Daddy of 'em all

Traci Hercher

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Recommended Citation
https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.34m0-58x8

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DADDY OF 'EM ALL

by

Traci Hercher

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Film and Video Production in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

August 2019

Thesis Supervisor: Assistant Professor Michael Gibisser
PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Since its inception in 1897, the annual Cheyenne Frontier Days has drawn hundreds of thousands of visitors to Wyoming for a 10-day celebration of "Western roots," culminating in the world's largest outdoor rodeo nicknamed "The Daddy of 'Em All." Shot during the 2018 Frontier Days, Daddy of 'Em All tracks the proliferation of settler colonial narratives that the event seeks to ossify through its signs, symbols, and sets. Through dislocated images and interviews with past and present Frontier Days volunteers and attendees including my mother, a then-resident of Cheyenne, the film grapples with heritage, ideology, violence, and borders in a time of growing nationalism.
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INTRODUCTION

“Myth-making, by definition, is simultaneously a psychological and social activity… its function is to reconcile and unite individualities to a collective identity.”

- Richard Slotkin

*Daddy of ’Em All* is an experimental documentary that explores Cheyenne Frontier Days (CFD), a 10-day celebration held annually in Cheyenne, the capital city of Wyoming. Marketed as a celebration of “Western roots,” CFD occurs each Summer and is comprised of multiple distinct events that culminate in the world's largest outdoor rodeo, coined “The Daddy of ’Em All.” Inaugurated in 1897 as ‘Cheyenne Frontier Day,’ the event featured only a handful of cowboys wrestling a horse into a boxcar. Since then, the annual festivities at CFD have been unbroken by two World Wars and the Great Depression due to the tenacity and affection of its numerous supporters and volunteers. CFD has increased in popularity every year; today it imports hundreds of thousands of visitors to Cheyenne. My film explores the role of this event in 2018, in its 122nd iteration, and its community of volunteers and participants during a time of growing White Nationalism.

The production choices I made for *Daddy of ’Em All* were informed by historical and theoretical research about the town of Cheyenne and Frontier Days, Westward Expansion, Frontier and American mythology, and the particularities of the white supremacist ideology driving each of these. As a white American concerned with thinking critically about race in my work, I set out to use the essay film format to think through “The West” as a sort of crux of white
American identity evidenced at this celebration of the “Western lifestyle.” In this addendum to the film, I have compiled some of my findings and the ways that my research shaped or became manifest in the film.

The selection of the events hosted by CFD featured in Daddy of ’Em All include a cattle drive; “Old Frontier Town”; spectators at Indian Village viewing Native American cultural sharing; attendees photographing one-another in a makeshift jail; the orchestrated raising of a football field-sized U.S. flag in the bucking arena; the Grand Parade which begins with the Cheyenne Frontier Days Old West Museum’s collection of authentic 1800s horse-drawn carriages and climaxes in a series of military transport vehicles which increase in size; and the carnival. Each of the featured events in the film neutralizes violence through its various visual and aural representations. For example, the Grand Parade normalizes violence with its accumulation of vehicles used for war, all of which are driven by white Americans smiling and waving to the crowds, the racist rhetoric spouted by white male announcers blares through the loudspeakers during the rodeo and is met with enthusiastic cheers from roaring crowds, and, an open, constructed jail is set up for white attendees to enter for the purposes of creating and taking home photographic souvenirs. In order to defamiliarize the violent history and oppressive conditions that CFD seeks to normalize and celebrate, I sought to make a film that is rather an encounter with the distorted world that the festival constructs. My position is critical; in the film, the settler colonial narratives and celebrations which serve as the bedrock of the festival are rendered peculiar and disturbing. The strategies I used to achieve this were primarily my photographic framing choices coupled with durational images and through asynchronous, distorted sound and voices which transform the images they are paired with.
HERITAGE

