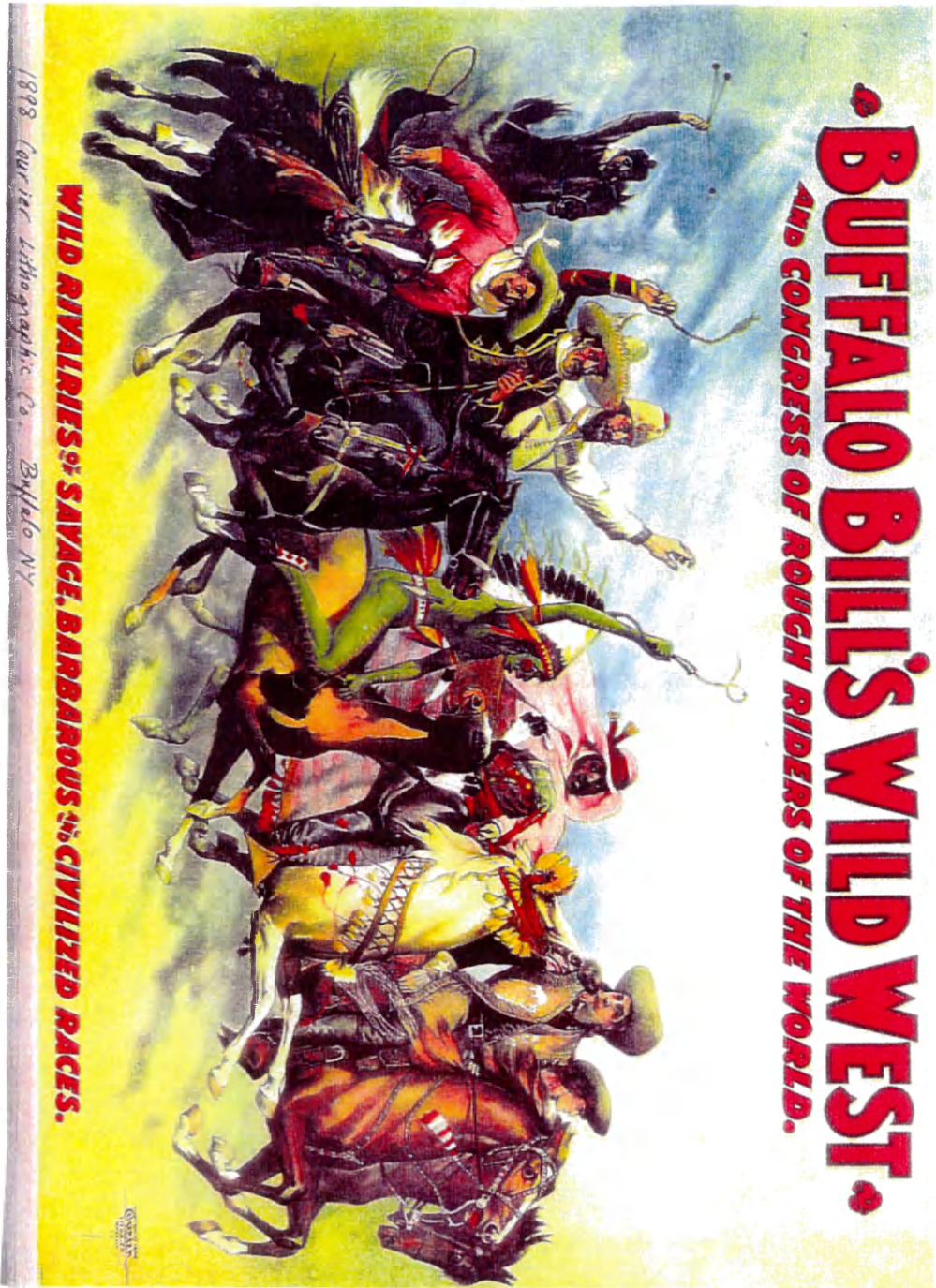


Figure 25



1893 A. Hoen & Co., Baltimore MD

Figure 26



1902 Enquirer Job Printer Co. Cincinnati, OH

Figure 27

COL. W.F. GODY
PRESIDENT

BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST
AND CONGRESS OF
ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD

