

# THE FRONTIER HERO MODEL: EMERGENCE AND TRANSITION

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**Author's Note:** This is a paper that I wrote while a graduate student in the summer of 1980. It will be apparent to the reader that I had been influenced by "Turnerian" professors in both my undergraduate and graduate education. Additionally, several months after I wrote this, Ronald Reagan defeated the incumbent Jimmy Carter in the election. From that vantage point of more than two decades later, it appears to me that Reagan, in many respects, symbolized the fascination that Americans had, and continue to have, with the mythical "west." After all, where had millions of Americans first been introduced to Reagan? In addition, it is hard to argue with the fact that George W. Bush also has played on the cowboy image in attire, attitude, and his favorite vacation spot. The mythical image lives on apparently.

## **PREFACE**

The purpose of this project is not to construct a biography of either Daniel Boone or William Cody, but rather to view each man in light of the symbolic nature of his life. Nevertheless, it is necessary at the outset to present a skeletal life story of each man, thereby providing the reader with a general framework that can later be applied to the more analytical discussion of each man and his particular impact. The attempt is to present an objective view of each man, devoid of the myths which eventually obscured the facts of each man's life.

## **DANIEL BOONE**

Daniel Boone was born in November of 1734 just outside of Reading, Pennsylvania. Of Quaker descent, Boone was the son of Squire and Sarah Boone. Squire Boone's father George had arrived in America in 1717. Boone never attended school and first began to hunt and explore at the age of twelve. In 1750 his family moved to North Carolina eventually settling in the town of Buffalo Lick. In 1755 Boone joined Braddock's North Carolina Militia as a blacksmith and teamster. While in the army he met John Finley, a frontiersman who told him of the wilderness area known as Kentucky. In 1756 Boone returned to his home and married seventeen year old Rebeccah Bryan and settled into a life of varied employment: blacksmith, surveyor, land speculator, hunter, and trapper.

In 1767 Boone first ventured into the wilds of Kentucky. A second trip was made in 1769 through the Cumberland Gap into what is present day Esthill County. In March of 1775 Boone set out with the first group of settlers into Kentucky as an agent of Colonel Richard Henderson of the Transylvania Company. In April of the same year the party reached what was later to become the settlement of "Boonesborough" and erected a fort. Boone was made a major in the Kentucky militia in 1776. Kentucky by that time had been organized as a county of the state of Virginia. From February to June of 1778, Boone was a captive of the Shawnee Indians. He finally escaped and returned east for a time, eventually going back to Kentucky in 1779 with a new group

*of settlers.*

It was in 1780 that Virginia repudiated Henderson's land titles in Kentucky. The settlers sent Boone east to purchase the necessary land warrants. Along the way Boone was robbed of the twenty thousand dollars in his possession. To add to this mishap, Boone was later evicted from his land in Kentucky for improper filing procedures. In 1788 Boone left Kentucky and moved into what is present day West Virginia. In 1798 or 1799 he moved to Missouri due to the lure of another land grant, one which he would later lose due to his failure to develop the land. Rebecca Boone died in 1813 after fifty-six years of marriage and Boone spent his remaining years in Missouri with his son Nathan. It was there that Boone died in September of 1820.

Boone's personal appearance is a subject of controversy. In reality he was no more than 5'8" tall, yet several writers depicted him as a giant. He had a large head, blue eyes, light hair and eyebrows, a wide mouth with thin lips, and a distinctly Roman nose. The mythical image of Boone has greatly obscured many facts of his life, yet we can surmise that he possessed great courage and an adventurous spirit. As a man of well over eighty, Boone made a trip on the Platte River following it to the Rockies where he spent the winter trapping in the Yellowstone country. His exploits generally have been exaggerated, however. He was not, for instance, the "discoverer of Kentucky," nor its "first explorer," nor the first "white man of the west" as writers would later suggest. Nonetheless, it is well documented that he played a significant role in the early settlement of frontier lands.

