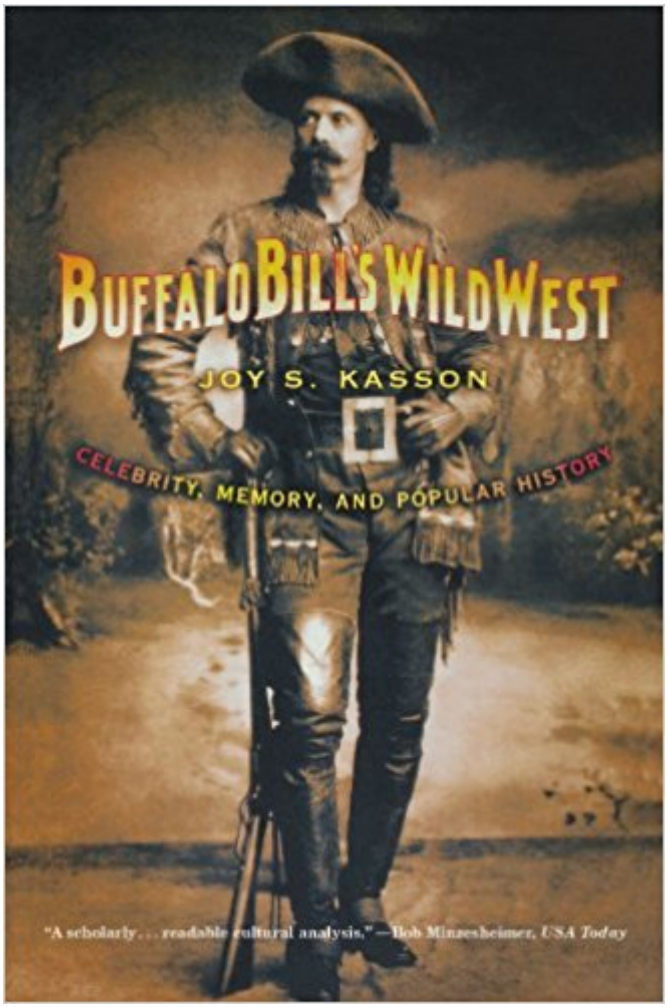
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Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, And Popular History



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Synopsis

A fascinating analysis of the first famous American to erase the boundary between real history and entertainmentCanada, and Europe. Crowds cheered as cowboys and Indians--and Annie Oakley!--galloped past on spirited horses, sharpshooters exploded glass balls tossed high in the air, and cavalry troops arrived just in time to save a stagecoach from Indian attack. Vivid posters on billboards everywhere made William Cody, the show’s originator and star, a world-renowned figure.Joy S. Kasson’s important new book traces Cody’s rise from scout to international celebrity, and shows how his image was shaped. Publicity stressed his show’s "authenticity" yet audiences thrilled to its melodrama; fact and fiction converged in a performance that instantly became part of the American tradition.But how, precisely, did that come about? How, for example, did Cody use his audience’s memories of the Civil War and the Indian wars? He boasted that his show included participants in the recent conflicts it presented theatrically, yet he also claimed it evoked "memories" of America’s bygone greatness. Kasson’s shrewd, engaging study--richly illustrated--in exploring the disappearing boundary between entertainment and public events in American culture, shows us just how we came to imagine our memories.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

William "Buffalo Bill" Cody was the Wild West adventurer par excellence: he served as an army scout in the Civil War, skirmished with American Indians on the Great Plains and killed enough buffalo to help bring them perilously close to extinction. But if that were all he had done, few would remember him today. Buffalo Bill’s real genius, historian Kasson (Marble Queens and Captives), a

