Crude Optimism

Romanticizing Alberta's Oil Frontier at the Calgary Stampede

Kimberly Skye Richards



An immaculate young woman regally waves at a sea of enthusiastic fans. Perched on her head is a white cowboy hat embellished with a tiara that has "Calgary Stampede Queen" written on it in rhinestones. She is a vision of "westernness" in cowboy boots, a buckskin skirt and jacket, and turquoise jewels. Her express purpose this hot July afternoon is to welcome the 115,000 folks attending the "Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth," the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede. She is a "welcome figure,"[1] like those white-cowboy-hat-wearing individuals in the Calgary airport who stand in the arrivants' path and greet travelers. These performances of western hospitality amount to a performance of power: the assertion of settler rights to land.[2] They are just

1. I borrow this term from Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson's essay "Welcoming Sovereignty," which examines Indigenous sovereignty and gestures of welcome that take place in spaces of transit and gathering (2016:24).

2. In using the term "settler" to describe non-Indigenous people living in western Canada, I am referring to the idea within settler colonial studies that being a settler is not an identity, but a structural position and experience of power and privilege. Settlers settle into land appropriated by imperial nations and create independent homelands for themselves. They are defined by conquest; they are "founders of political orders and carry their sovereignty

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Student Essay Contest Winner

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The **Graduate Group in Performance Studies at UC Berkeley** provides an interdisciplinary and individually crafted curriculum directed at advanced studies in the literatures, performances, cultural contexts, and theories of performance throughout the world. Based in the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies, the PhD program at once takes advantage of Berkeley's distinguished history in the field of drama and theatre studies, and opens out to a wider interrogation of the disciplines and methodologies of performance studies. The program is administered by the Graduate Group in Performance Studies, comprised of faculty from a wide range of related departments. Students in the PhD program conduct research in a diverse array of interdisciplinary methodologies, on projects spanning the fields of theatre, dance, and performance studies. The PhD in Performance Studies is designed as a five-year program (10 semesters). It offers core courses, but no predetermined areas of emphasis. Each student determines an individual research agenda within the broader field of performance studies, using faculty resources to develop both a clear field specialization and a sense of interdisciplinary innovation.

one subtle manifestation of the affective logic of settler colonialism at the century-old festival designed to preserve and promote western heritage and culture in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

As a fourth-generation settler born in southern Alberta, I regularly attended the Calgary Stampede as a child. There was a time when I fantasized about being the Stampede Queen, galloping around arenas on a fast buckskin horse, upholding the ideal of white femininity, and drawing people into the Stampede spectacle through



Figure 2. Display commemorating the role of the Rodeo Royalty in the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, 14 July 2017. (Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards)

with them"; they do not require labor, but require Indigenous people to vanish (Veracini 2010:3, 94). More recent immigrants face a political order already constituted, and are co-opted into the settler colonial regime, becoming settlers themselves as they benefit materially from the original dispossession of Indigenous peoples and contribute to ongoing dispossessions.

Figure 1. (facing page) Interactive photo opportunities are prevalent at the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, where everybody can be a cowboy, 13 July 2018. (Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards)

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affective appeal. Competing in the Calgary Stampede Queen competition when I was 20 years old, and attending the Stampede in nearly all of the nine years since shored up many questions: Why aren't the Rodeo Royalty—the Queen and her two Princesses—more racially and ethnically representative of Calgary's increasingly diverse population?[3] Why does the Stampede's espoused value of "commitment to the community" translate into the celebration of volunteerism and more unpaid labor when more than a million visitors annually pass through the gates, paying CAD$18.00 for an adult ticket (Calgary Stampede 2018)?[4] How has the spectacle of frontier life enacted at the Stampede helped to brand Alberta as a Wild West full of the optimism and excitement of frontier opportunity across the unfolding of the western Canadian settlement and cattle frontier (c. 1880–1920) and the oil frontier (1941–present)?[5]



Figure 3. Visiting rodeo queens and princesses watch the Stampede rodeo. Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, 8 July 2017. (Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards)

The answers to these questions are bound up with how performances at the Stampede aid Alberta's oil and gas industry by reinforcing affective ties to that industry, as well as creating distractions and diversions from decolonization that Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call "settler moves to innocence." These strategies "attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege" (2012:10), and build on the worldview that I call "crude optimism." Playing off Lauren Berlant's notion of "cruel optimism" (2011), crude optimism is a binding optimistic attachment to fossil fuel extraction, pipeline development, and consumption despite the brutal realities of extractivism and climate destabilization caused by the release of carbon into the atmosphere. Crude optimism, like cruel optimism, exists "when something you desire is actually an obsta-

3. Women between the ages of 19 and 24 who are Canadian citizens, have been a resident of Alberta for at least 12 months prior to application, and have never been married or had children are eligible to compete in the Calgary Stampede Queen and Princesses Competition. Competitors are judged on their ability to look presentable and professional, as well as their riding ability, personality, and ability to speak comfortably with people from all backgrounds and walks of life. Once crowned, the Royal Trio receives outfits and jewelry for all appearances as well as makeup, manicures, hairstyling products, a custom saddle, and a year's worth of riding lessons. Currently the Royal Trio receives small honorariums throughout the year ($1,000 monthly) and a $2,000 scholarship if attending a postsecondary institution (Calgary Stampede 2019). For more information on the history of program, see Hamblin (2014).

4. The core values of the Calgary Stampede brand are western hospitality, integrity, pride of place, and commitment to the community (Calgary Stampede 2018).

5. Alberta's oil sands have the third largest oil reserves in the world, after Venezuela and Saudi Arabia. According to Statistics Canada, capital investment in Alberta's upstream energy sector, which includes oil sands, conventional oil and gas, mining, and quarrying, was equal to about $28.3 billion in 2016, estimated at $26.5 billion in 2017, and is forecast at $23.7 billion in 2018. In 2017, approximately 140,300 people were employed in Alberta's upstream energy sector (Government of Alberta 2018). Throughout the essay when I cite financial information, I am referring to Canadian dollars.

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cle to your flourishing" (Berlant 2011:1). To be "crude" is to be in a natural or raw state, "not changed by any process or preparation," not manufactured, refined, tempered, etc.[6] Crude optimism is confidence that our fossil fuel economy and petropoliticized regime will lead us to the best of all possible worlds. Crude optimism keeps us "loving oil," as Stephanie LeMenager describes our deep attachment not to the substance itself but to the "good life" fantasy that fossil-fueled modernity makes possible (2013:102). At the heart of the issue are the questions: Why do we stay attached to oil despite clear evidence of its instability, fragility, and cost? What has led us to this cruel impasse and produced or sustained a culture of climate denial and willful ignorance?[7]

Today the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede features the world's richest rodeo with more than $2 million in prize money, chuckwagon races, country and western music concerts, a parade, midway, Calgary Stampede Indian Village, trade show, livestock exhibitions, western art competition, and grandstand show featuring an eclectic display of youth talent, vaudeville acts, and First Nations dancing and drumming. Many of these performance practices produce an affective climate of crude optimism that is politically and economically expedient for the petroleum industry, underwrites settler innocence, and legitimizes the expropriation of Indigenous land.

