AMERICAN VISIONS

The Epic History of Art in America

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There was one kind of American whose depiction had always raised problems: the American Indian. Whites had been praising, deriding, or trying to be objective about the first Americans ever since they crossed the Atlantic. The image of Indians projected by writers and artists was a faithful index of the way white society at large thought about them. If, at first, some Puritans felt they should be converted, they imagined them as innocent and childlike, waiting for God's word. When the Indians rebelled against Christianity and its bearers, they became imps of Satan. When white Americans wanted to show their own native identity—their difference from the English—they dressed up as "Mohawks" to

throw the tea chests into Boston Harbor. On the other hand, when the British used Indians as auxiliaries, the Declaration of Independence complained that George III had sent "savages" against the settlers. In America the Enlightenment view of Indians as Noble Savages was always unstable: behind it lurked the other stereotype of the Indian as treacherous, cunning, violent, and animal, which instantly emerged in periods of conflict as a justification for killing them.

The classic image of the Indian as Noble Savage was made by Charles Bird King (1785–1862), a former student of Benjamin West's in London who had returned to the United States in 1812 and settled permanently in Washington in 1818. His specialty was painting Native Americans for the recently formed Bureau of Indian Affairs, and between 1821 and 1842 he turned out some 140 portraits of Indians who had come, on various delegations, to negotiate with the white authorities in Washington. Among them were two Pawnee chiefs, Petalesharo and Peskelechaco, whose multiple portrait he made in 1821. Rather confusingly, it bears the title *Young Omahaw, War Eagle, Little Missouri, and Pawnees* (Figure 106). These faces have the directness and intelligence of portrait busts from the Roman republic: their muscular frames, aquiline noses, sparkling eyes, and level gaze (directed slightly above your eyeline, thus suggesting thought about higher things) could hardly be more noble, and the message is that, un-

106. Charles Bird King, *Young Omahaw, War Eagle, Little Missouri, and Pawnees,* 1821. Oil on canvas, 36⅛ × 28″ (91.7 × 71.1 cm). National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; gift of Miss Helen Barlow.

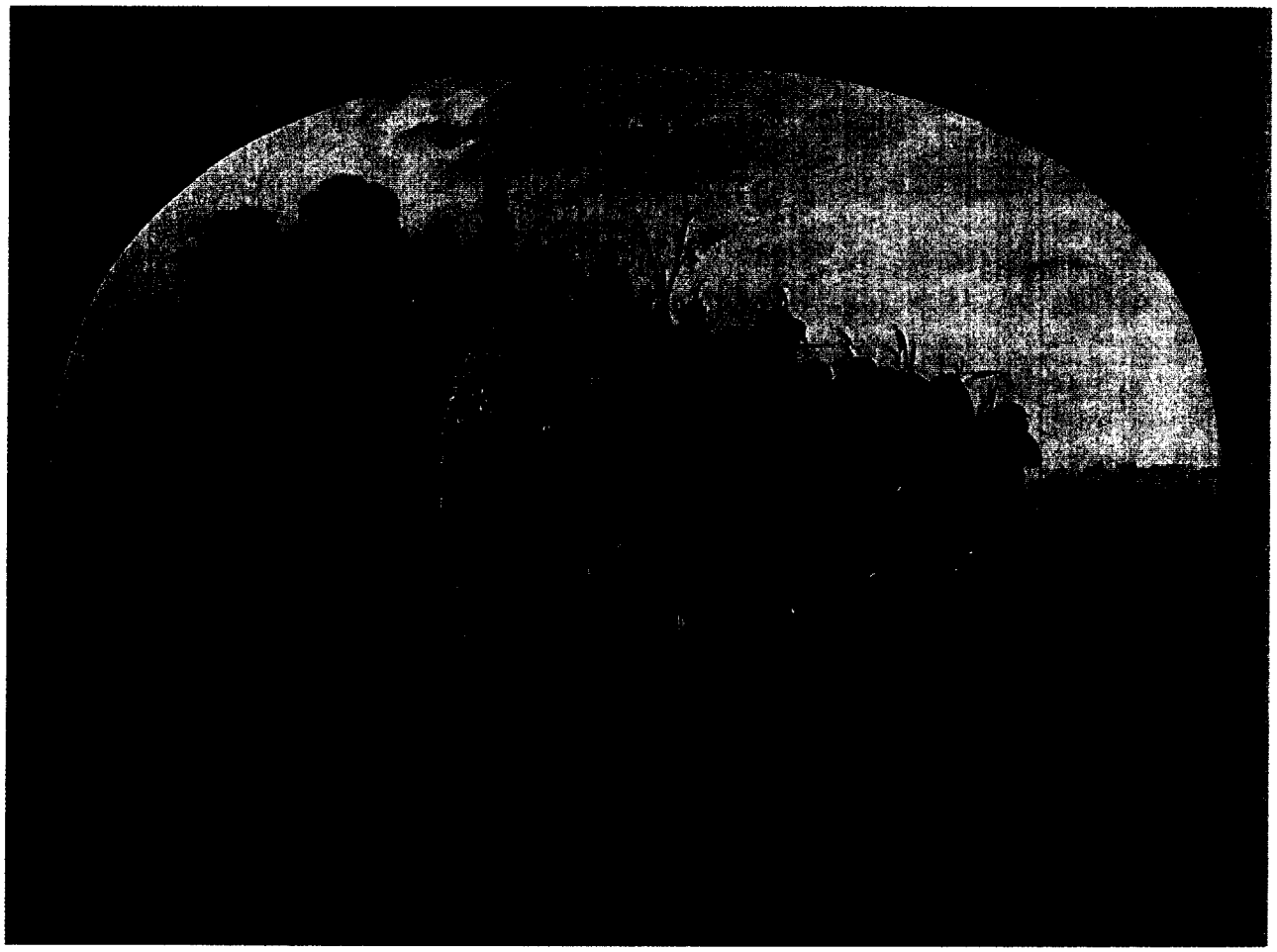
der the skin garments and ceremonial face paint, red men and white are indeed brothers.