## **WILLIAM CODY**

William Cody was born on a farm in Scott County, Iowa in February of 1846. His father Isaac died when the boy was eleven years old and from that point on Cody the young Cody was self-supporting. He first worked as a "cavvy boy" to one of the supply trains of an expedition opposing Mormon advance. For a time he rode as a messenger boy for the freighting firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell. He briefly attended school at the age of twelve, but in 1859 ventured to Colorado in search of gold. In April of 1860 Cody began to ride for the famed "Pony Express" and three years later served as a scout for the 9th Kansas Cavalry. In 1864 he joined the Army and served as a scout for General A.J. Smith in Tennessee. In 1866 Cody married Louisa Frederici of St. Louis and for two years was employed by Goddard Brothers, the food contractors for the construction crews working on the Kansas-Pacific Railway. He was so adept at providing the workers with buffalo meat that he earned his soon-to-be-famous nickname "Buffalo Bill."

In December of 1872 Cody launched a theatrical career that would dominate the rest of his life. Playwright Ned Buntline's show called "Scouts of the Plains" starred Cody as "himself." He toured with such characters as "Texas Jack" Omohundro and "Wild Bill" Hickok. He remained in acting through 1876 at which time he was lured back to the western frontier by the Sioux Indian War. He became the head scout of the 5th Cavalry. It was around this time that Cody got involved in the

range cattle industry with Major Frank North. A sizeable ranch was established about sixty-five miles north of North Platte, Nebraska. Cody also set up a small farm just outside the city limits of North Platte.

In 1883 Cody began what was to become his trademark for the rest of his life. In the remote cowtown of Omaha, the "Wild West Show" was born. Cody was thirty-seven at the time and had already established a weighty reputation as a frontier scout. For the next thirty-three years the Wild West Show would command large audiences in Europe and America. Cody was the main attraction of the show which consisted of sharp-shooting, stunt-riding, fancy roping, and outlandish reenactments of Indian battles. During the years of the Wild West Show Cody worked with an odd mixture of notable people including Wild Bill Hickok, Annie Oakley, and Chief Sitting Bull.

Cody died in 1916 while visiting his daughter in Denver, Colorado. Most of the information concerning this colorful man came from his own words and he was most certainly an untrustworthy chronicler of events. Nevertheless his merits as an army scout were widely acclaimed. Cody, interestingly enough, after over a generation of performing, died penniless and is buried on Lookout Mountain just outside of the city of Denver.

## **INTRODUCTION**

***Beauty and truth are both aspects of human experience, but beauty is preferred . . . Hence it is not surprising that each legend involves a highly selective process by which the beautiful eclipses the truth (Steckmesser, p. 249).***

Perhaps no segment of history has so captured the collective imagination of the American society as the history of the frontier, a romantic and mythic history bursting with heroic men and women, legendary deeds, and powerful forces. It is the intention of this study to examine an integral part of that history, the symbolic hero. The subjects to be viewed are Daniel Boone and William Cody. They will be viewed in a comparative fashion with a focus on two basic questions: first, what caused the emergence of the frontier hero in the late eighteenth century?; and second, what are the similarities and differences between the initial hero and his nineteenth century successor? A secondary feature of this research will be a brief analysis of the transmission of the frontier hero symbol into the twentieth century.

## **BOONE IN CONTEXT**

***His life it is well for our youth to note and con, and making him their model, some of his virtues don (Wector, p. 188).***