Performance analysis can help to disentangle the legitimizing narratives, structures of feeling, embodied behaviors, and cultural practices that allow violent and racialized acts of dispossession, extractivism, and coloniality to become thinkable. Diana Taylor, in her study of "disappearing acts" during Argentina's Dirty War, shows how a small group of power brokers manipulated and controlled a viewing public through a spectacle of collective identity. She argues that public spectacle is "a locus and mechanism of communal identity through collective imagining": it offers a population insight into events at the same time as it blinds them to the meaning of the situation (1997:ix). Her analysis illustrates how the destruction of civil society is not only about weapons, but also ideological penetration, which renders many complicit. Likewise, the Stampede spectacle is a site for the production, negotiation, and dissemination of ideologies conditioned by the cultural and material conditions of the oil frontier.[8] Through the Stampede, the fantasy of the American myth of the frontier came to relate to ordinary life.[9] The celebration of the cowboy is not simply nostalgic—a marker of what is lacking and desired; the frontier is a crude and cruel fantasy in which the community imagines itself as still existing.

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6. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "crude (adj.1a)," accessed 4 June 2018. www.oed.com.libproxy.berkeley.edu/view/Entry/45152?rskey=Bxe3ml&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid.

7. Since the 1990s, a generative multidisciplinary field of petrocriticism has been excavating the local and global impacts of oil. Petrocritics have shown how petroconsumption has shaped fundamental sociopolitical assumptions, such as the ideals of freedom, democracy and modernity, and forestalled consideration of oil's social and ecological costs (see Coronil 1997; Apter 2005; Mitchell 2011; Szeman 2007; LeMenager 2013; Huber 2013).

8. Although the notion of the frontier is most often associated as an edge of free land pushed forward by US settlement, the frontier has emerged as a useful analytic in other contexts in which the world economy expands to incorporate new spaces of accumulation. Michael Watts describes oil frontiers as "economies of violence in which the politics of dispossession figure centrally" (2001:190). Michael Redclift's capacious definition of frontiers as "contested zones, where rival versions of civil society (or its denial) vie with each other, and where it was often their definition and management of nature that was most at odds" befits Alberta's oil frontier (2006:ix).

9. For consistency with scholars of western cultural history like Richard Slotkin (1992), who traces the historical development of the myth of the frontier in American literary, popular, and political culture from the colonial period through the 1990s, when I refer to the "American myth of the frontier" I am referring to stories drawn from US history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing US ideology and moral values. Although the vast, fertile land amenable to cattle ranging and agricultural development in western Canada meant that late-19th-century frontier life was not solely an American experience, the myth of the frontier is a distinctly American cultural construction, having first been used to explain and justify the establishment of the American colonies, and later deployed to account for the rapid economic growth, emergence as a powerful nation-state, and distinctive approach to modernization.

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The Petropoliticization of the Myth of the Frontier

The Calgary Stampede began in 1912 when an American cowboy turned vaudeville entertainer named Guy Weadick pitched a six-day spectacle entitled the Frontier Day Celebration and Cowboy Skills Championship to four prosperous Alberta ranchers: George Lane, Pat Burns, A.E. Cross, and Archie McLean. He was helped by Harry C. McMullen, general livestock agent for the Canadian Pacific Railroad, who had contacts in the ranching industry (Gray 1985:37).[10] Weadick was aware of Frederick Jackson Turner's famous lecture on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" ([1893] 1921) in which Turner argued that the US frontier had ended in 1890 with the disappearance of the vast reserve of undeveloped land and expressed his fear that, with its disappearance, Americans had lost the conditions through which they acquired their virile character. Weadick believed that the romance and culture of the "disappearing" Old West would be popular in Alberta (Bryden 2011:142–44). But while Turner's thesis indicated the frontier had ceased to exist as such in the United States, in Alberta the frontier remained a material reality even as the nature of the frontier evolved rapidly from a cattle-ranging frontier to a prosperous agricultural frontier and later to an oil frontier (Foran 2008:5–6). Weadick received $100,000 of credit from the "Big Four" (Lane, Burns, Cross, and McLean), and replaced the fantastical elements of the American Wild West show with the "authenticity" of the Canadian frontier by featuring real cowboys in a professional rodeo.[11] The 1912 event was memorable and led to a postwar victory restaging in 1919 and became an annual event in 1923.

The Stampede emerged at a time when settlers were gaining land titles and commencing wheat farming, effectively privatizing the land. Early Stampedes capitalized on nostalgia for the golden age of the cowboy when boundless free land existed for cattle ranging and homesteading. Now that the adventurous life of the cowboy on the open range was coming to an end, it was opportune for the formation of a performance space in which this life could be dramatized. Donald Wetherall contends the frontier narrative enacted at the Stampede erases important aspects of Alberta's history, merely portraying Indigenous life and culture as a source of color, and offering a vision of ranching life that had only existed for a limited time: "It posited that rodeo represented the essence of the Anglo-Canadian Protestant conquest of the West and saw open-range ranching (not railways, wholesaling and distribution, mining, irrigation, wheat farming, and land development, and other elements) as the formative cultural and economic

10. Calgary began hosting an exhibition and agricultural fair in 1886, which was designed to share knowledge about agricultural practices, advertise district wealth, promote settlement, bring business to the young city, and create an opportunity for social interaction and entertainment for the diverse population that had settled the Canadian West (Foran 2008:3). In 1908, the federal government awarded Calgary $50,000 to host the Dominion Exhibition, a kind of miniaturized World's Fair intended to highlight regional production and encourage farmers and ranchers to improve the quality of their livestock, grain, and dairy products. The eight-day event also featured the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch Wild West Show, the troupe with which Weadick was touring and performing as a trick roper. Weadick hoped to stage a "Frontier Days and Cowboy Championship Contest" in Calgary as early as 1908, but it was not clear that rodeo entertainment and its perceived elements of animal cruelty would be well received in the urban center (Foran 2008:5). Yet Weadick was persuasive and in 1912 he and McMullen ascertained financing for the event (Felske 2008:98).

11. Buffalo Bill (William Cody; 1846–1917), a trapper, Civil War soldier, Pony Express rider, stagecoach driver, scout, and buffalo hunter; and Wild Bill Hickok (James Butler Hickok; 1837–1876), a gunman and guide, had been the subjects of laudatory fictions published in dime novels. They collaborated with frontier mythmaking by mythologizing their own lives and reenacting their real and perceived adventures in circus-like pageants that staged key scenes of the Wild West like the buffalo hunt, pony express ride, and battle of Little Big Horn. The Buffalo Bill Show went on to be seen by more than 60 million people and strongly influenced both American ideas about the frontier past as well as perceptions of the US abroad during the period of massive European emigration. Their Wild West shows were important prefaces to the Stampede phenomenon that featured Canadian cowboys.

