



## Wild West Shows

*Paul Reddin*

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The Wild West: a term that conjures up pictures of wagon trains, unspoiled prairies, Indians, rough 'n' ready cowboys, roundups, and buffalo herds. Where did this collection of images come from? Paul Reddin exposes the mythology of the American frontier as a carefully crafted product of the Wild West show. Focusing on such pivotal figures as George Catlin, Buffalo Bill Cody, and Tom Mix, Reddin traces the rise and fall of a popular entertainment shaped out of the raw material of America. Buffalo Bill and other entertainers capitalized on public fascination with the danger, heroism, and courage associated with the frontier by continually modifying their presentation of the West to suit their audiences. Thus the Wild West show, contrary to its own claims of accuracy and authenticity, was highly selective in its representations of the West as well as widely influential in shaping the public image of life on the Great Plains. A uniquely American entertainment - colorful, energetic, unabashed, and, as Reddin demonstrates, self-made - the Wild West show exerted an appeal that was all but irresistible to a public hovering uncertainly between industrial progress and nostalgia for

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