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Review of *Wild West Shows and the Images of Native American Indians, 1883-1933* By L.G Moses

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Wild West Shows and the Images of Native American Indians, 1883-1933. By L.G. Moses. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. Photographs, abbreviations, notes, bibliography, index. xvii + 364 pp. \$39.95.

A chapter or two into this extraordinarily well-documented and illustrated work on one of the more bizarre but colorful topics in American and Native American history, I felt compelled to rummage through an old footlocker to find a personal journal from the 1960s when I lived and worked in Little Eagle, South Dakota, on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation as a community development worker and recruiter for the Job Corps. Moses's chronological account of the emergence of Wild West

shows and their "Show Indians" from George Catlin's early *Tableaux vivants* to Buffalo Bill Cody's world-touring extravaganzas fascinated me because I had actually spent a long evening or two in 1966 writing down the account of one Philip Earring, a Hunkpapa Teton Lakota acquaintance in Little Eagle, who had ridden with the Hundred and One Ranch Real Wild West show out of Oklahoma. The "Hundred and One" was one of the most successful of the many shows that were spawned out of the Buffalo Bill era. Moses tells the story through 1933, but Earring told me that he answered an ad for cowboys, bronc riders, and Indians in 1941.

Earring's youthful experiences on the road as a performer were probably not unlike those of many earlier Hunkpapa and other Indians who felt the lure of the world beyond the chaotic pressures and poverty of late nineteenth-century reservations. Many of the questions those disarmed, former warriors were asking themselves were ones Philip Earring doubtless pondered sixty year later: Who am I? What the hell does it mean to be an "Indian?" What do *they* want me to be? And, what do *I* want to be? An analysis of how the Show Indian image was created and marketed, what about it was "authentic" and what staged and tailored to fit a stereotype the public already held and wanted to see, forms a good part of Moses' book.

For Philip Earring—and countless others before and after him—the bottom line was simply that this was an opportunity to escape the stultifying paternalism of reservation administrators and sanctimonious prescriptions of competing missionaries. But as the author documents, a good number of Christian reformers and politicians fought very hard to prevent Indians from being lured off the reservations into the perceived debauched life of show business. In their view, Indians risked being lured from the righteous path by Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and a host of other covetous wheeler-dealers who appeared on the frontier following the end of the Indian wars. Some Show Indians, doubtless, were victimized by ruthless recruiters like James Asay in Rushville, Nebraska, and Moses documents

this unfortunate part of the total picture carefully. But the majority of the thousands of Indians who worked these shows and early movie sets, while not growing rich, had a tolerably interesting life experience. As Moses concludes: "It would be wrong . . . to see the Show Indians as simply dupes, or pawns, or even victims. It would be better to approach them as persons who earned a fairly good living between the era of the Dawes Act and the Indian New Deal playing themselves, re-creating a very small portion of their histories, and enjoying it."

Moses has done a fine job of tackling and synthesizing a very large amount of material from innumerable archives, newspapers, and previously published sources to create this highly readable book. There are over thirty pages of supplementary notes and anecdotes lending further depth to the text. And, finally, there is a solid bibliography and accurate index.

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