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event in the history of southern Alberta" (2008:42). As such, Wetherall argues the Stampede is an invented tradition in Eric Hobsbawm's sense—the kind of mass-produced tradition that occurs in rapidly changing societies to establish new bonds of loyalty and promotes a sense of community—such as nostalgia for an imagined past (1999:61–86). Despite Weadick's efforts to stage an authentic representation of western Canadian frontier life, by the mid-1950s the generic myth of the American frontier took hold due to the popularity of televised westerns—a transformation facilitated when western film and television actors like Duncan Renaldo and Leo Cariollo (Cisco Kid and Pancho), James Drury (The Virginian), Roy Rodgers and Dale Evans, and Jay Silverheels (Tonto) performed in or attended the Stampede as special guests. While the invention of tradition typically arises from efforts to justify contemporary ideologies as grounded in the past, frontier mythology was not invented (or imported) by oil men, though they have been able to justify their strenuous and risky undertakings through this mythology.



Figure 4. The cowboy and the western horse are celebrated in public art in Calgary, including By the Banks of the Bow *created by Bob Spaith and Rich Roenisch. Stampede fairgrounds, 16 July 2017. (Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards)*

The myth of the frontier served as a foundation for a creation story neither continuous with the British Empire, East Coast authority, nor Indigenous worldviews.[12] It has enabled Calgarians to define and articulate their guiding beliefs, explain their deepest and most persistent concerns, and provide direction for future action. More specifically, the frontier narrative normalizes the turbulent and sometimes overwhelming booms and busts of frontier life (and mineral markets), and helps the community adjust to, manage, and/or rationalize the discrepancy between the reality of their lives and the "good life" they imagine and expect. After all, the tough cowboy is more likely to survive the "end of oil" than the suburbanite who depends on all of the modern fossil-fueled amenities.

Early in its history, the Stampede's Board of Governors consisted of local businessmen, farmers, and ranchers. As Alberta's oil and gas industry took off in the late 1940s when a major crude oil reserve was found in Leduc, Alberta, oil executives and white-collar workers from related investment and engineering firms joined the Board of Directors, and took over managing the spectacle, adapting it to suit their needs. This resulted most explicitly in an oil show at the Stampede from 1966 to 1977 featuring a 41-meter-tall derrick-like steel tower with a rig drilling 2,100 meters below Stampede Park and topped with a natural gas flare. Exhibits on exploration, transportation, pipelines, and processing procedures were also showcased to educate the public about the industry.

Today, Calgary is home to the head office of nearly every major oil and natural gas company in the country, major pipeline operators, drilling companies, energy-related engineering firms, and trade associations. ENMAX, Atco, Cenovus Energy, Encana, Flour, Plains Midstream Canada, Repsol, TransCanada, and Worley Parsons Resources & Energy are all sponsors of the Stampede. Sponsorship generates positive brand associations through big oil's performed

12. Frontier imagery in Calgary extends beyond the Stampede and is linked to urban identity through public ceremonies, public art, and architecture (see Seiler and Seiler 2001).

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commitment to community. Mel Evans has shown how oil companies like BP have sought out associations with prestigious cultural institutions to "artwash" their brands and perform the role of "Corporate Citizen." She argues this association with cultural institutions helps oil corporations to maintain the "social license to operate" despite the ever-accumulating social and environmental catastrophes from oil excavation, transportation, and refinement. Cultural sponsorship is a survival strategy for a precarious industry: "To survive an international onslaught of criticism and anger following a crisis, oil companies must first develop a relationship with the core values, experiences, and highest held beliefs of a culture" (Evans 2015:70). Sometimes this backfires with protests of art exhibitions backed by unsavory corporations. This was the case during the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary when Shell Canada sponsored *The Spirit Sings*, an exhibit of Native artifacts at the Glenbow Museum, at a time when Shell was involved in a dispute with the Lubicon Lake Cree Indian Nation, a small Cree community in the far north of Alberta, about the right to drill on their land.[13] This kind of faux pas has not been the case with the Stampede.

Rather than shy away from the contentious public issue of the dispossession of First Nations through oil extraction and pipeline development, in recent years, oil companies have sponsored the part of the Stampede that features First Nations culture and performance: Indian Village.[14] Since 1912, members of the five nations of Treaty 7—Kainai, Tsuut'ina, Stoney Nakoda, Siksika, and Piikani—have been invited to set up teepees in what has been called "Indian Village" for the past 107 years, and what will be known as "Elbow River Camp" from the 2019 Stampede onwards.[15] Teepee owners and their families live onsite during the duration of the festival and take turns opening their teepee to the public for viewings of family artifacts and answering questions about Indigenous culture. Since 2016, Indian Village has been situated in ENMAX Park, a 16-acre green space along the Elbow River, separated by water from the rest of the Stampede spectacle. ENMAX Park is owned by ENMAX Corporation and connects to the 650-meter-long Cenovus Legacy Trail (owned by Cenovus Energy Ltd.) that weaves along the Elbow River and narrates the story of the area's western heritage through interpretive signage and sculptures. The Cenovus trail connects to the Trans Canada Trail, a national trail designed to connect Canadians across 13 provinces and territories, and accepts funding from TransCanada Corporation, owner of the controversial Keystone XL pipeline. Moreover,

13. After protests by the Lubicon Lake Nation and a call to encourage people to respond to the exhibition, a number of museums and private owners boycotted the exhibit, and sent letters of protest to the Glenbow Museum and the Alberta and Canadian governments. Outside the museum, 150 individuals protested; and in front of the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Rebecca Belmore, an Anishinaabe artist, staged *Artifact #671B*—which involved her sitting on the ground for two hours on a day when the temperature remained below –20°C, in solidarity with the Lubicon Cree Nation (see Bennett 2016).

14. There have been other public relations efforts to try to maintain the reputation of the oil industry in Calgary during the 2015 recession that resulted from falling oil prices and included an estimated 40,000 jobs lost in the energy sector (Bickis 2016). One such campaign was Cenovus Energy Inc.'s sponsorship of Family Day at the 2017 Stampede. Cenovus provided free entrance to all families who arrived before noon, and it offered a pancake breakfast to the first 25,000 guests. Vicky Reid, director of community affairs at Cenovus, described the gesture as "a gift from us to the community." In reference to the financial toll of the 2015 oil slump, Reid remarked: "We know as well as anyone that the last couple of years have been difficult, and this was a way for us to give back to the community and give families an opportunity to go to the Stampede who might not otherwise get to go" (in Andruschak 2017).

15. Treaty 7 was signed on 22 September 1877 between representatives of Queen Victoria and the chiefs of the five First Nations at Blackfoot Crossing in what is today southern Alberta. Treaty 7 is one of 11 numbered treaties between First Nations and the Crown signed between 1871 and 1921. In this agreement, the Blackfoot surrendered 50,000 square miles of hunting grounds extending from the Cypress Hills west to the Rocky Mountains, and from the International Border north to the boundary of Treaty 6, to the Canadian government in exchange for reserves that were set up based on an allocation of one square mile for every five people in a tribe, as well as annuity payments and provisions (Dempsey 2015:115–17).