At about this time, a young artist in Philadelphia saw just such a group of Plains Indian chiefs passing through on their way to Washington. He was George Catlin (1796–1872). He had originally trained as a lawyer, and then, self-taught, become a not very successful portrait painter and miniaturist. He lamented being confined to "the limited and slavish branch of the arts in which I am wasting my life and substance for a bare living." Catlin would hardly be remembered today if the sight of those Indians had not changed his life. Their "silent and stoic dignity," he wrote, impressed him. It made real and urgent what had, up to then, been an abstract issue for him. Catlin was quite well read, and he was fascinated by the philosophical questions raised by Enlightenment writers about the "savage" state. Was it, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau had argued fifty years before in *Émile*, the natural state of man in which the root of human goodness showed itself, free from the deformities of property and despotism, the incrustations of manners? Or was it closer to the dyspeptic view of Thomas Hobbes, a century before that—"solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short"? Or something in between? Only in the American West, Catlin decided, could one find out. And even there, one had better hurry: for the eventual fate of the Indians at the hands of advancing whites was not in doubt. Whiskey, disease, and the gun were harrying them to extinction. Their rights, he wrote, had been "invaded, their morals corrupted, their lands wrested from them, their customs changed, and therefore lost to the world; and they at last sunk into the earth, and the ploughshare turn[s] the sod over their graves."

Catlin thus became the first painter (for Lewis and Clark had taken no artist on their crossing of the continent) to travel west with the sole purpose of finding out about Indians, as distinct from converting the "savage" to Christianity, annexing territory, or surveying land. With a crazy and optimistic courage, he decided, as he later put it, to go out alone, "unaided and unadvised, resolved (if my life should be spared), by the aid of my brush and my pen, to rescue from oblivion so much of their primitive looks and customs as the industry and ardent enthusiasm of one lifetime could accomplish."

Unaided he was, but not unadvised. Catlin first went to St. Louis, Missouri, to call on the aged doyen of American explorers, General William Clark, who with Meriwether Lewis had led the first east-west expedition across America to the Pacific at Thomas Jefferson's behest in 1803–4. Clark was now the superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Missouri Territory. He let Catlin pick his brains, and took the artist on a journey with him to Wisconsin in 1830.

In March 1832 Catlin set off on the first of his own journeys. John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company, which since its foundation in 1808 had acquired a virtual monopoly on the Western sources of beaver, otter, wolverine, and other



prized pelts, had a steamboat, the *Yellowstone,* built to ply the forts and trading posts along the Missouri River. Its route covered more than a thousand miles, much of it following the track of Lewis and Clark's journey into the heartland along the Missouri—a northwestern diagonal from St. Louis, along the edge of Nebraska, through South and North Dakota to the junction of the Yellowstone River near the border of Montana. This vast stretch of territory was the home of the Plains Indians, the Sioux, Chippewas, Assiniboine, and Mandans. Catlin wangled a berth on the *Yellowstone*'s maiden voyage. The voyage took three months, and during it Catlin worked as though possessed, painting the Indian warriors, chiefs, and women, observing their rituals, riding with them on buffalo hunts, entering their tents and sweat lodges, and keeping voluminous notes in his journal about their appearance, customs, diet, and ceremonies. The Plains Indians had art traditions of their own, but none of depictive portraiture, and so the sight of this white man painting illusionist renderings of tribal leaders fascinated them—if one can judge by Catlin's own rendering of himself painting a portrait

107. George Catlin, *Catlin Painting the Portrait of Mah-to-toh-pa–Mandan,* 1857–69. Oil on cardboard, 15⅜ × 21⅞″ (39.1 × 55.6 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.; Paul Mellon Collection.

of the Mandan chief Mato-Tope, "Four Bears," 1857–69. (Figure 107). Some objected that by painting them in profile, Catlin had made them out to be mere half-men.

The most sensational images he brought back from this trip were of the Okeepa, the Mandans' most important religious ceremony, never before witnessed by a white man. Lasting several days, it culminated in a terrifying rite of endurance: young initiates were hung from the roof of the lodge on rawhide cords attached to skewers driven through their breasts and shoulders; when they lost consciousness, they were let down, their little fingers were cut off, and—with buffalo skulls and other totemic objects tied to the skewers in their flesh—they were made to run in a circle until these weights tore out. Catlin's hasty sketches of this ceremony would fascinate white audiences back east, as would his studies of the buffalo hunt—which, reworked by a succession of artists from Currier and Ives to Albert Bierstadt, became a standard Western iconographic form for the next seventy years and more. White images of the Noble Indian were also shaped by Catlin's more considered and better-finished portraits of tribal elders, chiefs, and warriors, such as White Cloud, chief of the Iowas in 1844. He also painted chiefs who had led their people in resistance against the federal government's drive to evict them from their lands, and were now prisoners, such as the Sauk leader Black Hawk and Osceola, chief of the Seminoles. Osceola was dying in jail, and Black Hawk holds the corpse of his totemic bird, a black hawk; he, too, would soon be dead.

In 1837 Catlin started showing his "Indian Gallery" to viewers in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington. By then it comprised nearly five hundred paintings, along with thousands of sketches and Indian artifacts. By 1840 he had visited forty-eight tribes. What drove him? De Tocqueville's "consciousness of swift and inevitable change." He knew at the outset, and every passing year confirmed, that his subject matter was dying, not just "slipping away" but being ground into extinction by his own people. America consumed painted Indians as fast as it could wipe out real ones.

Catlin paid his own way on these trips, but he hoped to sell his "Indian Gallery" to the U.S. government. But in the 1840s there was no mechanism for federal patronage, and although Catlin lobbied incessantly for a special bill in Congress authorizing the purchase of "the most perfect monument of an extinguished race that the world has ever seen," he failed. Some congressmen felt that Indians were not worth sympathetic commemoration, especially not in the halls of Congress itself, and most found Catlin's asking price ($65,000 to begin with, eventually dropping to $25,000) far too high.

