The Expectations of a Queen: Identity and Race Politics in the Calgary Stampede

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During the 1954 Queen of the Stampede contest, Evelyn Eagle Speaker, a young Kainai woman, stepped outside the spaces designated for Aboriginal participation at the Calgary Stampede and into a space dominated by young, white women. From the Stampede’s beginnings, visitors consumed specific depictions of North American Aboriginal groups that reinforced constructed identities that were often in conflict with one another. Early Stampede promoters worked hard to attract rodeo enthusiasts and tourists to “The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth,” and one of the major draws was the presence of First Nations participants. Members of the southern Alberta Treaty 7 Nations have always contributed to the success of the Calgary Stampede. Aboriginal men and women often played the part of the Canadian ”authentic Indian” by donning traditional First Nations dress in street parades, at the evening grandstand show, and on-site at the Stampede’s Indian Village. At these venues, the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Tsuu T’ina, and Nakoda Nations displayed their cultural past for tourists and Calgarians of varying ages, genders, and social classes. Although Aboriginal men competed with white cowboys in the
rodeo events, Eagle Speaker’s participation in the Queen of the Stampede contest sparked a controversy unparalleled by male rodeo competitors. When Evelyn Eagle Speaker was crowned Queen of the Stampede, a debate emerged around how she should perform her role. As the first non-white Stampede Queen—or even contestant—Eagle Speaker presented an unexpected challenge to North American race and gender expectations. In her study of Canadian beauty pageants and nationalism, Patrizia Gentile notes that beauty contests provide cultural historians with “a unique way to explain gender and bodies as signifiers of morality, sexuality, class, race, and ‘womanhood.’”

A case study of the 1954 Queen of the Stampede contest demonstrates the constructed nature of racial identity presented through a negotiation of bodily performance. Evelyn Eagle Speaker confronted the expectations of race by articulating a racialized femininity that simultaneously contested and embodied a number of white, middle-class standards.

While a number of books and articles about the Stampede have been published, many of them concentrate on cowboys and Western Canadian culture, giving little consideration to First Nations participants. An exception is the recent article by Hugh Dempsey, “The Indians and the Stampede,” published in Max Foran’s edited collection, Icon, Brand, Myth: The Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, and Mary-Ellen Kelm’s article, “Riding into Place: Contact Zones, Rodeo, and Hybridity in the Canadian West 1900–1970,” which focuses on First Nations rodeo competitors. Unlike these previous studies that either provide an overview or mention a broader aspect of First Nations participation in the Stampede, this chapter specifically interrogates non-Aboriginal expectations of Evelyn Eagle Speaker’s vie for, and eventual win of, the Queen of the Stampede competition. Since the debate over Eagle Speaker’s role as Stampede Queen took place in public, this chapter focuses on public sources in order to understand the non-Aboriginal reactions and anxieties that accompanied her participation. Newspaper articles, letters to the editor, photographs, and cartoons all articulate understandings of race and gender. In addition to these sources, Evelyn Locker (née Eagle Speaker) graciously answered my questions and commented on drafts of this chapter, sometimes offering views that differ from my own interpretation of events. Where possible, I have attempted to integrate Evelyn’s own understanding into this narrative without claiming to speak for her or the Kainai community.

Dorinne Kondo observes that “the world of representation and of aesthetics is a site of struggle, where identities are created, where subjects are interpellated, where hegemonies can be challenged.” The subject formation that Kondo addresses is achieved through a process that Judith Butler describes as “performativity.” In her now classic book, Gender Trouble, Butler tackles Simone
de Beauvoir’s claim that “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one.” She asks, “How does one become a gender? ... What is the moment or mechanism of gender construction? And perhaps most pertinently, when does this mechanism arrive on the cultural scene to transform the human subject into a gendered subject?” It is possible to ask the same questions about racial identity: How does one become a race? What is the moment or mechanism of racial construction? And when does this mechanism arrive on the cultural scene to transform the human subject into a racialized subject? Drawing on Foucault’s model of inscription, which he applied to prisoners’ bodies, Butler works out how gender is inscribed on the surface of bodies through discourse and discipline. She argues that what we assume to be an “internal essence” of one’s identity—such as gender or, arguably, race—is constructed through discourse, maintained through a repeated set of acts, and presented through a “stylization of the body.” Thus, Evelyn Eagle Speaker’s participation in the Queen of the Stampede competition set the stage for a public debate over clothing precisely because her racial identity seemed incongruent with her position as the winner of a traditionally white beauty contest.

In a colonial context, the performance of race was often framed through an articulation of opposites. Historians such as Paige Raibmon and Myra Rutherford have noted that colonial discourses rely on racialized concepts of the other and form a number of binaries—such as uncivilized/civilized, dark/white, authentic/inauthentic—that attempt to describe First Nations peoples. Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha refers to this feature of colonial expression as “fixity”: “the ideological construction of otherness.” He explains that the stereotype is its primary discursive strategy. It oscillates between “what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.” In Canada, colonial binaries affected how people thought about race, but the expectations of race often did not fit within these boundaries. This was the case at the 1954 Queen of the Stampede contest. When the markers of racial identity were put on display in an arena that expected white cultural attributes, Evelyn Eagle Speaker came to embody culturally constructed racial identities and illuminated tensions between constructed colonial binaries.