MR. NATE SALSBURY
VICE PRESIDENT
AND MANAGER

MARKSMANSHIP -
FOOT AND HORSEBACK

1898 Enquirer Job Printing Co. Cincinnati, OH

Figure 28

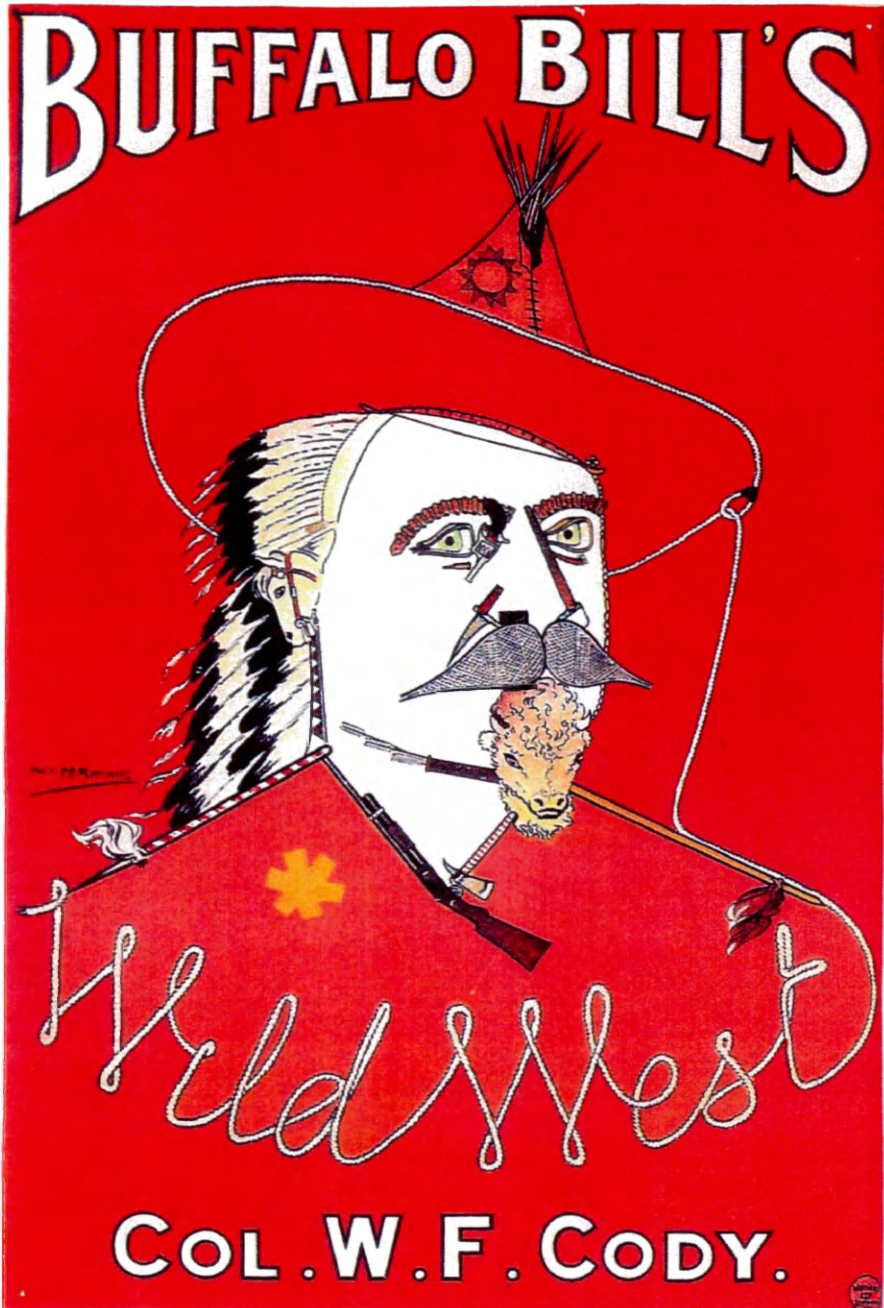
BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST

AND CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD.