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in promotional material online and handed out at the 2017 and 2018 Stampedes, Indian Village is marketed as being "presented by Obsidian Energy," formerly Penn West Petroleum Ltd., a mid-sized Canadian oil and natural gas production company based in Calgary.[16] It is deeply disturbing that no fewer than four major energy corporations that profit from resource extraction in Indigenous territories have name rights to Indian Village and the paths that traverse through it, in a political landscape in which pipelines are being pushed through unceded lands without consent. This was most recently demonstrated in January 2019 when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police entered a fortified checkpoint built by members of the Unist'ot'en clan of the Wet'suwet'en Nation that was meant to control access to their traditional territories, and arrested 14 people who refused to comply with a recent court order to dismantle the checkpoint, which would effectively clear a route for the Coastal Gaslink natural gas pipeline project (owned by TransCanada Corporation).[17]



Figure 5. Teepee owned by Leo and Maureena Pretty Young Man (Siksika), 13 July 2017. Indian Village has been a feature of the Calgary Stampede since its inception in 1912, providing visitors an opportunity to learn about the traditions and cultures of the five nations of Treaty 7. (Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards)

Each time I visited Indian Village in the past three years, I have found the green space refreshingly less crowded and quieter than the carnival-like atmosphere on the other side of the bridge. Native and non-Native people rest on picnic benches shaded by red umbrellas with ENMAX branded upon them. Children of all ethnicities play in the grass between the 26 teepees, 30 to 40 feet tall and magnificently assembled in a large circle. Each teepee displays a unique and colorful design that came to its original owner in a spirit dream. Inside are extraordinary displays: tanned hides,

16. The company rebranded in 2017 after a multiyear accounting fraud in which nearly 300 million Canadian dollars were misclassified to reduce reported operating costs and make oil extractive activities appear more profitable and efficient, and more than half of the company's workforce was terminated (Stempel 2018).

17. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police action in January 2019 appears to be a violation of Article 10 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states "Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return" (UN 2008).

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boned tunics and vests, and leather jackets adorned in exquisite beading; moccasins, gloves, belts, and knives; drums and arrows, pipes and Hudson Bay blankets; buffalo horns and headdresses. These precious artifacts are typically placed on buffalo hides that rim the circumference of the teepee. In the center of some teepees, I have seen local plants and fruits—choke cherries, rhubarb, saskatoon berries, apples, sage, sweet grass, and other wild grasses—neatly displayed in bowls and baskets alongside tools made of animal bones or stones for crushing berries or making medicine. I have also met teepee owners and their friends and family members who are beading or preparing meats as visitors peruse the displays and take photos.

Teepee owners with whom I have spoken have expressed great pride in carrying on the tradition of setting up teepees at Indian Village, as did their fathers and grandfathers, and showcasing their culture and ways of life.[18] The Stampede played an important role in sustaining cultural practices in an era when the Department of Indian Affairs was determined to obliterate the customs and cultures of First Peoples. In 1912, when the Stampede began, it was one of only a few places in Canada where First Nations peoples could assemble, speak their languages, and practice their cultures openly with their children.[19] It also gave First Nations people an opportunity to leave their reserves, which at the time required permission from a government-appointed Indian agent. In an interview, Gerald Sitting Eagle, the nephew of Ben Calf Robe, one of the original teepee owners, described Indian Village as a positive space for Indigenous people to gather and celebrate their culture and ways of life: "As children, we looked forward to it. All year it was residential school, and then you'd go home and come straight up here" (in Cole 2016). Sitting Eagle also indicated that the Stampede remains a time in which traditional knowledge is passed onto younger generations, such as how to tan hides, cut meat, and make bannock and utensils.



Figure 6. Visitors are invited to watch daily Pow Wow competitions in Indian Village. Competitors from each of the five Treaty 7 nations participate in the intertribal dance. 13 July 2017. (Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards)

Indian Village provides settlers and visitors a unique educational experience in which history is narrated by Blackfoot interpreters. During the Stampede "Pow Wow" I attended in 2016, the emcee introduced the five tribes of Treaty 7 and described where each tribe is located, taught the audience how to say several Blackfoot words, and explained the significance of each dance: the grass dance was used traditionally to help flatten the tall grasses when tribes would move to set up a new camp; and the jingle dress dance, for which the bells attached to the girls' dresses were thought to cap-

18. When one of the Calgary Stampede teepee owners decides to retire, he passes on the teepee to another family member, usually a son, in a teepee ceremony.

19. Weadick insisted that First Nations people participate in the Stampede even though the Department of Indian Affairs was concerned that participation would undermine the policy of assimilation and sought out ways to get around a law passed in 1914 that made participation in fairs and parades illegal without the permission of local Indian agents (see Dempsey 2008).

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ture medicines, was a prayer to ask the ancestors for help in healing. The traditional dances performed in the Pow Wow, like the traditional storytelling, flag raising and lowering ceremonies, teepee raising demonstrations, and meat-cutting competitions, allow First Nations peoples opportunities to share their history and their traditional culture. Noran Calf Robe speaks positively of Indian Village's offerings: "I like the non-native people learning the true ways of our people and our traditions, no more Hollywood Indian stuff. Learn the true stuff from us" (in Weasel Child 2016:9).

Despite these positive aspects of Indian Village, none of the performances of traditional Blackfoot culture I have witnessed in Indian Village appear to foreground sovereignty or consent. In the time I have spent in Indian Village I have never heard conversations about key issues negatively affecting First Nations' communities, such as the opioid epidemic; hardships from poverty; intergenerational trauma stemming from residential school experiences; the loss of missing and murdered Indigenous women; nor the disproportionately high rates of incarceration affecting Indigenous people in Canada. These subjects are absent from the representation of Native life in Indian Village.



Figure 7. Indian Village, 12 July 2015. Families representing the Kainai, Tsuui'ina, Stoney Nakoda, Siksika, and Piikani First Nations reside in the teepee for the event's duration. Each one has a unique design on the outside and beadwork, traditional clothing, and artifacts displayed inside. (Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards)

I have also noticed an absence of protocol within a space owned by Obsidian Energy, ENMAX Corporation, Cenovus Energy Ltd., and TransCanada Corporation. Although signs outside the teepees ask visitors to "Please treat the teepees with respect," no protocol is established between teepee owner and tourist, no treaty made between guest and host. I am not required to introduce myself, specify where I come from, name my ancestors, or present an offering when I enter a teepee. As the gift of welcome is proffered without clarification of what is expected in return, it fails to signal sovereign control over the rules of the space, the authority under which such rules are enforced, or remind visitors that they are guests. Settlers and visitors are invited to "explore Indian Village," as advertised on a handbill handed to me on-site in 2017, and enter these spaces at their will, gaining access without individually asking for consent (Calgary Stampede 2017). Settlers move "innocently" without giving up power or privilege, or even demonstrating humility, when consent on Indigenous lands is presumed; crude optimism brews when powerful local oil corporations, who already own the land upon which one is standing, convincingly demonstrate their commitment to the protection and maintenance of land through urban "beautification," and the effects of private management yields community-centered spaces and the showcase of local Indigenous cultures.