Beauty contests and pageants began as early as 1921 with what would become known as the Miss America contest and gained popularity following the Second World War. More specifically, a new type of “socialite” rodeo queen materialized as American rodeos began excluding women from traditional rodeo events following the death of a prominent female competitor, Bonnie McCarroll, at the 1929 Pendleton Round-Up. As cowgirl athletes’ presence in rodeos decreased, the importance of rodeo queens as promoters began to swell. Although, at the core, most pageants, including rodeo queen competitions, were
advertising gimmicks for businessmen, these events actively promoted specific ideas of race and femininity through the display of bodies. Gentile argues that “[b]eauty pageants became ubiquitous because their structure and messages promoted western values of competitiveness, individuality, respectability, and conformity widely and effectively. They strive[d] to sell not only goods, but also spread ideals of community, respectability, character, and symbols of nation.”

These ideals were based on concepts of appropriate femininity, and, as a number of historians have noted, many post-war cultural activities, sometimes intentionally, reinforced the normalcy of white, middle-class standards of heterosexuality. Following the Second World War, beauty competitions served to strengthen popular gender, sexual, and racial norms, but as they attempted to create a universal beauty ideal by collapsing racial, ethnic, and sexual diversity, beauty contests actually made the notion of beauty problematic and exclusionary. Specifically, they created a space where gender and racial identities were performed, and they supported post-war, white gender and racial ideals by presenting a norm that young women could strive toward. However, as Sarah Banet-Weiser asserts, the beauty pageant is also a site in which “the meanings ascribed to individual and cultural identities are continually negotiated and often vehemently contested.”

As the example of Evelyn Eagle Speaker will demonstrate, beauty contests provided an arena where these ideals could be simultaneously performed and challenged.

The Stampede Queen and Princess contest began in 1946 when Ms. Pat-sy Rodgers was asked by members of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Board to become the first Stampede Queen. In 1947 the Associated Canadian Travellers (ACT), a society founded in 1888 by travelling salesmen who raised funds for local community associations and charities, asked community clubs to sponsor one contestant. The queen was chosen through the sale of tickets and competitions related to personality and riding ability. Revenue secured by ticket sales was donated to a local charity, and in 1954 net proceeds went to the Council for Retarded Children. From 1947 to 1963, the winners were chosen by this method. Unlike most beauty contests, the Queen of the Stampede competition did not have a specific category for judging physical appearance although the newspapers occasionally referred to the winners as “beauties” and recorded contestants’ physical appearance, including height and weight. The winner, whose friends and family sold the most tickets, was called a “sponsor girl,” and the two runners-up were labelled her “ladies in waiting.” This was a method of selection commonly practiced in rodeo queen competitions in the United States.

The personality aspect of the competition was completed in the form of interviews conducted by sponsoring clubs before they decided to nominate a
candidate. As Gentile emphasizes, personality was an important component of beauty competitions that drew on the belief that outer beauty, or the “social self,” corresponded with inner beauty and was an important prerequisite for consideration as a viable beauty contestant. This focus evoked the idea that beauty is good and, more importantly, that beauty is indicative of moral integrity and wholesome character. Ultimately, a beauty contest participant was required to demonstrate how her inner goodness informed her public self. Through a series of questions and character references—in Eagle Speaker’s case, this included reference letters from the Business College and the Department of Indian Affairs—the onus was on the contestant to prove that she could conduct herself appropriately in public. Personality and charm, or the ability to portray a public self, was a necessary characteristic.

The Stampede Queen and Princess contest was not a beauty pageant like the more famous Miss America pageant, yet participants were still required to conform to specific standards. Contestants were young, unmarried women between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four, and community clubs typically sponsored white girls from middle-class homes. For example, Peggy Fisher, who was chosen as the 1954 Orange Hall Association candidate, was described as follows: “A slim brunette, five feet seven inches in height. One of a family of three boys and two girls, Peggy is popular with her classmates and is a good basketball player.” Her personal and public life exemplified the attributes of an acceptable middle-class girl: attractive, popular, proficient at various extracurricular activities, and a member of a traditional family unit. The Queen of the Stampede contest reinforced ideas about post-war white femininity but combined them with expectations of a local Western femininity that included horsewomanship. Evelyn (Eagle Speaker) Locker explained that the Stampede Queen’s horse-riding abilities were demonstrated throughout the Stampede. Eagle Speaker’s participation seemed natural to her because she came from a ranching family, but as a First Nations woman who was raised on the reserve, she presented a challenge to what non-Aboriginals believed to be the beauty-pageant norm.