Hoping that European acclaim would help his cause, Catlin took his "Indian Gallery" to London in 1839, where it excited a good deal of interest—though not from potential buyers. In 1844 he showed it in Paris, where it was visited by

Louis Philippe; Catlin became the first man to install *le Wild West* in Gallic consciousness. The great Alexander von Humboldt, prince of natural scientists, singled him out for praise—an honor comparable to being lauded by Goethe, had Goethe been alive. But none of this cut much ice back in Washington. Neither did his larger dream, a museum of nature in what was still referred to as "the great American desert." Catlin spoke of forming "a *Nation's Park*, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty." It would preserve the Indians by exempting them from history. The tidal wave of white settlement would flow past them, leaving them in peace. In effect, Catlin invented the idea of the national park—but too early for the whites, and too late for the Indians. Meanwhile, his failure to dispose of the "Indian Museum" brought financial ruin, and he was imprisoned for debt in London in 1852. He managed to sell his life's work to Joseph Harrison, an American locomotive manufacturer—an exquisite irony, since the steam train was already so powerful an element in the machinery of Indian suppression. From Harrison, luckily, Catlin's paintings passed to the Smithsonian Institution, whose staff Catlin joined as an adviser in his last years.

Besides Catlin, the artist who did most to record the still robust society of the Plains Indians in the 1830s was the Swiss painter Karl Bodmer (1809–1893). Bodmer was hired by Prince Maximilian zu Wied, a German naturalist and a devotee of Humboldt, who had already traveled in the wilds of Brazil in 1815, to come as his recording artist on an expedition up the Missouri—Catlin's territory—in 1833–34. Not only was Bodmer a far more skilled draftsman than Catlin, he had the help of Prince Maximilian's ethnologically trained eye when it came to picking which details of dress, ornament, facial painting, and weaponry to include as significant. There is a world of difference—in observation, in intensity—between Catlin's portrait of the Mandan chief Mato-Tope, "Four Bears," with his generic "Indian" face, and Bodmer's watercolor of the same man, his

108. Karl Bodmer, *Mató-Tópe (Four Bears), Mandan Chief,* 1833–34. Watercolor on paper, 13¾ × 11¼″ (34.9 × 28.6 cm). Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska; gift of the Enron Art Foundation.

profile like a hatchet, with a tense dignity that fairly springs off the paper at you (Figure 108). Catlin painted an impression, but Bodmer gives a biography, to those who can read the codes of Mandan Indian ornament. The red wooden knife in Mato-Tope's hair testifies that he has killed a Cheyenne chief hand to hand. The yellow hand on his chest shows that he took prisoners. Each dyed yellow feather from a great owl represents an arrow wound he has received in battle; and so on. Likewise, in his portrait of "Flying War Eagle," the young Mandan warrior Mahchsi Karehde (Figure 109), superb in his red buffalo robe and standing more than six feet tall, Bodmer was careful to enumerate each talon in his bear-claw necklace and to include his eagle-wing fan and the wolves'-tails which, strung to his moccasins, signified that he had already killed two enemies in combat.

Bodmer also paid close attention to landscape, setting down with a fascinated eye the details of terrain in the Missouri River valley, such as the "White Castles," eroded landforms shaped by wind and water from soft stone. Such sights, you cannot help but feel, stirred Bodmer—and his patron too—as a heroic and primeval landscape, a fitting backdrop to men who represented a human antiquity that reached back beyond the Doric or even the Homeric Greeks. German Romanticism entailed a worship of origins, and here part of the origin of mankind seemed to disclose itself to them. Perhaps the earliest Germans were men like these?

What Catlin, Bodmer, and Maximilian recorded of the Mandans, in their sketches and notes, is now virtually the sum of what is known about them. For they were not the only whites to meet the Mandans. Regular contacts had been taking place since 1804, the year Lewis and Clark's expedition passed through their territory. Visits from traders and trappers had brought the germs of smallpox. In 1837 an epidemic devastated the tribe, leaving fewer than 150 of its members alive. Mato-Tope, who had always made a point of welcoming the whites,

109. Karl Bodmer, *Máhchsi-Karéhde (Flying War Eagle), Mandan Man*, 1833–34. Watercolor and pencil on paper, 16⅞ × 12″ (42.9 × 30.5 cm). Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska; gift of the Enron Art Foundation.

uttered a dying curse whose words were taken down by a trader named Francis Chardon. "I have never called a White Man a Dog," he said,