There is an image of a man, tall and broad, clothed in buckskin, peering down the barrel of a musket, poised for the kill -- a thoughtful man, yet capable of violence if

the need arose. In Short, the prototype of the ""frontier hero," a type that most would agree can be traced to one man, Daniel Boone. He is unique because he was the first, and it is from his model that subsequent frontier heroes would appear on the American scene. The emergence of Boone is therefore our first pursuit. To begin that search we must reconstruct, albeit briefly, the historical context from whence he emerged. In true Turnerian tradition, it is necessary to attack this problem from the perspective of "multiple causation" (Turner, p. 1). In this case the multiple causes to be cited will be three: one, the emergence of the frontier vision in early America; two, the image of Boone projected in the literature of the day; and three, the significance of the hero on the American psyche. These three variables, coupled with the man himself, acted simultaneously to carve out the prototype of the frontier hero model. H.N. Smith in his classic work *The Virgin Land*, proposes that the idea of the frontier is central when defining the American way of thought. At the outset of the eighteenth century, the image of the west beyond the Appalachians was incomplete at best; reliable information was not to be had. Colonial America was an Atlantic and commercial endeavor. Settlement beyond the Atlantic coast had no merit for its own sake, according to British thought. After the defeat of the French in 1763, Lord Egremont, British Secretary of State, declared that Americans should be forbidden from moving into the interior of the continent. His logic was clear: American colonists beyond the reach of governmental control would be of no use to the empire (Smith, pp. 3-5).

Yet the American west, like the proverbial mountain "was there," and to suggest that the interior and its vast resources be ignored was unrealistic. As early as 1750 Benjamin Franklin had voiced an American appraisal of the frontier in a yet colonial context: his prediction that in another century the greatest number of Englishmen would be on this side of the Atlantic caused him to exclaim: "What an accession of power to the British empire by sea as well as land! What an increase of trade and navigation!" (Van Doren, p. 217). His argument was that Britain should allow for American expansion due to the economic potential of further colonies. Britain, however, like the protective mother, was leery of her child's increasing independence of thought and not swayed by Franklin's argument.

Further evidence of a growing frontier vision can be witnessed in the writings of Nathaniel Ames in his *Almanack* of 1758:

*Nature, through all her works, has stamped authority on this law, namely, "That all fit matter shall be improved to its best purposes." Shall not those vast quarries that teem with mechanic stone -- those for structure be piled into great cities; and those for sculpture into statues to perpetuate the honor of renowned heroes, even those who shall now save their country. O! ye unborn inhabitants of America! Should this page escape its destined conflagration at the year's end, and these alphabetical letters remain legible, when your eyes behold the sun after he has rolled the seasons round for two or three centuries more, you will know that in Anno Domini 1758, we dreamed of your times (Benton, p. 29).*

Eighteen years after the Ames editorial, America declared her independence from Britain, an act that served to intensify her feelings of continental destiny. The establishment of the Mississippi as the western border by the Treaty of Versailles in 1783 transformed America into a western looking nation (Smith, pp. 9-10). Thus a frontier vision had been awakened, a vision grounded in the lure of free land (Turner, p. 15). But the vision would not have achieved its mythic quality, nor would the frontier hero have emerged, had it not been for the image of both man and frontier portrayed in the literature of the day. It is to that second interacting variable, the image of Boone in literature, that we next direct our attention.

It is noteworthy to realize that Boone reached his middle years and beyond at the dawning of the age of Romantic literature. Romanticism was a many sided revolt against the logical reasoning of the previous literary age (Joseph, Preface). The natural feelings of man, the simplicity of nature, and the exaggeration of the beauty and goodness of life -- these were the themes of romantic literature. Such themes would lend themselves to the expanded role of the "heroic" nature of man. Commentator Paul Zweig suggests that human beings must have some "expanded ideal of behavior" (Zweig, p. 35). If this is true then romantic literature certainly offered an expansion of ideals. The gallant heroes portrayed by authors and poets such as Byron, Goethe, and Chateaubriand had a significant impact on both the literature and culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Joseph, p. 55).

Romanticism was more, however, than a literary movement. Its influence was felt simultaneously in the world of philosophy, particularly through one of its leading spokesmen, Jean Jacques Rousseau. The French philosopher stressed both the natural goodness of man and the beauty, simplicity, and divine aspect of nature. By portraying the common man as the "noblest" of beings, Rousseau promoted a democratic principle which coincided well with the American "experiment" (Wector, p. 67).