On 17 April 1954, Evelyn Eagle Speaker’s entry into the Queen of the Stampede contest was announced in *The Albertan*. While she was attending business college in Calgary, the nineteen-year-old was sponsored by the Calgary Elks Lodge, an exclusive club for white males. The members of the Elks Lodge decided to sponsor a First Nations woman for the contest, and Evelyn was the one chosen from others who were interviewed. The newspaper announcement explained that Ms. Eagle Speaker was a “full-blooded Indian princess” who was born on a reserve near Lethbridge to Chief Eagle Speaker of the “Blood Tribe.” The announcement also highlighted her education at St. Paul’s Indian School.
and her graduation from the high school in Cardston. It has been observed by other historians that First Nations performers in North America were either presented as the remnant of a “vanishing race” or as an example of “the stunning transformation of former primitives.” According to press reports, Evelyn’s successes as an educated First Nations woman demonstrated to the concerned public the ability for Canada’s Aboriginal population to “improve themselves.”

In the initial announcement of her entry into the contest, Evelyn was quoted as claiming that her only thought on accepting the honour was for the good it could do First Nations peoples. “Sadly enough,” she explained, “the large majority of persons still think of the Indians as illiterate people. Perhaps, now, I may get the opportunity to inform the thousands of tourists visiting Calgary during the Stampede that the Indian of today is well educated and a good Canadian.” This would be an opportunity for Evelyn to represent the Aboriginal community as productive members of Canadian society and to dispel some of the negative ideas held by non-Aboriginals. Here was an occasion to challenge the colonial discourse. As Lucy Maddox points out, Aboriginal performers often managed their own performances, sometimes using them to advance their own political agendas. Instead of making an attempt to escape their performative roles, they would control and exploit them, “turning performance into an effective means of self-expression.”

Even recently, when I asked Evelyn (Eagle Speaker) Locker to reflect on why she decided to participate, she explained that the reason she let her name stand in the competition was “[n]ot for personal glory but to bring attention to my people to show that we were capable of being anything we chose to be. I wanted to be an example to the youth of my nation and a symbol for everyone worldwide that the Indian of then and today could be well educated and a good Canadian. And to show that Native people could compete equally in such a contest.” Eagle Speaker wanted to demonstrate that Aboriginal people were not inferior to the white population, but in order to achieve this — to set a good example for other First Nations youth and dispel stereotypes — spectators had to recognize Evelyn Eagle Speaker as an Aboriginal woman, and an obvious signifier of her race would be her clothing and her name.

Shortly after Eagle Speaker’s entry into the competition, the Elks Lodge organized a naming ceremony, with the consensus of the head chiefs of the Treaty 7 Nations, at Calgary’s Cinema Park Drive-in. Each of the five Treaty 7 southern Alberta Nations demonstrated their support by making her an honorary princess (see figure 1). A number of well-known Aboriginal leaders took part in the event, including Jacob Two Young Men, chief of the Nakoda; James Starlight, chief of the Tsuut’ina; Joe Crowfoot, chief of the Siksika; Percy Creighton, minor subchief of the Kainai; and Eagle Speaker’s father, Michael
Eagle Speaker, subchief of the Kainai. Instead of choosing an appropriate Blackfoot name, the Elks Lodge selected the name “Princess Wapiti,” wapiti being the Cree word for “elk.” Her sponsor helped showcase an Indian Princess who could embody universal Aboriginality. This reinforced Eagle Speaker’s racialized and gendered identity as a “full-blooded” Indian Princess. Even though she had been chosen to compete in a primarily white event and although she was well educated, the naming ceremony emphasized that she was not the typical Stampede Queen contestant; it emphasized her racial identity. As a ceremony that took place in Calgary, not on the reserves, at a drive-in—a space specifically intended for entertainment—this was a public event designed to draw attention to Eagle Speaker and the Elks Lodge. It was this construction of Aboriginality, however, that also allowed her to subvert racial expectations.

Including Eagle Speaker, fourteen contestants were vying for the 1954 Stampede Queen title. They were all sponsored by local community organizations such as the Lions Club, the Rotary Club, the Orange Hall, and various Legions. Most of the contestants represented the “typical” pageant competitors: they were young, middle-class, Euro-Canadian women. It was obvious that Eagle Speaker was an exceptional contestant, as demonstrated by the newspa-
per advertisement published in *The Albertan* (see figure 2). Amidst a number of cowboy hats, only Eagle Speaker is pictured wearing feathers, and she is identified by her “Indian name,” Princess Wapiti. Furthermore, in order to sell more tickets, the interested public was invited to meet and vote for Princess Wapiti at the Western Canadian Sportsmen’s Show held in Calgary during the first week of June. Eagle Speaker was in attendance at the Sportsmen’s Show Indian Village. However, the public could meet another Stampede Queen candidate, Kay Dench, at the Russell Sporting Goods booth at the same event. Dench was billed as an “expert Calgary horsewoman” and demonstrated her riding skills each evening at the Sportsmen’s Show. Eagle Speaker was positioned as an “Indian Princess,” while Kay Dench’s expert riding skills and cowboy costume were emphasized. This was a common dichotomy—the cowgirl and the Indian Princess, a feminized version of the dominant cowboy/Indian binary made popular by American Wild West shows, dime novels, and Hollywood movies. The cowboy versus Indian opposition was replicated at the Stampede even though it was constantly complicated by Aboriginal participation in the rodeo. Evelyn Eagle Speaker was sometimes cast this way, most likely in an attempt to accommodate her presence even though, like Dench, Eagle Speaker was also an expert horsewoman. Her presence at the Western Canadian Sportsmen’s Show reinforced the constructed difference between Eagle Speaker and the other competitors through the performance of race, yet this articulation of racial identity was “performed” in order to transgress the actual racial boundary of participating in the Queen of the Stampede contest.

