

2013

Universiteit Utrecht American  
Studies

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# **[Buffalo Bill and Dutch Understanding about the American West between: 1880-1940]**

To what extent did the Buffalo Bill-legend influence Dutch  
understanding of the American West'

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## Introduction

William Frederick Cody, better known as Buffalo Bill, is one of the most well-known figures in American history. The former bison hunter was famous for his heroic adventures and charismatic personality. His phrases “about balky mules, riders who killed three thousand buffalos, horses who ate men and his Indian exploits” were adopted everywhere.<sup>1</sup> He even used the term ‘rough riders’ before Teddy Roosevelt did.<sup>2</sup> However, Cody was not only known for his personality. He was also an entertainer and his Wild-West shows toured around the United States and Europe. Romanticized events and characters of the Old West attracted a large number of people. As a result, Cody and his shows became a symbol for the ‘Wild West’.

The Buffalo Bill Historical Centre (BBHC) in Cody Wyoming researches this subject. Many books and articles have been written on Cody’s influence on American culture. This resulted in fascinating insights. For example, Jay S. Kasson asserted that he did not only represent “a great entertainment form” but also “a link between national identity and popular culture”.<sup>3</sup> This means that the Wild West show should not be understood as just a show. It also implicates the dissemination of a certain image about America’s identity. This explains why Buffalo Bill is such a popular topic among American authors.

However, Cody’s influence on European perceptions is less well researched. This is an interesting observation because it is a well-known fact that Buffalo Bill made three tours on the Continent. The BBHC has therefore started an international research project to solve this problem. The academic importance of this research should not be underestimated. W.T. Stead already wrote in his book *The Americanization of the World* (1902) “how the rest of the world would be inevitably swamped by American products and American cultural values”.<sup>4</sup> This prognosis clearly realized when looking back in history. Coca-Cola, Hollywood, semantic influences and of course the ‘Wild West’-cult can all be found in European culture. Therefore, the Buffalo Bill’s popular shows may have changed European perceptions about America to great extent. This suggestion is strengthened when focusing for example on the Mussolini Propaganda. Italian fascists claimed that Cody originated from Italian condottieri. They were not the only ones who wrote about his influence. Don Russell describes in his book ‘the lives and legends of Buffalo Bill’ how the English started to see “the American West as one of the romantic and adventurous areas of the world” after the spectacular shows “invaded England in 1887”.<sup>5</sup> As a result of these observations, the influence of the ‘Buffalo Bill-legend’ on Europe should be researched in greater detail because it could tell something about how Europeans visualized the American West.

This thesis will not address whole of Europe but only the Netherlands despite the fact that Cody never visited this country. Regardless, Buffalo Bill was still very popular among the Dutch. A databank for newspapers shows that his name can be found in thousands of documents. This is a fact that should not be underestimated. The replacement value of journalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>1</sup> Haldeen Braddy, “Buffalo Bill and the Wild West,” *Western Folklore* 15, no.2 (1956): 298.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>3</sup> Jay S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 8.

<sup>4</sup> William T Stead, *The Americanization of the World* (New York: H. Markley, 1902), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 324.

is mentioned by Katherine White in her essay *Through Their Eyes: Buffalo Bill's Wild West as a Drawing Table for American Identity* wherein she explains:

*Rather, the show's vibrant and ritualistic engagement, a current awareness of historical change, and a slew of journalistic interpretations supplied tools to spectators and readers so that they could experiment in constructing diverse, but sometimes converging, ideas of what was "purely and distinctly American."<sup>6</sup>*

In other words, newspapers symbolized and influenced a broader popular culture where Buffalo Bill became part of. Several of these documents will therefore be analyzed for the way Cody's Wild West was interpreted in the Netherlands. This research will be strengthened by also focusing on two of its most important cultural traits: 'Native Americans' and 'weapons'. These pillars of the American West are chosen because they are essential for 'the Myth of the Frontier' that Cody wished to spread with his show. Richard Slotkin gives in his book *Gunfighter Nation* the following meaning to that underlying narrative: "the conquest [by violence] of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans .... have been the means to our achievement of a national identity.... and a phenomenally dynamic and 'progressive' civilization".<sup>7</sup> The results of this research will answer the central question to what extent the Buffalo Bill-legend influenced Dutch understanding on the American West.

This underlying narrative of the Wild West show should be discussed in more detail because it forms the academic backbone of this thesis. The above mentioned explanation of Cody's Wild West by Slotkin is not unquestioned and the use of it should be substantiated. For example, White argues that the intentions and meanings of the 'Buffalo Bill-legend' should not be limited to a single understanding.<sup>8</sup> She asserts that it is important to hold on to a multi-interpretable definition of 'the legend'. It visualized for some people 'Turner's frontier', or "civilization versus savagery", while others saw the shows as representing "the best parts of wilderness".<sup>9</sup> She strengthens her argument by taking examples from the show. At one point, Cody depicted himself with the scalp of the 'Yellow Hair' as revenge for general Custer, who was killed by Sioux and Cheyenne warriors at Little Big Horn, while in other shows he tried to romanticize and praise the lifestyle of Native Americans.<sup>10</sup> In other words, these variations in the show can explain variations in the understanding of 'the American West'.

Regardless, most authors do focus on a single message constructed by Cody. Kasson argues in his book *Buffalo's Bill Wild West*, how "Buffalo Bill had brilliantly propounded the thesis that American identity was founded on the Western experience: triumphant conquest of wildness through virtue, skill, and firepower".<sup>11</sup> Variations in the show exist but the general theme never changed. Cody's cowboys did not stop defeating hostile Native Americans, dramatic events of America's history were still shown, and Western civilization was praised in almost every scene. The spectacle was "so

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<sup>6</sup> Katherine White, "Through Their Eyes: Buffalo Bill's Wild West as a Drawing Table for American Identity," *Constructing the Past* 7, no. 1 (2005): 36-37.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's*, 265.

gripping.... that it became part of the spectator's own experience".<sup>12</sup> Kasson substantiates his point by looking at Cody's heritage in American culture. Similar themes kept emerging years after his death. The power of the show was so powerful that the underlying narrative of the show "formed American values for many years".<sup>13</sup> "The memory of the Wild West was transformed into an impression of a buffalo hunt on the plains."<sup>14</sup> As a result, the 'Myth of the Frontier' is an essential part of Buffalo Bill's Wild West.

This explains the choice for a single image of Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West'. However, the dissemination of a certain image is something completely different than how it is interpreted. Culturally depended variations should be considered certainly when comparing America with Europe. In their book *Buffalo Bill in Bologna*, Robert Rydell and Rob Kroes agree with Kasson that Cody wished to spread a clear representation of the American West but at the same time they argue that Buffalo Bill's influence in Europe should not be interpreted in the same way as in America. "We need to take a longer view" and "to ask ourselves to what extent the Wild West intersected with ideas about the American West that had already been formed by earlier carriers of imagery".<sup>15</sup> For example Germans were raised in a time of nation-building and romanticism with the stories of Karl May. This background may have raised their interest in the Wild West show. They compared Native Americans with Winnetou and described them as symbol of "peoples threatened by the onwards march of civilization".<sup>16</sup> Several newspapers dramatically presented the Native Americans, who travelled along with Buffalo Bill, as "a dying race".<sup>17</sup>

In other words, Cody formed a single image of the American West but it was not always interpreted in the same way. Therefore, a combination of the above mentioned approaches will be used within this thesis. First, a single image of the American West did exist. It was Cody's intention to present a clear story about the American West and despite different interpretations they were needed to substantiate a bigger story. And second, it is argued that the interpretations on Buffalo Bill's Wild West varied. It is a multidimensional concept depending on context and knowledge of the viewer. The different understandings of the 'Buffalo Bill-legend' "emphasize the processes of creating cultural hybrids" whereby several interpretations can coexist.<sup>18</sup> It would therefore be interesting to analyze how the Dutch have seen the Wild West show.

The first chapter of this thesis will focus on the academic discussion surrounding this topic. What is the 'Buffalo Bill legend' and how did it influence the understanding of the American West within the United States and Europe? The multidimensional characters of the legend itself and national identity need to be clearly understood. The available information and arguments will be distilled from the books and academic articles that have been published over time. The next three chapters will focus on 'Buffalo Bill's Wild West' in Dutch public media between 1880 and 1940. Each chapter will discuss a different period. The first will focus on 1880 – 1900 when Cody made his first two European tours.

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<sup>12</sup> Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's*, 265-266.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, 87.

<sup>15</sup> Rob Kroes and Robert W. Rydell, *Buffalo Bill In Bologna: The Americanization Of The World* (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 2005), 111.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, 112.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, 113.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, 6.

The second will focus on 1900-1917, when Buffalo Bill made his longest tour in Europe and the years before his death. And the third will focus on 1918-1940, the period after his death.

The idea behind the research is to analyze how and if this legend influenced the understanding of the American West and two of its most important cultural traits; Native Americans and violence. Dutch newspapers, which can be found in online archives, will be explored. The emphasis is not only on what is exactly written about these different aspects but also on the existence of certain patterns and symbols. A new computer program called Texcaular, which is developed by researchers of the University Utrecht and is still in its beta-phase, is used to do that. One of its goals is looking for regular words or definitions that may suggest the appearance of a certain trend. As a consequence, two different stories will emerge; one on what is written about Buffalo Bill within Dutch popular culture and a second on what is written about the American West including two of its most important cultural traits.

These results, which should be interpreted as representative for Dutch understanding, will be compared to answer the main question. If there is overlap between both stories, and if they change over time in a similar way, then it is likely that the Buffalo Bill-legend has influenced the understanding of the American West in the Netherlands.

## Chapter 1 Academic Discussion

This chapter will discuss several academic studies about Buffalo Bill's Wild West. The first part offers a brief historical introduction about the life and times of William Cody in order to distinguish why it is relevant to study the cult around him. The second part discusses how Buffalo Bill represented the Western expansion and constructed images of a mythical Wild West that became part of American mass culture. The third and final part of this chapter deals with the question how Cody influenced his audiences and their understanding of the American West. This context must not be underestimated. For example Rydell and Kroes argue that "Cody was a forerunner of 'America's mass culture around the globe' and contributed to the understanding of its national identity."<sup>19</sup> It is therefore important to present the big picture that will serve as an academic guide throughout the rest of this thesis.

### Historical context

Buffalo Bills' Wild West show and its influence around the world cannot be understood without explaining its historical background. Who was William Cody and how can he be interpreted? It is necessary to deal with this context to properly understand the relation between Cody's representation of the American West and the widespread dissemination of this image.

The person behind the legend is connected to various heroic stories. These are a mix of reality and myths. His sister for example claimed that he originated from Irish kings.<sup>20</sup> The purpose of this myth-building was to enlarge his status as legend. This does not mean that it was all invented. William Cody could claim some actual experience on the frontier. However, many exaggerations are traceable in the stories that were told about him.

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<sup>19</sup> Rob Kroes and Robert W. Rydell, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization Of The World* (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 2005), 12.

<sup>20</sup> Maaïke Vanden Berghe, "De invloed van Buffalo Bill op de beeldvorming van de indianen" (PhD diss., Ghent University, 2008).

Nonetheless, 'the real experience' started when he was a child and forced to provide for his family. He searched for gold, he hunted for fur, joined the cavalry during the Civil War where he saw action and he worked for the famous pony express. His actual fame starts after the Civil War when he joined a firm called 'Goddard Brothers'. This firm provided the US army with buffalo meat; a quite dangerous job because buffalos were also important for the Native Americans. This was the moment where Cody started to distinguish himself. He was not only seen as an experienced frontiersman but also as "the reincarnation of heroism in the battle against Native American". Railroad workers composed the following song about him:

*Buffalo Bill, Buffalo Bill  
Never missed and never will  
Always aims and shoots to kill  
And the company pays his buffalo bill.*<sup>21</sup>

Cody used this popularity to become the showman he is now known for. For example, he gained his nickname 'Buffalo Bill' after he was challenged by another 'frontiersman' to shoot the most buffalos. The match was made into a big show where Cody eventually defeated his opponent.<sup>22</sup> He also toured around the prairie with rich Americans who wanted to experience the life on the frontier. Cody dressed himself up, told about all his adventures, and hired Native Americans for some extra excitement. In other words, he was already 'a showman' before he even started with his Wild West show.

Cody's fame proliferated around the whole country and he got into contact with Ned Buntline, a pseudonym for Edward Zane Carroll Judson, Sr.<sup>23</sup> This book publisher, author and journalist cooperated with Cody by writing down his experiences and heroic adventures in so-called dime novels. He was presented as a heroic cowboy surrounded by the wildness of the frontier. These stories are the first example of Buffalo Bill's Wild West presented as popular culture. The exaggerated novels were a huge success and people dreamed about meeting Buffalo Bill. As a result, stage plays were organized in big cities from 1872 where Cody sometimes even showed up to act as himself. The reactions of the audience when this happened can be generalized as 'crazy':

*Between the acts the audience learned that the real Buffalo Bill was in the theatre, a spotlight was turned on him, and everybody in the house cheered, stamped and hollered. At the end the crowd refused to leave if Cody wouldn't make a speech.*<sup>24</sup>

The success of the plays convinced Cody to organize a new form of entertainment wherein he wanted to imitate the curiosities of the Wild West. Cody accomplished this by creating a sort of circus in 1882. He improved the quality by using actual Native Americans, cowboys and wild animals and by reenacting important historical events of the frontier. Furthermore, Buffalo Bill asked showbiz organizer Nate Salisbury and publicity man John Burke to work on the commercial and professional aspects of the shows. This was a successful idea. They even succeeded in contracting Chief Sitting Bull, famous for his victory at the Little Big Horn and despite the fact that he stayed with the 'circus'

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<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth J. Leonard and Julia C. Goodman, *Buffalo Bill, King of the Old West: Biography of William F. Cody, Pony Express Rider, Buffalo Hunter, Plains Scout & Guide, Master Showman* (New York: Library Publishers, 1955), 150.

<sup>22</sup> Vanden Berghe, "De invloed."

<sup>23</sup> Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 149.