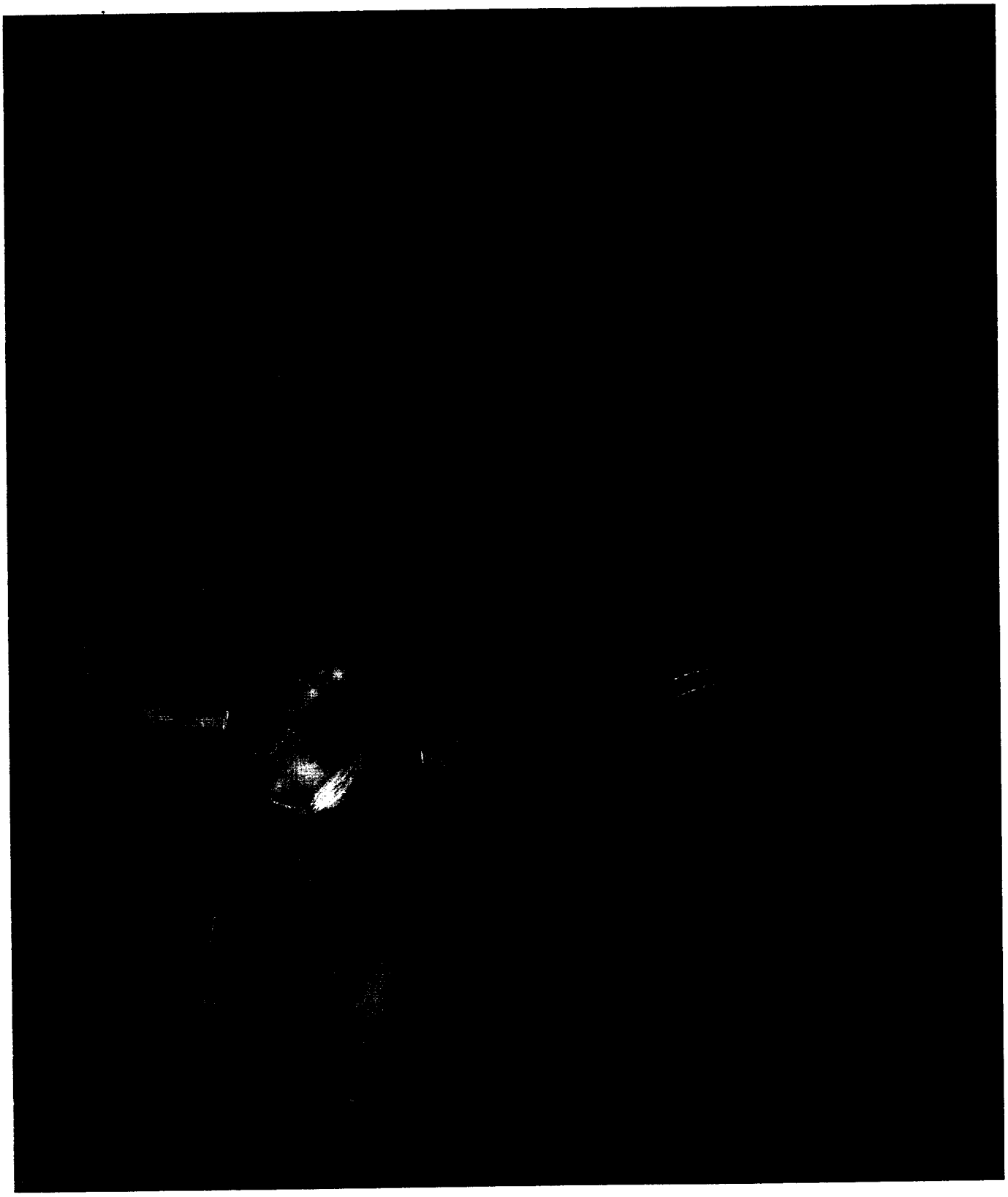
> but today, I do pronounce them to be a set of Black harted Dogs, they have deceived Me, them that I always considered as Brothers, has turned Out to be My Worst enemies. I have been in Many Battles, and often Wounded, but the Wounds of My enemies I exalt in, but today I am Wounded, and by whom? By those same White Dogs that I have always Considered, and treated as Brothers. I do not fear Death my friends, You Know it, but to die with my face rotten, that even the Wolves will shrink with horror at seeing me, and say to themselves, That is the Four Bears the Friend of the Whites. . . . [T]hink of all that My friends, and rise all together and Not leave one of them alive. . . .

But it was too late for such a rising to be much more than a dying warrior's dream. What happened to the Mandans befell many other tribes, and those that did not perish were uprooted or reduced to a marginal, begging existence on the fringe of white settlements. The terrible years of "Indian Removal" were now under way. In his second address to Congress in 1830, President Andrew Jackson, a famed Indian-killer who habitually referred to his foes as "savage bloodhounds," had called for a policy of apartheid. Indians and whites could no longer mingle behind the frontier; the Indians must be driven out of their ancient lands and relocated to new ones west of the Mississippi. Jackson dilated on how this segregation would be for the Indians' good. It would free them from "the power of the states." It would "enable them to pursue happiness in their own way and under their own rude institutions," and "retard the progress of decay, which is lessening their numbers." It would also free huge tracts of territory for unimpeded white development. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 proved to be an unmitigated disaster for the Cherokees, Choctaws, Creeks, Seminoles, and other tribes, some seventy thousand of whom were harried from their lands east of the Mississippi, while hundreds of thousands of black slaves were moved in to grow cotton on the territory they had vacated. Of the Cherokees alone, four thousand died on the Trail of Tears from Tennessee to Oklahoma.

The genocidal brutality of Jackson's removal policy found no reflection in American painting of Indians, except in a skewed and distorted way: when Indians fought back, their hostility toward the white invaders was translated into atrocity stories for the palpitant Eastern viewer.

Thus the Noble Savage mutated quite rapidly through the late 1830s and 1840s into the Demonic Indian, in whose fierce and phallocratic presence all talk about the brotherhood of man was wasted effort.

The Demonic Indian had already appeared in American painting: a vivid example was John Vanderlyn's *Murder of Jane McCrea*, 1804 (Figure 110). It was



110. John Vanderlyn, *Murder of Jane McCrea,* 1804. Oil on canvas, 32 × 26½" (81.3 × 67.3 cm). Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.

meant as an illustration to *The Vision of Columbus*, a historical epic of America which Vanderlyn's fellow expatriate Joel Barlow, diplomat and sometime Connecticut preacher, thought his finest work—a turgid swathe of heroic couplets. At one point it describes the murder of a rebel's fair wife by Mohawks in the pay of the British during the Revolutionary War:

> The scalps by British gold are paid:
> A long-hair'd scalp adorns that heavenly head;
> And comes the sacred spoil from friend or foe,
> No marks distinguish and no man can know.
> With calculating pause and demon grin,
> They seize her hands and thro' her face divine
> Drive the descending axe. . . .

