"EVERYTHING OF INTEREST IN THE LATE PINE RIDGE WAR ARE HELD BY US FOR SALE":
POPULAR CULTURE AND WOUNDED KNEE

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Then suddenly nobody knew what was happening, except that the soldiers were all shooting and the wagon-guns began going off right in among the people.¹

So BLACK ELK DESCRIBED THE ERUPTION of violence at the Pine Ridge Reservation on the morning of 29 December 1890. Called in to suppress the messianic Ghost Dance religion and prevent an outbreak, U. S. Army troops, after two months of tense inactivity, killed over two hundred Lakotas in a ninety-minute burst of violence. Long a marker of the end of the Indian wars and the close of the frontier era, the massacre at Wounded Knee holds a prominent position within western history and popular consciousness.²

At the same moment that Wounded Knee entered history, it also entered the realm of popular culture. Photographers George Trager, newspaper reporter William Fitch Kelley, and dime novelist Francis Dougherty soon produced images and

¹ John G. Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks (1932; reprint, Lincoln, 1979), 261.
narratives of Wounded Knee, and popular entertainer William F. (Buffalo Bill) Cody participated in the events surrounding the conflict. Mass-produced, commercial, and cheap, these images and narratives depended upon their audience's commonly held assumptions to make sense of the battle's chaos. Because they relied upon shared values to ascribe meaning to the violence, these artifacts can be read as "vehicles of self knowledge," as interpretations that the culture made of itself. For the historian, the value of these popular texts lies precisely in their ability to suggest how a culture understood itself at a critical historical moment, to express what might be called their era's "cultural logic."

An examination of the self-knowledge articulated by these popular texts and acts makes clear that Wounded Knee belongs not exclusively to the history of the West, but equally to the larger social history of the late nineteenth century. Of a piece with the Coeur d'Alene mining strike, the Homestead steel strike, and the Haymarket riot, the battle was a frontier episode in the succession of domestic military engagements that mark the late nineteenth century as perhaps the nation's most socially turbulent period.

In an unsigned editorial entitled "Certain Dangerous Tendencies in American Life," published the year after the violent nation-wide railroad strike of 1877, the Atlantic Monthly put forth a strategy for coping with increasing class conflict. Voicing the anxieties of an educated and professional middle class that felt itself besieged, even as it moved into a position of cultural dominance, the Atlantic called up militaristic visions of an America threatened by a "savage" working class population. Civilization itself seemed at stake as the magazine fearfully declared the nation to be in "the earliest stages of a war on property, and upon everything that satisfies what are called the higher wants of a civilized life": "culture . . . property . . . order".

To stem the tide of social "disorder and disintegration," the Atlantic proposed incorporating the "dangerous" immigrant and working classes into a "vital, organic, and spiritual . . . unity" with its readership through a process of cultural reeducation. According to this view, social stability could only be restored through educating the menacing classes into a revitalized and "homogeneous" national culture based on law, order, and respect for private property. This vision can be understood as part of the larger process of the "incorporation of America," in which the nation was unified and.

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1 I take this phrase from Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (New York, 1982).


stratified through rising corporate structures, expanding communication and transportation networks, and an emerging national culture. Consonant with the evolution of a nation unified along hierarchical lines, the Atlantic argued for a top-down cultural solution to a fundamentally social and economic conflict between classes.\(^6\)

Events leading up to Wounded Knee, and more importantly the Ghost Dance religion, belong to this larger social history as an attempted renegotiation by the Lakotas of their position within the emerging national order. On the most basic, geographical level, the conflict resulted from the military's attempt to return the Lakotas to the Pine Ridge Reservation after their flight into the Badlands. Yet because the reservation functioned as a place of reeducation as well as physical containment, what seems on the surface a simple boundary dispute was actually a deeply antagonistic cultural conflict.

A variation of the Atlantic's cultural imperative undergirded reservation policy: Indians must cease understanding themselves according to their own self-definitions and instead reconceive themselves according to the norms of middle-class American culture, i.e. as property owners, Christians, English-language readers and writers. Reservations were physical spaces designed to redefine the cultural space of Indians—to move them from savagery, a position wholly outside the social order, to quasi-citizens, a position within the emerging social hierarchy, albeit on its lowest rungs.

The Ghost Dance represented an active resistance to incorporation into American society. A reaction against ten years of reservation life, the Ghost Dance promised the Sioux, as well as other Indian nations, a return to their former autonomy through the regeneration of the earth, the total erasure of whites, and, most significantly, the resurrection of preconquest rhythms of life. The Ghost Dancers literally embodied the vanishing ideal of cultural self-determination.

Thus, the threatened outbreak from the Pine Ridge Reservation and the ensuing military response represent a struggle not simply over the proper physical space of the Lakotas, but also over their appropriate cultural space. In escaping from the reservation, the Lakotas threatened to escape from their assigned social position and, as the Ghost Dance promised, recapture their traditional, independent selves. The Ghost Dance frightened whites precisely because the success of incorporation required containing all elements of society within a fixed hierarchy—any uncontained populations were by definition hostile.