<sup>24</sup> Leonard and Goodman, *Master Showman*, 212.

for a short period, he popularized the Wild West show.<sup>25</sup> The actors of the show were not only showmen. Cody, other cowboys, and the Native Americans often left the group to join a battle somewhere on the frontier. 'The master showman' attempted to exploit this by stating that his Wild West show was not just an act but an accurate representation of American history.<sup>26</sup>

Buffalo Bill's success should not be underestimated. 'The Wild West show' appeared on posters and advertisements in almost every city, his performances dominated the local newspapers, and the earlier mentioned dime novels were still sold in large numbers around the whole country.<sup>27</sup> The show did not only tour around the United States but also traveled three times to Europe. It was such a success that Cody received the honor to perform in front of some very important Europeans. Queen Victoria of Great Britain, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, and the Pope all have visited his show. Also many other Europeans were impressed by the show. The Prussian army for example, tried to learn how Cody transported his horses. Thousands of people from Spain to Belgium gathered around his camp of tents in the hope of seeing real Native Americans.

Nonetheless, the popularity of the shows diminished after his final tour in Europe around 1909.<sup>28</sup> He had one last success with another entertainer called Pawnee Bill but this was short-lived. This did not mean that Buffalo Bill's image of the Wild West was over. Numerous authors still wrote about one of the most famous symbols of the American West. Cody himself gave his last performance in 1916 and died in January 1917, just a few months later.

In short, Buffalo Bill should be understood as an important and influential showman. His Wild West show became extremely successful and professional over the years. The mixture of the Buffalo Bill legend with stories of the frontier attracted numerous visitors from all classes. Some newspapers stated that he brought the Wild West to life.<sup>29</sup> His success can therefore be compared to the success of Hollywood in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. This context of early mass culture clarifies why it is so important to discuss the influence of Buffalo Bill. The following sections of this chapter will analyze the important themes within Cody's Wild West and how it influenced understanding about the American West around the world.

### **Buffalo Bill's Wild West**

This section focuses on how Buffalo Bill constructed a specific narrative about the American West. His performance should be understood as a collection of recognizable symbols.<sup>30</sup> The Wild West as presented by Buffalo Bill lived on for almost 45 years with many important changes and features. This construction results in different interpretations but with more or less general patterns. The various aspects of the show that can be discussed are therefore almost uncountable. However, two main pillars that are central for the show can be distinguished and will be discussed below.

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<sup>25</sup> Vanden Berghe, "De invloed."

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American Culture*, ed. R. White, P. N. Limerick et al. (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 254.

## Violence

The first symbolic pillar is the use of guns and violence in the Wild West show. It is important to understand that these concepts are as multidimensional and diverse as the show itself is. Katherine White argues that the use of violence and guns was sometimes used for pure entertainment while it made the American West into a place of adventure at other moments.<sup>31</sup> Annie Oakley, her husband Frank Butler, and Gabriel Dumont illustrate this reasoning. Their sharpshooting acts intrigued many visitors but also different stories can be distinguished besides entertainment. This was certainly the case for Oakley. The shows were performed in an era where women were not expected to use weapons. Oakley represented with other female actors a different kind of woman. Therefore, Kroes and Rydell write that “the female performers in the wild west shows revealed the ability of performers to edit—if not rewrite—cultural scripts and to test the limits of Victorian values.”<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, it can be said that the sharpshooters represented the marksmanship and qualities that were needed to survive on the frontier. The Wild West was romanticized into an adventurous place with extraordinary features. This last characteristic was broadened by the reenactment of countless historic events; “Hunters chased Buffalo, Indians attacked the Deadwood stage, and the Pony Express once again delivered the mail to isolated frontier outposts”.<sup>33</sup> Some came to see the American West as a dangerous place where violence happened each day. The men and women on the frontier were almost obliged to weapon themselves for protection. “The Wild West was the place where only the fittest could survive.”<sup>34</sup> Also the relating ‘heroic’ theme was a common feature. The frontiersmen could not be seen apart from their dangerous adventures where violence was a necessity. Buffalo Bills renaming of the show in “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Congress of Rough Riders” clearly substantiates this reasoning.<sup>35</sup> The brave ‘frontiersmen’ did all what was possible to stop the spread of barbarism and wildness. In other words, guns and violence represented several stories and identities of the American West.

However, authors such as Jay Kesson and Richard Slotkin argue that all variations can be unified in a single story. The historian Frederick Jackson Turner at the 19<sup>th</sup> century described an American frontier that was constructed and spread by the axe.<sup>36</sup> Buffalo Bill did the same thing but with guns.<sup>37</sup> This happened in a period when many Americans started to rethink the identity of the young republic. The United States was expanding fast in size and power after the Civil War. As a result, the moving frontier with its famous features symbolized America’s greatness.<sup>38</sup> The Wild West with its guns and violence became an important part of a national identity. Slotkin calls this “the usefulness of regenerative violence to popular and political culture”.<sup>39</sup> Its influence cannot be underestimated.

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<sup>31</sup> Katherine White, “Through Their Eyes: Buffalo Bill’s Wild West as a Drawing Table for American Identity,” *Constructing the Past* 7, no. 1 (2005): 37.

<sup>32</sup> Kroes and Rydell, *In Bologna*, 32-33.

<sup>33</sup> Robert V. Hine and John M. Faragher, *The American West: A new interpretive history* (Yale: Yale University, 2000), 502.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 54.

<sup>36</sup> White, “Frederick Turner,” 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>38</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894), 199-227.

<sup>39</sup> Christopher Sharrett, “Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America,” *Film Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1993): 51.

An interesting development within this construct implies the transformation of conquerors into victims.<sup>40</sup> The reenactment of the Little Big Horn, the Alamo, and many other violent clashes showed the harsh battles frontiersmen faced on the American West. White men and women were forced by these circumstances to risk their lives for the nation. This image was symbolized by Buffalo Bill himself who defended from 1885 till 1907 each show a settler and his family who were attacked by Native Americans. This inevitable development in the form of heroic sacrifices for Western civilization represents the almost divine character of the American West, or as Kroes and Rydell argue:

*The bullet is a kind of pioneer of civilization. Although its mission is often deadly, it is useful and necessary. Without the bullet, America would not be a great, free, united, and powerful country.*<sup>41</sup>

### *Native Americans*

The second important aspect of the show was the use of Native Americans. A similar discussion appears here as well. White shows in her work the different ways Native Americans were represented. She distinguishes between two forms of representation. The first focuses on the violent scenes where Native Americans were represented as savage and aggressive. Famous historical events, such as the killing of General Custer, made huge impact in American society. The reenactments had a similar goal.<sup>42</sup> Kasson gives an overview of the countless posters and advertisements that were scattered around America and Europe.<sup>43</sup> They depicted Native Americans as 'horrifying' and continuously attacking vulnerable settlers. The opposite development, which became important in a latter phase of the shows, was the making of these people into objects of interest. Buffalo Bill had used many real and famous 'Native Americans' over the years. Seeing 'Cherokee' and 'Sioux' trial members 'at work' and their 'daily lives' fascinated countless visitors who normally only read about them in newspapers or other sources.<sup>44</sup> This 'exotic' element became especially important in Europe where most people had rarely heard of them not to mention seeing them.<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, authors such as Slotkin argue that also the use of Native Americans substantiates the idea of a single underlying story. They were constantly represented as barbarous enemies of American civilization. Their one goal in the show was to attack the white men.<sup>46</sup> This seems to contradict the development of the show itself. Kasson describes how Native Americans were transformed from vicious barbarians into interesting exotic objects.<sup>47</sup> This is a result of a historical context where the wars against Native Americans had ended at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They did not represent a real threat anymore and were even seen as Americans at a certain point.

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<sup>40</sup> White, "Frederick Turner," 11.

<sup>41</sup> Kroes and Rydell, *In Bologna*, 114.

<sup>42</sup> White, "Drawing Table," 35.

<sup>43</sup> Jay S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 58-59.

<sup>44</sup> White, "Drawing Table," 40.

<sup>45</sup> Kroes and Rydell, *In Bologna*, 141.

<sup>46</sup> White, "Frederick Turner," 3.

<sup>47</sup> Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's*, 265-273.

'The White City' however, a racist symbol for America's greatness and civilization, still needed a wild forerunner and a horrifying opponent.<sup>48</sup> This was connected to the powerful "Myth of the Frontier" where Native Americans would always fight against the white men. As a consequence, old stereotypes were still present in both the show and American society. Their traditional lifestyle was under constant threat for example by the American government who tried to re-educate and Americanize them. Their presence could only be accepted after their total defeat. One of the most symbolic events was the dramatization of Custer's death and Buffalo Bill's scalping of Yellow Hair. This young Cherokee warrior was said to be responsible for the death of General Custer who felt at the Little Big Horn. The use of the scene was not only revenge but it also visualized how the white man conquered the barbarian. Slotkin states that "he [Buffalo Bill] was the man who ultimately defeated them [Native Americans]"<sup>49</sup>.

### *The American West*

These two aspects underpin the constructed identity of the American West. The question remains if there is only one story to tell or if there are more. White focuses on the latter and distinguishes many different overarching stories for all elements.<sup>50</sup> There does not need to be one conclusion. The American West can be understood as a historical place, it can be understood as a adventurous place, or it can be explained as a place for understanding America's identity.

However, other authors such as Kasson and Slotkin focus on the idea that all variations eventually refer to a single story for the Wild West. Buffalo Bill constructed a grand narrative where the American West represented America's greatness. Slotkin's main argument is that the frontier, with its violence and battles, was supposed to symbolize the story behind America's identity, an idea of "progress, renewal, and infinite possibility".<sup>51</sup> There are many parallels with Frederick Jackson Turner's 'Frontier Thesis' of 1893. The westward moving frontier, or the American West, with its romanticized identity of heroics and adventure, becomes the foundation of America's expanding civilization.<sup>52</sup> It are the men and women of the Wild West who are responsible for the greatness of the nation. This recurring theme of the show is very clear and powerful despite the fact that the show was interpreted in several ways. The underlying story of Buffalo Bill's Wild West can therefore be generalized into the story of American expansion, defeated Native Americans, romanticized gun battles, the idealization of Western civilization or in short: the 'Myth of the Frontier'.<sup>53</sup>

### **The influence of Buffalo Bill**

The discussion above offers the story behind Buffalo Bills' Wild West. This is important to mention because the next section will analyze how this show has influenced the perception of Americans and Europeans. Buffalo Bills' Wild West represented the constructed idea of America's civilization but it must at the same time be seen as a collection of identities and stories. As a result, visitors formed various understandings of the American West. This does not mean that similar patterns cannot be distinguished within the different interpretations. Audiences from Germany to London have romanticized the Wild West as a place of adventure and worshipped its exotic features. However, it

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<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, 162.

<sup>49</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 75.

<sup>50</sup> White, "Drawing Table," 35-50.

<sup>51</sup> Sharrett, "Twentieth-Century America," 51.

<sup>52</sup> Christian Feest, *Indians And Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays* (Aachen: Alano Verdag, 1987), 403-414.

<sup>53</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 254.

is too easy to state that all nations just imitated each other. This would also not account for the many variations. Only seeing the American West as a flexible and multidimensional concept can explain the differences between countries in understanding the frontier.<sup>54</sup>

The mentioning of a grand narrative behind the show, such as Kasson and Slotkin have done, does not explain how people have interpreted it. Regardless, many authors easily presume that it was approximately the same everywhere. Even the European context generated many of the same patterns in their opinion. Don Russell argues for example how the shows “contributed to a large degree to the traditional view in England of the American West as one of the romantic and adventurous areas of the world”.<sup>55</sup> Kasson goes even further by stating that “the Wild West displayed American military and cultural adventurism in a way that seemed familiar to Europeans at the high tide of imperialism. It was another example of the wild world of exotic others brought under the control of white, civilized authority. No wonder the Wild West became synonymous with America for millions people at home and abroad”, Kasson concludes.<sup>56</sup>

This is not strange because he was worshipped and idolized wherever he came. Cody himself was fully aware of his influence and did nothing to stop it. On the contrary, he started to make use of it by stating that his Wild West show represented reality. As one of his posters mentions: “It is not a show in any sense of the word, but it is a series of original, genuine and instructive objective lessons in which the participants repeat the heroic parts they have played in actual life upon the plains, in the wilderness, mountain fastness and in the dread and dangerous scenes of savage and cruel warfare.”<sup>57</sup> This does not mean that people took every aspect of the show for granted. Many knew, as Kasson asserts, that it was an idealized representation but they also thought that the basic symbols were realistic.<sup>58</sup> Cody succeeded in doing this by not only claiming to represent a realistic version of America’s history but also by showing it. He used realistic backgrounds, historic events, traditional Native American life, and wild animals. He adapted the show many times till it reached perfection. The power of his performances was that he brought the Wild West to life. White claims: “Where books, paintings, and some other shows depicting Indians offered only words, pictures, or white actors, Buffalo Bill presented actual Indians, who now inhabited their own representations.”<sup>59</sup>

In other words, the show was experienced as reality by many visitors. Authors as Kasson and Russell easily conclude that the visitors, no matter where they came from, also copied the underlying story. This generalization of the influence of Cody is certainly clear when focusing on their accounts of the upper classes. Buffalo Bill was the man who brought Great-Britain and the United States closer together by impressing queen Victoria so much that she honored the American flag, he was the man who brought the Wild West to the Pope at the Vatican, and he was the man who had the privilege to take Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich of Russia, the son of the Russian Emperor Alexander II, on a hunting trip. This widespread elation around the Atlantic has persuaded many authors to think that Buffalo Bill successfully implanted constructed images of the Wild West in the heads of his visitors.

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<sup>54</sup> Kroes and Rydell, *In Bologna*, 11-12.

<sup>55</sup> Russell, *The Legends*, 324.

<sup>56</sup> Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's*, 65-66.

<sup>57</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 82

<sup>58</sup> Lester G. Moses, “Buffalo Bill's Wild West,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001): 1091.

<sup>59</sup> White, “Frederick Turner,” 16.

“Understanding the Wild West as a site of memory helps to explain its powerful attraction for a variety of spectators and its long-lasting survival as a cultural legend.”<sup>60</sup>

The main problem of this reasoning however, is the lack of cultural representativeness. This is certainly the case when comparing America with Europe. It seems almost impossible to think that a multidimensional Wild West, even with a single underlying narrative, also resulted into one single interpretation. The cultural hybrids of mass culture and national identity must be mentioned as well.<sup>61</sup> Feest shows that European interpretations did not only differ from the American context but that there were also unique national interpretations.<sup>62</sup> In other words, authors who have generalized Buffalo Bill’s influence in the world have focused too much on similar patterns.