My projects always begin with relationships that are very meaningful to me personally; much of my work is about understanding my role within my immediate family. As a life-long midwesterner, my connection to Frontier Days is through my mother. Until she was 18, my mom moved almost every year with her parents, brother, and sister; the longest subsequent time she spent in any one location was as an adolescent for the four years they stayed in Casper, Wyoming. The time she spent there proved formative perhaps in part due to the length of their stay. My parents met in Colorado and before my sisters and I were born they moved to Illinois due to my dad’s job. I grew up hearing from my mother how much she adored and missed the west. My parents had both been in the midwest for thirty years before they split up in 2012, at which point my mother moved from the Chicago suburbs back to Casper, WY, where she stayed for several years before relocating to Cheyenne in 2016. She has since moved again, to Bailey, Colorado, but during the Summer of 2018, she graciously hosted me for a full month including time leading up to and after Frontier Days as well during the event while I worked on the project. As a child, I spent a bit of time visiting my maternal grandparents and my aunt (my mother’s sister) in various cities in Wyoming while they were living there, but I was quite young, so my memories of the visits are mostly sparse and incomplete. I only learned through conducting an interview with my mother during film production that I had ever even attended Frontier Days, when I was three or four years old. I’ve always been ambiently aware of Frontier Days as a concept from my familial connection to Cheyenne, but I really rediscovered it in 2016 when my mom mentioned to me off-hand that she planned to volunteer there that Summer. Confronted with Cheyenne Frontier Days again as an adult, I found it difficult to comprehend how exactly it was that this event was still ongoing. Having never been to CFD as an adult prior to production
for the film during the Summer of 2018, my research had its genesis with the question: what is keeping CFD alive? and my findings informed my overall perception of the event, and, in turn, the way that I decided to capture each of the scenes featured in the film. My research centered around the cultural and demographic make-up of the supporters of CFD and the economic forces at play for the town of Cheyenne and the state of Wyoming. Early on, I discovered that CFD continues to run because of the support of approximately 2500 volunteers. I also learned that the ambient events surrounding the rodeo remain strongly connected to those that were established in its first incarnations over a century ago.

THE RHIZOMATIC WEST

After I decided to pursue this project, I began by viewing various traditional and subgenre Western films including Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in the West*, Robert Altman’s *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, and John Ford’s *Stagecoach* and *The Searchers*. Because my interest with *Daddy of 'Em All* was not to pursue the Cowboy-as-hero that is thematic in the traditional Western, I turned my attention primarily toward Acid Westerns like Monte Hellman’s *Ride in the Whirlwind* and *The Shooting*. These films were inspiring in their subversion of the traditional Western form by shining light on the destructive nature of white Americans. I alternated at first between viewing and internalizing many Westerns and conducting research on the American West broadly. From my research I discovered the only real consensus across readings to be that defining the American West in any certain terms is difficult. In Charles Bowden’s “Unnatural History of America,” *Blood Orchid*, he writes of the West, “we are embedded in this thing but we cannot see it. It is always… over the next hill, the far side of the mountain, up the farthest canyon, something that slipped away yesterday, last week, twenty years ago, the last century… Or it never was at all… I can’t find the West… and nobody is likely to
frame an elegant map of it and put it on the wall… It’s a kind of secret thing.”¹ In *The Rhizomatic West*, Neil Campbell theorizes the American West as more than geography; he writes, “it is a complex, unstable signifier by those who’ve lived within it, passed through it, conquered it, settled, farmed, militarized, urbanized and dreamed it.”² Thinking about the West via Delueze and Guattaris’ rhizome is useful in pinning it down in one way, but this of course leads outward in many webbed and non-linear directions. By engaging with the American West historically, one must also confront the always-shifting line of the Frontier and what it meant at various moments in history as well as today -- there is a massive confusion of time and space with merely the word, “frontier.” In his seminal book from 1920, *The Frontier in American History*, Frederick Jackson Turner theorizes that the ever-encroaching frontier line of Westward Expansion has a tethered relationship to the development of (white male) American identity. He proposes that a strong sense of collective identity was essentially born out of, “the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward.”³ Turner’s project was driven by his concern that without the action of colonial settlement and expansion, Americans would lose something of their collective identity in the process.


² Neil Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West: Representing the American West in a Transnational, Global, Media Age* (University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 41.

