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Author

Bird, S. Elizabeth

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Buffalo Bill and Sitting Bull: Inventing the Wild West. By Bobby Bridger. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002. 502 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

In spite of its title, Bobby Bridger's book is essentially a "life and times of Buffalo Bill" rather than an analysis of the relationship between William F. Cody and Lakota Chief Sitting Bull. In fact, Sitting Bull is rarely more than a peripheral figure, and we never get a clear sense of him as an individual who actively shaped events. The star of Bridger's show is undoubtedly Cody, as the author documents Buffalo Bill's rise from fifteen-year-old Pony Express rider to perhaps the first bona fide "celebrity" in American history. His internationally renowned Wild West show was a genuine sensation that indelibly defined the Wild West in the imagination of the United States and Europe.

Bridger offers an exhaustive account of Cody's life, beginning with his journey west as a child, through his jobs with the Pony Express, and later as a buffalo hunter and scout for the army, where he developed his reputation as an Indian fighter. The rest of the book is devoted to Cody's career as a showman, first playing himself in fanciful shows on the New York stage, then performing as the master of the Wild West show, building on the already legendary reputation established through the dime novels of Ned Buntline and others. Bridger frequently takes detours into the historical events surrounding Cody's life, placing it in the context of the Civil War aftermath, the western expansion guided by "Manifest Destiny," the ferocious Indian Wars, and the eventual "closure" of the western frontier.

As Bridger points out, Cody's role in shaping American mythology "through his imaginative creation of the concept of the theatrical form of the 'Western'" (7) is widely accepted. He adds that it has also become accepted that Cody built his initial reputation on his role in the irresponsible destruction of the buffalo and, later, on the exploitation of American Indians featured in his show. Bridger argues that this misperception is based on a misunderstanding of Cody's lifelong relationship of mutual respect with Indians: "in assuming Cody was exploiting Native Americans, one also fails to gain a basic knowledge of the fundamentally significant roles Indians played in the creation of an important design in the fabric of American mythology" (9). Essentially, Bridger asserts that Indians participated in the creation of the myth, perhaps as much as Cody himself.

Thus, sometimes buried in the vast amount of historical information contained in this book is a thread that claims a close, virtually mystical relationship between Cody and American Indians, primarily the Lakota. Indeed, Bridger quite successfully suggests that the Lakota respected Cody as a warrior, even as he participated in battles and skirmishes that killed many of them. He frequently refers to Cody's Lakota nickname, Pahaska (Long-Hair), which he says was bestowed as a mark of that respect. In later chapters he shows that Cody saw himself as an advocate for Indian rights. In an era when many saw Indians as either savages or helpless children, Cody paid them well in his show and extended them the same rights as other participants in terms of independence and control over their salaries. Indeed, Bridger offers many specific examples of how Cody stood up for the rights of his Indian workers,

such as ensuring they received the same food when others tried to discriminate against them. Bridger argues that participation in the Wild West show offered Indians a way to live their old lives as horsemen and hunters, retaining their pride rather than languishing on government reservations. In the final analysis, says Bridger, the Wild West's role was to "provide a unique sanctuary for both Native Americans and buffalo" (24), and the show "simply offered those Lakotas of the horse and buffalo culture . . . a final chance to be themselves" (329).

Although some of this argument is persuasive, it is problematic. Bridger is an unapologetic advocate for Cody, and one sometimes feels he protests too much. He acknowledges, for instance, that Cody was a showman who melded reality and fantasy to create a powerful myth. Yet Bridger uncritically accepts Cody's accounts of events, such as the famous duel with Yellow Hand. He writes that Cody was not responsible for the extermination of the buffalo; he killed them as the Lakota did, he mourned their loss, and he worked to preserve them. Yet the book describes how Cody took part in wagers and contests in which he single-handedly killed hundreds of buffalo, and not only for food. It was surely in part because of his reputation that mass buffalo hunts became fashionable; the outcome may not have been what he wanted, but he certainly had a role in bringing it about.