Interesting examples to substantiate this argument are American interpretations of Native Americans. The above mentioned authors would be satisfied with saying that the visitors of Buffalo Bill started to see them as an exotic and savage people, American, but nonetheless defeated and nothing more than an object of interest. Despite the fact that some news articles do seem to point in that way, the reality is much more varied. For example, “an article in the Columbus Press-Post called the Indian performers “stalwart fellows with no signs of degeneracy, but with clean, straight, and muscular limbs, lithe as willows and supple as whips”.<sup>63</sup> Another newspaper compared them to the heroic figures of Hercules and Atlas. This was not only some interest in an exotic counterpart but pure adoration.

More variations can be found in Europe. For example, the Germans did see the Native Americans as exotic objects but compared their situation to a global increase of materialism and the decline of traditional virtue and values.<sup>64</sup> They were therefore respected and idolized. In Italy on the other hand, denigrating and racist comments dominated the newspapers.<sup>65</sup> These variations do not mean that the conclusions of authors as Kasson and Slotkin are incorrect. General patterns of the show can be found within these countries. However, it means that there are also patterns that are unique for each nation.

Authors as White state that Buffalo Bill did create certain focal points but left it to the visitors to make something out of it.<sup>66</sup> Rydell and Kroes, who have presented the multi-interpretable identity of the Wild West, show that there is not one story to tell but there are several: “Europe was never just one homogeneous setting for the reception of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show as an accomplished form of American mass culture. Each European country had at the time its own specific history in fictionalizing the American West.”<sup>67</sup> They assert that there are two important questions that need to be asked before concluding how the Wild West shows may have changed the perception of a nation. The first deals with the question “what Europeans choose to read in what they saw? What did they make of it?”<sup>68</sup> It is important to ask if visitors accepted the shows as reality or something else and how this may have influenced their interpretation of the American West. The second question deals with a longer view and asks how the image of the Wild West may have intersected with ‘what was

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<sup>60</sup> Moses, “Wild West,” 1091.

<sup>61</sup> Kroes and Rydell, *In Bologna*, 12.

<sup>62</sup> Feest, *Indians Europe*, 403-414

<sup>63</sup> White, “Drawing Table,” 37.

<sup>64</sup> Kroes and Rydell, *In Bologna*, 111-112.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, 114

<sup>66</sup> White, “Drawing Table,” 46.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, 111.

<sup>68</sup> Kroes and Rydell, *In Bologna*, 111.

already known': "The Wild West made a splash in a pond already filled with images of the American West."<sup>69</sup> This approach can be used for as well the identity of the Wild West as some of its main pillars; guns and Native Americans. This results into interpretations of the American West. "The shows did not merely ratify the spectator's "sense of superiority and triumph," they became a tool in an identity process that was hardly that straightforward."<sup>70</sup> This would mean that not only the performance itself had the power to influence its visitors but that it is also depended on other factors which should be regarded as more contextual and local. This approach is better able to discuss and explain the variations in understanding the Wild West between different countries.

## Conclusion

The academic discussion showed that Buffalo Bill's Wild West must be understood as a multidimensional concept with a single overarching story focusing on the 'Myth of the Frontier'. The variations in the show did not undermine this reasoning. Regardless, its multidimensional character does result into different interpretations of the American West. This is certainly the case when analyzing different cultural contexts. White writes that "journalists and others continuously fitted a variety of retroactive patterns of value and identity to the emotional power of the show itself."<sup>71</sup> In other words, the representation of the 'American West' varied from nation to nation while being depended on the unique interpretation of each visitor. This thesis attempts to find those patterns for the Dutch context.

## Chapter 2

The first period runs from 1880 to 1900 and is mainly characterized by the two tours Cody made to Europe. Its enormous success in America persuaded William Cody to cross the Atlantic. His first show was planned for London in 1887. The Wild West Show was part of the 'American exhibition' that represented typical American art and industry.<sup>72</sup> Buffalo Bill became its greatest act even before he had made his first performance. People were fascinated with all the exotic things that he would bring along. This was not strange when looking at his packing list: "its entourage included 83 saloon passengers, 38 steerage passengers, 97 Indians, 180 horses, 18 buffalo, 10 elk, 5 Texan steers, 4 donkeys, and 2 deer."<sup>73</sup> Its success was completely guaranteed after the announcement that real Native Americans would participate.

The 'Wild West show' was not an exclusive performance for the British. Newspapers all over Europe sent their journalist to report about every little detail of the show.<sup>74</sup> They wrote for example about the camp of tents where they stayed, the massive amount of cattle, and of course the performance itself.<sup>75</sup> Buffalo Bill's first performance was a private show in front of the British royal family. It was a huge success. This was symbolized by an impressive act of gratitude from Queen Victoria who saluted the American flag: "It was a great event. For the first time in history, since the Declaration of

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<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, 111.

<sup>70</sup> White, "Drawing Table," 40.

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem, 48-47.

<sup>72</sup> "De Amerikaansche Tentoonstelling En Buffalo Bill," *Java-Bode*, 24 June 1887, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Rob Kroes and Robert W. Rydell, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization Of The World* (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 2005), 106.

<sup>74</sup> Maaïke Vanden Berghe, "De invloed van Buffalo Bill op de beeldvorming van de indianen" (PhD diss., Ghent University, 2008).

<sup>75</sup> "Gemengd Nieuws," *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 22 April 1887, 5.

Independence, a sovereign of Great Britain had saluted the Star - Spangled Banner, and that banner was carried by a member of Buffalo Bill's Wild West."<sup>76</sup> Also a second 'royal event' was organized for the European 'elite' in Windsor Castle. The show was attended by members of the royal houses of Great-Britain, Belgium, Greece, Austria, Germany, Sweden and Norway.<sup>77</sup> These events, combined with the fact that almost every performance was sold-out and thousands of others may have seen the show as well, made Buffalo Bill's Wild West into a huge success.

Cody was impressed with his European achievements. As a consequence, he returned in 1889 after a short American season. Cody started with his new shows in Paris. The French context is interesting because there it can be seen that he adapted his show to European audiences by accentuating Native Americans and replacing American civilization with Western civilization.<sup>78</sup> The underlying narrative however, did not change. The show was again a huge success. Thousands of French visited the show, children set up their own camps in the neighborhood of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, and several artists told how inspired they were by the whole spectacle.<sup>79</sup>

Also the shows in Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom were very successful. It was not only the performance itself but the whole spectacle around it. Prussian soldiers were impressed how he transported hundreds of horses and almost everyone in Italy talked about how Buffalo Bill tamed the wild horses of the Duke of Sermonete in just five minutes.<sup>80</sup> Only his show in Spain was less profitable because he had to leave Barcelona after an epidemic but this did not unnerve its success. In fact, "by the time Cody returned to England for another performance for Queen Victoria, his show had earned a reputation on both sides of the Atlantic for its 'authentic' representation of the American West and for inspiring dreams of freedom in European societies that seemed locked into class-based social hierarchies".<sup>81</sup>

This overview showed the huge impact Buffalo Bill made on his European audiences. Thousands of people have visited his shows and many more have read or heard about it. It would therefore be interesting to analyze his influence on Dutch perception of the American West.

## **Buffalo Bill**

This section will analyze how Dutch newspapers wrote about Buffalo Bill and his show between 1880 and 1900. The Wild West show toured around Europe and attracted thousands of people but without organizing a performance in the Netherlands. Regardless, the popularity of the show was not exclusive to the citizens of the countries that it visited as mentioned above. Numerous others who were not able to see the performance could read or hear about it in public media such as newspapers.<sup>82</sup> They show that the European visits of Buffalo Bill did not pass by unnoticed in the Netherlands. Dutch journalists were actually fascinated with the performances and his name can be traced from Amsterdam to Batavia.

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<sup>76</sup> Kroes and Rydell, *In Bologna*, 32.

<sup>77</sup> Vanden Berghe, "De invloed."

<sup>78</sup> Kroes and Rydell, *In Bologna*, 109.

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>80</sup> Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 250.

<sup>81</sup> Kroes and Rydell, *In Bologna*, 110-111.

<sup>82</sup> Katherine White, "Through Their Eyes: Buffalo Bill's Wild West as a Drawing Table for American Identity," *Constructing the Past* 7, no. 1 (2005): 35-50.

Furthermore, the statistics prove that his visits to Europe were very important for Dutch perception. Almost all articles are written around the time of his European performances. The name 'Buffalo Bill' was mentioned in at least 34 pieces after his first arrival in 1887. The collection mainly exists out of newspaper articles and advertisements that present Buffalo Bill as an already famous hero. The prognosis that his return to the United States will show a fall in the number of documents is correct. The years around his second tour show a similar conjecture. At least 214 articles and advertisements are written in the period 1889-1895. Most of them deal with his performances in Europe which was underlined by titles as 'letters from Paris' and 'letters from London'.<sup>83</sup> However, when the memories of his show faded away the interest in Buffalo Bill seems to drop as well. In fact, the year 1896 shows not a single article that mentions his name.

This argument is strengthened when looking at recurring words. Two of them are '*voorstelling*' and '*tentoonstelling*' which both stand for show in Dutch. These concepts are completed by '*stukken*' which means play. Furthermore, these words do not only show the importance of the European tour but also tell something about the way the Wild West show was interpreted. First, it can be said that Dutch journalists were less interested in underlying historical and nationalistic narratives but were fascinated by the spectacular aspects of the show. Rydell and Kroes state that many Europeans enjoyed it as pure entertainment.<sup>84</sup> The second interpretation however, is more interesting. It sees entertainment, even when only mentioned as such, as symbolic for the relation between national identity and popular culture. In fact, the show-element becomes a crucial part. Almost all articles of the 1880s and early 1890s were written within the context of exhibitions. 'The American exhibition' in London of 1887-1888 was supposed to represent America's art and industry while Cody's performance was part of that. An article published in the '*Java-Bode*' argues that the Wild West show was not only a symbol for the Wild West but for American entertainment in general.<sup>85</sup> People were attracted by the show and excitement which created a link between popular culture and identity. It was all seen as part of the big picture. This argument is similar to Slotkin's assertion that the simple but spectacular features of Cody's Wild West were extremely powerful in spreading a certain story.<sup>86</sup>

Another interesting observation is how the performance was Europeanized. The focus on American entertainment does not mean that Dutch newspapers only saw Buffalo Bill within an American context. A majority of the articles pointed at a bigger development. Feest for example argues that several European audiences recognized Western superiority within the show.<sup>87</sup> As seen above, the Wild West symbolized a changing environment where rapid modernization was replacing an old world. It is therefore interesting to see how many articles already relate Buffalo Bill's show to what is changing. The '*Java-Bode*' mentions: "Tegenwoordig is die 'woestijn' een der kolossaalste korenschuren en de rijkste mijnstreek van de wereld, doorkruist door de rendearendste spoorwegen en bezaaid met bloeiende steden."<sup>88</sup> (For translations look in the notes.) This is a development that can be compared to the experiences of the European industrial revolutions.<sup>89</sup> It results in the mixing of 'Buffalo Bill' as a 'showman' and a 'historical man'. He was the man who represented how the world was once, what the Dutch had read about for years, but it complicates at the same time the

<sup>83</sup> "Engelse Brieven Uit De City", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 11 May 1887, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Kroes and Rydell, *In Bologna*, 111.

<sup>85</sup> "Verspreide Indische Berichten", *Java-Bode*, 22 October 1886, 4.

<sup>86</sup> Christopher Sharrett, "Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America," *Film Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1993): 51.

<sup>87</sup> Christian Feest, *Indians And Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays* (Aachen: Alano Verlag, 1987), 403.

<sup>88</sup> "Uit den Vreemde. Los en Vast.", *Java-Bode*, 6 September 6 1890, 5:

That desert is nowadays an important bread basket and one of the richest mining areas in the world

<sup>89</sup> Feest, *Indians Europe*, 404.

unique story that Cody wanted to share by merging European with American stories as can be seen in again the *'Java-Bode'*: "Een echte Ulysses noemt Wyl dezen Honorable Colonel, met een Ithaka te midden van den rijken prairienstaat Nebraska."<sup>90</sup> It shows that a unique American context was interpreted by integrating it into a European discourse.

In short, the Dutch were certainly very aware of Buffalo Bill's European tours. They enjoyed the entertainment and connected this outlet of popular culture to the forming of some kind of historical identity but at the same time developed unique interpretations. However, many journalists still experienced the show as "de indruk door de beschaving op de roodhuiden gemaakt".<sup>91</sup> A comment like this one presumes that the Dutch agreed with many its racial and nationalistic content. The question remains to what extent Dutch perception about the American West has been influenced. The next sections will try to answer that.

## Violence

The representation of the American West as a violent and rough place was a central feature of the Wild West show. Cowboy figures such as Buffalo Bill were not only necessary to defend America's civilization on the frontier, but also to spread it. Their special qualities and courage made them into true American heroes. This important aspect of the frontier was certainly noticed by the Dutch press. 'Rough', 'wild', and 'courageous' are just a few of the words that often return in articles where the identity of American West is discussed. Also the recurrence of 'Native Americans' in relation to 'aggressive' en 'warlike' should be mentioned. It made the American West into a violent and dangerous place.<sup>92</sup> This is an image that should not be underestimated when presented in a context of historic reality. *Het Nieuws van den Dag* for example, connected a short introduction about Cody's show, which is full of violent and adventurous events, to a real story about a robbery on a train in Texas.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* praises its historical realism by letting actual Native Americans and famous cowboys such as Buck Taylor participate and fight each other.<sup>94</sup> In other words, 'the bullet' and 'violence' were part of a real Wild West.

These two concepts were in the American context linked to an idealized version of the Westward moving frontier. This glorification of violence and its 'users' could be distinguished to some extent in Dutch documents. The Wild West as a rough and violent place, where the bullet was a symbol for historical progress, was idealized in the form of entertainment. The Dutch were fascinated by all its exotics aspects such as how fast Buffalo Bill was able to tame the horses of the Italian Duke of Sermonete.<sup>95</sup> An image by the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwschblad* where the young student Buffalo Bill uses his gun to point a country on the map underlined this thought as well.<sup>96</sup> The *Java-Bode* even compared Buffalo Bill with Hercules in 1886.<sup>97</sup> He rides his horse as a centaur and never misses a shot while being surrounded by wilderness. An explanation of this idealization of the Wild West could be

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<sup>90</sup> "Uit den Vreemde. Los en Vast.", *Java-Bode*, 11 July 1891, 5:

Wyl calls this honorable colonel a real Ulysses, with an Ithaka in the middle of the rich prairie-state Nebraska

<sup>91</sup> Ibidem:

The impression made on 'redskins' by civilization

<sup>92</sup> 1. Native Americans 2. Aggressive 3. Warlike

<sup>93</sup> "Gemengd Nieuws", *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 31 January 1887, 17.