CFD AS THEATRE

All of the events hosted by CFD including the rodeo are each in their own way fantastical performances of life during the “Frontier Days,” which, interestingly, is also the time when Cheyenne Frontier Days festivities had their genesis. When these different elements of CFD initially came together, they were already once-removed from reality, approaching the fantastical and theatrical. Today, however, there is less emphasis on the mythological element of this amalgamation of events and, rather, they are presented as akin to historical record. CFD prides itself on celebrating the “Western lifestyle,” and in its marketing suggests attendees leave as “modern cowboys.” I have tried to answer with the film the question, what is the modern cowboy? My film seeks to suggests a through line in the white American male cowboy of the Frontier Days to the modern-day white American male capitalist. I do this by introducing the cowboy in one of the first shots of the film paired with an interview with Bobby Mims, the winner of the CFD Chuckwagon Cook-off, and ending the film with thoughts from my mother in response to my question to her about who the “good ol’ boys” of Wyoming are.

In Bruce McConachie’s “American Theatre in context, from the Beginnings to 1870,” he writes, “theatrical performances do cultural work of historical significance through their repeated circularity over time.” His thesis is distinct from other Theatre Historians in that he believes the ‘feedback loop’ between the audience and the performers indicates the success and longevity of any a given performance. For him, “audience response necessarily leads the historian to embed performance events into their social and cultural milieu; spectator response, in turn, is potentially the most important key to historical context.”

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5 Mcconachie, 111.
events, religious rituals, militia parades, gothic thrillers, circus horsemanship, domestic melodramas, and other kinds of public performances all fell under the umbrella of theatrical entertainment; this puts Cheyenne Frontier Days (with its militia parades, staged productions, and rodeo as sporting event) into this category of theatre as well. McConachie suggests that white spectator participation in entertainment during the period when Cheyenne Frontier Days began primarily assisted audiences in “justifying celebrating, marginalizing, and erasing cultures of other Americans.” The audiences were primarily white and also primarily Christian, which, as a cultural system “organizes behavior and belief in the body, the family, the community, and larger social institutions” and emphasizes the boundaries of cultural systems supporting construction of dimensions and dynamics of class, race, and gender. He writes about the emphasis for white Americans on the cultural systems of Republicanism and gentility particularly, which is evidenced in the primary image of a (cowboy) hero on horseback within the cultural system of patriarchy. From 1830-1870, he writes, “the performances enjoyed by white Americans continued to marginalize or erase the black and ‘red’ Americans also living on the continent.”

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7 Mcconachie, “American Theatre” 112.

One element of the kind of performance to which McConachie refers is the Grand Parade at CFD. The military has been heavily involved in Cheyenne Frontier Days since its genesis—forts including D.A. Russell in Cheyenne were established by the U.S. military at the time of colonial settlement to keep white Americans safe from Native Americans who were fighting to protect their land from the intruders. *Daddy of ‘Em All* includes a split but recurring static shot of CFD’s Grand Parade from the position of the spectator. The parade exalts the development of transportation as bound up in notions of “progress” that include Westward Expansion, so the images of the procession provide an apex to the action of the film and an apt convergence of the film’s ideas. The framing of the shot formally mirrors the efforts of Parade’s organizers to create a simplified historical representation of an actually complicated and violent history. The last of the parade shots culminates in ever-larger military vehicles, cheerleaders, and a clean-up crew –
suggesting that the road is paved for the parade to circle back around in the future. In *Daddy of 'Em All*, CFD’s Grand Parade is captured in a way that suggests Westward Expansion not only in the East-to-West movement of bodies and vehicles through the frame but with the display of ever-larger military vehicles. This speaks to the violence that was necessary such that expansion was possible and that white Americans exist where and with the power that they do right now.

**WHO IS THE DADDY OF EM ALL?**

The title of my film, “Daddy of ’Em All” comes directly from the nickname Cheyenne Frontier Days earned from its supporters over the years, but allows for multiple interpretations. There isn’t one way to read the title and, further, without the inclusion of footage of the rodeo to which it refers, the meaning of this phrase is necessarily transformed. In the film, who is the “Daddy” and what are they the most significant daddy of, exactly? Turner writes, “the frontier is productive of individualism. Complex society is precipitated by the wilderness into a kind of primitive organization based on the family. The tendency is anti-social. It produces antipathy of control and particularly to any direct control… the frontier individualism has from the beginning promoted democracy.”\(^9\)

The pairing of the frontier with individualism (which remains uniquely American) speaks to the inherent patriarchy in Imperialist ideology like Manifest Destiny which drove Westward Expansion. In my previous work I have explored patriarchy in (my own) nuclear family, its reverberations outward and impact within. *Daddy of 'Em All* is concerned with white America’s imagined exceptionalism and subsequent violent domination. My questions going into production were about who is welcomed to and celebrated by Frontier Days via the events it puts on and who is ignored, punished, and violently excluded via its visual and aural rhetoric. Cheyenne Frontier Days is decidedly male and attracts a majority white audience.