The military forces and the purveyors of popular culture examined here split the task of confronting the threat posed by the Lakotas. While the military responded to the danger of the Lakotas determining their own physical space, popular culture responded to the threat of the Lakotas determining their own social and cultural identities. Using the rhetorical strategies made available by the Atlantic twelve years earlier, Buffalo Bill Cody, William Fitch Kelley, George Trager, and Francis Dougherty

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\(^6\) [Harrison], “Certain Dangerous Tendencies,” 393. On the ideology of incorporation, see Trachtenberg, Incorporation of America. On the manipulation of culture for social ends during this period, see Lawrence W. Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America (Cambridge, MA, 1988).
represented the struggle to contain the Lakotas within the physical space of the reservation as a skirmish within the larger national war over civilization and culture.

Buffalo Bill Cody's role in the events surrounding Wounded Knee dramatizes how institutional structures of popular culture operated according to the same logic as did political and military forces. This shared logic centered around the question of the most effective way to incorporate the Indians into the nation's "organic" social order. On a concrete level, Buffalo Bill's Wild West show helped maintain the reservation as the legitimate physical space for the Indians, their proper conduit into American society. More abstractly, the Wild West show helped create a distinct cultural space—spectacle—that corresponded to the physical space of the reservation as a means of incorporation. Like the reservation, the space of spectacle served as the arena for negotiating the Indians' position within the emerging social hierarchy.\(^7\)

Blurring the boundary between entertainment and politics, Buffalo Bill and his Wild West show figured repeatedly as participants in the events of Wounded Knee. In November 1890, Cody convinced his friend, General Miles, the Army officer in charge of the military operation against the Ghost Dancing Lakotas, that only he could bring in Sitting Bull without violence. Sitting Bull, having traveled across the United States and Canada with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show during 1885, shared a friendly, respectful relationship with Cody. However, a resentful and fearful agent rescinded Cody's orders soon after his arrival at the Standing Rock Agency, and the showman departed without ever seeing Sitting Bull.

Buffalo Bill's more significant interaction with Wounded Knee came after the massacre, when he incorporated a number of Ghost Dancers into his Wild West show. When General Miles left Pine Ridge for Chicago on 26 January, he took with him twenty-five Ghost Dancers deemed potential troublemakers to confine at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, until all threat of disturbance passed. When Buffalo Bill offered to take the prisoners on the show's upcoming European tour, Miles agreed and released them into his custody. The prisoners, along with one hundred other Sioux from Pine Ridge, departed for Europe in April 1891.\(^8\)

Contemporary newspaper reporters noted a third interaction between Cody and the Pine Ridge Sioux. According to William Fitch Kelley of the Nebraska State Jour-

\(^7\) For an overview of Buffalo Bill's career, see Brooklyn Museum, Museum of Art-Carnegie Institute, and Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Buffalo Bill and the Wild West (Brooklyn, 1981); Don Russell, The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill (Norman, 1960), and The Wild West: A History of Wild West Shows (Fort Worth, TX, 1961); Sarah J. Blackstone, Buckskins, Bullets and Business: A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West (Westport, CT, 1986). For a discussion of Buffalo Bill's role in mythologizing Theodore Roosevelt's racist ideology of imperialist expansion, see Richard Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America (New York, 1992), 63-87.

\(^8\) Commissioner of Indian Affairs T. J. Morgan, who normally opposed the use of Indians in Wild West shows, apparently agreed to let the Ghost Dancers go with Cody, feeling that since they had proven themselves to be savages by their recent actions, they might as well be publicly displayed as such. L. G. Moses, "Wild West Shows, Reformers, and the Image of the American Indian, 1887-1914," South Dakota History 14 (Fall 1984): 213.
nal, Agent Royer of Pine Ridge had drawn his Indian police force almost entirely from Indians who had previously performed with Buffalo Bill's show.

These incidents illustrate how Cody and the Wild West show, like the military, worked to maintain the reservation both as a coherently ordered, securely bounded space and as an effective tool of Indian acculturation. Cody and his show, by operating as a resource base upon which the government could draw, helped the military restore order. In their roles as popular culture characters, Buffalo Bill and Sitting Bull had developed a relationship that the government could exploit and that Cody made available for that purpose. Similarly, the Wild West show assumed the military's policing and surveillance function by removing the unruly elements from the reservation and keeping them under close supervision and control. Miles's easy accession to Cody's proposal indicates that from the government's perspective the show and the prison fulfilled the same function.

Not only did the Wild West show help preserve order on the reservation by removing unruly elements, it also served as a training ground to acculturate Indian leaders. Like the reservation itself, the Wild West show socialized the Indian performers into American norms and values. In this case, the Lakotas who performed with the show were not only themselves integrated into white society but on their return acted as extensions of the agent's governmentally-derived authority. Performing a crucial educational function, the Indian police encouraged the acculturation of traditionally-minded Indians, upheld the supremacy of the law, inculcated respect for the rights of private property, strengthened the authority of the agent over that of the tribal chief, and generally prepared the Indians for the dissolution of the tribal government and their eventual incorporation into American society. According to Commissioner Hiram Price, the Indian police functioned as "a perpetual educator."

Most significantly, however, Buffalo Bill illustrates how transforming the Lakotas into spectacle facilitated their incorporation into a national social order. By including the Ghost Dancers in his show, Cody effectively removed them from the political realm of the reservation and transferred them into the cultural space of spectacle, an amorphous locality in continual motion across America and Europe. Once in the realm of spectacle, the very act of performing became a form of policing. By casting them in the role of violent savages resisting the onslaught of white civilization, the show effectively prevented the Lakotas from playing out that role in reality and actively resisting the imposition of the reservation system. By imaginatively resisting incorporation they were more effectively incorporated, and by enacting the role of "dangerous class" in popular spectacle their actual threat to the social order was contained and nullified.