The Stampede's Main Events

Although Indian Village is an important part of the Stampede's past and present, the rodeo and the chuckwagon races are the central features of the Stampede and the performances that

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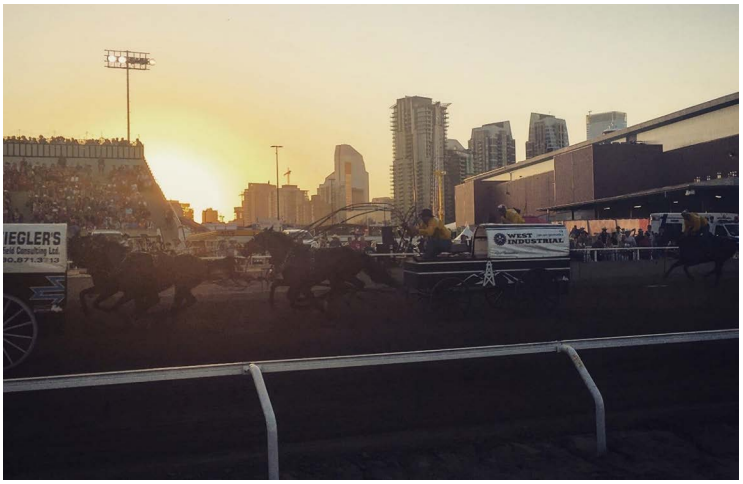


Figure 8. Chuckwagon racing at the Calgary Stampede. 15 July 2017. (Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards)

transmit frontier fantasies to the broadest audience. In the rodeo and chuckwagon races, cowboys and cowgirls act out the taming of the west, fostering a tone of adventure and excitement about the frontier that obscures its brutal realities. The Stampede's main events help to sustain a crudely optimistic worldview by normalizing risk as a basic factor of frontier life and by cultivating a thirst for speed.

The Stampede rodeo is highly theatrical. When I attended in 2018, an empty outdoor arena suddenly erupted with movement and color as the livestock brand of the Calgary Stampede ignited into flames out of the arena dirt. As fireworks exploded from the infield, 16 young women carrying the flags of the sponsors of the Stampede galloped around the paneled pen, and a booming announcer's voice welcomed all to the "Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth!" Next, the Stampede Queen and Princesses galloped the periphery of the arena on their palomino and black horses, regally waving to the crowd; following them were three young men from Siksika Nation, who let out war cries as they sped past surprised and delighted spectators on their painted ponies. A loud rock guitar musical cue signaled to the crowd that the next group deserved respect and admiration, and we cheered even more loudly to welcome the rodeo competitors, described by the announcer as the "greatest horsemen and women in all of the world today," as they rushed to the center of the arena on foot. From the height of the grandstand, four cowboys in western hats, chaps, and spurs descended from guide wires to the center of the arena where they removed their western hats to sing the Canadian and US national anthems. Amidst the chaos of the scene, the cowboys arrived, like a deus ex machina, paid their respects, and then began to work.

The Stampede rodeo is comprised of the conventional list of rodeo events: bareback bronc riding, tie-down roping, saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, ladies' barrel racing, and bull riding. In the stock events (bareback riding, saddle bronc riding, and bull riding), animals are individually moved from holding pens behind the arena and loaded into bucking chutes, equipped with rigging by stockmen, and mounted by the cowboy who has drawn their name. In the bareback event, a cowboy attempts to stay mounted atop an unsaddled bucking bronc for eight seconds. Once the stockmen have strapped the bareback rig around the ribcage of the bronc and positioned the flank strap, the bareback rider slides over the chute onto the bronc, and secures his rosined gloved hand in the leather handle (called a "bareback rigging") cinched around the bronc's withers. When the cowboy feels secure, he nods for his team to jerk tight the flank strap and open the gate, and the bronc, angered by the bucking strap around his flank, wheels out of the chute, slams his front legs into the ground, and kicks as high and as hard as he is able. The cowboy triumphantly holds his other arm into the air, counteracting the shock of being whipped back and forth. He rolls the spurs of his boots from the shoulders of the bronc back towards his flank in rhythm with the bucks, often almost appearing to lie with his back flat against the back of the animal. Finally, the eight second horn blows, and the cowboy either jumps off, or is "picked up" by one of two mounted men in the arena, who assist the competitors at this stage, and clear the arena. The event is similar to saddle bronc riding, a classic rodeo event that is a descendent of broncobusting on ranches, where cowboys use a saddle and balance

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with a "buck rein," a halter rope in one hand attached to a halter on the bronc's head. Both events dramatize the spectacle of a man attempting to physically dominate an animal 10 times his weight.

Tie-down roping, steer wrestling, and barrel racing are timed events that feature horses at advanced stages of training. In these events, the success of the cowboy or cowgirl depends upon the horse's "brokenness" and performance. Tie-down roping replicates the experience of catching and restraining calves on an open range for branding or medical treatment in which a calf is pushed out of a chute and a mounted cowboy, pursuing the calf at full speed, ropes the calf's neck, dallies the rope to his saddle horn, and abruptly stops his horse to jerk the calf to a standstill. The horse must keep the right amount of pressure on the rope by backing up, neither choking the calf nor letting it loose, as the cowboy leaps off the right side of his horse, runs to the calf, throws it to the ground, ties its legs together with a piggin' string, and throws his hands up in the air signaling to stop the clock. Each horse and rider partner know exactly what the other is going to do, and they are able to precisely perform their role as they adjust to the calf. The horse continues to control the calf for the cowboy even when it has no rider on its back.

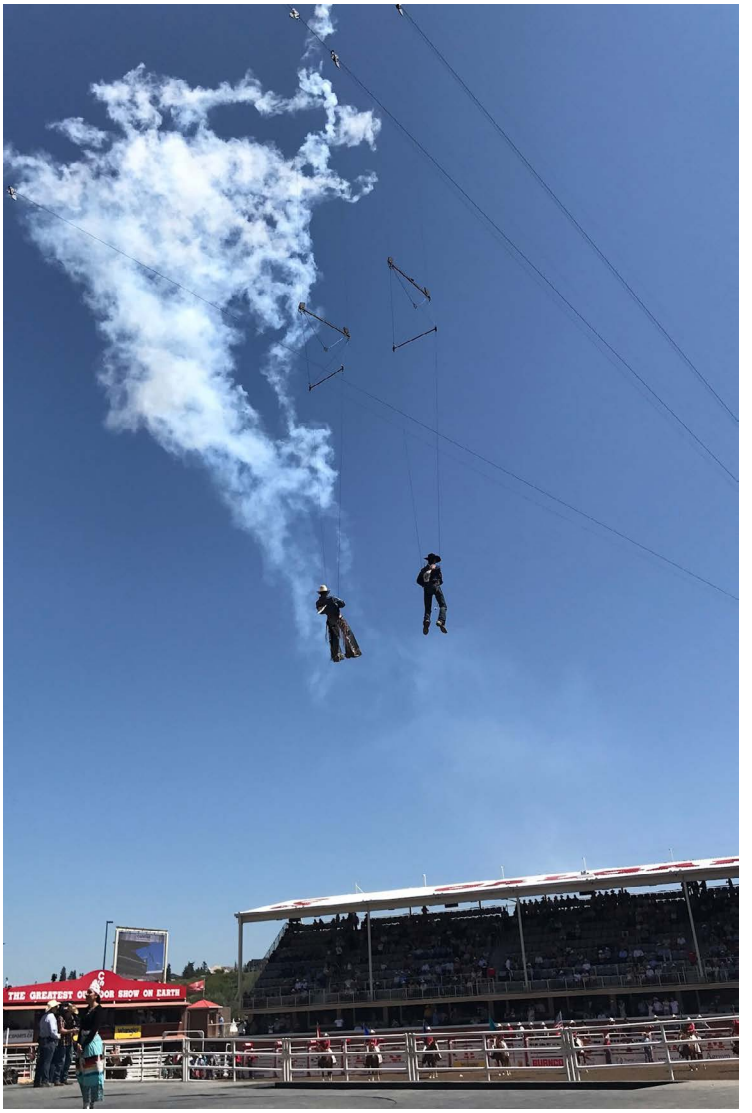


Figure 9. Leading rodeo competitors descend from guide wires at the top of the grandstand to the arena at the start of every afternoon's rodeo. Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, 15 July 2017. (Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards)