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I’m interested in what gets learned and what gets lost in white American patriarchal and isolated familial structures and hope that the title of my film might implicate both the individual white American “daddy,” as well as “America” as a kind of daddy of Imperialism. Relatedly and peculiarly, in his personal history of CFD, *Daddy of Em All; the Story of Cheyenne Frontier Days*, Bob Hanesworth fully embraced the nickname for the purposes of determining an organizational structure for his book. He assigned Cheyenne Frontier Days as a singular, male-gendered subject beginning with Chapter 1, “Conception and Birth: The ‘Daddy of ’Em All Comes Into Being’” and closing with Chapter 8, “Maturity, 1926-1967: Seventy and Still Going Strong.”

Figure 2: Still from *Daddy of ’Em All*, Cattle Drive

“The striking and peculiar characteristic of American society is that it is not so much a democracy as a huge commercial company for the discovery, cultivation, and capitalization of its enormous territory. The United States are primarily a commercial society, and only secondarily a nation.”

10 Robert D. Hanesworth, *Daddy of Em All; the Story of Cheyenne Frontier Days* (Cheyenne, WY: Flintlock Pub., 1967), 13, 105.
TEMPORAL DISSONANCE

I decided to document Frontier Days on 16mm film because it was the cinematic material of the 19th and 20th century, the time period represented at CFD. By presenting the film digitally, I not only have the ability to utilize stereo sound, but am also able to connect it materially to contemporary cinema, and, ideally, generate an atmosphere of temporal and spatial confusion which leaves the viewer asking: where and when are we? Further confusion in this direction comes by way of the visual and sonic motif of the train. By making the presence of the train surface multiple times throughout the opening of the film, I hope to point to the significance of the transcontinental line in aiding Westward Expansion and in particular the settlement of Cheyenne. In *Iron Cages*, which examines race and culture in nineteenth-century America, Ronald E. Takaki mentions the 1869 editor of the *Cheyenne Leader* newspaper’s description of the train as, “the iron horse in his resistless march to the sea” which fundamentally altered the nature of westward migration from a slow and gradual process which involved a lot of careful planning to the “pierced center of the desert” as we know the railroad today. Stations, like downtown Cheyenne’s hub, acted as nuclei for “civilized” settlement. The railroad functioned as a corporate interest which was actively involved in the white settlement of the West and the disenfranchisement of Native American people who had occupied the land it pierced. One example was in their support for the 1871 Indian Appropriation Act which stripped tribes of their sovereignty and power. The Native American territory between Kansas and Texas had a white population of just 7000 in 1880, but by 1889, five years after the railroad was complete, the

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white population had increased to 110,000. In the diary of seventeen year-old William Emsley which documents the cattle drive that he co-directed from La Grande, Oregon to Cheyenne in 1876, the association of the railway with the U.S. comes into focus in a line which follows his sighting railway car smoke for the first time in three years, he writes, “I’m beginning to think we are getting back to America.”

![Figure 3: Still from Daddy of 'Em All, Frontier Park](image)

“When Jefferson looked west he did not see the frontier filled with Indians but instead envisioned an opportunity to realize his dream of an agrarian utopian society of independent anglo-american farmers.”

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CFD’s cattle drive, a public and advertised event at CFD, is in reference to the late 1800s “Frontier days” when there were not other means of moving cattle across great distances. The cattle who are driven into Frontier park stay for the duration of CFD and become part of the rodeo, but were it not for the rodeo itself and the spectacle that CFD seeks to create, these cattle would likely be transported by truck (if relocation were necessary at all). One of the strategies used in *Daddy of ‘Em All* is to extend the influx of people and animals to the land by drawing out their landing. In this way, colonial settlement is rendered ongoing in the space of the film, speaking to colonial settler infrastructure as insidious and encapsulating hopefully beyond the scope of the film’s set: Cheyenne. As Patrick Wolfe outlines in “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” elimination includes, “more than the summary liquidation of Indigenous people,” he goes on, “it is both a complex social formation and as continuity through time that I term settler colonization as a structure rather than a historical event.”\(^{16}\)

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Jefferson was the first prophet of American democracy, and when we analyse the essential features of his gospel, it is clear that Western influence was the dominant element. He was born in the frontier region of Virginia, on the edge of the Blue Ridge, in the middle of the eighteenth century. His conception was that manufacturing development and city life were dangerous to the purity of the body politic.”