The Wild West show can be seen as a technology for producing social knowledge, that is, knowledge about the Indians' proper role in a changing society. Buffalo Bill drew attention to this by stressing the show's historical authenticity and educational

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value. He reached back to the pre-reservation era for a model of Indian behavior and cast the Indians in the role of barbarous savages futilely resisting the glorious western expansion of civilization. The show produced knowledge open to contestation, however, and various groups debated the value and meaning of the show's Indian content.\textsuperscript{10}

Reform groups such as the Indian Rights Association condemned Wild West shows for miseducating both Indians and whites. By propagating the model of barbarism versus civilization, the IRA argued, Wild West shows undermined integration, assimilation, and cultural homogenization and preserved traditional modes of behavior and culture. According to the IRA, the Wild West show acted as "the foster-father of those barbarous customs, modes of life, and habits of thought which Indian education justly aims to destroy."\textsuperscript{11}

Indian historian Vine Deloria, Jr., on the other hand, sees the knowledge produced by the shows in an entirely different light. To him, the shows provided Indians with a transitional space in which to educate themselves about American society from a position of relative safety. This knowledge had real material benefits for the Indians, helping them recognize and resist government exploitation. For Deloria, the Indians gained invaluable knowledge about the real workings of political power by participating in the low-culture realm of popular spectacle.\textsuperscript{12}

Both detractors and supporters of the Wild West show linked the representation of Indians in popular spectacle to their position in the social hierarchy. For critics, the show produced knowledge that encouraged resistance towards incorporation; for advocates, the knowledge gained during shows enabled Indians to maneuver more advantageously through the same process. For both whites and Indians, the negotiation of the later's position within the emerging social hierarchy took place on the public stage of spectacle.\textsuperscript{13}

As Buffalo Bill and the Wild West show indicate, popular culture did not simply produce "after-the-fact" representations of the events of Wounded Knee. The actions of the popular press also highlight popular culture's active influence on these events. Twenty-five journalists covered the story at Pine Ridge at one time or another during the period of conflict, and many of them worked to make Wounded Knee a media-inspired military action, a rehearsal for the Spanish-American War. As word of the Ghost Dance spread in the fall of 1890, white settlers began to deluge the government with demands for protection. Local newspapers published incendiary rumors of war.

\textsuperscript{10} Richard Slotkin, "The 'Wild West'," in \textit{Buffalo Bill and the Wild West}, Brooklyn Museum et al., 29.

\textsuperscript{11} Moses, "Wild West Shows," 214.

\textsuperscript{12} Vine Deloria, Jr., "The Indians," in \textit{Buffalo Bill and the Wild West}, Brooklyn Museum et al., 54-55.

\textsuperscript{13} On the political implications of spectacle, see Amy Kaplan, "Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of American Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890s," \textit{American Literary History} 2 (Winter 1990); Michael Rogin, "'Make My Day!': Spectacle as Amnesia in Imperial Politics," \textit{Representations} 29 (Winter 1990).
and added their weight to the mounting calls for troops. This “propaganda, disguised as news” served local interests: an increased military presence would do much to restore local economies depressed by a regional economic downturn.¹⁴

When the military arrived at Pine Ridge in November, reporters and photographers from across the nation came with them. For weeks nothing happened. The reporters, disappointed and in need of stories to fill their daily dispatches, filed rumors and untruths, stirred up fear and anxiety, criticized the delays and peace missions, and urged military action. They criticized Generals Brooke’s and Miles’s plan to coax the Lakotas peacefully back onto the reservations. The press fed an insatiable demand, local and national, for news and images of the impending crisis, and even the Lakotas learned about their impending fate from reports of troop movements in the New York, Chicago, and Omaha papers available at the traders’ stores.¹⁵

Commissioner of Indian Affairs T. J. Morgan recognized the role of the press in manipulating the crisis and pinpointed as a significant cause of the conflict the “exaggerated accounts in the newspapers” that “frightened many Indians away from their agencies into the Bad Lands.” Dr. V. T. McGillycuddy, former agent at Pine Ridge, denied that any war or outbreak existed prior to the massacre, and the Reverend Thomas L. Briggs, a missionary among the Sioux, felt “it was in very truth a newspaper war.” Tensions ran so high among soldiers and Indians alike by late December that the likelihood of an unplanned confrontation burgeoned. Rather than recording and transmitting news of the action as it transpired, the press actively participated in bringing to a head the crisis of Wounded Knee.¹⁶

William Fitch Kelley epitomizes the press’s behavior. Son of a prominent physician, Kelley worked briefly as a reporter after attending college and then proceeded to practice law in Lincoln, Nebraska, for twenty-two years. During his stint as a reporter he covered the events at Pine Ridge for the Nebraska State Journal from 24 November 1890 to 16 January 1891. One of three reporters actually present at Wounded Knee, he was first to dispatch his report over the wires. Not merely a witness, Kelley took part in the battle: standing amidst the Indians when the fighting broke out, he supposedly killed three Sioux at close range.