professor of American studies and English at UNC-Chapel Hill, argues in this insightful study, was in how he capitalized on his own history. As a showman who presented a packaged, sanitized representation of the Wild West, Cody anticipated both the Warholian cult of celebrity and the "real-life" melodramas of modern television, Kasson says. And in the process, he codified the archetype of the Western hero that persists to this day. Bill's performances in his traveling Wild West showsAfeaturing "authentic" scenes of Indian life, re-creations of historical events (including the Battle of Little Big Horn) and the thrilling presence of Buffalo Bill himselfAwere, she argues, a triumph of self-promotion and self-definition. As Buffalo Bill constructed a public identity quite apart from his private life, he magnified his role in history: "In Buffalo Bill's Wild West, historical events seemed to become personal memory, and personal memory was reinterpreted as national memory." This book will, of course, appeal to a curious cross-section of Wild West aficionados and scholars of 19th-century mediaAbut because Kasson is a perceptive and skillful writer, it is also well suited to thoughtful general readers who like good, critical histories. With prose that's never too academic, she delivers a fine analysis of an American folk hero who was at once a shameless self-promoter and an important architect of our national myth of the Wild West. 132 b&w illus. (July) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adult/High School-A thoroughly researched, entertaining, personal, and hu-man account of William F. Cody. Buffalo Bill was the consummate showman and frontiersman, equally at home hunting buf-falo on the prairies of Nebraska or performing privately for Queen Victoria at Earl's Court, London. He was, for generations of Americans, the real West and his Wild West Show was its true story. From his public-relations maneuvers, our images of Native Americans, Western landscapes, cowboy roundups, and sharpshooters like Annie Oakley would be born. Through carefully researched diaries, anecdotes, and other historical documents, Kasson demonstrates how Buffalo Bill created the spectacle and examines how his "subtle interweaving of fact, fiction, hype, and audience desire" fed Americans and Europeans starving for a glimpse of the "real" West. A century later, Americans would denounce the show's stereotypes as they became perpetuated in popular culture. Yet, paradoxically, Buffalo Bill and his Wild West Show did preserve some history and memory of the West at the very time it was disappearing to development. The book is enjoyable as both biography and cultural history, and has extensive notes. Liberally illustrated with glossy black-and-white portraits and photographs, as well as reproductions of posters, billboards, and political cartoons, it provides a fascinating study of the man and his time.-Becky Ferrall, Stonewall

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there probably isn't a better book out there on cody. and if you're interested in him, a book you nmight not find through usual searches if "Eiffel's Tower" which covers the 1889 world exposition in paris, where thomas edison, cody, whistler, and half the famous french painters of the day were in attendance. cody, of course, entertained hundreds of thousands of visitors to two shows a day and was the toast of parisian society...

Easy & fun to read while being full of history. Kasson makes learning about BB engaging & interesting. I highly recommend this.

Definitely a must-add to any collection you might have about Buffalo Bill. Really a great book.

I like these book whille it shows a life of a wild west hero from other side of curtain. The bookexplain how the shows began to be first step to advertise a bright spectrum of avdience not only in USA but also in Europe.Poor or rich they like the shows.

Excellent!

Love the book!

Joy Kasson uses the story of Buffalo Bill Cody and his Wild West show to tell us about the beginnings of celebrity in America. Tracing Buffalo Bill's life from Army scout through Wild West show impresario she reveals how Cody "created an American memory through entertainment" by bringing together Northerners and former Confederates in the final decade of the nineteenth century for a shared and comforting interpretation of American identity. The imperialist story the Wild West Show told was legitimizing to American's who wanted to view their destruction of native American life in their westward advancement as the justifiable acts by victims of murderous natives, now happily tamed as actors, rather than the other way around. She demonstrates how Buffalo Bill's thesis about western conquest by white Americans influenced the twentieth century interpretation of American history in many ways, not the least of which was the Boy Scouts, and particulary through the powerful genre of the motion picture, in which Cody's influence was seminal.Buffalo Bill's Wild

West Show promoters were among the first to manipulate the public through advertising and image building. Kasson has given new insight into a late twentieth century culture that produced such phenomena as an actor as president, spin doctors and focus groups, and in countless other ways blurred the line between performance and reality.A book both scholarly and readable, Buffalo Bill's Wild West has broken new ground in our understanding of the beginnings of our celebrity culture.

After checking this book out of the library and reading some of it, we knew we had to own it. Kasson writes well for the serious amateur of the Wild West, and the scholarship appears solid. It's clearly a work of contemporary history-writing, in that Kasson is very attentive to how we re-tell our past to ourselves, how myths and celebrity develop. In this respect it resembles Paul Reddin's "Wild West Shows" (University of Illinois Press, 1999), which we also recommend. Readers who want to know what it was REALLY like on the plains will want to consult other books.

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