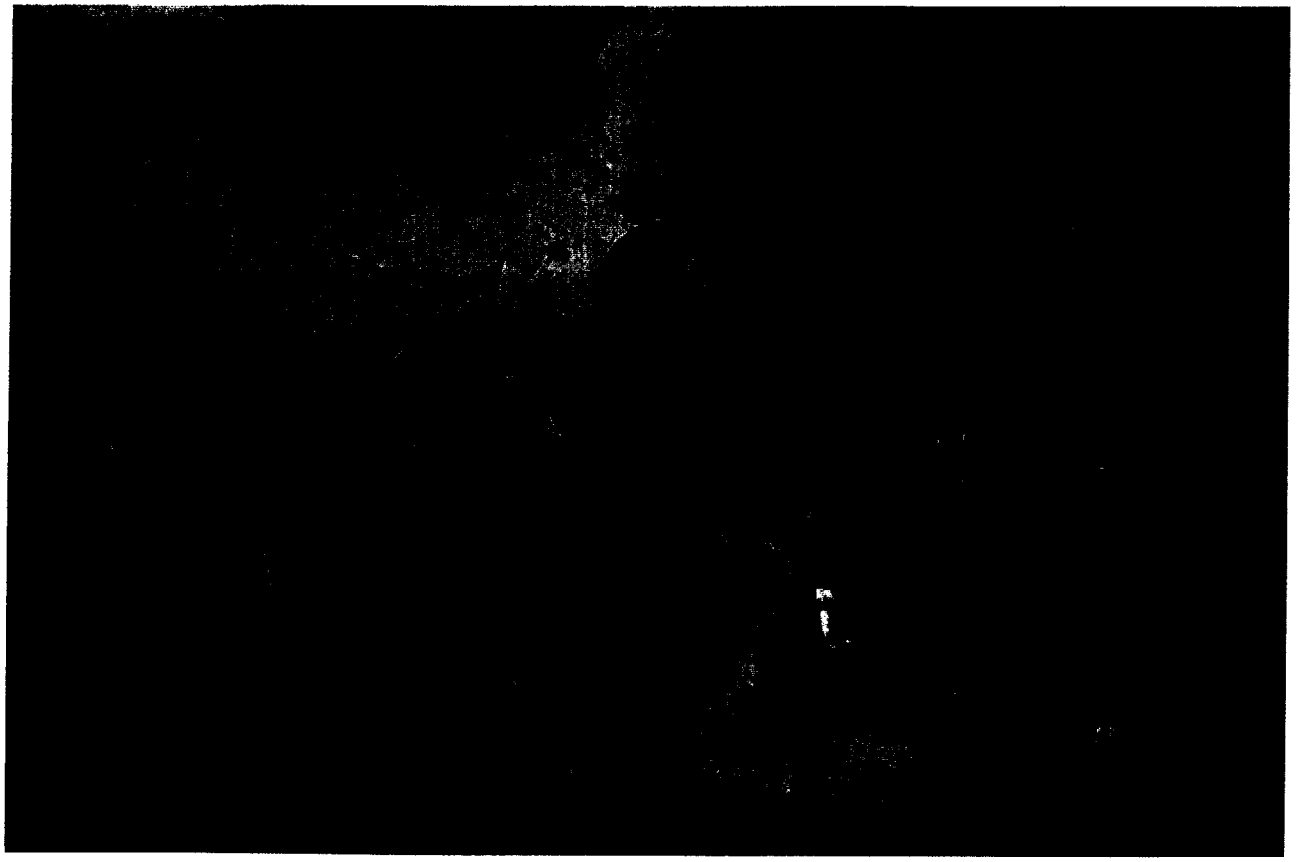
Vanderlyn's painting is far better than the sub-Miltonic fustian of the poem. It is a pastiche *all'antica*, featuring the white victim as a grief-stricken Niobid and her red murderers in the poses of two Hellenistic sculptures Vanderlyn had studied and drawn in the Louvre. But its energy and concision are extraordinary, almost worthy of Vanderlyn's hero Jacques-Louis David. And Vanderlyn may not have wished to imply that these bloodthirsty braves were typical of all Indians—only that they were Noble Savages gone wrong, corrupted by the perfidious British.

The Demonic Indian, as a symbol of *all* Indians, entered the official visual language of the U.S. government in 1827, when the Italian sculptor Enrico Causici was commissioned to carve a bas-relief for the rotunda of the Capitol in Washington. It shows Daniel Boone locked in mortal combat with an enormous Indian, while a smaller one—his proportions dictated by the narrowness of the panel—lies dead on the ground between them (Figure 111). The scene illustrates an episode in October 1773 (the year is carved on the lower branch of the tree) when Boone led a party of settlers across the Kentucky frontier; they were attacked by Indians, but Boone's bravery encouraged the whites to drive them off. An emblematic moment, therefore, in the penetration of the early frontier. This Indian warrior is depicted as an ogre, savagery incarnate, with bulging eyes and a bloodcurdling snarl on his face; Boone is cool and calm. In the early 1830s Causici's relief was shown to a group of Winnebago Indians from Wisconsin who, having sold their land to the federal government and accepted tribal relocation to Iowa, were visiting Washington. Reportedly, they examined the carving and then "raised their dreadful war-cry and ran hurriedly from the hall." This, the whites who were present felt, showed that Causici's sculpture had impressed them with the futility of resistance. But perhaps the Indians were just insulted by it, as well they might have been.

111. Enrico Causici, *Daniel Boone Struggling with the Indian*, 1826–27. Sandstone sculptural relief in the rotunda of the United States Capitol, Washington, D.C.