Similarly, I am convinced that Cody did have a mutually respectful relationship with many Lakota people and that he treated his Indian riders well. Yet the Wild West show did not represent Lakota culture in any real sense but rather formalized the stereotype of Plains Indians as whooping, terrifying predators, a construction in dime novels that created the mold from which the Western developed. Cody probably didn't plan that or realize the long-term impacts it would have, but one can hardly accept that those impacts have been benign or positive for Indian people. And while the show enshrined the warrior dimension of Lakota culture, the artistic, religious, moral, and feminine dimensions of the culture were being systematically attacked on the reservations. And finally, while the Lakota did willingly participate, and many did quite well from it, it seems a stretch to suggest that they really had a major role in creating the form of the show and thus in actively shaping the mythology that developed.

I find it especially troubling that Bridger frames his discussion with a notion that somehow the rise of Buffalo Bill was the inevitable consequence of Lakota prophecy. In general, he takes a strangely credulous position on the literal reality of Lakota spiritual powers. He asserts a "documented Lakota ability to see into the future" (16-17); he believes that Black Elk "astrally-projected himself to the Great Plains" while in a coma in Paris" (353) and that chief Roman Nose "possessed magic abilities which prevented his being killed by bullets" (135). Bridger extends this belief to argue that beginning in his youth, Cody was "part of Lakota prophecy" (23) and that ultimately the Lakota understood that he would know what was best for them: "they knew what Cody planned for them would ultimately prove to be for the spiritual good of their people and nation" (11). This argument seems profoundly paternalistic, offering a Cody-centric twist on manifest destiny; surely there

are many who would not accept the idea that the legacy of the Wild West show and its descendants was ultimately “best” for Indian peoples.

However, it is perhaps unfair to apply traditional scholarly standards to a work that is more akin to popular history. Bridger is personally rooted in the era through his descent from frontiersman Jim Bridger, and he is rightly famous for his performances as a musician and chronicler of the American West through his one-man show *A Ballad of the West* trilogy. He clearly has wide knowledge of and love for his subject, but he is not a historian. Rather, he is a compiler of known information. He relies entirely on secondary sources, quoting extensively from Cody’s own autobiography, as well as from the work of Don Russell and Stanley Vestal. Research from primary sources would have enlivened the work considerably; for instance, he discusses the importance of dime novels in developing the Buffalo Bill myth but quotes from none directly.

Apart from this, and at the risk of sounding pedantic, I found the book marred by consistently poor copyediting, with frequent misuse of words—*effect* for *affect* (several times), havoc being “reeked” (78), *eminent* for *imminent* (114), a chapter called “Trodding the Boards,” and so on. The book is very long and could have been sharpened by judicious editing of lengthy and labored sentences.

In the end this book, while clearly a labor of love and a useful compilation for anyone unfamiliar with its subject, adds little to our knowledge of Buffalo Bill. And its most significant original contribution—consideration of the role of the Lakota in co-creating the myth of the West—is deeply problematic. The mythology of the Wild West certainly transformed the Plains Indians into unique American icons, but that iconic status has arguably served the needs of white culture far more than the cultures of Indians themselves.

S. Elizabeth Bird

University of South Florida

Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750–1830. By Greg O’Brien. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. 160 pages. \$45.00 cloth.

Greg O’Brien’s *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750–1830* presents an extremely valuable and long overdue look at Choctaw notions of power and authority by examining the changing roles of power and culture and the coincident involvement with Euro-Americans in the Choctaw homeland in the eastern United States. This book presents the stories of Taboca and Franchimastabe, two prominent, late-eighteenth-/early-nineteenth-century Choctaw chiefs who represented two types of power and influence: traditional, spiritual power and power derived from trade ties with Euro-Americans in and around Choctaw lands. Tracing the lives of these two leaders, O’Brien analyzes the sources of power in the context of cultural transition from a traditional society to one increasingly involved with Euro-American politics and markets. He efficiently combines many primary sources to explain the