These two contrasting and somewhat ironic themes, the expanded ideal of behavior and the appeal to the simplistic and natural, would weave their way into the literature which eventually surrounded the character of Daniel Boone. It was John Filson, an obscure Pennsylvania schoolteacher, who was first responsible for introducing Boone to the reading public of the 1780s. Filson's laboriously titled book, *The Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucky To Which is Added an Appendix Containing the Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boone*, portrayed Boone as a sensitive philosopher-type, equipped with ornate language and a passion for nature (Steckmesser, p. 4). Consider the opening lines of the narrative in which Boone is apparently speaking:

*Curiosity is natural to the soul of man and interesting objects have a powerful influence on our affections. Let these influencing powers actuate, by permission or disposal of Providence, from selfish or social views, yet in time the mysterious will of heaven is unfolded, and we behold our conduct, from whatever motives excited, operating to answer the important designs of heaven (Filson, p. 49).*

At the outset, Filson portrays Boone as a noble character who recognizes his role in God's divine plan. Indeed, throughout the narrative, Filson continues to paint the picture of a

fearless frontiersman who risks his life in order that more settlers might venture into the west. The importance of the legend created by Filson relates to the impact it had on the ensuing literature of the day. Although later condemned as inaccurate history, writers were forced to draw from Filson's sketch since it was the only well known source of information depicting Boone's career in any detail. It became the faulty foundation for the biographies, poems, periodical articles, and dime novels which combined to form the collective portrait of the frontier hero named Boone (Steckmesser, p. 5). Filson's sketch was translated in French in 1785 and German in 1790 thereby spreading the frontier image into the European reading public of that era (Wector, p. 184). Filson had clearly struck a popular nerve concerning heroes and the expanding frontier vision.

The popularity of Filson's characterization of Boone can be witnessed in the growing myth surrounding the life of the man. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, myth and reality were becoming indistinguishable. Boone had become the subject of tall tales which spread from one author to the next, generally accenting the more sensational aspects of his life. In 1823, for instance, the myth of Boone found a home in James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*. Cooper was widely read and did much to popularize the frontier hero to the eastern elite of his day. It would seem that Cooper's character of "Leatherstocking" bore a striking resemblance to Boone, particularly in terms of his heroic character traits. Hence the connection had been made. The frontier vision coupled with the romantic and exaggerated literature of the day had created a legend of heroic proportions. But, why was this so popular with the American public? What did Boone represent to the public, and in a larger sense, what is the significance of the hero in relation to the American psyche of the early nineteenth century?

In *The Virgin Land*, Henry Nash Smith points out that to the Americans of the early nineteenth century there were two distinct "wests": the "commonplace domesticated west" and the "wild west" (Smith, p. 52). The former included the agricultural frontier and was generally viewed as tedious, boring, and rather "hum-drum." In contrast, the latter, which included the unexplored areas of the country, was seen as exciting and filled with adventure. Smith regards the public's preoccupation with the "wild west" as a form of rejection aimed at the settled society; a cult of wildness and a mood of "primitivism." The attitude of primitivism was a natural outgrowth of the Romantic era. Along with the fascination with the wild frontier there was an implied hostility to "civilization." Smith continues, however, to point out that this view was in contrast to another viewpoint implicit in the frontier vision – that is, that humankind must conquer the elements thereby advancing the course of civilization (Smith, p. 52).

This dual vision was easily embodied in a legendary hero such as Daniel Boone. Was he the trail-blazing bearer of civilization or a child of nature? Timothy Flint's biography of 1833 portrayed Boone as both a force for the advancement of civilization and a man who simply could not fit into society; hence the notion of Boone as the restless wanderer. Biographer John Peck, writing in 1847, called Boone the "creature of Providence," while James Perkins, another biographer, accented the "child of nature" interpretation (Smith, pp. 55-57). In the final analysis such debate is perhaps immaterial; Boone apparently could serve either purpose depending on the needs of society. The hero could become what the public wanted him to become.