Kelley spread fear among local inhabitants with his reports of imminent catastrophe. Under headlines such as “Bad Reports Verified, Indians Rampage,” “The Redskins Retreat, War Clouds Grow Darker,” and “Spurn Their Proffer, Hostiles as Aggressive as Ever,” he conveyed “authentic information” that the Indians planned to


¹⁶ Ibid., 208, 205; Eastman, “Ghost Dance War,” 30. Not all newspapers took such alarmist positions: Watson, “Last Indian War,” 206, quotes the Chronicle (Custer, SD) of 6 December 1890: “so far as the people of the Hills are concerned, there does not appear to be any reasonable grounds for alarm, hence we would deem it advisable, for the present, and until actual danger presents itself, to dismiss fear and await further developments.”
kill all the whites in the area. He wrote that reliable sources told him “horrible tales of riot, pillage and desolation,” as well as of the destruction of houses and livestock. According to Indian scouts, the “hostiles” were prepared for and committed to war. Kelley also urged military action, arguing that troops, not diplomacy, should have been employed from the first. War or “unconditional surrender” would prove the only choice.17

Kelley’s newspaper reports fueled the events leading up to Wounded Knee. Yet they stand as objects of historical interest in another sense as well. Structured according to a logic shared by other literary institutions of middle-class culture, Kelley’s articles served as vehicles of self-knowledge for a social stratum that felt itself under siege. Using the language of the Atlantic’s 1878 call to arms, Kelley painted Wounded Knee as a mortal struggle between opposing cultural systems and as a well managed response to social disorder incited by a “dangerous class.”

Kelley framed his understanding of the events of Wounded Knee in terms of order and control. He placed the blame for the then current state of affairs on the previous agent, Gallagher, who, Kelley argued, “certainly lost control over the people here” long before he left his position. The new agent, Royer, on the other hand, “sought to grasp affairs with a firm and determined hand,” but by then it was too late. All efforts to resolve the crisis peacefully were misguided, according to Kelley, because they “fail[ed] to impress [the Indians] with the proper respect for law and order.”18

For Kelley, the military represented the forces of order and the rebellious Indians the forces of chaos. In contrast to the tightly-disciplined army, the hostile Indians sowed mayhem among themselves and throughout the entire area. Quoting General Miles, Kelley wrote: “At last accounts the Indians were fighting among themselves. Their camp was pandemonium. There was no head to the hostiles. The desperadoes were destroying their own people.”19

To Kelley, destruction of property symbolized the chaos caused by those Indians who had escaped from government control. Every day reports came in, wrote Kelley, of “property of all kinds plundered and destroyed, settlers frightened” and stock killed by “roving” Indians, “red marauders,” and the “red cyclone.” Lack of respect for property indicated to Kelley a low level of civilization. While the “hostiles” wantonly destroyed homes and livestock, the “friendlies” expressed concern about the safety of their property.20

The issue of control extended to self-control as well. Kelley repeatedly implied that the poverty and degraded conditions in which the Lakotas lived resulted from their own lack of self-discipline. When issued food by the government, Kelley re-

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18 Ibid., 75.

19 Ibid., 237.

20 Ibid., 131, 92.
ported, they feasted for a day or two and then fasted and begged until the next ration
day came around. "Such is the Indian," he wrote, "he lives only in the present, appar-
etently never realizing the morrow is to come." Commenting on the number of days it
took Indian leaders to arrange a council with General Brooke, Kelley noted that "an
Indian never seems to appreciate 'the time is fleeting.'" In Kelley's eyes, the Lakotas
had failed to internalize self-regulating conceptions of time and discipline.\textsuperscript{21}

He also asserted that Indians' internal flaws of mind and character caused their
current misfortune. Kelley blamed the massacre on the "insanity" of the Indians for
attacking an overwhelming force of soldiers. He puzzled over the poor rate of recovery
among wounded Indians, ignoring the grim irony that they were being tended by mili-
tary doctors wearing the same blue uniforms as the soldiers who had just attacked
them. He attributed their low rate of recovery to their obstinate refusal of modern
medicine and their "disinclination to be properly treated." For Kelley, the Indians' ig-
norance and refusal of modernity explained and justified the bloody conflict.\textsuperscript{22}

Kelley feared that what he saw as the overwhelming chaos of the hostile Indians
might infect the forces of order and control. When General Brooke delayed taking
decisive action, Kelley depicted the agency itself as slipping out of control, as Indians
near the agency readied themselves for battle against unprepared soldiers. The night
after the battle, "pandemonium reigned supreme," as hostile Indians threatened to
penetrate the boundary of the agency and mix with the soldiers in close, physical
combat.\textsuperscript{23}

Between these contrasting visions of the military's control and the hostiles'
chaos, Kelley perceived a middle stage of controlled disorder. Kelley approvingly de-
scribed the activities of the friendly or chastened Sioux as "spectacles," not unlike
those in a Wild West show. He depicted the beef issue as a "most exciting sight" that
many spectators ventured out to behold:

\begin{quote}
    it is a thrilling spectacle, from one to two hundred parties scampering
over the plain, Indians letting forth their tremendous whoop, cattle bellowing as
they seek to join their fellows and are cut off by the Indian on horseback. The most
exciting of all sports to be witnessed on the frontier [it provided a] most exciting
afternoon, as well to the observer as to he who takes part in the chase.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

Likewise he emphasized the visual display of the Indian women coming in to the
agency on ration day: the sight of the brightly painted women dressed in their "rather
pretty attire" and waiting in a long, winding line would "be called handsome by some
and certainly picturesque by all." Kelley also commented on the elaborately arrayed
company of Indian scouts, which "makes a splendid appearance with their new showy

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 78, 99
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 188, 198, 251.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 194.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 80-81.
\end{footnotes}
uniforms, their graceful horsemanship.” The ultimate spectacle occurred when the army finally brought all the rebellious Indians into the agency: “It was a grand sight to see them slowly marching along for three hours up and down the hills, and as General Miles said, a sight never again to be witnessed in Indian warfare on this continent.” Seemingly disparate, these spectacular events represented moments when the Indians were securely under government control, either receiving food, submitting to military authority, or acting as agents of the government.25

Kelley used these incidents as tropes to denote the submission of the Lakotas to governmental authority; for him spectacular moments fulfilled the same political function as did Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show. In both cases the “unruly” Lakotas performed strictly limited roles assigned to them by a central authority, their potential political actions contained within a defined cultural space.