Media discourse surrounding Eagle Speaker’s participation in this competition emphasized otherness but also reinforced her femininity in an attempt to validate her acceptance as a competitor. The Calgary press almost always referred to Eagle Speaker as the “Indian Princess,” “Princess Wapiti,” or “Indian Maiden.” In their eyes, she was first and foremost an Indian Princess. These terms evoked images of Aboriginal femininity popularized by colonial ideas about the “noble savage.” Romantic poets and playwrights of the nineteenth century, such as James Nelson Barber, often defined the “Indian Maiden” in terms of her relationship with male characters. As Rayna Green argues, the story of Pocahontas was probably the most popular of these myths and took a strong hold in the American imagination. The most famous Canadian example of the depiction of an Indian Princess is E. Pauline Johnson, a poetess and performer, and a woman of Canadian Aboriginal heritage. Johnson is credited with creating “a synthetic pan-Indian stage presence that necessarily relied as much upon popular European fantasies of the Native as it did upon direct Aboriginal inspiration.” She was billed as “the Mohawk Princess” and during her performances of “Indian poems,” she would wear her Native costume...
of buckskin dress, leggings, moccasins, hunting knife, and a Huron scalp that had belonged to her grandfather. Johnson was one of Canada’s most popular performers, and because of her reputation, she captured the imaginations of Canadians, who supported her performance of Aboriginal culture and Native
femininity. By successfully embodying both the role of a white genteel woman and, when practical, a female version of the “noble savage,” Pauline Johnson encouraged the mythology of the Indian Princess and challenged it at the same time. Like Johnson, Eagle Speaker’s public expression of racial identity was framed in terms of the Indian Princess.

The Indian Princess, of course, was not the only depiction of First Nations women. “Squaw” was widely used to describe Aboriginal women by non-Natives and provided a derogatory term based on the opposite image of the noble Indian Princess. Often when it was used by the white settlers, it took on demeaning connotations and was applied generally to all Native American females even though the word meant “wife,” “female friend,” “woman of the woods,” or “female chief” in some languages. Activist Muriel Stanley Venne notes that “when a person is called a ‘Squaw’ she is no longer a human being who has the same feelings as other women. She is something less than other women.” Aboriginal women’s lives exemplified what Rayna Green describes as the “Pocahontas Perplex,” the Indian Princess–squaw dichotomy, which was a racialized version of the Madonna–whore duality. While the princess was considered beautiful and proud, the squaw was often seen as debased and immoral. In many ways, these ideas were not in conflict with the expectations of other beauty queens. Pageant participants were often depicted as morally upstanding, possessing characteristics such as purity, respectability, and domestic expertise. However, Native women were doubly burdened because they were women and the racialized other. They were haunted by suspicions concerning their morality and civility. As late as 1955, the “Indian Prize” for the most accurately attired “Sarcee,” “Stoney,” and “Blackfoot” woman was still advertised as the prize for the “best-dressed squaw.” Since language is fluid, however, not all First Nations women defined this word in negative terms. Unlike Venne, Evelyn (Eagle Speaker) Locker points out that it became a common term for any Native woman, not just prostitutes, and there was no derogatory meaning in its general use. The media, however, never referred to Eagle Speaker as “squaw,” and it seems that as a representative of the ACT and the city of Calgary, it was important to distance her from a potentially negative image.

On 22 June 1954, the local newspapers announced Evelyn Eagle Speaker’s Stampede Queen contest win (see figure 3). The Calgary Herald declared that “[t]he Indian princess turned queen [would] exchange her Indian finery for Western garb for her reign at the Stampede.” But once the “Indian Princess” had become the “Rodeo Queen,” Stampede and city officials, the ACT, and the non-Aboriginal community could not agree on what she should wear. The ACT thought that as Stampede Queen—a representative of their organization and of the city—Eagle Speaker should wear the cowboy hat and boots
befitting such an honour. Lyle Lebbert, chairman of the Associated Canadian Travellers Stampede Queen contest, explained that just because Evelyn Eagle Speaker was an “Indian girl,” it was not going to make a difference to the ACT regulations.54 A number of vocal Calgarians, however, preferred that she wear her traditional Aboriginal dress. Evelyn (Eagle Speaker) Locker reflects that she had very little to say about the decision and tried to carry on with her classes at business college while others debated her role as Stampede Queen.55