It is evident in keeping with the third interacting variable, that Boone had become a significant element in the collective American psyche. By 1830 he was the identifiable American frontier hero. Filson's late eighteenth century projection of

Boone had been “played out” in a host of literary adaptations in the early nineteenth century. Boone came to represent the American frontier aspiration and, what Thomas Carlyle termed “life in all its potentialities.” Moreover, Boone, as Carlyle’s hero of history, served a dual function: he was a model for others to imitate and it was through him that history moved forward. In short, he was an instrument of progress (Bentley, pp. 34-35). This second element is perhaps most important – Boone as representative of a “noble cause.” The factual story of his life became less important than the aspiration he represented. It was Boone the symbol that finally won out over Boone the reality. It is to that symbol that we next direct our attention.

### ***THE FRONTIER HERO MODEL***

Kent Ladd Steckmesser in his book *The Western Hero in History and Legend*, proposes that it was through the interpretations applied to Daniel Boone that a great heroic tradition was fixed on the American cultural landscape (Steckmesser, p. 7). In essence, the traits of Boone, both implicit and explicit, defined a frontier hero model that would have an enormous impact on the perceptions of the American frontier. The frontier hero was seen as individualistic, resourceful, strong, fearless, and modest. In addition, the hero was a tool of Providence, an epic achiever who was leading America into her “westward” destiny. It is with this model in mind, coupled with the three heretofore historical variables, that we may now proceed to the second subject of our inquiry, William Cody. This will be a comparative view framed by three questions. First, was Cody a product of the frontier hero model? Second, what dimension did he add to the existing model? And third, what role did he play in transmitting the frontier hero model into the twentieth century? Before pursuing answers to those questions, it is necessary to place Cody in historical context.

### ***CODY AND HIS TIMES***

***For the small part I have taken in redeeming the west from savagery, I am indebted to circumstances rather than to a natural inborn inclination for the strifes inseparable from the life that I was almost forced to choose (Cody, p. vi).***

It is worth noting that William Cody was born in February of 1846, several months after democratic journalist John O’Sullivan implanted the phrase “manifest destiny” in the American vocabulary (O’Sullivan, p. 5). If Boone was the symbol of an emerging frontier, Cody was destined to become the personification of a flowering frontier. By the time Cody was born, that deeply ingrained frontier vision was quickly becoming an almost fanatical belief in the future of America. Consider the words of O’Sullivan in an 1839 editorial:

*We must onward to the fulfillment of our mission, to the entire development of the principle of our organization – freedom of conscience, freedom of person, freedom of trade and business pursuits, universality of freedom and equality (Annals of America (1839), p. 511).*

In short, Cody was born when the “march” of civilization was America’s noblest pursuit and he would become one of the symbols of that march. Was he a product of the already established hero model? The answer to that first question lies in two particular aspects of Cody’s life and career: his view of himself which he was more than willing to publicize, and pure chance (Smith, p. 103).

Cody was raised in a society that glorified its frontier heroes. He had actually been part of the “real” frontier and had credentials to prove it, including his experiences as an army scout, Indian fighter, cowboy, and buffalo hunter. He saw himself as inheriting the heroic tradition of Daniel Boone, a fact evidenced in his own book titled Story of the Wild West and Campfire Chats which was published in 1888. Cody subtitled the work a “Full and Complete History of the Renowned Pioneer Quartet: Boone, Crockett, Carson, and Buffalo Bill.” Interestingly enough, Cody devoted twenty chapters (nearly 400 pages) out of the book’s fifty-four chapters to his own story. Cody is the subject of over half of the book’s more than two hundred illustrations. In spite of this focus on himself, Cody was careful to point out his feelings of modesty to the reader:

*. . . it is with some feeling of embarrassment and trepidation that I trench so far upon the borders of apparent vanity as to classify myself with such distinguished characters in the great work of redeeming for civilization the territory lying west of the Mississippi Valley (Cody, p. 401).*

Nevertheless, and “painful” though it must have been, Cody “trenched” forward to depict his life to be, in fact, “bigger than life,” and in so doing, illustrated his marvelous capacity for self-promotion (Smith, p. 103). Time and again in his writing he portrayed himself as a child of Providence, working to make America safe for westward expansion. Cody especially accented this theme when referring to the American Indian. Again, consider his own words:

*. . . but particularly fascinating is the story of the reclamation of the Great West and the supplanting of the wild savages that from primeval days were the lords of the country . . . those evidences that proclaim to a wondering world the march of the Anglo-Saxon race toward the attainment of perfect citizenship and liberal, free, and stable government (Cody, p. vi).*

Cody’s grand opinion of himself, though gaudy, was shared by others. Typical of the attitudes of those who wrote about Cody is this selection from the memoirs of Alexander Majors:

*In his delineation of Wild West life before the vast audiences he has appeared to in this country and Europe, he has been instrumental in educating the Indians to feel that it would be madness for them to continue the struggle against the innumerable whites, and to teach them that peace and happiness could come to them if they would give up the warpath and barbarism of the past, and seek for themselves homes amid civilized scenes and associations (Majors, p. 244).*

It is worth noting that Majors viewed Cody not only as an instrument of Providence, but also a "teacher" who could lead the "savages" to a better way of life which was in line with the inevitable historic progression. Hence, coupled with Cody's unique background, it was his attachment to a "noble cause" that qualified him as a frontier hero. But these factors would have come to naught had it not been for a second aspect of Cody's career, pure chance or fate, in this case his first meeting with Edward Z.C. Judson in 1869.

Judson, who wrote under the alias of Ned Buntline, was assigned in 1869 to do a series of articles for the New York Weekly concerning the American west. Buntline's intention was to create a dime novel hero patterned after Major Frank North, commander of three companies of scouts who were fighting against the Sioux Indians at the time. North declined such an overture and referred Buntline to an obscure twenty-three year old scout named Cody. The imaginative Buntline was delighted to meet and accompany Cody on a scouting expedition and promptly returned to New York to complete his assignment. The result of Buntline's interviews with Cody was a serial titled "Buffalo Bill: The King of the Border Men," which was lacking in facts and heavy with hype (Smith, p. 104). A seemingly insignificant meeting between Buntline and Cody resulted in the introduction of Buffalo Bill to the American reading public. The reaction to the Buntline serial was positive and created a fad-like attraction to William Cody and the exciting frontier. Cody, in fact, became the personification of the frontier for many people and was invited to New York by James Gordon Bennett, editor of the New York Herald to view the theater production of Buntline's serial. The drama and accompanying acclaim appealed to Cody and he was soon asked to play "himself" in various renditions of the Buntline story. On the night of December 16, 1872 Cody stepped on a Chicago stage opposite "Texas Jack" Omohundro to act in Buntline's loosely constructed playlet called "Scouts of the Plains." Neither acting ability nor experience in the theater were necessary requirements for involvement in the Buntline productions, and certainly Cody had neither. Nevertheless, through some expert press-agentry, Cody had been exposed to the public and began to gain a reputation of epic proportions. The myths surrounding Cody were enhanced in 1878 when Prentiss Ingraham began publishing some two hundred different dime novels about the life of Buffalo Bill (Smith, p. 102). It was Ingraham, perhaps more than any other author due to the sheer volume of his work, who transformed Cody into a colorful and dynamic popular hero.