Kelley made the dynamics of the conflict legible and comprehensible to his readers by utilizing the Atlantic’s value system to articulate the distinctions between “hostile” and “friendly” Indians. Kelley categorized the “hostiles” as chaotic, premodern, internally flawed, and lacking respect for property. He defined the “friendlies,” in contrast, as spectacular, entertaining, concerned with their private property, and subject to government control. Kelley marked the restoration of order on the reservation as the moment when the Indians themselves accepted the legitimacy of this value system by requesting a civilian, as opposed to a military, agent—one who would “teach them the white man’s ways and modes of living.”26

As this last quotation indicates, controlling the Lakotas militarily became a question of educating them culturally. Kelley presented the “outbreak” as a refusal to obey and the response of the soldiers as an educational one, “to teach the Indians to comply with the orders of the government.” For Kelley, the Sioux belonged to the same conceptual category as children, as those who have not yet internalized the structures and modes of rational self-control. He represented the military as a force of education, commanded to instill in the Indians the right kind of knowledge—the knowledge of obedience—suitable to their place in the social hierarchy. For Kelley, then, the massacre itself became an act of education: “This band is exterminated wholly and another lesson has the Indian received as the reward of treachery.”27

The question of education elucidates Kelley’s views on the integration of Indians into American society. He initially opposed the use of Indian police to bring in the “hostiles” because it would teach the wrong lesson. Soldiers needed to perform that function so the Indians would learn to obey the authority of the government, which the Indian police did not sufficiently represent. Later, however, Kelley spoke well of the Indian police for their efforts to emulate the white soldiers, even going so far as to compare them to the Irish police found in metropolitan forces. He seemed to imply that as with the Irish, a social group many early nineteenth-century Americans con-

25 Ibid., 79, 122, 253.
26 Ibid., 255.
27 Ibid., 36, 198.
sidered unassimilable, American society could eventually incorporate the Lakotas by first subsuming them to police authority.

Like newspapers, photographs also related the story of Wounded Knee. They, too, constituted acts of interpretation that rendered the conflict comprehensible to a national audience. Five photographers captured on film the events surrounding Wounded Knee: George (Gustave) Trager, Clarence Grant Moreledge, J. C. H. Grabill, W. R. Cross, and Solomon D. Butcher. Trager played a crucial role in the mass marketing and distribution of Wounded Knee images, handling Moreledge's vast output as well as his own. He also took the only photographs that preserved the bloody aftermath of the battle.

Trager was born in Gefell, Germany, in 1861. He emigrated to the United States and later moved to Chadron, Nebraska, in the fall of 1889. With his business partner, Trager purchased the Bon Ton Art Gallery, advertised the partnership as Trager & Kuhn, Wigwam Photographers, and began supplying the area with images. Trager's first introduction to the Pine Ridge reservation came in March 1890, when he photographed the live beef issue. It was an event that had become a popular spectator sport and thus offered both the occasion and a promising market for his photographs. He continued to take photographs at Pine Ridge as the Ghost Dance gained momentum and as fears of an uprising spread. Soldiers and local buyers snatched up his images and newspaper editors across the country used Trager's and other photographers' works to illustrate accounts of the imminent war.28

On the morning of 30 December, word of the fighting at Wounded Knee reached Chadron. Trager obtained permission from General Miles, then passing through Chadron on his way to Pine Ridge, to go to the site of the conflict. After hurrying to the agency, Trager accompanied a detachment of soldiers and a civilian burial detail to the battle site and took a number of photographs of the conflict's aftermath. At the site of the massacre, aware of his photographs' potential value, Trager took on a new business partner, Joseph Ford, an enterprising barber from the agency, who was busily stripping the corpses of valuable artifacts like Ghost Dance shirts, clothing, and guns.

Throughout the month of January, Trager continued to take photographs of Indian councils and camps, military activities, and the final surrender of the Lakotas. Images of the conflict, its development, and its aftermath were, like the newspaper reports, in great demand across the country as news, mementos, and entertainment. Local newspapers publicized the sale of the images, noting that "there are a number of beauties among them, and are just the thing to send to your friends back east." Trager's and Ford's Northwestern Photographic Company, independent wholesalers, and traveling agents distributed the photographs across the country. Trager even contacted

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28 Factual information about Trager is drawn from two sources: Carter, "Making Pictures for a News-Hungry Nation," a comprehensive photographic history of the conflict, and Lynn Marie Mitchell, "George E. Trager: Frontier Photographer at Wounded Knee," History of Photography 13 (October-December 1989). Drawings and engravings from photographs can be found in, among other publications, the January and February 1891 issues of Illustrated American, a weekly "news-magazine," and Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, a New York weekly. Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, contains bound volumes of both publications.
Buffalo Bill in an attempt to sell the photographs through his Wild West show. By May 1891, however, the first flush of national fascination with Wounded Knee had faded, and Trager moved on to more profitable enterprises.29

Like Kelley's articles, these photographs articulated the cultural ideology of their historical moment and acted as visual expressions of a concern for order, control, and hierarchy. Yet like the newspaper, their power derived in part from their ability to render this ideology almost invisible. In their realism, their seeming fidelity to nature, the photographs appeared to be simply found rather than constructed, to be objective truth rather than point of view.