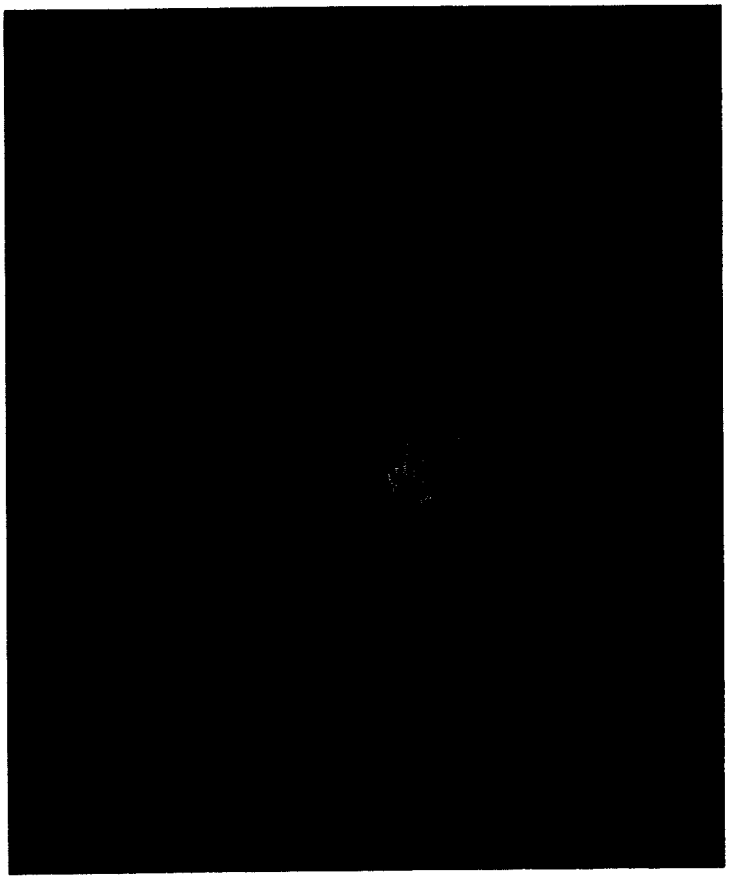
Painters, following on from Vanderlyn's *Murder of Jane McCrea*, revived one of the literary forms of earlier American colonization: the captivity narrative. These described the bizarre fate of white women and their children abducted by Indians. Some were killed, but others became "white squaws," losing (so the stories insisted) their language, their memories, and their shame: they were living proof of how Europeans, weak women in particular, could still go to seed and revert to primitivism when the props of higher civilization were kicked away. This "Criolian degeneration"—in effect, cultural entropy through racial mixture—had been one of the worst fears of the Puritans, and it was to become an obsession with nineteenth-century white Americans as its anxieties took in black slaves as well as red savages.

Horror inspired by miscegenation is certainly at the heart of a painting like John Mix Stanley's *Osage Scalp Dance*, 1845 (Figure 112). Stanley (1814–1872) made a specialty of painting "Indian" subjects all over the West. Here, muscular Indian warriors encircle a white woman and her child. She kneels on the ground, her arm raised in a plea for their lives. Her dress is unsuited to the frontier, being long, white, and gauzy; she is meant to be both pure bride and virgin sacrifice.



112. John Mix Stanley, *Osage Scalp Dance*, 1845. Oil on canvas, 40¾ × 60½″ (103.5 × 153.6 cm). National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; gift of the Misses Henry, 1908.

The bare bottom of her clinging little boy emphasizes their helplessness and (perhaps) desirability to the savage brute. Stanley, one presumes, had seen engravings of Poussin's *Rape of the Sabine Women* and *Massacre of the Innocents*. By contrast, the Indians are dark and dreadful: all id. One of them raises a war club to bash out the woman's brains, but he is restrained by a chief who interposes his spear. This figure wears a medallion, a silver disk of the sort that the federal government issued to tribal leaders, bearing the effigy of the President. He has had contact with whites and learned a little mercy. But what will the white angel's fate be, now that her life has been spared? Worse than death, no doubt.



By the 1840s it seemed to most American whites that, whatever the tolerant might say or think, on the frontier itself there could be no truce between the white man and the red: they were locked in a territorial fight to the finish. This was given lurid expression by the painter Charles Deas (1818–1867), who, inspired by Catlin's example, had gone west to paint the Sioux and Winnebago Indians in 1840. In *The Death Struggle*, 1845 (Figure 113), a white trapper on a white horse has been ambushed by an Indian on a black one. Teeth glitter, eyeballs bulge, the Indian's horse snorts red fire from its nostrils (a sign of its satanic nature)—and, bound together in a frenzy of hatred while brandishing their knives, they plunge over the edge of an abyss. Given the manic character of this image, it is not altogether surprising to learn that Deas was committed to a lunatic asylum in 1848, a few years after painting it, and died there twenty years later.

But by the 1840s it was also apparent to many white Americans that the Indians were bound to lose the battle for land and, probably, for survival—that they were a "dying race," one more image for the loss of America's original nature. Once the whites had won, they could view their defeated enemy through the lens of their art with magnanimous regret—though never with guilt. Were they not self-condemned by (as one congressional document phrased it) "their suicidal repugnance to the light of civilization"? The laws of Progress had condemned the Indian, and so the children of Progress could mourn him, up to a point. His liq-