Clearly, then, Cody profited greatly from the already established frontier hero model. Due to his unceasing self-aggrandizement and the chance meeting with Buntline, Cody met the moment with a high degree of flair. He did more, however, than simply follow the existing model. He shaped and exploited the western "myth," proving just how commercially profitable it could be. In the process, he established a formula for later western mythology (Steckmesser, p. 253). His most important vehicle for such "myth-making" was the famed "Wild West Show" which opened on May 17, 1883 in Omaha, Nebraska. The show was an amalgamation of cowboys, Indians, trick riding and shooting, and reenactments of famous Indian/White frontier confrontations. At the center of it all was Cody, the colorful and soon to be legendary main attraction.

The Wild West Show was significant for two reasons. First, the popularity of the show, as evidenced by the millions of people who saw it, signaled the attraction of the adventure-filled and mythical west ala Buffalo Bill. Not known for his adherence to fact, Cody implanted his perception of the frontier on the American consciousness. Second, Cody took the show to Europe for several months where over one million people saw the performances. The mythical frontier idea was exported and thereby expanded. Cody later recalled walking the streets of London in the late 1880s and seeing copies of Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* in many of the shop windows (Cody, p. 501). In short, Cody had taken the frontier hero image and publicized it both on America's east coast and in the great cities of Europe. Clearly, then, Cody added an extra dimension to the frontier hero figure, that of the "showman." It was this dimension, coupled with the original model, that established Cody as a transitional figure in the ongoing development of the frontier hero. It is to that point of transition that we finally turn our attention.

There is a certain irony in the fact that William Cody and Frederick Turner were contemporaries. On July 12, 1893, just hours after Buffalo Bill had impressed another gallery at the Chicago World's Fair, Turner delivered at that same exposition, his soon-to-be-famous "Significance of the American Frontier" speech. In it, Turner pointed out that, as of 1890, the "frontier" no longer existed in America. The era of cheap and alluring western land was over. The frontier, which Turner claimed had been the major force in shaping our development as a nation, had vanished. As a result, Turner mused, the uniquely American cultural psyche would undergo a dramatic change (Turner, p. 59). The characteristics that were part of that psyche such as individuality, resourcefulness, and a buoyant freedom, would have to be manifested in dramatically changing circumstances. Americans would be forced to live within certain and finite limits. Thus on that hot July day in Chicago, the captivating contrast was set. Buffalo Bill, symbol of the frontier, entertained the crowds. Frederick Jackson Turner, prophet-historian, proclaimed the close of that frontier. Such was the unique place of Cody in our history – an odd mixture of frontier scout and showman, a remnant of a closing age, a connecting rod between what was and what would be.

It was precisely that position, coupled with his unique personality, that made Cody a significant player in the transmission of the frontier hero model into twentieth century America. He and the literature and showmanship that surrounded him, had provided a formula for commercial success. His formula made its way into thousands of motion pictures, novels, and radio and television programs. The formula, of course, consisted of noble heroes, daring rescues, fancy shooting, and host of dead Indians (Steckmesser, p. 253). It was an appealing formula, though heavily laden with myth. In short, the western saga can be traced, at least in part, to the life, literature, and legend of William "Buffalo Bill" Cody.

## **CONCLUSION**

The frontier hero model, from its emergence in the late eighteenth century through Daniel Boone until its last personification before 1890 through William Cody, was ever increasing in symbolic importance. As Steckmesser points out in his book, the lives of heroes are valuable to the historian as a record of human aspirations and traditions (Steckmesser, p. 252). Their factual validity is less important than their symbolic quality. Boone and his adventurous story captured the collective aspiration of a budding nation. Cody, though capitalizing on those that had gone before him, retained that vital connection to the frontier and its noble cause that so captivated the American mind. Finally, it is through such men as Boone and Cody that important periods in history are often personified in the popular mind. Consolidating the deeds of many in a single person offers a simplistic and appealing version of history. No doubt, if we delved deeply for the intricate complex of facts that surround a man and his life, we would emerge with a more sophisticated story. We would do this, however, at the risk of detracting from the mythical quality of the symbolic hero.

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