CHEYENNE: MAGIC CITY OF THE PLAINS

The mass influx of people to Cheyenne each Summer for CFD sits in stark contrast to ordinary life in the town which, in 2017, had a population of 63,624 according to the U.S. Census. Cheyenne holds the largest concentration of people in the state, and Wyoming is the least populous state in the country. Both the state and local economy depend on the tourism business generated by Frontier Days. According to the CFD economic impact report following the 2018 celebration, the impact resulting from direct visitor spending surrounding the event

toted approximately $27.1 million. The report also indicates that CFD is recognized as the “consummate Western Heritage, cultural, and entertainment experience in the world” following only Yellowstone National Park, Jackson, and Grand Teton National park as top tourist attractions to the state of Wyoming. On the whole, the study shows that in 2018, travelers tended to incorporate CFD into their Summer plans that include other destinations in the state of Wyoming, suggesting that the positive economic impact extends beyond the community to the entire state. Some of this research enters the film via Lois Deaver (CFD Miss Frontier, 1946) whose audio interview is paired with a shot from a Grand Parade float of the parade-watchers waving as well as dynamic views of downtown Cheyenne. The interview moves from discussion of the economic benefits of Frontier Days at its origin toward revelations that Ms. Deaver was invited to be Festival Royalty because her father was very involved in the production of Frontier Days as Chairman and details about her experience as Miss Frontier. The interview as well as additional research also indicated that the role of Miss Frontier at CFD has changed very little since 1947 aside from a complication of the selection process– Miss Frontier is now selected via a juried contest which requires an application on the part of the women who are interested. In 1946 as Miss Frontier, Ms. Deaver was never invited to speak publicly at any point, but was expected to be make herself visible at each of the CFD events. In 2018, Miss Frontier and the Lady in Waiting were objectified in the same way, demonstrating that CFD’s attitude toward women is the same as its attitude toward people of color or difference.

AMERICAN MYTHOLOGY

The wild western hero as cowboy became dominant in the 20th century in America in the wake of Buffalo Bill, showman and creator of “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” show in the 1880s. Prior, men on horseback were actually known for their acts of lawlessness and brutality in the territory of Arizona and along the border with Mexico. The perspective of the cowboy shifted and was solidified as heroic after the Wild West show gained popularity, which, in its early days strongly resembled the modern-day rodeo.¹⁹ For white Americans, the advance of the frontier meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, and the cowboy as American hero assisted Europeans who’d left their homeland in creating a positive and unique image to grasp onto of their new lives in a faraway place. According to Richard Slotkin in *Regeneration through Violence*, “the mediating figure of the frontier hero was not only a psychological but a social and political necessity.”²⁰ Slotkin suggests that if white Americans did not have a moral rationale for

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claiming and conquering Native American territory, “they would simply be exercising, like the Indians, the right of the mighty over the weak.”

The structural elements of a myth include a protagonist or hero, in this case the cowboy, a universe in which the hero may act, and a narrative which describes an interaction between the hero and the universe. A mythology is a network of narratives that dramatizes the world vision and historical sense of a people or culture, reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of compelling metaphors. In effect, myth artifacts are constructions of symbols and values derived from both real and imaginary experience that are rehearsed in accord with the deepest needs of the psyche. In the case of Cheyenne Frontier Days, the foundation for white American mythology is the attitude between dark and light races, which performs the deepest needs of the American settler: “the need to affirm – for themselves and for the home folks – that they had not deserted European civilization for American savagery.”

The Europeans who came to the U.S. grappled with a sense of exile from their homes and found justification for their departure in their victory of over the Native American people. This victory, as they saw it, allowed them to establish themselves as English by setting up a similar civilization to the one they’d left, but, additionally, superior to the home English by exalting their heroism in battle with Native Americans. Washington Irving, among the first writers with a distinctly American voice, warned that Western Expansion could lead to white racial decay. The deep-seated racist fears of leaving behind the “civilized” ways of the Europeans they’d left led settlers to begin performing the distorted and adulterated image of the tale of their settling almost immediately after it occurred.