<sup>94</sup> "De Antwerpsche Tentoonstelling", *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 26 July 1894, 7

<sup>95</sup> "Uit den Vreemde. Los en Vast.", *Java-Bode*, 11 July 1891, 5.

<sup>96</sup> "Jong Geleerd, Oud Gedaan.", *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 27 May 1895, 2.

<sup>97</sup> "Verspreide Indische Berichten", *Java-Bode*, 22 October 1886, 4.

the fact that Dutch journalists were already familiar with the Wild West thanks to the books of Thomas Mayne Reid.<sup>98</sup> Buffalo Bill re-enacted what they have read about in the years before. The Dutch journalists immediately romanticized what they witnessed in Buffalo Bill's Wild West ranging from violence to marksmanship. In other words, violence was not seen as a bad thing but a specific quality of the idealized frontier.

However, when a journalist wrote about the lasso-acts of Colonel Cody, the driving skills of 'king of the cowboys' Buck Taylor, or the shooting-performances of Annie Oakley it would be wrong to immediately compare this to an American context where violence was also idealized.<sup>99</sup> Many articles actually questioned the reality of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Dutch journalists were very aware of the image that the 'Wild West show' attempted to spread about toughness and roughness but most important they did not agree about its special meaning for American history. As a consequence, some newspapers mocked the heroic and adventurous cowboy. The *Rotterdam Nieuwschblad* discussed the image-construction of several shows when the 'Pawnee Bill' show visited Belgium in 1894 (and also in a later stadium the Netherlands).<sup>100</sup> The author of the text writes how Europeans enjoy the show but at the same time remain retained when its reality is emphasized by the leading characters. Another example was published in the *Java-Bode*. The journalist warns his readers that Buffalo Bill's beautiful clothes and his impressive bankaccount proves that it is only a show.<sup>101</sup>

In other words, many journalists argued that not all cowboys were outlaws or heroes.<sup>102</sup> Travel experiences and actual historical events had contradicted this image of the American West years before the arrival of Buffalo Bill. One author openly expresses his disappointment with heroism on the frontier as presented by the stories of Haviksoog, or Hawkseye, and other leading characters of the American West including Buffalo Bill. Almost all of them proved to be false or exaggerated. It is however, not a strange interpretation. This changes the meaning of the above mentioned idealization and a two-sided message appeared. On the one hand, violence was seen as part of the real Wild West while the entertaining use of the bullet was glorified within Dutch understanding. But at the same time it was argued that its American context was exaggerated. It is however, not a strange interpretation of violence. It was already mentioned that Cody adapted his show to an European audience. The American context became less important and as John F. Sears argued:

*Buffalo Bill demonstrated the riding and shooting skills of the frontier, but as leader of the nations of the world he unified the wild and the civilized, the American and the European.*<sup>103</sup>

In short, the focus on guns and violence offers a very interesting perspective. On the one hand, violence in the Wild West show was glorified. Roughness and toughness against wildness and uncivilized people were almost seen as divine. Buffalo Bill himself was made into the symbol of civilization. On the other hand, the European journalists denied the historical exaggerations of violence and relating aspect for the American context. The doubt about a heroic American cowboy prevented that violence became part of an idealized American identity.

<sup>98</sup> "De Antwerpsche Tentoonstelling", *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 26 July, 1894, 7

<sup>99</sup> "Engelsche Brieven Uit De City", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 9 May 1887, 1.

<sup>100</sup> "De Antwerpsche Tentoonstelling", *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 26 July 1894, 7.

<sup>101</sup> "Verspreide Indische Berichten", *Java-Bode*, 22 October 1886, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>103</sup> John F. Sears, "Bierstadt, Buffalo Bill, and the Wild West in Europe", in *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions*, ed. R. Kroes, RW Rydell, DFJ Bosscher et al. (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993), 14.

## Native Americans

As seen above, the role of Native Americans in the Wild West show has been widely discussed. The overarching conclusion was that they were represented as a savage people whose cultural identity was opposing America's identity. As a consequence, they were given an important historical role in the development and direction of America's civilization. Buffalo Bill made them also an important part of his European tours.<sup>104</sup> The word 'indianen' and many synonyms are among the most often recurrent words. Many visitors had never seen a Native American before. Also Dutch journalists were intrigued by their relative nearness. They were once introduced to Native Americans by the stories of Fenimore Cooper, Gustave Aimard, and Karl May as an advertisement in *De Locomotief* shows when both Winnetou and Buffalo Bill are recommended.<sup>105 106</sup> The Dutch now got the chance to meet them.

This interest in Native Americans did not lead to doubt regarding its accuracy. Critical reactions on their representation are largely absent. It is interpreted as realistic. *De Kleine Courant* for example, describes how Cody recreated the actual Wild West and connected this to the following description about Native Americans:

*Zij vertegenwoordigen een gedeelte der toestanden die thans nog hier en daar in Amerika bestaan maar langzamerhand verdwijnen. Zij leven hier zoals zij in het wilde westen leven en gehoorzamen aan Buffalo Bill het hoofd der expeditie.*<sup>107</sup>

When Buffalo Bill started to pay more attention to their daily lives the Dutch did too.<sup>108</sup> 'Indianendansen', 'tipi's', and 'leefstijl der Indianen' are concepts that often return in the articles.<sup>109</sup> The *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* even wrote a whole article about their lifestyle as could be seen in Buffalo Bill's Wild West.<sup>110</sup> Dutch journalists were clearly intrigued by the realism of the show.

The Dutch understanding of Native Americans should not be described as an idealization. This becomes clear when comparing their interpretation to those of other European countries. For example, Native Americans were in the Netherlands not seen as a defeated people while many other nations, such as France, did.<sup>111</sup> The Dutch wrote about the conflicts as if they were still going on with an undecided outcome. In other words, Native Americans were in their perception still the enemy of Western Civilization. Many journalists, such as one of the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, described them as frightening as possible: "De indruk was overweldigend. De Indianen waren geheel beschilderd, en gewapend alsof zij, zoals in den ouden tijd, op een veldtocht tegen den vijandelijken sta uittrokken. Gelijk een wervelwind renden zij in de omheining rond".<sup>112</sup> Their distinguishing features such 'war paint' and 'horrifying' clothing are often mentioned. The Dutch newspapers also connected the

<sup>104</sup> Vanden Berghe, "De invloed."

<sup>105</sup> Feest, *Indians Europe*, 403.

<sup>106</sup> "Advertentie", *De Locomotief*, June 12, 1891, 4:

Advertisements for both Buffalo Bill and Karl May's Winnetou

<sup>107</sup> "De Amerikaansche Tentoonstelling En Buffalo Bill", *De Kleine Courant*, 9 May 1887, 5

They represent a part of the situations that in some place on the American West still exist but slowly disappear. They live here like they live in the Wild West en only listen to the head of the expedition Buffalo Bill.

<sup>108</sup> Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's*, 40.

<sup>109</sup> 1. Native American dances 2. Teepee's 3. Native American lifestyle

<sup>110</sup> "De Antwerpsche Tentoonstelling", *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 26 July 1894, 7.

<sup>111</sup> Feest, *Indians Europe*, 408.

<sup>112</sup> "Engelsche Brieven Uit De City", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 13 May 1887, 1:

The effect was impressive. The Native Americans were completely painted, and armed like they, just as in the old days, were preparing for a battle against their enemies. They ran around like a whirlwind.

identity of Native Americans to hostile actions as extensively shown by Buffalo Bill. Attacks on stagecoaches and caravans, battles with cowboys and soldiers, and many other similar acts are enthusiastically described.<sup>113</sup> It results in the depiction of Native Americans as wild and aggressive.<sup>114</sup> This argument is similar to the statement of Kasson who substantiated his reasoning by mentioning Buffalo Bill's use and dissemination of posters about Native Americans.<sup>115</sup>

The aggressive uncivilized Native American is a prominent theme of the Wild West show. Buffalo Bill used this image within a specific historical context. Native Americans became the counterpart of America's moving 'frontier' and their ultimate fate was 'defeat'. Slotkin calls this 'the American myth of the frontier' but it has also strong parallels with other countries. As seen above, many European countries started to think about the development and consequences of 'modernization'.<sup>116</sup> Dutch newspapers often point at a conflict between two cultures. Native Americans are not only generalized into the opponents of Americans but symbolized as the counterpart of 'Western' civilization as a whole as a journalist of *De Locomotief* also suggests: "Sommige Indianen dragen Europeesche kleedij, dat staat volmaakt idioot, en sommigen rooken sigaren en sigaretten."<sup>117</sup> *De Tilburgsche Courant* even states that the Native Americans of Buffalo Bill are represented as too civilized.<sup>118</sup> These ideas are often combined with racial stereotypes as the same journalist of *De Locomotief* shows: "Hunne kleur is die van oude koperen centen."<sup>119</sup> 'Roodhuiden', 'roodhemden', and 'roodhoofden' are almost mentioned as often as 'indianen':<sup>120</sup>

This racist interpretation contradicted other European views to some extent. Many European countries were strongly influenced by Romantic ideals at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. German, French, and British journalists described "the Indians during the show as noble warriors bent by the adverse destiny which had made them the last representatives of a disappearing race".<sup>121</sup> As a result, the journalists in other countries had some respect for them. The hostile Dutch reactions however, have more parallels with South-European perspectives such as Italians who compared them with raw meat.<sup>122</sup> The 1890s did see a sort of compassion with Native Americans who lost everything and lived in poverty but most of them still argued that they needed to be raised by Western civilization. The *Java-bode* even knew to find a Native American of the 'Wild West Show' in Paris who was so impressed by 'white civilization' that he said the following:

*Gij blanken, zijt ons toch ver vooruit. In ons land zitten wij, wanneer wij samenkomen om wetten te maken rondom het vuur, geven de pijp rond en daarmee het recht tot spreken. Maar jelui zijt veel knapper: gij rookt, spreekt allen te gelijk en wordt toch verstaan. Wij Indianen zijn toch zeer dom.*<sup>123</sup>

<sup>113</sup> "Gemengd Nieuws", *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 31 January 1887, 17.

<sup>114</sup> "Osage Indianen Mattelen een Reiziger", *De Volksstem*, 7 September 1892, 2.

<sup>115</sup> Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's*, 54.

<sup>116</sup> Feest, *Indians Europe*, 403-408.

<sup>117</sup> "Bij De Indianen", *De Locomotief*, 25 November 1892, 2:

Some of the Native Americans wear European clothes, that looks completely ridiculous, and some smoke cigars and cigarettes

<sup>118</sup> "Amerika", *De Tilburgsche Courant*, 18 December 1890, 2.

<sup>119</sup> "Bij De Indianen", *De Locomotief*, 25 November 1892, 2:

Their colour is like old copper coins

<sup>120</sup> 1. Redskins 2. Redshirts 3. Redheads

<sup>121</sup> Feest, *Indians Europe*, 404.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibidem*, 409.

<sup>123</sup> "Nederlandsch-Indie", *Java-Bode*, 21 November 1889, 5:

In short, Dutch understanding of Native Americans did not have many parallels with interpretations of other European countries. However, it remained very close to Buffalo Bill's underlying narrative. This image may have been adapted to a Dutch context but the strong parallels with the 'Myth of the Frontier', by presenting them as an uncivilized people who fought against white civilization, are obvious.

### **American West**

Cody constructed the Wild West into a predestined place that symbolized the westward direction of America's civilization. The sections above have shown that the Dutch were to some extent influenced by Buffalo Bill's construction of the American West. This resulted into an unique interpretation that was adapted to the Dutch context. A similar pattern appears for the interpretation of the American West as a whole. This is quite logical because the part on Buffalo Bill already showed a connection between this outlet of popular culture and national identity. It was part of the context where the Wild West show belonged to as the *Java-Bode* also suggests: "De expositie vertegenwoordigt de Amerikaanse kunst en nijverheid".<sup>124</sup>

Regardless, Buffalo Bill's Wild West was interpreted as an unique and romantic place. It is a paradoxical development because the historical accuracy of the region is not criticized while some of its essential aspects are. Newspapers defend for example its historical realism because historical figures such as Buck Taylor participate, but at the same time they criticize exaggerations about America's heroism.<sup>125</sup> In others words, the journalists who refute typical American symbols, such as the accuracy of acrobatic and sharpshooting cowboys, do defend the theater where they perform. This idealization of the American West often returns in newspapers when Buffalo Bill is discussed. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* devotes for example a whole column to a statement of Cody where he explains the history and symbolic value of the cowboy hat.<sup>126</sup> This reasoning is completed by a Dutch fascination with exotic aspects of the show such as Native Americans and wild animals. As a result, Buffalo Bill's frontier is seen as an idealized place that represents historical realism.

Two concepts make this identity-construction even more interesting; 'civilized' and 'uncivilized'. The inferiority of Native Americans, violent historical events, the glorification of violence, and its lack of modernity make the Wild West into a symbol of the pre-modern era.<sup>127</sup> This image is strengthened when compared to its transforming status. The uncivilized frontier started to move when the 'white men' came. Their skills, as described by a journalist of the *Algemeen Handelsblad* to represent Western craft and knowledge, were able to transform deserts into fertile regions.<sup>128</sup> As a consequence, the 'Wild West Show' does not only underline the uniqueness of the American West but also a more general historical transformation. It represents what once was but is gradually disappearing. The *Java-Bode* of 1890 gives 'America-specialist' W. Wyl the opportunity to interview

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You white people are far more developed then us. When we come together to make laws, we sit around the fire and hand on the Calumet which gives you the right to speak. But what you do is much more impressive: You smoke, you all speak at the same time, and you are still heard. We Native Americans are very stupid in comparison to you.

<sup>124</sup> "De Amerikaansche Tentoonstelling En Buffalo Bill," *Java-Bode*, 14 June 1887, 6:

The American exposition needs to represent its nations art and industry

<sup>125</sup> "Engelsche Brieven Uit De City", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 9 May 1887, 1.

<sup>126</sup> "Engelsche Brieven", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 14 May 1887, 1.

<sup>127</sup> Feest, *Indians Europe*, 410.

<sup>128</sup> "Reisbrieven uit Amerika. Het Land der Cowboys." *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 9 October 1892, 6.