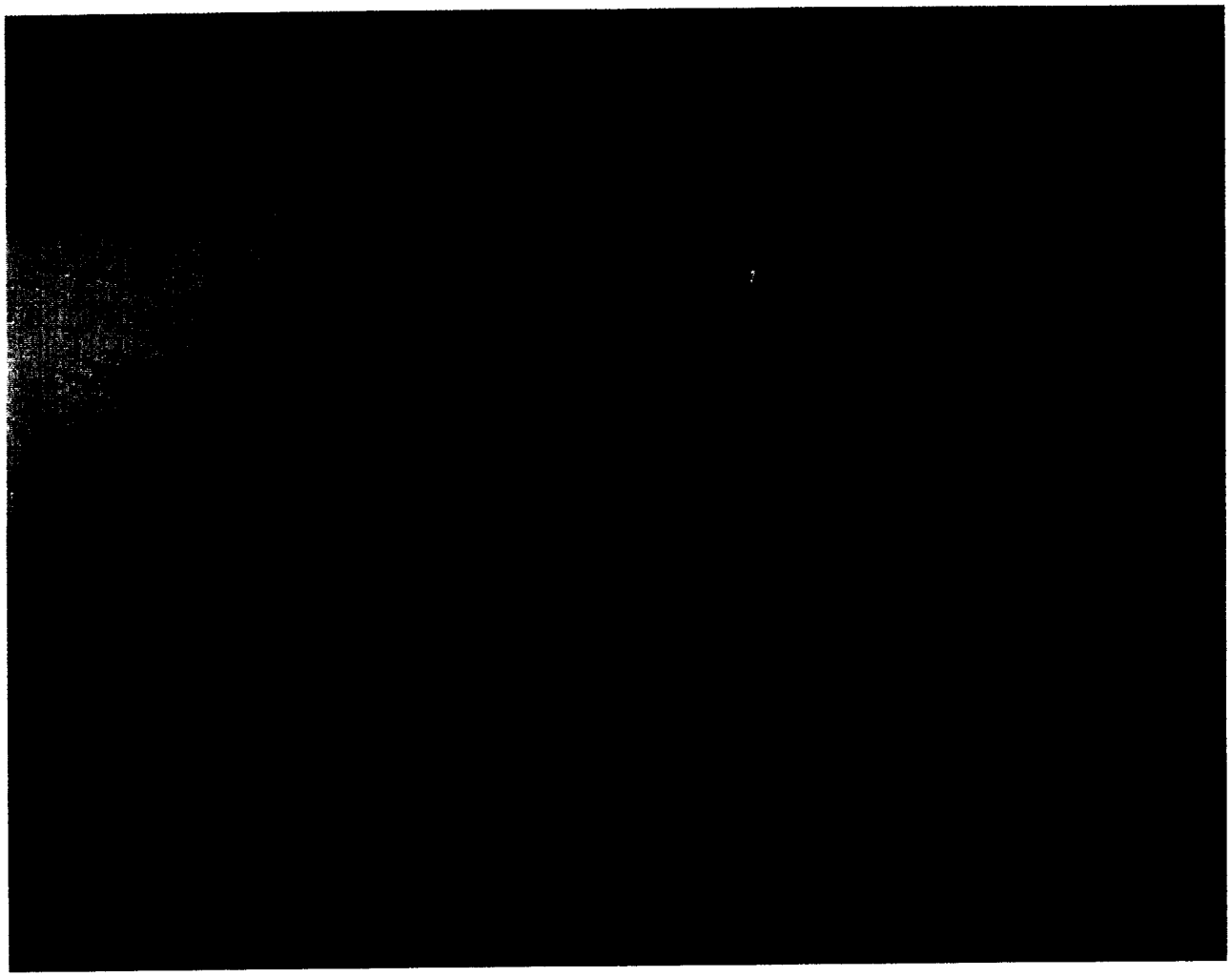
113. Charles Deas, *The Death Struggle*, 1845. Oil on canvas, 30 × 25" (76.2 × 63.5 cm). The Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont.

uidation was merely the fulfillment of the natural order, in which the strong displaced the weak. Nothing personal. Thus a new stereotype rose to replace the Demonic Indian: the Doomed Indian. Tompkins Matteson (1813–1884), a painter who seems never to have gone west—he spent his whole professional life in New York—painted *The Last of the Race* (Figure 114) in 1847. From a cliff, the remnants of an Indian tribe—an old chief in a red cloak, a younger man, and two women—contemplate the ocean, over which the sun is setting. That the sunset is over the sea identifies the place as the Pacific coast. This is the end of the line. Even the dog knows that. The image accurately follows the sentiments expressed by William Cullen Bryant in 1824, through the mouth of an imagined Indian:

> They waste us—aye—like April snow
> In the warm noon, we shrink away
> And fast they follow, as we go
> Towards the setting day,—
> Till they shall fill the land, and we
> Are driven into the western sea.

Probably the most vivid image of the Doomed Indian is the most official one, placed where few visitors notice it today—on the Senate pediment of the U.S. Capitol in Washington. It is the work of Thomas Crawford (c. 1813–1857), an American sculptor who, until his life was cut short by a brain tumor in his early forties, was one of three gifted American "Florentines" working in Italy—the others being Hiram Powers and Horatio Greenough. Crawford had begun his studies with Bertel Thorwaldsen in Rome in 1835; by 1853, when the U.S. government offered him the commission for the Senate pediment, he was in complete command of a neo-classical vocabulary derived from Thorwaldsen and Canova—lucid, highly abstract, politically eloquent, and based on Greco-Roman models. The theme of the pediment was "The Progress of Civilization." It should provide an allegory of "our history of the struggle between civilized man and the savage, between the cultivated and the wild nature," wrote Captain Montgomery Meigs, the supervisor of the Capitol's extension, in his instructions to Crawford.

Crawford designed the pediment after the model of Phidias' sculptures for the east pediment of the Parthenon. At the center is America; to her right—our left—are various figures of white security, progress, and prosperity: a vigilant soldier, a merchant, a schoolteacher, two eager students, and a "mechanic" or artisan. Such are the agents of civilization. On the other side of the pediment is the earlier stage of American development. A pioneer is felling a tree, necessary prelude to the taming of the wilderness. And the marble trunk is about to fall on some Indians. Beside it, a young Indian boy, a hunter, gazes with alarm at the pioneer;



next to him, his father, a chief with feathered headdress, sits in the familiar posture of melancholy, head on his hand, frozen with despair. And beyond him, his wife and her child sit by an open grave. If this was the official view of the fate of the American Indian in the mid-1850s, what chance of succor from the federal government did they have? Other derogatory images of Indians have been removed from the Capitol in years past, but Crawford's figures, like Causici's Daniel Boone, are built into the very fabric of America's seat of government, and likely to remain there.

The catchphrase of American expansionism from the mid-nineteenth century on was "Manifest Destiny," always declaimed and usually written with capitals. Manifest Destiny was a rhetorical figure that became an ideology, and transfused itself through all policies. It was invoked as a raison d'être for the annexation of Texas in 1845 and the consequent Mexican-American War of 1846–48, the occupation of Oregon in 1846 and of California in 1848. Its quintessential utterance was written in 1846, and soon afterward read to the U.S. Senate, by a journalist named William Gilpin, who had traversed the Oregon Trail two years before.