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The annual onslaught of tourists to Cheyenne for Frontier Days doubles as a ritualistic performance of the original Euro-American settlement of the town – it happened so suddenly when it was at the end of the Union Pacific Railroad in 1867 that it was deemed the “magic city of the plains” by a newspaper reporter. The still below from *Daddy of ’Em All* features a life-size model of an average street in late 1800s Cheyenne. The block is a permanent structure referred to as “Gunslinger Square” in CFD programming, and the site of the “Shoot ’Em up Show” which is performed by the Cheyenne Gunslingers performance group at noon everyday.

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during CFD. This constructed town acts as a monument to colonially-settled Cheyenne whose buildings, meant to convey an appearance of permanent structure from the front, were in fact merely facades. Much of the infrastructure of Cheyenne was not sustainable, due in part to the speed with which it rose up, and much of it had to be rebuilt. The act of creating a monument to these buildings of the ‘frontier days’ suggests a celebration of a period of actually difficult and tenuous living for those who occupied and frequented buildings like these at that time. This permanent display pays homage to structures which couldn’t and didn’t last. In the film, these facades act as a visual metaphor for the desperate grasping in the settler colonial narratives about who “owns” the land and how power is disseminated. The original buildings did not persist and, further, these monuments wouldn’t exist without the dedication of those who so desperately need them in order to maintain their belief system and orientation to the world. In the same way that the original buildings in Cheyenne did not possess a true or solid foundation, the narrative of the cowboy as the hero and conqueror of the wide open West, paving the way for Euro-American expansion, is hollow. Westward Expansion is tied to the false notion that white people had a divine right to what is now American land which was already occupied and tended carefully by indigenous populations for thousands of years prior to their arrival.
“Let all be merry in many ways
And celebrate old frontier days;
For when we die, as Bill Nye said
We’ll be a very long time dead.”26

26 Robert D. Hanesworth, *Daddy of Em All; the Story of Cheyenne Frontier Days* (Cheyenne, WY: Flintlock Pub., 1967), 11.
“Sometimes, pard, I can’t explain it
There’s a something in the breast
Of most every human critter
Causing him to love the West.
There’s an innate sort of feelin’
That’ll git right up an’ swell
When a broncho starts to buckin’
An’ the Sioux begin to yell.”27

WHITE SUPREMACIST IDEOLOGY

CFD’s rootedness in racist ideology is impossible to ignore. To return to my earlier mention about how steadfast Frontier Days has stayed to its origins – in Bob Hanesworth’s history of CFD, he included a snippet from an event in the second annual CFD celebration which involved a, “staged ambush and attack by Arapahoe and Shoshoni Indians,” on a white wedding party which carried on, “until the cowboys chased the Indians away.”28 He goes on to say, “the entire representation was realistic and afforded a vivid idea of the early days in the west.”29 This particular event has since been retired from CFD, but the attitude that spectacularized the cowboy ‘win’ over the Native Americans still permeates Frontier Days. For me it was difficult to disentangle the way Native Americans were integrated into CFD at its start from the way they represent themselves there today. During my time at CFD in 2018, I interviewed Sandra Ironcloud, Arapahoe and matriarch of the group in 2018 and for the eleven preceding years. She

27 Robert D. Hanesworth, Daddy of Em All; the Story of Cheyenne Frontier Days (Cheyenne, WY: Flintlock Pub., 1967), 56.
28 Hanesworth, Daddy of Em All, 28.
29 Hanesworth, Daddy of Em All, 28.
mentioned on several occasions during our conversation that it was unclear at that juncture whether her group would be granted the contract and option to return in 2019, but that they were honored to have been included for the many years that they had been. For the entirety of the hour-long interview, a CFD Indian Village Public Relations representative paced back and forth nearby within ear-shot. This surveillance made our conversation feel extremely limited. I was struck by Ms. Ironcloud’s repetition regarding her gratitude for having had the opportunity to be on the contract for so many subsequent years as she was not repetitive about any other aspects of our conversation; I could not help but connect this to the surveillance of our interview. In Daddy of ‘Em All, I suggest the notion of the modern violence of looking and shooting as a gesture of control in the way the Native American dancing is decentered and, rather, the spectators come into focus.