Steer wrestling similarly demonstrates tremendous teamwork between horse and rider. A steer wrestler and a mounted "hazer" pursue a steer out of the chute. The hazer rides alongside the running steer to keep him in line while the wrestler slides off the right side of the saddle, grabs one of the steer's horns and his muzzle, digs his heels in the ground, and pulls the steer down by twisting his neck until the animal gives in and falls to the dirt. Winning competitors can wrestle their steer—weighing up to 700 pounds—in less than five seconds, but they are only able to catch their steer if their horse springs straight out of the box and veers left so that the cowboy's feet can drop to the ground. Ladies' barrel racing also demonstrates the importance of a fast, well-trained horse. As it is the only rodeo event at the Stampede in which women compete, the cowgirls and their charging thoroughbreds tend to solicit great encouragement from the audience. When it is their time to run, they steer their horses around three

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45-gallon oil-drum barrels arranged in a cloverleaf pattern at full speed, and fly towards "home" in less than 16 seconds.

The Stampede rodeo culminates in bull riding, during which a cowboy circles a plate of rope around the girth of a 2,000-pound Brahma bull, mounts and locks his hand in a braided handhold, and attempts to stay on his back for eight seconds as the bull bucks and spins with extraordinary power and agility. Unlike horses, a bull will never become a willing friend or partner. When a cowboy dismounts or is thrown off, bulls ruthlessly attempt to stomp, injure, or even kill the rider. As Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence argues, the bull's reproductive capacity and strength render him a source of admiration for those who exalt masculinity. Rather than vanquishing the bull's male force, the bull rider tries to equal it and oppose it with his own. This is highlighted by the high degree of autonomy given to the bull. Bull riders utilize very little rigging equipment or restraining gear—nothing touches the bull's head or is placed between the rider and the animal's back (1982:189). It is a contest between man and beast.[20] The scoring system is quantitative and qualitative: the rider must remain mounted for eight seconds and then he may receive up to 50 points for his riding and up to 50 points on the quality of the animal's performance. In other words, the cowboy who proves his supremacy by riding the fiercest animal is rewarded. As Lawrence points out, this dynamic resonates with Richard Slotkin's reading of the American myth of the frontier as a story in which the conqueror absorbs the energy of the conquered through a phenomenon he calls "regeneration through violence" (1973:5): the cowboy gains power by taming nature; the more violent the struggle, the greater the invigoration (Lawrence 1982:160). The privileging of violent struggle and extractive relationships is alarming but perhaps not surprising in the contemporary Albertan context where "corporate cowboys" in downtown skyscrapers who quickly manage to make nature work for them are similarly rewarded with immense cash prizes.

The theme of invigoration and vitality from the struggles of the frontier is crudely optimistic. The fact that each bronc, calf, steer, and bull trots or lopes out of the arena, freed of the cowboy's saddle, rigging, rope, and flank strap, is also meaningful. When I attended in 2018, the crowd particularly enjoyed when a bull refused to exit the arena after he had thrown a cowboy to the ground opting instead to lower his head and paw up dirt, signaling he was ready to fight. His aggressive demeanor affirmed that he had not been tamed or refined; he remained a wild and formidable threat to the cowboy. In an atmosphere of crude optimism, this feature of the rodeo performance is significant as it indicates not only that there remains work for the cowboy to do another day, but that the rodeo cowboy respects the limits of nature. Though he engages in highly risky behavior, he does so to demonstrate his prowess and attain a one-time material reward; though he may try his luck again the next day, he always stops short of doing irreparable damage to the animal, and if he becomes too aggressive and engages in unnecessary roughness in his treatment of animals, he is penalized, jeopardizing his own chances of success. As much as the Stampede rodeo events dramatize the cowboy's exciting life on the frontier, there is another performance occurring: a performance of restraint that suggests that the regeneration of fortune, spirit, and power through violence has ecological limits, and provides assurance that crude optimism is not simply arrogance, however fallacious that may be.

The chuckwagon race, which is part of the evening entertainment, differently dramatizes the riskiness of the race across the frontier towards financial gain. Chuckwagons were used in western Canada from the 1860s to 1900s as mobile kitchens and rest stations for cowboys working on cattle drives and to carry all that migrating settlers required (van Herk 2008:240).

20. It is also a challenge of man overcoming fear of pain or injury. The big arena screens often show cowboys behind the chutes, jumping up and down and beating their chests to "amp" themselves up before strapping themselves to this beast. The force of the first jump of an animal out of the chute has been compared to that of whiplash in an average car accident (Fredriksson 1985:121), and once out of the chute, contestants suffer from strained ligaments, pulled muscles, bone chips, and shoulder separations, to say nothing of what happens when they are on the ground with an angry bull. These cowboys demonstrate immense courage and mental toughness.

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Each night at the Stampede, 36 chuckwagons race over 9 heats, vying for almost $90,000 each day and a chance to win $100,000, the championship title, and a bronze championship trophy (sponsored by ATCO, a major Alberta energy provider) on "Showdown Sunday." In each heat, four outfits—each consisting of four horses hitched to a chuckwagon, a 1,300-pound wagon with a canvas canopy—race to be the fastest team around the racetrack without penalty. The drivers (all of whom are men) sit on a hard bench with a tight spring for bounce, and guide their teams of sleek thoroughbreds to the right side of their starting barrel and try to steady their horses—amped with fear and excitement—until the horn to signal the start of the race sounds. At the Stampede, each outfit is accompanied by two outriders who begin the race unmounted. One outrider holds the reins of the front horses on his team, trying to still the fussing horses and avoid a false start. The second outrider, positioned at the back of the team, prepares to throw a (now plastic) stove into his wagon. When the klaxon blows, all the teams take off in a flurry of legs and canvas, harness and dust, and cut a figure 8 pattern around their respective two barrels before taking a lane on the racetrack in a counter-clockwise direction. The outriders, having completed their tasks, leap onto the backs of their horses, and race behind their teams, striving to finish within 150 feet of their wagon to avoid penalty.