Buffalo Bill.<sup>129</sup> The article repeatedly mentions that the American West as presented within the show is not the same as it once was. This is confirmed by Buffalo Bill himself. Shooting buffalos for example is not possible anymore because they are almost extinct. This should not be seen as a romanticized image of how the Wild West once was. Wyl attempts to present the modern Cody, with his beautiful clothes and pockets full of money, as the symbol of improvement. In other words, the Dutch may have had their doubts about some aspects of the American West, but it symbolized in their perception the battle ground between 'good' and 'evil'.

Many European audiences have witnessed the same transformation but, in contrast to the Dutch, romanticized the pre-modern past of the American West. Dutch journalist mainly celebrated the victories of Western civilization over this uncivilized region. The *Java-bode* of 1887 for example, introduces a member of Buffalo Bill's Wild West called John Nelson who leaves the safeties of civilized life to confront the challenges of the 'American West'.<sup>130</sup> This example can be compared to the description of Alkali Dick in *De Sumatra Post*, another member of Buffalo Bill's Wild West.<sup>131</sup> This cowboy has left the Wild West show and travels through Western-Europe. However, he actually wanders between two worlds where he feels a certain connection with but perhaps does not belong to anymore. His qualities were useful on the actual Wild West but civilized Europe only likes him as an entertainer. A clear difference is made between 'civilization' and 'barbarism'. This is important to mention because the Dutch did not want to compare themselves with the American cowboy as bravest among all but at the same time, they did see some parallels between America's civilization and that of their own.

In short, the Dutch interpreted Cody's American West as the battleground between 'civilization' and 'barbarism'. It strengthened their ideas on the region as symbolic place for the historical development of Western civilization but without copying an American context.

## Conclusion

During 1880-1900 Europe was introduced to Buffalo Bill. The Dutch were never able to welcome him but were certainly aware of his presence. Countless articles were written about Cody and his Wild West. The Dutch saw him as showman and as a symbol for a historical transformation. The result was a unique interpretation of the American West. This chapter offered three insights to support that idea. First, the Dutch glorified violence in the same way as Buffalo Bill did but also criticized the representation of American heroism. Second, Native Americans were seen as barbarous and thought to be part of an uncivilized past. Where other European audiences glorified them as noble warriors, the Dutch did not. These two themes resulted in a third insight which can be interpreted as the overarching story; the Westward moving frontier was symbolic for a historical transformation. This transition from a pre-modern era to modernity, which was so typical for the European context, was glorified and celebrated. It also gave violence an important function as Slotkin argued.<sup>132</sup> However, it is not American civilization that is spreading but Western civilization.

In short, the parallels with the underlying narrative are striking despite some contextual differences with other audiences. Again, it must be stated that Buffalo Bill intentionally adapted his show to the

<sup>129</sup> "Uit den Vreemde. Los en Vast.", *Java-Bode*, 6 September 1890, 5.

<sup>130</sup> "De Amerikaansche Tentoonstelling En Buffalo Bill," *Java-Bode*, 14 June 1887, 6.

<sup>131</sup> "Feuilleton: Het avontuur van Alkali Dick." *De Sumatra Post*, 24 May 1899, 1.

<sup>132</sup> Sharrett, "Twentieth-Century America," 51.

European context.<sup>133</sup> He certainly did not deny the importance of Western civilization as a whole. Therefore, it can be concluded that Buffalo Bill influenced Dutch understanding about the American West to great extent.

## Chapter 3

The second period that will be discussed runs from 1900 to 1917. Many events and developments between those years were of great influence for Dutch understanding about the American West. It started with 'The Congress of Rough Riders of the World'. This performance was constructed by Buffalo Bill to show 'the drama of civilization'. Modernity was symbolized by skilled white drivers from countries all over the world who had faced and battled wildness.<sup>134</sup> It even influenced President Theodore Roosevelt to set up his regiment of 'rough riders' that fought during the Spanish-American war.

His fame and popularity went much further. Buffalo Bill was elected in the US congress as a representative of Nebraska but withdrew in 1902, so he could perform in Europe. These performances took place from 1902 to 1906. He visited England, Wales, Germany, Italy, Croatia and Belgium.<sup>135</sup> The European audiences had not forgotten Buffalo Bill. He was almost everywhere received as a hero. Cody even made arrangements to visit Holland but cancelled at the last moment. His last performance was in the Belgian city Ghent on the 21<sup>st</sup> September of 1906.<sup>136</sup>

Unfortunately, there is not much information on Cody's third tour. A few articles and texts mention that the shows were impressive but there are not many specific details.<sup>137</sup> Two of the most important developments were the absence of Annie Oakley due to a serious accident and the death of Nate Sallisbury, just a few days before departure to Europe. Regardless, the 'Wild West show' was still very influential in Europe. For example, the nowadays famous Belgian football club AA Gent presented its logo, a Native American Chief, as a remembrance to the show.<sup>138</sup> It shows symbolized Native Americans as aggressive and fearless warriors but also as noble and courageous.<sup>139</sup>

The interest in Buffalo Bill did not decrease but even grow. This period is characterized by cheap popular lectures on Cody and his experiences that started to spread around Europe. But despite his great successes, the interest in Wild West shows did decrease. Buffalo Bill had one last success with Pawnee Bill in 1910 but this was short-lived. Cody faced bankruptcy and had to participate in other shows to make ends meet. However, the health of the proud frontiersman gradually went downhill. He had to deal with severe arthritis:

*His last public appearance was at Portsmouth, Virginia on November 11, 1916. Major Burke walked to the center of the arena, and with tears pouring down his cheeks made the announcement that this marked Buffalo Bill's closing performance. The members of the*

<sup>133</sup> Sears, "Bill Wild", 14.

<sup>134</sup> "Buffalo Bill en de Oorlog in Z.-A.", *De Sumatra Post*, 21 May 1901, 5.

<sup>135</sup> Maaike Vanden Berghe, "De invloed van Buffalo Bill op de beeldvorming van de indianen" (PhD diss., Ghent University, 2008).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibidem*.

*audience climbed to their feet and gave Colonel Cody a ten-minute ovation. Buffalo Bill had reached the end of the trail.*<sup>140</sup>

A few weeks later, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1917, he passed away. The legend however, continued.

### **Buffalo Bill**

The former chapter discussed the influence of Buffalo Bill on Dutch society during his first two tours in Europe. Their understanding about the American West was brought into relation with the Wild West show. Cody had constructed a clear narrative how the region should be interpreted. The show and its history proved to be unquestionably linked. The Dutch did not exactly copy the overarching story of the Wild West show but merged its basics with their own perceptions of the modern world. Regardless, the clear parallel themes should not be underestimated.

It would be interesting to find out if this image was able to endure. An overview of the articles published in this period immediately shows an interesting development. The first period was characterized by an increasing interest in Buffalo Bill around the time of his tours. The second period however, does not see that pattern and the articles are distributed in random order. For example, Buffalo Bill returns to Europe in 1902 and that is the same year the results drop from 23 to 11 newspaper articles. The whole tour lasted till 1909 but the highest numbers of documents, 37, are published in the year 1911.

Furthermore, when looking at returning words and concepts a similar pattern can be distinguished. The former period focused on entertainment because words as ‘*voorstelling*’ and ‘*tentoonstelling*’ often showed up.<sup>141</sup> However, the same concepts are missing in this period. A mix of random words is often cited but a clear connection to the Wild West Show is absent. Only London and Paris, two of the cities where Cody performed, can be found back more than once. When looking at the content of articles, only about his show in Milan is something claimed that is specific for that performance.<sup>142</sup> This change suggests that the Dutch were less interested in the Wild West show.

However, this reasoning does not mean that they were less interested in Buffalo Bill. The search for relevant documents came up with 278 articles compared to the 269 in the former period. The Dutch only redistributed their interest and the consequence of this change was a varied collection of newspaper articles. Some documents still published about the show while other articles focused on different topics and three main patterns arose. First, it can be said that the American West of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was suddenly interpreted as a *fait accompli*. Western civilization had triumphed and a new world appeared. The Dutch were aware of this historical development when talking about Buffalo Bill as a journalist of the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* shows: “Thans is het voormalige wilde en romantische westen van Indianen, goudzoekers, en cowboys verdwenen.”<sup>143</sup> This is an important development because it set the Dutch apart from other West-European countries where this realization had happened years before.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>140</sup> Elizabeth J. Leonard and Julia C. Goodman, *Buffalo Bill, King of the Old West: Biography of William F. Cody, Pony Express Rider, Buffalo Hunter, Plains Scout & Guide, Master Showman* (New York: Library Publishers, 1955), 150.

<sup>141</sup> Both words mean ‘show’

<sup>142</sup> “De Tentoonstelling te Milaan bij Avond”, *Tilburgsche Courant*, 12 May 1906, 5.

<sup>143</sup> “Zig-Zags.: De Verovering Der Woestijn I.”, *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 23 May 1905, 21:

Meanwhile, the former wild and romantic West of Native Americans, gold diggers, and cowboys has disappeared.

<sup>144</sup> Feest, *Indians Europe*, 403-407.

Second, Dutch journalists are more focused on Buffalo Bill himself instead of his show. The trend was not only a celebration of civilization but a worship of his experiences and character. This reasoning is substantiated when looking at the following description of Cody published in *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*: “Stram in de houding, slank, bijna zeven voet lang, met wit golvend haar, bliksemende valkenoogen, fijn besneden neus en buitengewoon kleine ooren, telt hij nog heden onder de mooiste mannen van Amerika.”<sup>145</sup> This approach is also present in the year of his death when journalists are glorifying his deeds and adventures. A good example of that is the following obituary in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*: “Buffalo Bill, de groote strijder tegen de Indianen, de held van zoovele verhalen van durf, van slimheid en scherpzinnigheid van vermetelen mannenmoed, is dood. En al mogen er onder die verhalen velen wat sterk gekleurd en..... gecomplenteerd zijn, grootendeels zijn zij toch waar.”<sup>146</sup> In other words, Buffalo Bill started to replace his own show.

Third, Dutch journalists started to focus on so-called ‘*prikkellectuur*’; stories that could influence people to behave in a certain way.<sup>147</sup> These books were constructed around the Buffalo Bill legend, comparable to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century dime novels, and were very succesfull as can be seen in *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*: “Als men nu weet dat de geschiedenis van Buffalo Bill, Nick Carter, of de beide Wilsons bij duizenden exemplaren in winkels en kiosken verkocht worden.”<sup>148</sup> These forms of popular culture represented an idealized Wild West but Buffalo Bill’s specific overarching narrative was less prominent. How this worked out shall be discussed in the next sections.

In short, this period sees a growing transition of the Wild West show into a so-called broader ‘Buffalo Bill’ legend. The new story has strong parallels with the underlying narrative of its forerunner but does not have its power of entertainment. The new focus is on memory, personality, and books which can also be seen in the *Bataviaasch Handelsblad*: “Buffalo Bill, de bekende bestrijder der Roodhuiden, de koning der prairiën van het Far West heeft veel succes; sinds maanden komen er boekjes uit die zoogenaamd zijn gedenkschriften bevatten en door de jeugd gretig gelezen worden”.<sup>149</sup> It would be interesting to research what this implied for Dutch understanding about the American West.

## Violence

The Dutch newspapers of the first period interpreted the historical American West as a rough and though place. The Wild West show was a confirmation of what Dutch had already read in the stories of Karl May and Gustave Aimard. This influenced their understanding of the region as a dangerous and exotic place where violence was idealized. However, at the same time they questioned the superhuman identity of American cowboys. This is very important to mention because they were supposed to be the symbols of America’s identity and progress. The hero was in Dutch understanding

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<sup>145</sup> “Buffalo Bill”, *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 28 June 1911, 6:

Rigid in the position, slender, almost 7 feet long, and with white rolling hair, the flashing eyes of a falcon, a nice cut nose, and extraordinary small ears, he still counts as one of the most beautiful men of America.

<sup>146</sup> “Buffalo Bill +”, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 16 January 1917, 3:

Buffalo Bill, the great warrior against Native Americans, the hero of so many stories related to guts, to smartness, to cleverness and to courage, he has passed away.

<sup>147</sup> “Gemengd Nieuws: De Invloed Van Prikkellectuur”, *De Tijd: Godsdienstig-staatkundig dagblad*, 19 October 1911, 6.

<sup>148</sup> “Uit de Hollandsche Mail: De Aanslag ten Friedberg”, *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, July 23, 1910, 6:

If people only would know that the history of Buffalo Bill, Nick Carter, and both Wilsons are sold by thousands in shops and news-stands.

<sup>149</sup> “Nieuwjaarsdrukte Te Parijs”, *Bataviaasch Handelsblad*, 1 February 1908, 14:

Buffalo Bill, the well-known fighter of Native Americans, the king of the prairies of the Far West is very successful: since a few months books are published that describe his live and are eagerly red by the youth.

not American but 'white' and 'western' just as Buffalo Bill intended for by merging his show with European stereotypes.<sup>150</sup>

As seen above, most of the articles in this period rarely write about the content of the show. The Wild West show is being replaced by a more general Buffalo Bill-legend. This did not always had consequences for the interpretation of violence during this period. Strong parallels can be found when a claim is made about Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Dutch journalists still saw the frontier as a violent place. This becomes clear when *prikkellektuur* and its bad influence on society is discussed, for example in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*: "Thans hebben verschillende gemeentebesturen verboden dat in boekwinkels geschiedenissen als van Buffalo Bill en andere bloedige moordverhalen worden uitgesteld."<sup>151</sup> This warning also indicates that violence is still glorified by many. Important concepts related to that sentiment are 'revolvers', 'kogels', and 'paarden'.<sup>152</sup> They do not only characterize the identity of the Wild West but also connect it to a feeling of glory what becomes clear when looking at the following sentence in *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*: "Een paard, een lazzo, een paar revolvers en buksen.... klaar zijn ze! en de dames van het gezelschap kunnen met nog minder toe."<sup>153</sup>

However, this understanding about violence is not completely the same when compared to the former period. The most important difference is that journalists started to idealize the cowboy-figure and his special qualities. This is a possible consequence of the reorientation on Buffalo Bill. Everything he has done is idealized to great extent. For example, when Cody needs to leave his sick horses in France the newspapers glorify his 'honorable' decision to kill them himself.<sup>154</sup> Another example is Cody's 'Rough Riders Congress' where he arranged the participation of South-African *Boeren*. This symbol cannot be underestimated. They were seen by many journalists as true Dutch cowboys and the bringers of civilization to the African continent.<sup>155</sup> Cowboys are not just entertainers anymore. The once criticized American hero started to become an important pillar of Dutch understanding about the American West. He symbolized the qualities that were necessary to survive the disappeared wildness.

