

This nation, turning 100 years old, had no *Odyssey*, no St. George slaying the dragon, no Prometheus. The emerging American genius for making a lot of money was a poor substitute for King Arthur and his knights (although the Horatio Alger myth of rags to riches was good for a lot of mileage). Without a mythology and set of ancient heroes to call its own, America had to manufacture its heroes. So the mythmaking machinery of nineteenth-century American media created a suitable heroic archetype in the cowboys of the Wild West. The image was of the undaunted cattle drivers living a life of reckless individualism, braving the elements, staving off brutal Indian attacks. Or of heroic lawmen dueling with six-guns in the streets at high noon. This artificial Wild West became America's *Iliad*.