With 4 wagons, 24 horses, and 12 men, milling between 8 carefully staggered white barrels, chuckwagon racing is an incredible spectacle for those who revere raw power and fast money. Each time I have watched the chuckwagon race, whether from the grandstand or standing on the tarmac, I felt exhilarated when the horn blast and the four teams of horses charged around the barrels and maneuvered the symbolic obstacles of the frontier; the feeling in the crowd was electric and we cheered loudly for our favorite team to surge past its competitors. The Calgary Stampede has the preeminent chuckwagon racing competition in the world. It began in 1923 when the Stampede finally joined with the exhibition; Weadick was determined to provide the crowd with thrilling events, so he put out a challenge to surrounding ranches to bring their horses to the Stampede and participate in the first chuckwagon race. Since then, the risky wagon race has become one of the features of the Stampede.



Figure 10. Having been stepped on by a bull, a cowboy is taken out of the arena on a stretcher. Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, 14 July 2017. (Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards)

No one wants to witness a majestic and powerful horse get injured or watch a driver get tangled in his reins and dragged around the track amidst thundering hooves and heavy wagon wheels, but despite efforts to design lighter rigs and increase safety efforts, the event remains extremely dangerous. During the 10 days of races in 2018, a wagon flipped in the air as it came into contact with a barrel and the driver spilled onto the ground, narrowly managing to roll out of the way of the galloping hooves. In another race, a driver tipped out of his wagon and was run over by his rig, incurring a broken scapula and T-5 vertebrae chip. Spectacular accidents also occurred when horses tripped over each other, or suffered heart attacks or running injuries. In these cases, a crew runs to the scene of the accident and erects a dark tarp to prevent the audience from directly gazing upon the distressed animal thrashing on the ground before it is removed from the field. Since 1986,

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66 horses have had to be euthanized after being injured in the chuckwagon races (Vancouver Humane Society 2018).

On those occasions when I have been in the crowd when an accident occurred, I have been most impressed by the performance of rapid response. Paramedics and veterinarians rush to the injured parties, catch the unhitched and frightened horses, and attend to the fallen man. The announcer narrates what is happening, and reassures the audience, "We've got the operation under control." He declares, "Everything's going to be alright...We've got the very best paramedic crew and excellent veterinary services. When things like this happen, we just let them go ahead and do what they do best," and he directs the audience to take a deep breath, close their eyes, and say a little prayer for the injured parties. His narrative scripts the response to the accident as a performance of regaining dominance over the natural world: of controlling the unexpected, of overcoming the violence of the frontier. It is a performance of getting back to normal after a violent, sometimes deadly accident.

This spectacle, which simultaneously conceals and reveals the social anxiety around the violence of the frontier, has an anaesthetizing effect: it reassures the crowd that when crisis occurs, it will be redressed; it does *not*, however, call into question the structures that enable such violence to occur in the first place. The social sanctioning of chuckwagon racing in the face of its violence contributes to the formation of a "habitus" of violence and the acceptability, even the banality, of the violence of the frontier. Staging the brutal realities of frontier life allows audiences to purge their guilt over their complicity in the wreckage of the natural world without giving up the excitement or promise of frontier races for capital.

Playing Cowboy and the Pleasures of Being Crude

In addition to performances of the working cowboy in the rodeo, the Stampede is an immersive festival where participants shift between performer and spectator, reinterpreting and reproducing the symbols of the frontier. The whole city "goes western": downtown business owners dress up their storefronts with hay bales and lumber facades to imitate the Calgary of the 1880s, and most Calgarians, even those without rural roots, don a Stetson hat, denim jeans, a leather belt, and cowboy boots. "Playing cowboy" denotes a conscious desire to participate in a civic tradition. The simplicity of the cowboy "uniform" means that Calgary's increasingly racially and ethnically diverse population can appear to fit into the community so long as they can afford the necessary costume pieces—and are willing to demonstrate an investment in whiteness.

The desire to play the role became especially apparent when I attended the TransAlta Grandstand Show in 2015. In the midst of a flurry of song and dance, acrobatic acts, aboriginal hoop dancing, pyrotechnics, and a special appearance by retired Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield, a young man sporting a white Wrangler shirt, pressed jeans, and white western hat walked across the massive stage, presented himself to two judges adorned in judicial attire, raised his right hand, and swore "to be faithful and bear true allegiance to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada, her heirs and successors," observe the laws of Canada, and fulfill his duties as a Canadian citizen. Upon completing the citizenship oath, a young songstress donned in a white cowboy hat and silk blouse comprised of the national colors belted the chorus of a popular track by the Canadian pop star Chantel Kreviazuk, "It feels like home to me," as the emcee of the show shook hands with the new Canadian. This performance of citizenship exemplifies the invitation for new immigrants to frame their experiences in this territory within the mythology of the frontier, and see themselves as part of a community of cowboys. This saccharine moment also represents the Stampede's capacity to use spectacular performance to shield the populace from the historical and contemporary acts of colonial state violence that continue to be perpetrated on these lands.

The cowboy is a powerful symbol of regional identity because it enables Albertans to "evoke their regional identity as mavericks of Confederation" (Seiler 2008:193). Since the 19th century, the state apparatus has seldom acknowledged the role of cowboys in Canadian history, tending

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Figure 11. Looking back out through the entrance, the Stampede grounds blend into downtown Calgary, 14 July 2017. (Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards)

instead to celebrate the Mountie who represented the peaceful administration of law and negotiated resolution of conflict (184). Although the continental forces of the ranching industry drove cowboys north across the 49th parallel, the cowboy existed outside of Canada's imagined community. To worship cowboys north of the 49th when the myth of the frontier so clearly links cowboys to American mythology undercuts nationalist efforts to distinguish Canadian culture from US culture. This resistance to national narratives has resonated with Albertans who have resented those federal policies that have impinged upon deregulation and undermined free-spirited competition, and disadvantaged the resource-wealthy province. The cowboy reflects the ideals of freedom outside the constraints of society and an open frontier consistent with free-market capitalism, and tends to be suspicious of remote authority. In the US frontier tradition, the law moved west with Easterners who carried with them the legacy of the American Revolutionary War, which instilled in people the democratic right and duty to take back control of the law and enforce their own code of honor when authorities prove incompetent (Jennings 2015:13). Canada has no such vigilante tradition as British law was imposed on the Canadian west by the Mounted Police prior to settlement. It is logical that those who would reap the riches of Alberta's natural resources would identify with the American myth, which emphasizes individualism, fortitude, and perseverance in the face of adversity, be it one's vulnerability to the natural environment (either physical or financial, that is, whether or not there is oil to be found), or one's ability to march on despite new sociopolitical obstacles (such as carbon taxes, environmental impact assessments, legal precedents for First Nations' land claims, international trade agreements, and fluctuating markets). Moreover, the myth enables white-collar workers to see themselves as cowboys and rugged individualists, like those mavericks represented in dime novels and Hollywood pictures, rather than as corporate bureaucrats subject to governmental regulation.