Figure 9: Still from Daddy of ‘Em All, Indian Village
“Aside from economic benefit and the business principles, the overriding intent is to perpetuate the western spirit of the 19th century, to make history entertaining. In a word, ‘fun.’”

Integrated into a sequence in which I suggest the construction and build-up of CFD’s “Old Frontier Town,” I included a scene of attendees photographing one-another in a makeshift jail. When I encountered this set-up, I found the entire construction to simply provide additional evidence of the white supremacist ideology that underlies everything manufactured at CFD. The free jail is flippant in its disregards the United States’ mass incarceration structure which, in my view, is a form of modern-day slavery. The U.S.’s Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery while simultaneously legalizing it among imprisoned populations – at the time of its introduction, it allowed former slaveholders in the South to effectively lease prisoners to private firms including

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businessmen, planters, and corporations. In 2017, there were 1,549 black prisoners for every 100,000 black adults – nearly six times the imprisonment rate for whites (272 per 100,000) and nearly double the rate for Hispanics (823 per 100,000). This makeshift jail which is set up such that attendees may come and go freely, taking with them their photo souvenirs, takes lightly the real and damaging impact that our incarceration infrastructure has on American people’s actual lives. The prison system primarily doesn’t affect the white Frontier Days clientele, otherwise it wouldn’t be presented in this fashion. The white supremacist ideology that fueled systematic Native American removal from the land is the same one that fueled White American slave-holding. As Jason Pierce describes it in *Making of the White Man’s West*, “Indians were replaced with slaves as king cotton became rooted in the south economy,” thus, “Indian removal created a vacuum soon filled by slaves, further entrenching slavery in the American South and propelling the nation toward Civil War.”

Figure 11: Still from *Daddy of 'Em All*, Under the Flag

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One hundred-plus bodies move together to orchestrate the raising of a football field-sized U.S. flag in the bucking arena, encircled by tanks and other military transport vehicles. Viewed from the side, the choreography of this endeavor is stripped of its symbolic goal and becomes instead about the construction of image; the choreographed efforts are the focus in this scene. With a side-view, it is revealed that children being indoctrinated into the ideologies proliferated here are the ones who make the image the most appealing, jumping and running around underneath the football field-sized flag to make waves. Over the course of the scene, we primarily stay with one of the children, a young African-American boy whose energy shifts from joy in participation to fatigue and coercion into keeping the flag up and off of his head. The announcer’s voice through the loudspeakers shifts from clarity of its racist rhetoric to
indecipherable drone with the shift in point of view. The boy’s energy drain coincides with the amplification of the distorted sounds of a flag waving in the wind.

CONCLUSION

Richard Slotkin writes in *Regeneration through Violence*, “a people unaware of its myths is likely to continue living by them, though the world around that people may change and demand changes in their psychology, their world view, their ethics, and their institutions.”\(^\text{32}\) This was a guiding force for me in the production of *Daddy of ’Em All*. In a time of emboldened White Nationalism and terrorism across the world and in the United States, it is prescient to look critically at the ideology that upholds both direct acts of violence today and events such as Frontier Days which have been ongoing for over a century. Although the ideology is surfacing more often in recent years in violence and hate speech against immigrants, racial minorities, and Muslims, it is important for white Americans to realize that this same ideology is the foundation for the United States’ development. The film gives time and space to those who support Frontier Days which, at times, makes for an uncomfortable experience as racism is openly shared and spouted. As a white woman documenting CFD, there was a way in which I was able to be “undercover” at Cheyenne Frontier Days, and I think it was important to me that I grapple with and expose the racism that I encountered there as a privileged white American implicated at CFD and in the U.S. My films more broadly act as traces of my personal negotiation with the world and what I seek to truly understand; *Daddy of ’Em All* is an essayistic reflection of my process of analysis of Cheyenne Frontier Days. Because I am committed to social justice, I believe it is

important for me personally to thoroughly understand this history in order to strive for equality in ways both in my daily life and with my work. My hope is that by sharing the film I also ask others, particularly white people, to do this work too. It seems this is the first step in working toward real and sustainable equality for people of color who are forced to navigate a white-centered world.
REFERENCES


Hanesworth, Robert D. *Daddy of Em All; the Story of Cheyenne Frontier Days*. Cheyenne, WY: Flintlock Pub., 1967.