In a letter to Eagle Speaker’s father, Mike Eagle Speaker, Indian Events judge and former Hudson’s Bay Company officer Philip Godsell expressed his disgust with the Stampede’s insistence that Eagle Speaker should not wear her traditional dress. Godsell often supported the public display of First Nations artifacts and handiwork because he, like many other non-Aboriginals, believed that Aboriginal culture was “rapidly succumbing to the march of civilization.”56 Godsell contacted Alan Bill, the editor of the Calgary Herald, as well as a number of other friends, encouraging them to write to the newspaper and insist that Eagle Speaker be “allowed to wear her Indian costume in the Parade.”57 The first letters appeared in the Herald on June 25, only three days after the initial announcement of Eagle Speaker’s reign. They expressed their desire for her to wear her traditional dress.58 Judging from the opinions articulated in the

**Figure 3.** Evelyn Eagle Speaker and the runners-up: Kay Dench, Greta Arctander, Peggy Fisher. Glenbow Archives NA 5600-7629.
newspaper, there were three main reasons why the non-Aboriginal community thought Eagle Speaker should wear the doeskin dress made by her mother: first, because she was an authentic representative of her race; second because cowgirl attire was inauthentic; and finally, a genuine Indian Princess would secure commercial success. As detailed below, each reason sought to reinforce Eagle Speaker’s racial identity as a “full-blooded” First Nations woman and highlighted the way the Calgary public expected female Aboriginality to be performed. The remainder of this chapter will expand on each of these reasons.

A number of letters to the editor published in the *Calgary Herald* supported the suggestion that Eagle Speaker should wear the traditional dress because it would be an insult to Native Canadians to ask her to dress like a cowgirl. “Two Native teenagers” expressed their disappointment that Eagle Speaker would not be wearing her traditional dress during the Stampede. They explained that First Nations participants were “just as much an attraction at the Stampede as cowboys,” that their own dress was “very spectacular,” and “it would be a great honour for the Princess to appear as she actually is, an Indian Princess.” For Eagle Speaker to appear as she actually was, she would need to conform to expectations of race. As Peter Geller acknowledges, even though Aboriginal peoples participated in historical pageants and other community events as performers for their own reasons, organizers “attempted to define and limit their appearance and actions as ‘Indians.’ Elaborate dress, in particular, tended to affirm, and conform to, these perceived roles (for both Natives and whites).” Dress helped alleviate any questions about racial authenticity. Eagle Speaker’s racial identity was tied to the performance of that identity through the signifiers of adornment. She was not a white cowgirl but an Indian Princess, and she was required to act out her race to the satisfaction of others—whether they were members of her own community or non-Natives. Pamela Waller, daughter of L.G.P. Waller, inspector of Indian schools for the province of Alberta, expressed that Princess Wapiti “had every right to wear Indian robes if she chose,” and Mrs. E. Smitheran noted that “Princess Wapiti is undoubtedly proud of her tribal costume and all the glorious history it stands for—so I say let her wear it and wear it proudly. It would be an insult to her race to ask her to change.” Other letters expressed a similar sentiment: that her position as Stampede Queen was an “honour to her race,” “a credit to her race,” and “excellent publicity for the Indians” as she was “a representative of her race.”