The festive nature of the Stampede signifies a time for reveling in being crude: the taboos and constraints of everyday life are lifted, and marginally illegal activity is accepted. A massive downtown pub crawl takes over the city, and pop-up drinking and dancing tents named "Cowboys," "Ranchman's," "Wildhorse Saloon," and "Nashville North" accommodate thousands of thirsty city slickers turned cowboys and cowgirls who wish to act out their western fantasies. Rebecca Solnit writes that the fantasy of the western "enshrines the self-conscious desire to be unself-consciously masculine" (2007:31). She is right insofar as the frontier—real and constructed—is particularly hostile to women and queer folk. When cowboys act too crudely, women's bodies become a terrain of fantasy, masculine ambition, and conquest in the dancehalls of the Stampede (where oil companies sponsor parties costing upwards of $400,000 in boom periods; Tait [2016]).[21] When attractive women ride the mechanical bulls of these bars,

21. Elsbeth Mehrer, director of external relations at the YMCA of Calgary, describes the Stampede as a "breeding ground for sexism" that cultivates "misogynist, sexually charged and often damaging attitudes and behaviours."

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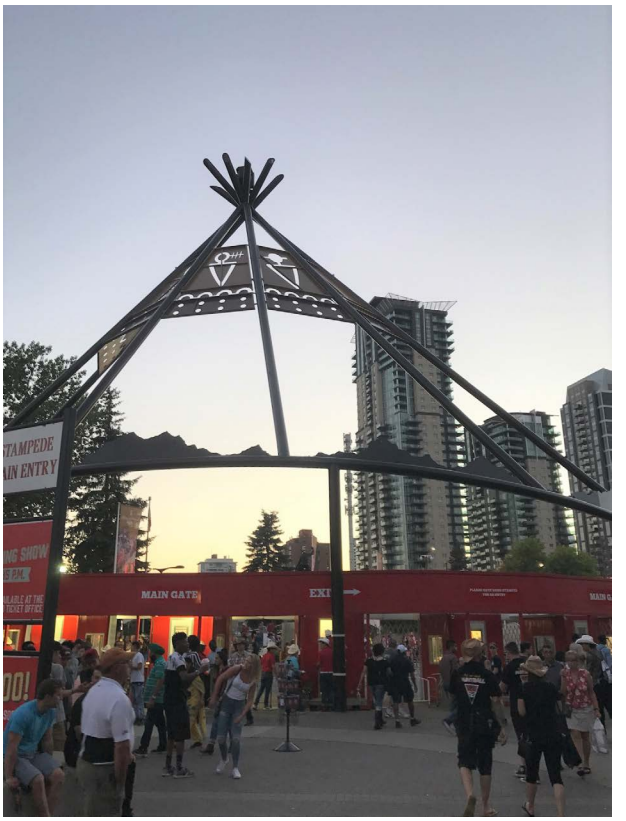


Figure 12. Stampeders cross the Elbow River to Enmax Park where Indian Village—Elbow River Camp as of 2019—is situated. 12 July 2017. (Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards)

I have often seen the operator slow down the bucking, allowing gawking spectators to ogle at the girl until she is finally defeated and thrown off, sometimes flashing her underwear if she is wearing a dress. Stories of sexual harassment and sexual assault have become so common at the Stampede that in 2015 a group of local Calgarians connected with the Calgary Sexual Health Centre to create a campaign for consent called #SafeStampede (Franklin 2016; Centre for Sexuality 2018).

Maurya Wickstrom's description of "performing consumers" in her work on global capital and its theatrical seductions is helpful for further understanding how "playing cowboy" services the petroleum industry. Wickstrom argues that although the experience of being transformed into something other than ourselves might be intensely pleasurable, corporations that create immersive environments "turn us into affective, embodied theatrical laborers on their behalf" (2006:4). We loan corporations the "phenomenological resources of our bodies" when we play out these fictions, making them appear in three dimensions, as if they were real, and allowing them to feel real even when we know they are really made up (2). Stampeding is, then, a form of the immaterial labor that Wickstrom, quoting Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, describes as part of the "emergence of an apparatus that supersedes all prior forms of sovereignty and smooths the way for the 'realization of the world market'" (5). As this immaterial labor materializes in the celebration of the cowboy, it raises the question: Who is responsible for the frontier scenario?

In the month leading to the 2013 Stampede, a terrific flood swept through the Bow River basin, and the city of Calgary declared a state of emergency as residents from more than 20 neighborhoods—roughly 110,000 people—were told to leave their homes and flee for higher ground. Just as the local community began to help families and businesses with flood recovery, Bob Thompson, President and Chairman of the Calgary Stampede Board of Governors, confirmed at a press conference that the Stampede would go on, "Come hell or high water," and the city needed to direct resources to prepare the downtown and the grounds for their annual display of western hospitality despite venues under two and a half meters of water, no public

She adds, "While the official Calgary Stampede brand asserts hospitality, integrity, pride of place and community; away from the parade and the exhibition on the grounds, the broader ethos celebrates a non-stop, hedonistic, liquor-fueled party for temporary cowgals and boys" (2014). A recent study conducted by the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy found that domestic abuse calls in Calgary went up by 15% in the latter half of the Calgary Stampede compared to an average day (Boutilier et al. 2017:13).

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transportation into downtown, and the infield of the chuckwagon track and rodeo arena completely submerged (CBC News 2013). The civic labor performed in the wake of the flood became *the* flood story, and producing the Stampede became a source of encouragement for overcoming the disaster. The labor expended to ensure that the Stampede would take place draws attention to the importance of performance practices for communities overcoming climatic and other disasters. A promotional video released a few months after the flood emphasizes the communal efforts to "defeat" the flood:

> Cancel Stampede and the flood waters have won. The show goes on and the city's character is proven one more time. As the water receded, a community spirit began to rise. And together we came armed with shovels and tools, mops and machinery. Powered by people, our community reached out arms of steel. Their hydraulics pushed us forward. The sound of reconstruction a battle cry throughout our neighborhoods. Through hell or high water we will overcome. (Calgary Stampede 2013)

The frontier narrative of humankind pitted against nature, overcoming nature's destructive force through physical labor, came to script the actions of subjects, and provide a model for resolution. The narrative that the flood waters of 2013 could not wash away the spirit of the city indicates the social significance of the Stampede. While it is positive to see a community come together in a moment of strife, and commit to cultural programming against the odds, it may also be that Calgary is stuck in a "bad script" of tough cowboys conquering nature (Taylor 1997:299).

The cultural and economic entanglement of the petroleum and cultural industries produces an impasse to transitioning away from a fossil fuel society; crude optimism persists even when a flood is exacerbated by climate chaos and global warming resulting from the release of carbon dioxide into the air due, in no small part, to the burning of fossil fuels. Our nihilistic attachment to fossil fuel extraction and consumption is "ultradeep," to borrow LeMenager's metaphor, and will require a significant disruption to release us from that dependency (2013:3). As the climate crisis is not reducible to substances like oil and carbon, but involves complex socioeconomic, political, and cultural operations linked to colonialism, theatre and performance scholars ought to bring to light those "Anthropocene (an)aesthetics" and sticky affects that stymy efforts to wean us off of fossil fuels, and allow extractivism to continue within Canadian and other performance cultures.[22] A full transition away from oil in Alberta (and elsewhere) will require changing everything—not just how the economy functions, but how we enact traditions and what stories we tell.

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22. I borrow this term from Nicholas Mirzoeff who examines how Western art has aestheticized anthropogenic destruction and produced an "Anthropocene (an)aesthetic" that allows extractivism to continue (2014:220).

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