"Attack on the Wagon Train" Enquirer Job Printing Co., Cincinnati, OH, 1898

Figure 28.5



1892 Alich P.F. Ritchie Weiners Ltd. London

Figure 29



1910 Russell + Morgan Printing Co.
Cincinnati OH

Figure 30

BUFFALO BILLS' WILD WEST



1905 Chaly, Paris.

Figure 31

BUFFALO BILLS'S WILD WEST
AND CONGRESS OF **ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD.**



A PRAIRIE PIC-NIC.

1894 A. Hoen & Co., Baltimore MD

Figure 32

BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST
AND CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD.

COL. W. F. CODY
BUCKLE UP!
WILL ADDRESS
AT EVERY PERFORMANCE

A CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS, REPRESENTING VARIOUS TRIBES, CHARACTERS AND PECuliarITIES OF THE WILY DUSKY WARRIORS IN SCENES FROM ACTUAL LIFE, GIVING THEIR WEIRD WAR DANCES AND PICTURESQUE STYLE OF HORSEMANSHIP.

1899 Courier Lithographic Co. Buffalo, NY

Figure 33

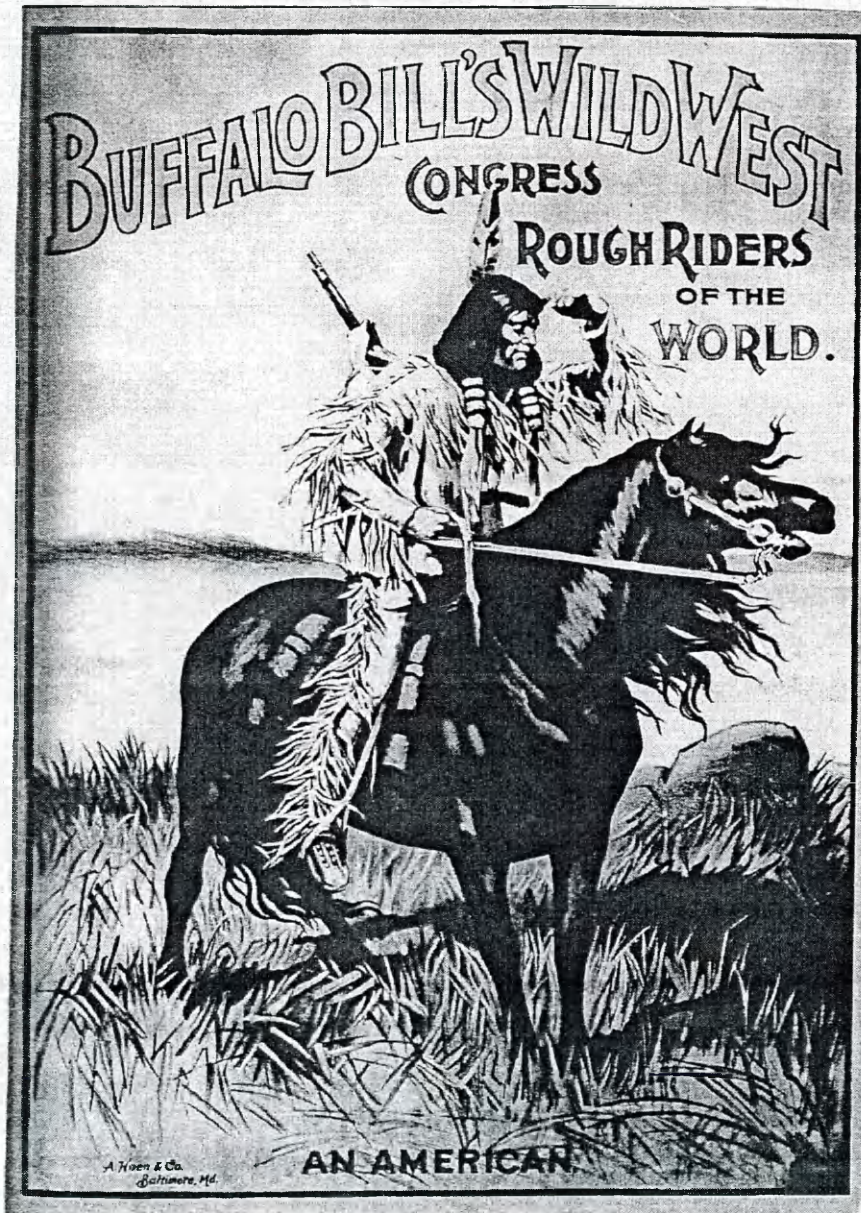


Figure 34



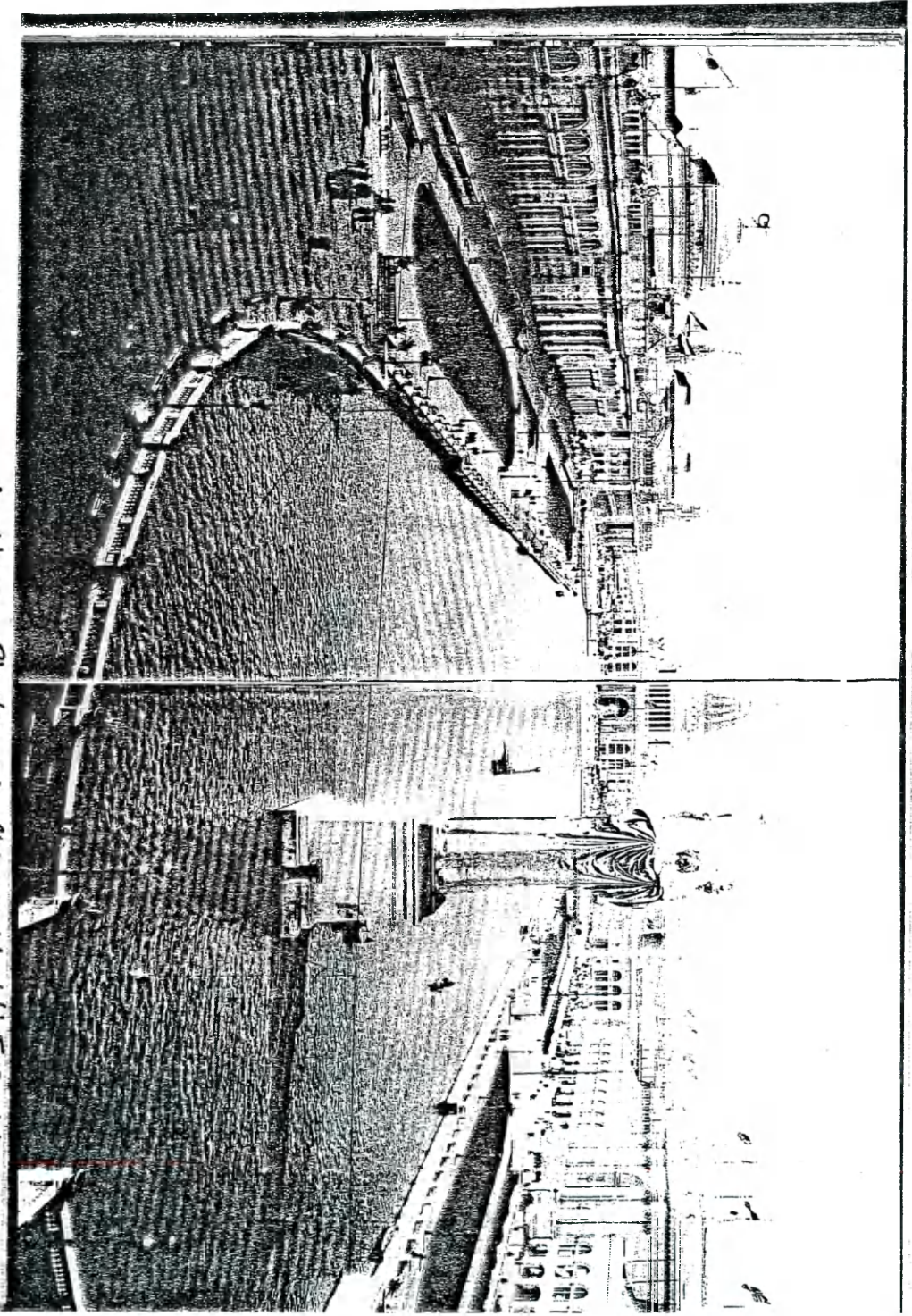
1902 Enquirer Job Printing Co. Cincinnati OH