The concept of “racial uplift”—the belief in the “good character of the race”—was another discourse used to accommodate white ideals of femininity and beauty. According to Gentile, “Embracing beauty practices and products that mimicked white ideals enforced racial uplift with the added caveat that while white women maintained high moral standards, non-white women had to be
Eagle Speaker was given the added burden of tackling a number of expectations that had been applied to non-white women. Furthermore, according to the non-Aboriginal public, it would be incongruous if she were dressed as a cowgirl and not an Indian because it would be inauthentic. Butler’s theory of performativity seems particularly useful in understanding how race is constructed to appear natural. The racialized subject is the product of racialized discourse, and what appears to be a natural identity trait is constructed and sustained through bodily signs and other discursive meanings. Therefore, markers of race, such as clothing, were important to affirm the authenticity of one’s racial identity. The letters to the editor demonstrate that non-Aboriginal Calgarians assumed race was a natural identity trait that should be reflected in signifiers such as apparel. For example, William Dowell wondered if anything could be “more ridiculous or out of harmony” than an Indian dressed in a cowgirl outfit! Some letter writers—such as Harry Hutchcroft, a long-time Stampede volunteer and former parade marshal—even went so far as to proclaim that dressing Eagle Speaker in a cowgirl costume would be deceptive, and it would not do to “[doll] up an Indian miss in a brand new factory-made cowgirl outfit.” Most blatantly, Gordon Robson claims in his letter to the editor that “Indian clothes” are the appropriate attire for Eagle Speaker and emphasizes his point by quoting Shakespeare: “For apparel doth proclaim the man.” Several First Nations peoples at the Stampede did not wear traditional dress, and many Native men dressed as and competed with cowboys, yet in this context, Eagle Speaker was expected to perform her Aboriginality by wearing “Indian clothes.” Historian Susan Roy observes that non-Native audiences often demanded that Indigenous “cultural traditions be limited to flamboyant costumes, drumming, singing and dancing.” It was obvious that Eagle Speaker’s reign as Stampede Queen was considered another Stampede spectacle and that she was on display. According to Philip Godsell, a cowgirl outfit did not suit her and “would cause her to be eclipsed by those attendants who could carry it to better advantage.” Perhaps Godsell was thinking of “real” cowgirl Kay Dench, who had performed with Eagle Speaker at the Western Canadian Sportsmen’s Show and, as runner-up to the Queen, would often be pictured with her. Therefore, what Eagle Speaker wore was integral to articulating her racial identity. Although, as Evelyn (Eagle Speaker) Locker points out, it was normal for her to wear Western clothes because she was from a ranching family and was an expert horsewoman, it seems Aboriginality was so clearly defined through specific discourse and performance that for her to wear cowgirl attire would be inappropriate, deceptive, and even less attractive. In other words, it was inauthentic, and authentic Aboriginality relied on the sustained performance of expected signifiers that were created through colonial discourses.
Finally, it was public opinion, as mediated through the press, that tourists should get the chance to see an authentic Indian who represented Calgary’s past. Amid the post-war tourist boom, Calgary, like many other places in North America and Western Europe, sought to sell its cultural past. Other historians have commented on this phenomenon as it applies to First Nations performance and have concluded that “a major reason for securing Aboriginal participation [in public celebrations] was to ensure tourist dollars.” Concerned Calgarians thought that, in her traditional dress, Eagle Speaker would be a great attraction for the Stampede visitors. “What a drawing card!” exclaims William Dowell. “Thousands will come to Calgary to see the lovely Indian girl we picked to be our Queen all rigged out in her native dress.” Of course, Eagle Speaker was a “drawing card” because authentic Indians represented the past. The rhetoric of the vanishing Indian, prevalent in Romantic literature, reinforced the belief that Aboriginal peoples represented the past, while Euro-North Americans were progressive and modern. Indigenous peoples were often called upon to perform the past at world fairs, exhibitions, and the Stampede. During other Stampede events, Aboriginal performance helped represent the Western past, but the Stampede Queen symbolized the modernity of the city. Since the queen was to represent Calgary’s progress, it became tricky for Euro-Canadian Calgarians to fully make sense of Eagle Speaker’s role. Her racial identity was bound by a temporal association with the past, but Eagle Speaker consciously sought to present herself as modern and commented that she wanted to demonstrate that First Nations peoples did not embody the stereotypes held by the non-Native majority.

It is not surprising that many members of the non-Aboriginal community conceived of Eagle Speaker’s role in this way. Even as a cowgirl, the Stampede Queen was seen as a representation of Western culture, but as an Aboriginal woman, Eagle Speaker was considered a piece of living history. In fact, Philip Godsell thought that it would be “anachronistic” to insist Eagle Speaker wear a cowgirl uniform. Probably the most obvious example of this sentiment came from Harry Hutchcroft, who observed: “The day may come when genuine full-blooded Indian maids are as scarce in Calgary as genuine cowgirls are now and by that time we may have to resort to make-believe substitutes, but while we have them to show our visitors in their own beautiful outfits, let us do so.” The belief that authentic Aboriginal culture was vanishing influenced how the public expected Eagle Speaker to perform her race.

On July 3, The Albertan made a front-page announcement that the “costume controversy” surrounding Evelyn Eagle Speaker, or Princess Wapiti, was settled “to everyone’s satisfaction” when Calgary Stampede officials announced that the Stampede Queen would wear her “royal Indian robes” in the opening
day parade and at the crowning ceremonies, and cowgirl regalia for all other occasions.” While opinion was split on how Eagle Speaker should dress, perhaps (and not surprisingly) the most pragmatic response came from Daisy Crowchild, a long-time Stampede participant and the wife of Tsuu T’ina Chief David Crowchild. She explained that “[t]he costume is too heavy to wear all the time.” She agreed that it would be good for Eagle Speaker to wear her Aboriginal dress (or as the newspaper described it, her “Indian costume and frills”) for the parade and cowboy garb for the rest of the Stampede. On the same day the controversy was declared resolved, _The Albertan_ ran an editorial cartoon by John Freeborn illustrating the attitudes toward an Indian Princess as Stampede Queen (see figure 4). The cartoon pictures Eagle Speaker riding a horse pulling a travois. She is wearing cowboy boots, kerchief, and cowboy hat, but a hole has been cut in the brim to make room for her “Indian” feathers. The horse also has a feather in its mane and is branded with a question mark. Her companion is a very confused dog, wide-eyed and shocked by the sight before him. Finally, the whole scene is accompanied by the old cowboy standard, “Home on the Range,” playing on a hand-crank phonograph. Although not reprinted in the cartoon, one of the verses of “Home on the Range” asserts the common non-Aboriginal understanding of First Nations peoples as members of a vanishing race: "The red man was pressed from this part of the West, / He’s likely no more to return / To the banks of Red River where seldom if ever / Their flickering campfires burn." To alleviate any confusion concerning the depiction of Eagle Speaker, the caption read “1954’s Miss (Poor-little-mixed-up) Calgary Stampede.” Evelyn (Eagle Speaker) Locker reminisces that she was comfortable with the cartoon because she “saw it only as the media’s perception.” The “mixed-up” questions it raised did not reflect her as much as it did those who debated her role. Regardless of audience opinion, this cartoon is an important cultural indicator. Could the Stampede Queen be both a cowgirl and an Indian Princess? Could she represent the West of the past and the West of the present? According to the cartoon, the whole idea confused the dog, the horse, and even Eagle Speaker. This, however, was a reflection of the anxiety felt by the observing public. Evelyn Eagle Speaker challenged the expectations of race by participating in an event that reinforced ideas about white femininity and revealed racial anxieties felt by the non-Aboriginal community. Her participation opened up a public debate about First Nations identity.