Throughout the photographs, contemporary viewers would have found contrasting images of order and chaos. In one image the officers of the 7th Cavalry pose in orderly formation, their hierarchical relationship clearly indicated by positioning and costume: the higher-ranking officers sit on stools in the front row, the lower-ranking ones stand behind, while an orderly holds two horses in the background and a civilian stands to one side (Fig. 1).30 In contrast to this vision of quiet regulation, other photographs depict anonymous Indian corpses strewn haphazardly across the landscape, dark humps barely discernible as human (Figs. 2, 3, 4).

A number of the photographs display the government's power to control both the bodies and the culture of the Indians. In the photograph of Young Man Afraid of His Horses, the Pine Ridge school (representing the entire process of re-education and acculturation) rises imposingly out of the mist in the background, suggesting the cultural authority the government exercises over the chief and his followers (Fig. 5).

Other images depict soldiers in orderly formation cleaning up and containing the chaos of Indian bodies. In the image of the civilian burial team gathering the dead Sioux from the field, mounted soldiers stand in silhouette in a line atop a ridge; in the foreground, grotesquely frozen and partially naked Indian corpses threaten to spill out of the rectangle bed of an open wagon (Fig. 6). And in the image of the subsequent mass burial, soldiers and civilians line up to memorialize their act as they dump a jumble of frozen bodies into the neat rectangular grave (Fig. 7).

In these two images, the rigid spaces of the wagon and the grave bind and contain those Indians who attempted to transgress the perimeters of the reservation and thus defy the government's authority. Where the military and political forces assigned the Indians to the specific physical space of the reservation, and Kelley and the Wild West show reassigned them to the cultural space of spectacle, these photographs assign the Sioux to the more restricted compositional spaces of wagons and graves. Like the reservation, the Wild West show, and Kelley's articles, Trager's photographs articulated the contemporary logic of creating social order by consigning distinct types of people to their proper spaces.


30 The identity of the photographer of this image, as well as of figures 5, 8, and 9, is not known for sure, although figures 1, 5 and 9 were distributed by Trager's Northwestern Photographic Co.
The defeat of the Lakotas at Wounded Knee was a “political idea enforced by guns and cameras,” with the photographs playing as important a role as the Hotchkiss guns in communicating official attitudes towards unreconstructed Indians.31 The photographs memorialized both military might and the power to represent: while one image presents a large artillery piece surrounded by proud soldiers (Fig. 8), another commemorates the role of Trager and his machine by capturing their shadows on the inside wall of the grave (Fig. 7, lower left corner).

Trager’s photographs acted as vehicles for the very values of incorporation that somehow made logical the killing of the Lakotas. Beyond documenting the deaths of a number of Indians, these images depicted the destruction of the tribal entity. They portrayed a people shattered into isolated, individual bodies, the sense of fragmentation visually heightened by the white expanse of snow surrounding each corpse (Fig. 2, 3, 4). As a group, these photographs acted as visual equivalents to the 1887 Dawes Act, which sought to replace the collective Indian nations with private individuals.

Like Kelley’s articles and Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show, Trager’s photographs addressed the question of how to incorporate the Indian into American society. He presented the new, post-tribal Indian in a portrait identified as that of Yellow Bird, son of the slain Medicine Man. Here viewers could have seen Wounded Knee’s desired outcome, the reconstructed and incorporated Indian child, sporting white-style clothes and posing in a crude version of a Victorian studio parlor (Fig. 9).

Trager’s photographs circulated as commodities, and through them Wounded Knee entered into the market at the same time that it entered into history. Trager neatly printed “Copyrighted by the Northwestern Photographic Co., Chadron, Neb.” on the faces of many of his images, sometimes on the body of an Indian (Fig. 3, 4). While this makes sense because the dark bodies rendered the white writing easily visible, it also suggests ownership of the Indian body, a declaration of possession under copyright law, an incorporation of the Indian into the legal system as cultural product rather than as person.

The reverse sides of the photographs reinforce this reading of the image. Trager printed advertisements there for other photographs (“Views. Wounded Knee Battle. Indian Camps. Indian Chiefs”), quack medicine (“Epilepsy Cured. The water from the Minne Pazuta Springs have cured 20 cases of the worst forms of Epilepsy within the last year”), and jewelry (“King, the Black Hills Jeweler, Manufacturer of Jewelry in Original and Rustic Designs”) (Figures 10, 11). When the market for Wounded Knee photographs began to dry up, Trager and Ford used the profits from the sale of the battlefield artifacts (which Ford had stripped from Indian bodies) to purchase the

31 This phrase comes from Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans (New York, 1989), 103, in reference to George Barnard’s Civil War photographs. Additional discussion of this idea can be found in Donna Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936,” chap. in Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science (New York, 1989); Kaplan, “Romancing the Empire.”
Minne Pazuta Spring, the curative powers of which they then advertised on subsequent photographs.\textsuperscript{32}

Trager and other photographers transformed the entire experience of the conflict—from the reservation beef issue, to the arrival of troops, the slaughter at Wounded Knee Creek, and the final incorporation of the Indian into American society—into affordable entertainment and made it available for leisurely consumption in parlors across America. Newspapers and magazines endlessly multiplied the images and sold them for pennies. From Trager’s itinerant salesmen one could have purchased a battlefield moment frozen in a photograph, an artifact taken from a real Indian corpse, or a miraculous cure at a spring bought with plundered relics. As the advertisement on the back of the photographs proclaimed, “Everything of interest in the late Pine Ridge War are held by us for sale.”