This had huge consequences for the understanding about violence. Its idealized forms were in the former period mainly tolerated to save civilization, and that is still the case to some extent, but now it was also missed. It became a romanticized memory and many newspapers, such as *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, mourned that modern civilization was not able to cope anymore with the challenges of the Wild West: "Wij betreuren het, dat een cowboy, meester op buks en revolver, 't van ons winnen zou als we met hem speelden."<sup>156</sup> The consequence of this new bigger picture, that made the Wild West into a barely question memory, was that the bullet image faded away. The American West was made into an exotic image from the 1900s and this eventually resulted into a sort-of cult.

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<sup>150</sup> John F. Sears, "Bierstadt, Buffalo Bill, and the Wild West in Europe", in *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions*, ed. R. Kroes, RW Rydell, DJF Bosscher et al. (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993), 14.

<sup>151</sup> "Avondblad", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 13 January 1910:

Meanwhile, several councils have decided for bookstores to forbid the sale of Buffalo Bill histories and other bloody murder stories.

<sup>152</sup> 1. Guns 2. Bullets 3. Horses

<sup>153</sup> "Brieven uit Nederland", *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 18 July 1900, 5:

A horse, a lasso, a few guns and rifles....and they are prepared!! and the women of this company are prepared with less.

<sup>154</sup> "Allerlei", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 20 December 1905, 9.

<sup>155</sup> "Buffalo Bill en de Oorlog in Z.-A.", *De Sumatra Post*, May 21, 1901, 5

<sup>156</sup> "Brieven uit Nederland", *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 18 July 1900, 5:

We regret it that a cowboy, master of rifle and gun, would beat us if we played with him.

In other words, violence was still idealized but not only to function as ‘the bullet of civilization’. It became a dear memory. However, this transformation was not complete. Almost every newspaper mentions Cody’s hunt for Kid Curry and the Wild Bunch after a bank robbery in 1904.<sup>157</sup> This results in shootings, killings, and their disappearance in the mysterious Badlands of Nebraska. It was a reminder that the wildness of the Wild West and the protectors of civilization had not completely disappeared. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West remained an idealized battlefield between the forces of good and evil, or as Slotkin would say: “The primary social and political function of the extraordinary violence of myth is to sanction the ordinary violence of oppression and injustice, of brutalities casual or systematic, of the segregation, insult, or humiliation of targeted groups.”<sup>158</sup>

In short, Dutch understanding about violence is two-sided. On the one hand, cowboys and their guns were romanticized as a dear memory of the past and faraway places. They were entertaining and symbols of superiority. This was partly a result of the reorientation on the Buffalo Bill legend. On the other hand, violence was still placed in a context of civilization. The bullet image reappeared and so did other important parallels of the Wild West show.

### **Native Americans**

The first period witnessed a hostile Dutch attitude against Native Americans. Journalists did not only see a justification for racial stereotypes in the Wild West show but it may have strengthened them as well. The uncivilized Native Americans were seen as enemies of Western civilization. This was an interesting interpretation because the Netherlands differed with that perspective from many surrounding countries.

However, the interest in Native Americans seemed to have dropped at the beginning of the 1900s. The first period came up with 63 articles that mentioned ‘*Indianen*’. The second period witnessed a fall to 30 pieces of text. The articles that could be found produced little evidence on a changing Dutch perspective. New developments, such as the focus on popular lecture, had many of the same parallels.<sup>159</sup> The Native Americans received special attention during this discussion. They were still seen as aggressive and warlike. Dutch newspapers wrote in the 1900s about youth gangs who were influenced by Native Americans.<sup>160</sup> They elected their own chief, imitated their dances, used nature as their new home, slaughtered animals and attacked other people.<sup>161</sup> Several authors condemned this way of behavior and connected it with the stories of Buffalo Bill. Furthermore, the few articles that did write about the Wild West show still mention how the performing Sioux and Apaches dressed in frightening war clothes, raged the stage, and attacked whites while driven by pure aggressiveness.<sup>162</sup> In other words, the change to the Buffalo Bill legend did not stop the stereotyping of Native Americans.

However, the idea that there was no change at all is incorrect. The racial contempt decreased and Dutch journalists were more aware of their difficulties. They also started to interpret the Native Americans as entertaining. They, just as violence, became part of a romanticized Wild West that was experienced as an entertaining and idealized battlefield. The description of Buffalo Bill’s show in

<sup>157</sup> “De Rooverjacht Van Buffalo Bill”, *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 14 December 1904, 5.

<sup>158</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 192-193.

<sup>159</sup> “Gemengd Nieuws: De Invloed Van Prikkellektuur”, *De Tijd: Godsdienstig-staatkundig dagblad*, 17 October 1911, 6.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibidem* 2.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>162</sup> “De Tentoonstelling te Milaan bij Avond”, *Tilburgsche Courant*, 12 May 1906, 5.

Milan by the *Tilburgsche Courant* makes this very clear: “We hoorden vervaarlijk gillen en schoten knalden, zoo woest door den blauwen nacht. Buffalo Bill in de arena. Bleeke schijnsels glimmerden boven de buigend oude muren; daarachter vermoorden elkaar Apachen Sioux bleekmuilen en roodhuiden in schijngavecht.”<sup>163</sup> A result of this interpretation was a new identity for Native Americans. They were suddenly romanticized as noble warriors. An article published in *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie* analyzed Wild West shows such as the one of Buffalo Bill.<sup>164</sup> The author romanticized the ideal of ‘*natuurmenschen*’, which means man of nature, and people who worked with their muscles. Native Americans represented certain skills that are hard to find in modern society. Feest explains how “the Indian was to the representatives of Romanticism the exact opposite of the most degraded representatives of European society.”<sup>165</sup> This article was not an exception and nostalgic feelings were more visible. These Romantic ideas had appeared in surrounding European countries years before.

Regardless, it would be strange to assume that the Wild West show was responsible for all these changes. The aggressive and hostile Native American was still a dominant theme within the Buffalo Bill legend while at the same time there are little newspaper articles to be found.<sup>166</sup> Faragher and Hine mention that this was not strange because “the whole spectacle was [still] designed to illustrate the inevitable law of the survival of the fittest.”<sup>167</sup> Nobleness could be distinguished to some extent but was not a main pillar of Buffalo Bill’s overarching story.

However, there are two other reasons for this change. First, there was the realization that the Native Americans had been defeated. The frontier had come to an end in Dutch understanding. The former chapter saw that many articles cheered the Western offensive against Native America. Journalists of this period witnessed only the sad result for traditional lifestyles and cheered when little progress was made. This is also suggested by a journalist of *Het Dagblad van het Noorden*: “De Indianen in Amerika die tot uitsterven gedoemd zijn doen zich nog wel eens gelden, toonen althans nog wel eens een overblijfsel van persoonlijkheids- en rechtsgevoel tegenover de onafgebroken beperking van hun rechten en bezittingen”.<sup>168</sup> Second, the influence of surrounding countries cannot be neglected. Karl May and his ‘Winnetou’, an actual noble Native American, became a huge success.<sup>169</sup> The Native Americans of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West are compared with Winnetou. Rydell and Kroes already mentioned that he was a symbol for the noble and romanticized Native American in German society. These two developments countered the old images of the Wild West show.

In short, the Dutch started to rethink their attitude against Native Americans. They became part of an entertaining and romanticized Wild West. This period also sees the appearance of Native Americans as victims of ‘modernization’. Historical changes lay beneath that transformation. Native Americans are not longer the unquestioned foes of White Civilization but started to become symbols of a romanticized past.

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<sup>163</sup> “De Tentoonstelling te Milaan bij Avond”, *Tilburgsche Courant*, 12 May 1906, 5:

We heard screams and gunshots, furious through the blue night. Buffalo Bill was in the arena. White lights shined above the leaning old walls; behind that Apaches Sioux White-man and Redskins were killing each other in a fake battle

<sup>164</sup> “Brieven uit Nederland”, *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 18 July 1900, 5.

<sup>165</sup> Feest, *Indians Europe*, 404.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibidem*, 403-414.

<sup>167</sup> V. Hine and John M. Faragher, *The American West: A new interpretive history* (Yale: Yale University, 2000), 502

<sup>168</sup> “Vereenigde Staten”, *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 7 July 1907, 5:

The Native Americans who are doomed to fade away are sometimes still active, although, they show sometimes some initiative for getting justice for the aggressions that are committed against them.

<sup>169</sup> “Nieuwe Uitgaven”, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 28 November 1912, 7.

## American West

During the first period, the Dutch interpreted the American West as a representation of the battlefield where Western civilization fought against barbarism. The above sections however, have made notion of changing perspectives regarding essential aspects of the American West. As a consequence, it is logical to presume that the understanding about the historical region as a whole changed as well.

This assumption is partly correct. Dutch understanding during this period can be summarized by a statement of John F. Sears: "they [Europeans] could experience vicariously the freedom, mobility, wildness, and violence which Buffalo Bill shared with the Indians while applauding the triumph of European civilization over savagery".<sup>170</sup> The applauding of European civilization will be discussed first. This period is more aware of the disappearing Old West, but the resulting interpretations did not necessarily differ. Buffalo Bill's Wild West is in many cases still represented as the counterpart of Western civilization. In fact, the many warnings for the bad influence of popular lecture underline the bad image of the American West and the superior image of Western civilization. Another example was published in *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*.<sup>171</sup> Miss Nan J. Aspinwall, a former member of the Wild West show, described her 1-year travel through the American West as an adventurous experience but also one with many incidents: "Hier en daar in het Westen moest ik het dubbele bijbetalen. Over ridderlijkheid van de heeren in het Westen, zal ik liever zwijgen."<sup>172</sup> She is happy when she has finally returned to the civilized world and does not want to experience the troubles of the Wild West again. Other old patterns, such as glorified violence and hostile Native Americans, complete this image about the Wild West. In other words, the American West was for many Dutch still part of the 'Myth of the Frontier'.<sup>173</sup>

However, this interpretation gradually became less prominent. The understanding of the American West was now mainly influenced by what Sears called the actual experience of the Wild West. The most important features of the region were idealized into emotional memories of a glorified past. This change was represented by countless nostalgic comments such as one of *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*: "Wij hebben 't met onze beschaving toch zoo ver gebracht, dat voor ons een curiositeit geworden is, wat alledaagsch diende te zijn; menschen de hun lichaam goed ontwikkeld hebben en wat kunnen uitvoeren met hun spieren."<sup>174</sup> Other examples are the new cult around cowboys and the idealization of Native Americans. Many other European countries contemned modernization.<sup>175</sup> The Dutch however, mainly focused on a romanticized image of the past without necessarily criticizing modern times. In other words, an overarching narrative about the victorious path of Western civilization started to make place for a romantic memory where only the historical representation of the Wild West itself was idealized. Another journalist from the *Het*

<sup>170</sup> Sears, "Bill Wild", 14.

<sup>171</sup> "Allerlei: Te Paard Door Amerika", *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 28 July 1911, 9:

Sometimes I had to pay double in the West. And about the chivalry of the men there its better for me to remain silent.

<sup>172</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>173</sup> "In De Arena", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 20 April 1915, 6.

<sup>174</sup> "Brieven uit Nederland", *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 18 July 1900:

Because our civilization has progressed so much, that what once normal has now become a curiosity: people who have trained their body and actually can do something with their muscles.

<sup>175</sup> Feest, *Indians Europe*, 405.

*Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie* described it in the following way: “maar, het hoopt toch op 'n soort Aimard-roman, geïllustreerd door levende schilderijstukjes”.<sup>176</sup>

Two developments were responsible for this change. First, many Dutch journalists were aware that Buffalo Bill's Wild West had ended while representatives of the former period thought that the struggle was still going-on. This changing *zeitgeist* had many consequences as an journalist in the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* also presumes: “Als kapitein Cody, of Buffalo Bill, weer eens met een Indianentroep naar Europa wilde komen, zou hij de leden van zijn gezelschap moeten grimeeren en in het costuum steken.”<sup>177</sup> In other words, the Wild West was not that wild anymore according. The *Middelburgsche Courant* agrees with this: “Buffalo Bill is opgegroeid in het Wilde Westen der Ver. Staten dat toen nog inderdaad wild was”.<sup>178</sup> Buffalo Bill's Wild West became part of history, something that was actually gone, a living memory. The second development that ensured the above mentioned change was less Dutch attention for the Wild West shows. Buffalo Bill's identity for the American West was less mentioned. Once “it presented in living color the western story”, but now it had just become “a good show”.<sup>179</sup>

In short, the Wild West show which represented ‘Western development as a whole’ gradually merged into a bigger Buffalo Bill legend. Old patterns did not completely disappear but new interpretations started to become more dominant. The result was a romantic American West where good and evil still fought with each other.

## Conclusion

This second period witnessed the transition from the Wild West show to a more general Buffalo Bill legend. Many aspects that represented Dutch understanding in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be found here as well. Violence still served as the famous bullet, Native Americans were still aggressive and savage, and the Wild West still symbolized a battle between civilization and barbarism. However, other themes emerged as well. Old interpretations gave way for idealized versions of history where violence was romanticized as symbol for a glorified region, where Native Americans were mourned, and where the Wild West combined these emotions into a living artwork.

In short, Buffalo Bills Wild West influenced Dutch understanding about the American West in two different ways. On the one hand, it had strong parallels with the grand narrative as described in the first period. On the other hand, a new interpretation of the American West became ‘an artwork’ of its own. It represented the historical Wild West as extremely idealized. Different elements of this new interpretation can still be related to the Buffalo Bill legend but the importance of his ‘Myth of the Frontier’ became less dominant.

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<sup>176</sup> “Brieven uit Nederland”, *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 18 July 1900:

....but, the hope is for a some sort-of Aimard novel, illustrated by lively artworks.

<sup>177</sup> “Gemengd Nieuws”, *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 4 December 1911, 10:

If Captain Cody, or Buffalo Bill, would return to Europa with his army of Native Americans. Then he has to make them up and dress them.

<sup>178</sup> “Verschillende Berichten”, *Middelburgsche Courant*, 16 January 1917:

Buffalo Bill has been raised in the Wild West what was in that period still actually wild.

<sup>179</sup> Sears, “Bill Wild”, 6.

## Chapter 4

The third period runs from 1918 to 1940. This chapter will merge the historical context of the years after Cody's death with what is written about him in general.