Evelyn Eagle Speaker fulfilled her duties as Stampede Queen by making a number of social appearances, including a trip to Hollywood and Las Vegas, and meetings with other beauty queens and notable individuals. Her presence subverted expectations of Aboriginality while encouraging discussion about racial identity. This is evident in a photograph entitled "From One Indian to
Another” published in *The Albertan* (see figure 5). M.I.U. Munshey of “West Pakistan” is depicted passing a silk embroidered tablecloth made in the district of Thar, where purebred Brahma cattle were raised, to Evelyn Eagle Speaker, who is wearing her Stampede Queen cowgirl outfit. They are surrounded by other members of the Treaty 7 Nations dressed in traditional Aboriginal costume, including elaborate feather headdresses. Even though Eagle Speaker is wearing her cowgirl garb, she is positioned as a racialized other. According to the caption, she was still the “Blood Indian Queen” Princess Wapiti and not the Stampede Queen. But the photograph actually subverts white discourses, because Eagle Speaker’s actions and dress clearly denote her as the Stampede Queen. She looks more like the other contestants that are pictured in *The Albertan* advertisement than like Princess Wapiti (see figure 2). Furthermore, Mr. Munshey is presenting Eagle Speaker with a gift appropriate for a white, middle-class Stam-
pede Queen, which undermined the suggestion that she was an Indian Princess who resided in a tipi, as she was cast at the Western Canadian Sportsmen’s Show. The text that accompanies the photo demonstrates the white community’s desire to rationalize Eagle Speaker’s participation and win in the Queen of the Stampede contest, but the photo validates her position as Stampede royalty.

In reviewing this chapter, Evelyn (Eagle Speaker) Locker expressed her concerns that I was turning the event into something more radical than it really was. She did not see her participation in the Queen of the Stampede contest as a chance to challenge the constructed norms of middle-class, white femininity. Instead, she believes that, as a Kainai woman who was crowned Stampede Queen, she “overcame any stereotypes and gave the Stampede what it wanted: a horsewoman from a Western tradition that was proud of her Native heritage.” The media coverage, however, suggests there were multiple layers to non-Aboriginal expectations of race.

In general, beauty pageants and queen competitions place women’s bodies on display, and Evelyn Eagle Speaker’s body produced anxieties about race and gender. The widespread concern expressed over what Evelyn Eagle Speaker should wear reflected deep-set unease surrounding the body as “the object of desire” and the body as a contested site for negotiating the boundaries of race and gender. Even though Eagle Speaker was allowed to wear her traditional
dress on occasion, the wider community attempted to make sense of her participation in accordance with standards of whiteness and expectations of Aboriginality. Yet, according to media accounts, Eagle Speaker’s involvement in the Queen of the Stampede contest challenged how non-Aboriginal Calgarians thought about Aboriginality and how it should be performed because she engaged with White assumptions about race and gender to turn those assumptions back on those who thought they knew the other. This episode provides an example of how racial identities are created via discourse and sustained through social performances. Contrary to what John Freeborn’s cartoon suggests, Evelyn Eagle Speaker knew who she was, even if Calgary did not quite know what to make of the Indian Princess who was crowned Stampede Queen. *

Notes

1 My sincere thanks are offered to Mrs. Evelyn Locker (née Eagle Speaker), who has been kind enough to share her memories of this event. Evelyn Locker retired in 2000 following a forty-six–year career with the Department of Indian Affairs, the City of Calgary, and the Shell Oil Company of Canada. She continues to actively participate in her community in an Elder advisory capacity and as a celebrated dancer. She and her husband travel extensively, attending a number of powwows. Evelyn holds status as a dancer and an Elder, and as one of the few people adopted by the Five Tribes. I would also like to thank the editors of this collection for all of their hard work, as well as James Opp and the anonymous reviewers, whose careful comments much improved this chapter.

2 For the purposes of this paper, I have not changed any of the quotations to reflect the current reclaimed names of the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Tsuu T’ina, or Nakoda Nations. All quotations from newspaper and archival sources reflect the titles commonly used in 1954; therefore, the historic names of the Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan, Sarcee, and Stoney Nations will appear in this context. In the remainder of the paper, however, I have decided to use the reclaimed names of the southern Alberta Treaty 7 Nations.