Figure 35



1894 A. Hoen & Co. Baltimore, MD

Figure 36



Appell dam, Stanley. The Chicago World's Fair of 1893:
A Photographic Record New York:
Dunn Paul, Inc, 1980. Figure 37

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- Fig. 2 *The Cody Calendar* (Cincinnati, 1898) 21x30 in., Circus World Museum, Baraboo, WI. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Fig. 3 *None Genuine Without this Signature* (Battle Creek, circa 1890). Reprinted from Ernestine Miller's The Art of Advertising.
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- Fig. 11 Advertisement for the "Prairie Waif" melodrama at the McClellan Opera House in New York, NY, circa 1873 printed by Forbes and Strombergs. Reprinted from the Internet. <http://gowest.coalliance.org>.
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- Fig. 13 *Buffalo Chase, Sioux Indians, Upper Missouri* created by George Catlin in 1861/1865. Paul Mellon Collection. Reprinted from the National Gallery of Art website <http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/pimage?50036+0+0>.
- Fig. 14 *Annie Oakley and Jonnie Baker* (Cincinnati, 1898) 41.5x82 in., Circus World Museum, Baraboo, WI. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
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- Fig. 19 *Girl Lassoing* (Cincinnati, 1898) 41.5x82 in., Circus World Museum, Baraboo, WI. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Fig. 20 *Dance de Cowboys* (Paris, 1905) 40x30 in., Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Fig. 21 *Buffalo Bill to the Rescue* (Baltimore, 1894) 38.5x28 in., Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, WY. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
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- Fig. 24 *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Pennant* (Boston, 1907) 81 in., Denver Public Library, Western History Department, Denver, CO. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Fig. 25 *Wild Rivalries of Savage, Barbarous and Civilized Races* (New York, 1898) 41.5x28 in., Library of Congress, Washington D.C.. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.

- Fig. 26 *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Baltimore, 1893) 22x28.5 in., Buffalo Bill Historical Society, Cody, WY. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Fig. 27 *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Cincinnati, 1902) 42x28 in., Circus World Museum, Baraboo, WI. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Fig. 28 *Marksmanship Foot and Horseback* (Cincinnati, 1898) 123x83 in., Circus World Museum, Baraboo, WI. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Fig. 28.5 *Attack on the Wagon Train* (Cincinnati, 1898) 81x27 in., Circus World Museum, Baraboo, WI. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
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- Fig. 30 *The Farewell Shot* (Cincinnati, 1910) 28x41 in., Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, WY. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Fig. 31 *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Paris, 1905) 41x30 in., Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Fig. 32 *A Prairie Pic-Nic* (Baltimore, 1894) 41x28 in., Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, WY. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
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- Fig. 34 *Medicine Man* (Cincinnati, 1898) 41.5x82 in., Circus World Museum, Baraboo, WI. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Fig. 35 *Chief Iron Tail* (Cincinnati, 1902) 42x28 in., Circus World Museum, Baraboo, WI. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Fig. 36 *An American* (Baltimore, 1894) 27x39 in., Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, WY. Reprinted from Jack Rennert's 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Fig. 37 *The South East Entrance to the Chicago World's Fair* photo by Charles D. Arnold, 1893. Reprinted from Stanley Appelbaum's The Chicago World's Fair of 1893: A Photographic Record.

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