Trager wanted to produce profits, not document history. He manipulated many of his images to increase their market appeal, based on his understanding of what the audience wanted, what they expected to see, and what their accumulated knowledge dictated an Indian should be. At one point Trager photographed a white child in Indian costume and sold it as “The Youngest Son of Chief Two Strikes.” Similarly, Trager flipped over Medicine Man, who had died face down, and photographed him in a gruesomely thrilling and exposed position lying face up (Fig. 3). Trager also retouched the photograph, inking over the corpse’s exposed genitals so as not to offend viewers’ delicate sensibilities.\textsuperscript{33}

Trager produced persuasive images of the Lakotas that seemed to capture the truth of their experiences. The Lakotas seem to have understood photography’s ability to usurp their claim to self-definition: in an attempt to control the identities that the Ghost Dance articulated, they refused to allow photographers to capture their religious ceremony on film. In light of the visual and ideological force of Trager’s images, the stereotypical “primitive” fear of photography’s power to steal souls seems an appropriately modern response.

This essay has focused on those aspects of popular culture that spoke in the language of the middle class and articulated an ideology of incorporation. Popular culture in the nineteenth century did not, however, speak exclusively for one social class, and the meanings it produced remained open to contestation. Individual texts confronted the period’s crises of social transformation from a variety of perspectives. Dime novels, for instance, although produced by businessmen, aimed at a working class audience and served as a contested terrain in which the values and concerns of the working class resonated. Old King Brady Among the Indians: or, Sitting Bull and the Ghost Dancers, written by “A New York Detective” (most likely Francis Worcester Dougherty) and published by Frank Tousey on 2 May 1891 as No. 440 of the New York Detective
Library series, provided an alternative perspective on some of the events leading up to Wounded Knee.\textsuperscript{34}

*Old King Brady* plotted a cultural map significantly different from that articulated by Buffalo Bill, Kelley, and Trager. Unlike these other forms of popular culture, the novel refused to silence the Indians by relegating them to the inarticulate cultural space of spectacle. Instead, *Old King Brady* placed the legitimate grievances of the Lakotas front and center and integrated the Indians into the narrative as characters with the same authority to speak and act as any other character.

*Old King Brady* did not focus on the violence at Wounded Knee itself. Rather, it dealt with the reservation system’s mistreatment of the Lakotas that led to the confrontation. The novel shifted focus away from reimposing order on the refractory Lakotas to look at the deeper “disorder” that lay behind their rebellion. Opposed to other popular texts, *Old King Brady* allowed readers to see the processes of this period not as a clear evolution of order superseding disorder, but as a prolonged dialectical movement between two competing cultural systems.

The plot, like those of most dime novels, is complex. An evil railroad tycoon named Ormond hires Old King Brady, a famous New York detective, to recover some bonds he indicates were stolen by his young, working-class clerk, Thad. The chase after the bonds takes Brady out West, where the Ghost Dancing Lakotas first capture, then release, and finally aid the detective. Brady has positive interactions with the Indians: an Indian youth named Joe assists him in his search for the bonds, and when Brady is about to be burned at the stake, Sitting Bull himself intervenes and saves his life. In the end Old King Brady recovers the bonds, Thad proves his innocence, and the evil Ormond dies an ignoble death.

*Old King Brady*’s treatment of the Lakotas distinguishes the novel from the forms of popular culture considered above. It gives the Ghost Dance a history by tracing it to its roots in reservation policy and places the blame for the impending conflict on the shoulders of the agents. Directly responsible for causing so much misery on the reservations, the agent forced the Indians to prepare for war. The driver of the stagecoach carrying Brady through Indian country explains the imminent warfare:

> What’s the cause? Why starvation’s ther cause—it am nothin’ else. Them rascally Injun agents is at ther bottom of it. They steal every blamed thing they kin lay ther hands on, an’ what’s left for ther Reds don’t ermount to much you bet. . . . How’d you like ter be struck into a

reservation whar ye couldn't git enough grub ter feed yer wife and young ones with? Wouldn't you kick? Now say?35

In posing this question, the novel creates a different perspective for its audience than did the texts of Buffalo Bill, Kelley, and Trager. Instead of allowing the reader to view the Lakotas as some mysterious, spectacular Other, the novel encourages the reader to identify with the Indians by imaginatively projecting him- or herself into their situation of poverty and exploitation.