### Buffalo Bill

The former chapter showed that the interest in Buffalo Bill did not disappear after his performances came to an end. A new cult emerged which focused on the so-called Buffalo Bill legend; Cody himself, and other forms of popular culture. This interest was not completely unique however. The United States already saw books and theater plays about the famous frontiersman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were important in establishing his popularity while they functioned as a memory for the Dutch. It would be interesting to analyze how this trend evolved after the death of Cody.

Buffalo Bill was during the third period, despite his death, more popular than even before. The years 1918-1940 see 733 newspaper articles wherein his name is mentioned. This number is larger than the two other periods combined and approximately 2.6 times as much as only the second period. In fact, a journalist of the *Zaans Volksblad* states that his fame had grown so popular that Dutch movie-producers could not use his name whenever they felt like:

*Blijkbaar hadden zowel de Amerikaans als de Hollandse filmexploitanten bezwaren tegen de titel 'Buffalo Bill' omdat die populaire naam een al te populair tintje aan de film zou geven en het publiek zou denken at het weer een ouderwetse 'Western' te zien zou krijgen.*<sup>180</sup>

One could argue that this number is misleading because the third period has also the most years in it. Regardless, a similar pattern can be distinguished when only looking at the yearly average. Buffalo Bill's name showed up 14 times a year between 1880 and 1900 (or 18 when working from 1886) and the second period witnessed an average of 16-17 times a year. The third period however, comes up with a number of 31-32 a year. In other words, Buffalo Bill had become twice as popular.

A second interesting observation is that the above mentioned trend seemed to have grown. Notions about the Wild West show had almost completely disappeared. The word 'show' is mentioned only in 20 articles and 'voorstelling' in 32 articles. The most important often cited words during this period are 'film', 'films', 'boeken', 'paard', and 'theater'. The word 'paard' refers mostly to horse racing where jockeys called their horse after the famous frontiersman. All these concepts give an impression of the broad popular culture where Buffalo Bill was part of. A new generation emerged without much knowledge about the Wild West show but they were able to read his books or watch his movies as a journalist of the *Leeuwarder Courant* indicates: "Ik heb evenals gij dat hebt gedaan de boeken van Buffalo Bill met roode wangen en gretige oogen gelezen".<sup>181</sup> It also explains why many of the documents are commercial advertisements.

<sup>180</sup> "De Trek naar het Westen", *Zaans Volksblad*, 25 March 1939, 5:

As well the American as Dutch movie producers apparently had some objections against the title 'Buffalo Bill' because that popular name would give an exaggerated popular flavor to the movie and the audience would as a result of that expect an old-fashioned Western.

<sup>181</sup> "In een klein Amerikaansch Stadje", *Leeuwarder Courant*, 8 December 1939, 5:

Like thou, I have read with red cheeks and eager eyes the books of Buffalo Bill.

The gradual transition from the Wild West show to the Buffalo Bill legend was completed during the third period. The Netherlands witnessed a romanticized construction of the Wild West surrounded by the personality of Buffalo Bill. The enriched popular culture with books, movies, and other products draws attention to this development by linking titles to his name and adventures.<sup>182</sup> As the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* suggests, this period remembered him as the man “die de held van vele avonturen en bijgevolg van vele jongensboeken was”.<sup>183</sup> These forms of popular culture were highly influential. Newspapers published images of a statue that was constructed in his name, children and grownups dressed as him, and journalists traveled across the Atlantic to visit his grave and research every little fact about his life.<sup>184</sup>

This interest did not mean that Buffalo Bill's Wild West was only about Buffalo Bill. Native Americans and violence can easily be found in the flood of articles. The word ‘*Indianen*’ for example, returns in at least 349 of the relevant documents. Also words as plainsman, cowboy, and West often return. This development suggests that the understanding of American West was to some extent still linked to the cult around ‘Buffalo Bill’ and kept strong parallels with Buffalo Bill's Wild West. The show and its story had disappeared but Buffalo Bill and the Wild West remained.

This is an interesting development because authors as Kasson and Slotkin argued that these new forms of popular culture actually strengthened old images when looking at American interpretations in the same period.<sup>185</sup> And it must be said that these new patterns did not completely replace the old ones. Also the Buffalo Bill legend represented some leftovers of the constructed narrative as can be seen in *De Gooi- En Eemlander* who described the Wild West as “de strijd der oprukkende blanke pioniers tegen de roodhuiden”.<sup>186</sup> Regardless, its presence did become less obvious.

In short, this period witnessed the complete transformation from the Wild West show to the Buffalo Bill legend. It would be interesting to analyze how this worked out for Dutch understanding about the American West.

## Violence

The former chapter stated that violence, as represented by Buffalo Bill's Wild West, gradually lost its function as a symbolic ‘bullet of civilization’. This was a consequence of a changing *zeitgeist*, external influences and other forms of popular lecture about Buffalo Bill. A new image appeared that romantically constructed violence as a synonym for adventure and excitement.

The third period witnessed a growing interest in the personality of Buffalo Bill. The transition from ‘show’ to ‘legend’ is complete. This may look like a complete change but it also implies some new developments. The new image on the American cowboy that appeared in the former period did not disappear in this one. The increasing interest in Buffalo Bill resulted in a stronger visualization of the legendary cowboy-figure. This image must not be underestimated. Everything that had something to do with Buffalo Bill's experiences on the frontier was seen as representative for the real American

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<sup>182</sup> “Advertentie”, *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 25 March 1925.

<sup>183</sup> “Buffalo Bill”, *Leeuwarder nieuwsblad*, 2 March 1927, 5:

....who was the hero of many adventures and, as a result of that, of many youth books....

<sup>184</sup> “Buffalo Bill's Graf”, *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 18 February 1924.

<sup>185</sup> Kasson JS, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (New York, 2000) 265-273.

<sup>186</sup> “De Trek naar het Westen' Centraal”, *De Gooi- En Eemlander*, 24 April 1937:

....the battle against the advancing white pioneers against the Redskins.

West.<sup>187</sup> It did not matter if this referred to his Civil War career or when he drove for the pony express.<sup>188</sup> Newspapers such as the *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* called him “een cowboy van de echte soort”.<sup>189</sup> His adventures, experiences, and jobs were seen as symbolic for the real frontiersmen. The heroic cowboy was a fearless white man who represented specific qualities that were needed to survive in wildness.

This same image was clearly linked to violence as well. Cowboys such as Buffalo Bill represented the continuous conflicts with Native Americans, the hunt for buffalo's, and struggles with bandits. Concepts that often return in the searches. Furthermore, notions about violence were linked to positive sentiments such as ‘moed’ and ‘avontuurlijk’.<sup>190</sup> Its influence is made clear by the many notions about popular culture. One article in the *Tilburgsche Courant* mentioned about a movie called ‘Buffalo Bill’: “En zoo wordt 't een eindeloze strijd die afwisseling brengt in de beelden, welke in bonte rij aan den toeschouwer voorbij snellen”.<sup>191</sup> This sentence is symbolic for the interpretation of violence in relation to Buffalo Bill's Wild West. The legend became part of a sentiment which compared violence to entertainment. Its main function within the Buffalo Bill legend was to make the American West more adventurous and attracting. This reasoning was substantiated by journalists who warned that the apotheosis around violence could be bad for society.<sup>192</sup> One journalist of *De Tribune* warned: “Deze romantische Wild-West verheerlijkende film heeft echter ook nog dit gevaar..... De stof is zo spannend verfilmd op sommige momenten dat men onwillekeurig wordt meegesleept”.<sup>193</sup>

The strength of this romanticized image does not necessarily contradict the bullet image. On the contrary, Slotkin stated for US movies of the 1920s and 1930s that they “succeeded in appropriating the literary and historical tradition of the Myth of the Frontier and translating its symbols and references and its peculiar way of blending fiction and history into cinematic terms”.<sup>194</sup> It should be mentioned that some journalist do describe Buffalo Bill's Wild West this way when looking for example at this article in the *Nieuwsblad van Friesland*; “De weinige overlevenden hebben hun voorvaderlijk erf moeten ontruimen voor hun blanke broeders, tegen wier meerdere ontwikkeling in den strijd om het bestaan zij niet opgewassen bleken te zijn”.<sup>195</sup> The step from historical reality to a violent celebration of Western civilization is small. However, it must be mentioned that these articles, which are predominantly written in the late 1910s and early 1920s, are a minority.

The developments of this period are not over. The late 1920s and 1930s saw the rise of a third image which can be defined as a critical one. Many articles attempt to explain why and how the American West has changed so much. The relating sentiment can be distinguished in the title of an article published in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*: “Hoe de Amerikaansche bison werd uitgeroeid”.<sup>196</sup>

<sup>187</sup> “De Lasso: Wat Zijn Cowboys?”, *De Tribune*, 6 March 1937, 3.

<sup>188</sup> “Allerlei. Buffalo Bill”, *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 11 April 1927, 14.

<sup>189</sup> “Wie was Buffalo Bill ? Een cowboy van de echte soort”, *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 29 January 1938, 32:

....a cowboy among cowboys.

<sup>190</sup> 1. Courage 2. Adventurous

<sup>191</sup> “Burgerschouwburg: Buffalo Bill”, *Tilburgsche Courant*, 30 April 1927, 2:

And so it becomes an endless battle which gives variety to the images,....images that quickly pass the eyes of the audience

<sup>192</sup> “Gemengde Berichten. Inbrekers van 13 jaar oud. De invloed van prikkel-lectuur.”, *Voorwaarts*, April 22, 1922

<sup>193</sup> “De Trek naar het Westen. Tuschinski”, *De Tribune*, 12 April 1937, 4:

This romantic Wild West idealizing movie has a danger..... The material is so exciting that a visitor can unintentionally be moved

<sup>194</sup> Slotkin, R *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman, 1992) 254

<sup>195</sup> “Buffalo Bill”, *Nieuwsblad Van Friesland*, 22 October 1918, 5:

The few survivors were told by their white brethren, who could not be beaten, to evacuate the grounds of their ancestors.

<sup>196</sup> “Verdwenen Grootheid. Hoe de Amerikaansche Bison werd uitgeroeid.” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, July 2, 1932, 16:

How the American Bizon has been exterminated.

Journalists started to condemn the bad influences of violent Western civilization. Conquest cannot be accepted in every circumstance. There is also interest for the fate of Native Americans. An article in the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* mentions their dissatisfaction with the way they are stereotyped by the Buffalo Bill legend: “De zegeningen der beschavingen (between ironic quotation marks) werden hun haast met geweld opgedrongen in het bijzonder vuurwater”.<sup>197</sup> The most interesting aspect is that it criticized as well violence as Western civilization. This third image is very influential and emerges in many articles ranging from the Buffalo Bill legend to outlets of popular culture. Violence was interpreted as bad and entertaining at the same time, as a movie review of *De Tribune* indicated:

*Er wordt natuurlijk niet bij vermeld dat diezelfde nobele blanken met jenever en andere fraaie beschavingsartikelen meer stuk voor stuk de uitgestrekte prairiën der roodhuiden hebben gesloten en hele stammen Indianen en kudden buffels tegelijk hebben uitgeroeid.*<sup>198</sup>

In short, this period witnessed a cult around the legendary cowboy-figure who was represented by Buffalo Bill. The historical American West was seen as the place of glorified violence and romanticized adventures. Its specific function cannot be seen apart from the packing it came in; entertainment. However, the influence of Buffalo Bill is not unquestioned for. The same period witnessed the rise of articles that criticize the use of violence on the American West. Two very strong but contradicting images emerged. However, both underline the glorification of violence as a form of entertainment.

### Native Americans

The former period saw some interesting new developments resulting in a two-sided understanding about Native Americans. First, they were generalized as fearless, aggressive, uncivilized and hostile to Western civilization but without the racial and extremely offending stereotypes. Second, the same period also witnessed a noble Native American who defended his territory. This image was mainly a result of historical circumstances and symbolized the decreasing influence of Buffalo Bill on Dutch understanding about Native Americans.

The renewed interest in Buffalo Bill during the third period, which resulted in an enormous amount of newspaper articles as mentioned in the introduction, presumes the continuation in interpreting Native Americans as hostile and aggressive. A short overview of the articles underlines this. ‘Scalperen’, ‘oorlogspad’, and ‘tomahawk’ are words that often return.<sup>199</sup> Buffalo Bill was seen as the hero of wildness and his opponents were Native Americans.<sup>200</sup> The cult around him was so strong that Dutch journalists interpreted it to be historical correct. They connected it to real historical events such as Buffalo Bill’s battles with the Sioux. The Native American was still the bloodthirsty warrior on the frontier as a journalist of *De Tribune* suggested: “Er zijn geen Indianen meer die op het oorlogspad zijn, er zijn geen trappers meer, die gescalpeerd moeten worden,....”.<sup>201</sup> This even resulted to some extent in the comeback of 19<sup>th</sup> century racial stereotypes when looking

<sup>197</sup> “White Horse Eagle. Zijn komst in Nederland.” *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 8 July 1930, 9:

The blessings of ‘civilizations’ were almost forced upon them with violence and especially firewater.

<sup>198</sup> “De Trek naar het Westen. Tuschinski”, *De Tribune*, 12 April 1937, 4:

Ofcourse, they do not tell you that the same noble whites with their gin and other nice products of civilization stole the wide prairies of the redskins and exterminated whole tribes of Native Americans and buffalos.

<sup>199</sup> 1. Scalping 2. The path of war 3. Tomahawk

<sup>200</sup> “Van Overal. Buffalo Bill”, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 1 March 1927, 1

<sup>201</sup> “De Lasso: Wat Zijn Cowboys?”, *De Tribune*, 6 March 1937, 3:

There are no Native Americans anymore waging war. There are no trappers anymore, that need to be scalped.

for example at the following sentence published in the *Nieuwsblad van Friesland*: “Kansas....toen nog een ruwe, onrustige Staat, met een woelige, wilde bevolking, die in voortdurenden strijd leefde met den rooden inboorling.”<sup>202</sup> This constructed image of Native Americans even proved to be far more widespread and stronger than expected.

However, the underlying story of this historical image must be understood within its actual context. The Buffalo Bill legend was not told anymore by the Wild West show but by different outlets of popular culture. As a result, Native Americans were not only seen as frightening but also as entertaining warriors. Journalists in the 1920s warned for the bad influence of stories about Native Americans on Dutch society. Youth gangs and other crimes were still explained by Buffalo Bill lecture found in the houses of suspects.<sup>203</sup> Movies with much-saying titles as ‘De Roode Duivels’ did not only tell about Buffalo Bill’s experiences according to the *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant*, but also about “den strijd van de blanken tegen de indianen in zijn volle breedheid”.<sup>204</sup> In other words, the aggressive Native Americans became part of an entertaining battleground where romanticized representatives of good and evil battled.