4 Evelyn did not feel that non-Aboriginals held stereotyped expectations of her. Evelyn Locker, personal communication, 2 April 2009.


8 Ibid., 141–42.

9 Ibid., 171–73.

10 Ibid., xv.


13 According to Bhabha, when colonial subjects identified with the colonizing authority and adopted cultural attributes of the colonizer, they were simultaneously alienated from it. The colonial subject would never be the same as the colonizer: in Bhabha’s terms, “not quite/not white.” Therefore, the colonizer was divided between the need to represent the colonized and the desire to reject them, to recreate the native population as alien and inferior. This produced a tension and challenged essentialist colonial categories because while the former strategy tried to “identify coloniser and colonised as mutually knowable and therefore similar, the latter insisted on their fundamental difference.” Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 89–92; and Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006), 166.


17 Gentile, “Queen of the Maple Leaf,” 3.


20 “From 1959–1963, to ensure that the winners were able to ride and were interested in, and able to represent the Stampede effectively, the top ticket sellers (5–10, depending on the total number of entrants), underwent a rigorous judging competition on appearance, poise, intelligence, and riding ability. Activities included a meet and greet dinner, public speaking, individual interviews with questions pertaining to the contest, the city, the Stampede, etc., riding a horsemanship pattern in the arena, and constant appraisals by ‘secret’ judges.” “The Origins of the Stampede Queen and Princess Contest,” Calgary Stampede Queen’s Alumni webpage, http://www.stampedequeensalumni.com; and Evelyn Locker, interview by the author, 2008.
See “Indian Maiden Chosen Miss Calgary Stampede,” *The Albertan*, 22 June 1954, in which it is noted that Eagle Speaker is five feet four inches tall and 114 pounds; or “Stampede Notebook,” *The Albertan*, 9 July 1954, where Eagle Speaker and others are described as “a bevy of beauties.”

For example, the first three Miss Frontier Days queens (1931–33) at Cheyenne, Wyoming’s Frontier Days celebration won their crowns through competitions where townspeople “voted” for their favourite candidate by purchasing tickets from her. Likewise, in 1935 the first rodeo queen of the Omak Stampede in Omak, Washington “was selected by the number of purchases made in her name at the local stores. A contestant gained 100 votes for every 50 cents spent.” Renée M. Laegreid, *Riding Pretty: Rodeo Royalty in the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); and Joan Burbick, *Rodeo Queens: On the Circuit with America’s Cowgirls* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2002).

Gentile, “Queen of the Maple Leaf,” 49.

Evelyn Locker, personal communication, 6 October 2008.

Gentile, “Queen of the Maple Leaf,” 61.


Evelyn Locker, e-mail message to author, 23 April 2009.

Ibid., 2 April 2009.

Ibid., 27 May 2008.


Evelyn Locker, e-mail message to author, 27 May 2008.


See Kelm, “Riding into Place.”

Evelyn Locker, e-mail message to author, 2 April 2009.


Green, “Pocahontas Perplex,” 704–07.


49 Green, “Pocahontas Perplex.”

50 Evelyn Locker, e-mail message to author, 2 April 2009.

51 Various Stampede parade prize lists for the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, 1924–55, including 1954.

52 “Stampede Queen Contest Winners,” The Albertan, 22 June 1954.


58 Of course, it is important to remember that people who agreed with the decision were probably less likely to write to the newspaper.


“Stampede Queen’s Costume Settled,” The Albertan, 3 July 1954, 1.


Gentile, “Queen of the Maple Leaf,” 87.


William D. Dowell, letter to the editor, Calgary Herald, 29 June 1954.

Harry Hutchcroft, letter to the editor, Calgary Herald, 29 June 1954.

Gordon Robson, letter to the editor, Calgary Herald, 29 June 1954, quotation from Hamlet.


Evelyn Locker, e-mail message to author, 2 April 2009.

Roy, “Performing Musqueam Culture,” 65.

DAR, letter to the editor, Calgary Herald, 29 June 1954; and Old Timer, letter to the editor, Calgary Herald, 29 June 1954.

William D. Dowell, letter to the editor, Calgary Herald, 29 June 1954.

“Enters Queen Contest,” The Albertan, 17 April 1954; and Evelyn Locker, e-mail message to the author, 2 April 2009.

An editorial explained: “Evelyn Eagle Speaker is a native Indian. Her tribal dress as symbolic of the history of this province, and the spirit of the West which the Stampede seeks to recapture as could be hoped for.” “Not Part Way: Indian Dress All Week,” Calgary Herald, 29 June 1954.

Godsell, “Queen’s Dress.”

Hutchcroft, letter to the editor.

“Stampede Queen’s Costume Settled,” The Albertan, 3 July 1954, 1.

Ibid.


82 Evelyn Locker, e-mail message to author, 2 April 2009.

83 “From One Indian to Another,” The Albertan, 7 July 1954, 16.

84 Evelyn Locker, e-mail message to author, 2 April 2009.