The novel locates the conflict within the historical processes of cause and effect and justifies the rebellion of the Lakotas. Joe, the young Sioux, explains Sitting Bull to Old King Brady: "‘Sitting Bull is not a bad Indian,’ said Joe. ‘He has been swindled, lied to and most outrageously abused by the agents. Would you stand quietly if you had been treated so?’’ Old King Brady replies, ‘‘Well, I rather think not.’”36 Later on, Brady suggests that it would have perhaps been better for the Lakotas if they had kept from making war. Joe responds angrily, ‘‘Kept from it! Why you know nothing about it. The war was forced upon us by the agents. They made the war that they might fill their own pockets. It was either that or something worse with the Sioux. Look down at those poor people. You rendered them a service and you were treated well were you not? but they are starving—starving—do you understand?’’37 Alone among the forms of popular culture considered here, the dime novel made explicit the economic motives behind the request for troops.

The last lines of the novel contain perhaps the most bitter critique, this time of the government itself:

Soon after [Old King Brady’s and Thad’s] return came the news of Sitting Bull’s murder by the United States Government, for the killing of the old medicine man can be termed nothing else.

Was there a man in all New York who really felt sorry for the death of General Custer’s slayer?

One there was certainly.

It was Old King Brady.

‘‘It’s no use talking,” he said to the police inspector. ‘‘Sitting Bull was a good friend to me, and while I was among the Indians I learned some things which made me ashamed to call myself an American citizen.’

‘What do you mean?” demanded the inspector.

‘‘I mean,” replied the detective, ‘‘that to Sitting Bull and his ghosts I owe my life.’”38

35 A New York Detective, Old King Brady Among the Indians; or, Sitting Bull and the Ghost Dancers (New York, 1891), 9.
36 Ibid., 22.
37 Ibid., 22-23.
38 Ibid., 30.
Old King Brady Among The Indians presents an unusual vision of the Indians' integration into American society. Through the figurative pairing of Joe, the young Lakota, and Thad, the young clerk, the novel incorporates the Sioux by equating them with the working class. The novel never fully realizes Joe's social integration; he drops out of the story at the end, his future still unresolved. But what we see of him earlier on suggests a social position for him that completely rejects that envisioned by the Wild West show, Kelley, or Trager.

In the novel, Joe hovers between white and Indian cultures, clearly a Lakota, yet dressing like a white man and speaking perfect English. His semi-acculturated status comes from following the path of assimilation: he spent three years at the Carlisle school (where, as in Trager's photo of Yellow Bird, Indian children wore the clothes and hairstyles of whites), followed by a stint as an Indian policeman (like Buffalo Bill's performers and Kelley's “friendly” Lakotas).

The novel, however, rejects this route of assimilation. Following the rise of the Ghost Dance and the ensuing troubles, Joe leaves the police force and the reservation “to go where [his] people go.” Refusing cultural reeducation, he explains to Old King Brady that “you can educate an Indian all you please, but you can't make him forget he's an Indian.” Old King Brady responds positively to Joe's stance: “I don't blame you a bit. I admire you for it.”39 The novel reiterates this approval of the unassimilated Indian at the end, when Old King Brady mourns the murder of Sitting Bull, symbol of the defiantly traditional Indian.

Old King Brady suggests that the ideal social position for both the Indians and the working class lay in honorable independence. The novel applauded Ghost Dancers' attempt to resist cultural transformation. Although Old King Brady could not present the inner complexities of the religious-political movement, it gave popular voice to the Ghost Dance's vision of cultural independence and self-determination.

In examining these popular representations of Wounded Knee, I have endeavored to explicate the political and social nature of the work performed by popular culture. Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, Kelley's articles, Trager's photographs, and Francis Dougherty's dime novel all proposed or embodied solutions to the pressing social and political problem of integrating western Indians into an emerging and stratified social order. They articulated their visions within the language of incorporation, a language of order, control, civilization, and education. Most significantly, they conceptualized the Lakotas in spatial terms, using their confinement within the physical space of the reservation as a model for relegating the Lakotas to the bottom of the social and cultural hierarchy.

The actual events at Wounded Knee were themselves a complex act of communication, a vast spectacle designed to produce meaning for specific audiences. The Lakotas comprised the initial audience, insofar as the military at first deployed its overwhelming force to awe them into peaceful submission. Yet, Wounded Knee also constituted a spectacle for the nation, which viewed the extravaganza through the

39 Ibid., 13.
mediation of the press and photographers, and again for the rapt audiences of Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows and the readers of dime novels. As acts of representation these popular media ordered, framed, and interpreted the actual events of Wounded Knee to communicate particular sets of meanings. At Wounded Knee the military deployed the technology of war as a means of communication, and popular culture utilized the technology of communication to support the logic of war. Working together, the military and popular culture defeated the Ghost Dance's assertion of autonomy and justified the incorporation of the Lakotas into American national culture and society.
Figure 1. Officers of the 7th Cavalry at Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota. Courtesy of the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Figure 2. Big Foot dead. Courtesy of the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
Figure 3. The Medicine Man taken at the battle of Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Courtesy of the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Figure 4. Bird's eye view of battlefield at Wounded Knee looking north. Courtesy of the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
Figure 5. Chief Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and village. Courtesy of the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Figure 6. Gathering up the dead at the battlefield at Wounded Knee. Courtesy of the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
Figure 7. Burial of the dead at the battlefield of Wounded Knee. Courtesy of the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Figure 8. The famous battery, Pine Ridge, 1890-91. Courtesy of the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
Figure 9. Yellow Bird, son of the Medicine Man. Courtesy of the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
Figure 10. Reverse of photograph. Courtesy of the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Figure 11. Reverse of photograph. Courtesy of the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.