The above mentioned development could suggest that the image of ‘the noble warrior who was threatened by the White man’ disappeared. The opposite is true. This same period witnessed a sharp rise in stories that criticized Buffalo Bill’s Wild West. Two of the often recurring words are ‘bison’ and ‘buffel’.<sup>205</sup> These apparent unimportant concepts actually point to critical articles where the historical transformation of the American West is explained. The emotional experiences of the Native Americans are described in detail, their defensive stances are romanticized, and the Buffalo Bill legend is criticized. A few of the articles, such as one in the *Leeuwarder Courant*, even stated that it were men as Buffalo Bill who were responsible for the dramatic developments on the frontier: “Daarom werd het verbod toen weer opgeheven en zei men overall: ‘Als de Indianen moeten verdwijnen moeten eerst de buffels uitgeroeid worden’.”<sup>206</sup> This sentiment can even be found in articles that see Native Americans as hostile but feel at the same time some compassion.<sup>207</sup>

This interpretation of Native Americans as noble warriors who have been wronged became quite prominent. Buffalo Bill is mentioned besides Fenimore Cooper and Karl May. ‘De Roode Duivels’ appeared together with ‘The Last of the Mohicans’.<sup>208</sup> The late 1920s and 1930s also saw an interest in the stories of actual Native Americans. This interpretation of Native Americans as noble warriors who have been wronged is not strange. Almost all tried to counter the stories that are told by Buffalo Bill. Luther Standing Bear, a Sioux chief, said in *De Sumatra Post*: “De blanke man die lang geleden naar het Westen trok was evenmin een vriend van de Indianen als een vriend van zijn eigen ras.”<sup>209</sup> The interest in Native Americans reached a peak which resulted in their idealization. Many examples can be mentioned but the most interesting one would probably be chief White Horse Eagle. He

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<sup>202</sup> “Buffalo Bill”, *Nieuwsblad Van Friesland*, 22 October 1918, 5:

Kansas, once a raw, restless state, with a turbulent, wild population, in continuous war with the red aboriginal.

<sup>203</sup> “Gemengde Berichten. Inbrekers van 13 jaar oud. De invloed van prikkel-lectuur.”, *Voorwaarts*, 22 April 1922, 1.

<sup>204</sup> “Nieuwe Bioscoop: De Roode Duivels”, *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant*, 24 April 1927, 10:

....the war of the white against the Native Americans in its full scope.

<sup>205</sup> 1. Bison 2. Buffalo

<sup>206</sup> “Over Indianen En Bisons”, *Leeuwarder Courant*, 4 March 1939, 20:

Because of that the bar was lifted and people said everywhere: The buffalos have to be exterminated so the Native Americans can be defeated.

<sup>207</sup> “Buffalo Bill”, *Nieuwsblad Van Friesland*, 22 October 1918, 5.

<sup>208</sup> “Advertentie”, *De Indische Courant*, 12 November 1937, 7.

<sup>209</sup> “Een siouz opperhoofd over het verleden. Boeken Over Indianen.” *De Sumatra Post*, 9 July 1928, 2:

The White man who a long time ago left for the West was neither a friend of the Native Americans or his own race.

visited the Netherlands in the 1930s at the age of 107 and claimed to have saved Buffalo Bill from hostile Mormons who dressed as Native Americans.<sup>210</sup> Regardless, White Horse Eagle disapproves of the image Buffalo Bill told about his saviors.

In short, the result of the renewed interest in Native Americans was a divided society that was defined by the *Algemeen Handelsblad* as:

*Het langzaam uitsterven van het Indianenras is een probleem waarover met groote heftigheid door de jaren heen is gepolemiseerd. Velen vinden zijn ondergang een smadelijke bladzijde in de koloniale geschiedenis van het Westen: anderen achten het ras als een cultuurelement van geen betekenis.*<sup>211</sup>

The Buffalo Bill legend influenced Dutch understanding about the Native American to great extent. Old stereotypes were combined with romantic ideals. However, this did not stop the emergence of a countermovement that criticized Buffalo Bill.

### American West

Journalists during the second period idealized the American West as a historical artwork. Authors as Kasson argued that this substantiated Buffalo Bill's historical narrative.<sup>212</sup> Also Slotkin gave a similar reasoning while talking about Western movies.<sup>213</sup> However, the transition to the Buffalo Bill legend did not stop changes in the interpretation of the region when looking from a Dutch perspective. The Wild West was still the battleground of Western civilization but the region also became an entertaining memory of a spectacular adventure where romanticized cowboys and Native Americans battled.

When looking at the renewed interest in the Buffalo Bill legend, it is logical to assume that this trend endured. Violence and Native Americans were not used anymore to substantiate the frontier myth but to remember a romanticized image of the Wild West. Also the American West seems to have become part of that. The available documents in the 1920s and 1930s, that mention 'Westen' at least once, show that over 55% of those articles are directly related to a form of mass culture typical for the Buffalo Bill legend such as movies and books. Furthermore, a majority of the remaining 45% make indirectly notion of these forms of mass culture or are directly focused on William Cody. In other words, the understanding about Buffalo Bill's Wild West was connected to entertainment because it needed to be enjoyable. As a journalist of the *Tilburgsche Courant* wrote: "De onverdroten minnaars van het wilde westen kunnen dus weer eens breed-uit genieten".<sup>214</sup>

However, many Dutch still wondered how the real Wild West would have looked like. The result was a lively mix between history and entertainment. Slotkin already argued how mass culture successfully

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<sup>210</sup> "Een 107-jarige Memoire-schrijver", *De Tijd: Godsdienstig-staatkundig dagblad*, 24 June 1940, 9.

<sup>211</sup> "Van Overal. Zijne Hoogheid Witte Paard Adelaar." *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 26 June 1930:

The slow extinction of the Native Americans is a problem about which with great vehemence has been discussed throughout the years. Many interpret it as a dark page in the history of Western's colonial history; others interpret it as a cultural and racial development without any importance.

<sup>212</sup> Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's*, 265-273.

<sup>213</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 191.

<sup>214</sup> "Burgerschouwburg: Buffalo Bill", *Tilburgsche Courant*, 30 April 1927, 2:

The indefatigable lovers of the wild wild west can therefore once again be very happy

influenced its audience during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>215</sup> This happened also in the Netherlands. The *Zaans Volksblad* argued how a movie about Buffalo Bill represented the real Wild West: “Deze film plaatst de toeschouwers terug in den Far West-tijd van het oog om oog en tand om tand in de streken waar God noch zijn gebod werd erkend”.<sup>216</sup> It is interesting that these comments have many parallels with the frontier myth. Something that is also suggested when looking at the titles of movies about Buffalo Bill: “Pioniers van het Westen”, “De Code Der Wildernis”, and “De trek naar het Westen”.<sup>217</sup> This image is completed when looking back at idealized violence and hostile Native Americans during this period. The frontier myth was adapted to mass culture which did not only result in an entertaining region but also a realistic one. The *Tilburgsche Courant* described it as the battlefield between ‘de voortrekkers der beschavingbrengende blanken’ and ‘strijdlustige en dappere Indianenstammen’.<sup>218</sup>

However, the fact that certain aspects of the frontier myth reappeared did not mean that they were also dominant. The focus on historical reality is about the glorification of violence, the heroism of cowboys and the interest in Native Americans. The stories behind these pillars of the American West were made entertaining as the following quote from *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie* symbolized: “Een romance van het gouden Westen; spannende avonturen, gevechten van man tegen man”.<sup>219</sup> In other words, the main function of remembering the historical value of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West was to make it more enjoyable.

The declining importance of this bigger historical narrative was also the result of criticism. Movie reviewers, journalists, and others argued that the idealization of Western civilization was undeserved.<sup>220</sup> However, at the same time they praised the heroic cowboys and aggressive Native Americans they saw in American mass culture. The result was a two-sided interpretation of the American West where on the one hand the progress of civilization was criticized while on the other it still functioned as an entertaining region. The following quote from *De Sumatra Post* makes this very clear, western civilization is mocked, while the Wild West is enjoyed:

*Verplaatst U zich van de kringen der Amerikaansche aristocratie, van uit het midden van die beroemde Amerikaansche schoonen naar het wilde Westen, het land van Buffalo Bill en U maakt hier een Romance mee, die U zal pakken, U zal doen meeleven, U doet lachen en schreien, U doet vechten en schieten, U inpalmt van begin tot einde.*<sup>221</sup>

In short, Dutch still saw Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, even in its new form, as historical realistic. The American West was nothing more than a romanticized battlefield where good battled evil. This vision was strengthened by the Buffalo Bill legend. However, the main function of this interpretation was to make the Wild West more enjoyable. In short, the frontier myth was replaced by entertainment.

<sup>215</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 191.

<sup>216</sup> “De Trek naar het Westen”, *Zaans Volksblad*, 25 March 1939, 5:

This movie places the viewers in the Far West-era where people fought for eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth in regions where God’s laws were not followed.

<sup>217</sup> 1. Pioneers of the West 2. The code of Wildness 3. The Journey to the West

<sup>218</sup> “Burgerschouwburg: Buffalo Bill”, *Tilburgsche Courant*, 30 April 1927, 2:

....the pioneers of civilization-bringing white.... .....belligerent and courageous tribes of Native Americans....

<sup>219</sup> “Advertentie”, *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 11 July 1927, 6:

A romance of the Golden West: exciting adventures, battles of man against man

<sup>220</sup> “De Trek naar het Westen. Tuschinski”, *De Tribune*, 12 April 1937, 4.

<sup>221</sup> “Advertentie”, *De Sumatra Post*, 22 August 1927, 4:

Move away from American aristocracy, from the midst of famous American beauties to the Wild West, the country of Buffalo Bill and here you will experience a romance that will move you, will make you feel sorry, will make you laugh, cry, fight, and shot. A movie that will touch you the whole way.

## Conclusion

This period witnessed the complete transition from the Wild West show to the Buffalo Bill legend. Both concepts represented a certain form of entertainment. The first was based on a specific show with one general underlying narrative. The second was based on Buffalo Bill himself and could be found in different outlets of mass culture such as books and movies. The historical narrative however, had lost its prominent position.

As a result, this transition proved to be important for Dutch understanding about the American West. The 'Myth of the Frontier' was replaced by an entertaining Wild West. Violence, Native Americans, and all other crucial concepts related to the region were adapted to this romantic image. This change did not mean that there was no focus on historical reality at all. Some Dutch thought that the entertaining cowboys and Native Americans were part of a real past while others criticized these representations. Regardless, Buffalo Bill's images still appeared but its overarching meaning had changed.

## Conclusion

This thesis tried to answer the following question: to what extent did the Buffalo Bill legend influence Dutch understanding of the American West? The research was divided in four chapters.

The first chapter started with a historical introduction. A short overview of William Cody's life showed how influential he had been. In fact, the Buffalo Bill legend became part of European and American mass culture. Much more interesting however, was the academic discussion. It was argued that Buffalo Bill had constructed a single story for the Wild West show. This reasoning was underlined by focusing on two important themes of Buffalo Bill's Wild West: violence and Native Americans. The result was defined by Slotkin as the 'Myth of the Frontier'. The American West became a predestined place where America's national identity was built and where white civilization conquered wildness.

Regardless, Buffalo Bill's Wild West was still very multidimensional. The single meaning of the show did not let to an universal understanding among its visitors. Various patterns and themes emerged over the years. As a result, it was argued that interpretations could vary as well. Rydell and Kroes showed how this worked out for European interpretations. Some agreed with the show and copied the 'Myth of the Frontier' while others saw it as a confirmation of a completely different story. In short, Cody did construct a single meaning for his Wild West but interpretations could still vary.

The second chapter analyzed the influence of the Buffalo Bill legend on Dutch public media in the period 1880-1900. Many articles were written about Cody and his Wild West Show despite the fact that he had never visited the Netherlands. As a result, strong parallels were found between Buffalo Bill's frontier myth and Dutch understanding about the American West. Journalists interpreted violence as the bullet of civilization and Native Americans into dangerous opponents. The Wild West symbolized a historical transformation where Western civilization would replace barbarism. On the other hand, there were also a few differences in the Netherlands. The most important was their denial of American heroism. The Dutch accepted the victorious path of Western

civilization but without accepting America's unique part in it. The result is an interesting mix between contextual influences and the patterns of Buffalo Bill's Wild West.

The third chapter analyzed the influence of the Buffalo Bill legend on Dutch public media in the period 1900-1917. Some interpretations stayed the same. The Wild West show still toured around Europe, violence was still glorified, Native Americans were still seen as violent, and the American West was for some still a battlefield between barbarism and civilization. However, there were also many differences. One of the most important developments was the transition from the Wild West show to the Buffalo Bill legend. Journalists were more interested in the stories surrounding his personality. A new image appeared that romanticized Buffalo Bill's Wild West, including its main pillars, as something of the past but where real adventures and courage could be found.

The fourth chapter analyzed the influence of the Buffalo Bill legend on Dutch public media in the period 1918-1940. Cody had died in 1917 but his legend continued. In fact, he was more popular than ever before. Notions about his shows had almost completely disappeared. His Wild West was represented by the Buffalo Bill legend. It returned in movies, books, and other forms of mass culture. Buffalo Bill remained one of the strongest symbols of the American West. It influenced Dutch interpretations about the American West to great extent. The region was romanticized into an entertaining place where heroic cowboys fought against fearless Native Americans. Also a new critical perspective underlined this view. Journalists warned for its bad influence on the youth because it was so entertaining and other journalists, who did not agree with its positive image, described what had actually happened on the American West. The frontier myth however, had almost completely disappeared.

In short, Buffalo Bill's Wild West should be understood as a multidimensional concept that represented a single meaning. The so-called 'Myth of the Frontier' was once very influential within Dutch understanding. However, this changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The transition from the Wild West show to a broader Buffalo Bill legend resulted in the understanding of the American West as a romantic and entertaining region. The new interpretations of violence and Native Americans substantiated that reasoning. Cody's historical narrative was fading away but it was replaced by a new image that still had many similarities with Buffalo Bill's Wild West. In other words, the story of the Buffalo Bill legend changed over time but it did influence Dutch understanding of the American West to great extent.

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