114. Tompkins Harrison Matteson, *The Last of the Race*, 1847. Oil on canvas, 39¾ × 50″ (101 × 127 cm). The New-York Historical Society, New York.

> The *untransacted* destiny of the American people is to subdue the continent—to rush over this vast field to the Pacific Ocean—to animate the many hundred millions of its people, and to cheer them upward . . . to teach old nations a new civilization—to confirm the destiny of the human race. . . .
>
> *Divine task! Immortal mission!* Let us tread fast and joyfully the open trail before us! Let every American heart open wide for patriotism to glow undimmed, and confide with religious faith in the sublime and prodigious destiny of his well-loved country.

Clearly, the destiny Gilpin and the jingo senators who cheered his words had in mind was not confined to North America. The "empire" he spoke of, embracing "many hundred millions" in "old nations," was that of Latin America, the Pacific, and Asia—not just the American Indian tribes. The Indians that expansionists would run into on the way to the Pacific were merely dust beneath the hooves and wagon wheels of Progress. Manifest Destiny meant what it said. It *was* manifest, obvious beyond all argument, that empire must expand beyond the Mississippi and not stop rolling till it reached the Pacific, where it could rest awhile and gather strength for the next American leap into history. Whatever you found was yours by absolute right. To see was to discover; to discover was to conquer. If the Indians fought back, they weren't just resisting invaders—they were up against History itself; and to see yourself as a force of History is to be freed from pity and from guilt. Manifest Destiny was America's myth of redemptive violence. It created its own heroes; and art had a large role in promoting it.

The emblematic hero of Manifest Destiny was long dead by then. He was Daniel Boone (1734–1820), frontier scout, real estate speculator, and supposed "discoverer" of Kentucky. In the early 1770s Boone had blazed a trail from western Virginia through the Cumberland Gap into eastern Tennessee near the Kentucky border, and this path—known as Boone's Trace or the Wilderness Road—was used by many frontier settlers in America's first great westward migration. He made money in Kentucky and Virginia land deals, some of them crooked; he was captured by the Shawnees (in 1778) but escaped; he had a formidable reputation as a pioneer and Indian-killer; and he was turned into a celebrity by John Filson, a writer to whom he dictated a wildly embellished autobiography, which became the model for all future tall tales of frontier heroes, such as Davy Crockett. Boone was the man who mediated between savagery and civilized authority—a midpoint between the "savage" Indian, the man of the woods who knows the woods, and the "civilized" colonizer who is innately a stranger to the wilderness. Boone was imagined as totally American—but in a white way. He goes into the wilderness and is redeemed; but his redemption becomes the means of further conquests by civilization. He thus represented the

best of both worlds. In the last twenty years of his life, the real Daniel Boone became a tourist sight. Awestruck visitors would approach the house where the old man sat in his fringed buckskin coat, shake his hand, and pay a dollar for a copy of John Filson's hagiographic book, which he would sign with a chuckle: "Every word of it true, by God!" Only six years after Boone died, Thomas Cole (who never met him) painted him as a figure out of classical antiquity, part Cincinnatus and part lake god, sitting gun in hand on a sarcophagus-like rock slab outside a rude cabin by the Great Osage Lake in Kentucky (Figure 115). Such men, it is clear, will no more return than the Romans themselves.

By the 1850s the chief metaphor of Western movement was biblical, not classical: the narrative of Exodus was taken up where the Puritans had left it, and Daniel Boone became Moses, leading his people to the Promised Land. George Caleb Bingham painted *Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers Through the Cumber-*

115. Thomas Cole, *Daniel Boone and His Cabin on the Great Osage Lake*, c. 1826. Oil on canvas, 38 × 42½" (96.5 × 123.2 cm). Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

land Gap (Figure 116) in 1851–52. Clean-shaven and rather elegantly dressed, Boone marches toward you with his rifle at the slope-arms position, fairly radiating determination; just behind him is a settler's wife on a white horse, suggesting (since Bingham's image draws both on Exodus and the flight into Egypt) the Virgin Mary protected by Saint Joseph. Stricken trees on either side record the dangers of nature, through which Boone will shepherd his followers.

The image of Boone as an American Moses was widespread. Its most spectacular use was in a later painting, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way (Westward Ho!)*, 1861, by Emanuel Leutze (Figure 117).

Leutze (1816–1868) had been born in Germany. His parents brought him to Philadelphia when he was a baby, and he grew up to study painting there, but in 1841 he returned to study history painting in Düsseldorf and remained there—with sojourns in Rome, Venice, and Munich—for twenty years. He painted American subjects, however, the most famous of which, then and ever since, was his large academic composition of 1851, showing George Washington and his men forging in a wherry across the ice-clogged Delaware. If there was anyone who could be relied on to produce a large, efficient, patriotic machine whose meaning would be over no one's head, that person was Leutze. In 1861 the federal government invited him to paint a mural at the head of the west stairway in

116. George Caleb Bingham, *Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers Through the Cumberland Gap*, 1851–52. Oil on canvas, 36½ × 50¼″ (92.7 × 127.6 cm). Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis, Missouri; gift of Nathaniel Phillips, Boston, 1890.

the House wing of the Capitol. It was, on the face of it, a strange time to issue such a commission. Government spending on the arts had been stopped by the outbreak of the Civil War. But this particular project was meant to show Northern confidence; the very act of embellishing the Capitol with a mural showed that the Union no longer feared that Washington would be taken by the Confederate army; and the apex of Leutze's design, the Stars and Stripes being passed into a young pioneer's hands at the peak of the ridge, conveyed the message that only the Union could carry Americans into the golden future of westward expansion. Leutze accepted eagerly, returned to America, made a trip west to the Rockies to research the scenery, and began his magnum opus.

It was a big wall, twenty by thirty feet, and Leutze divided it into three zones. At the top, in a foliated border that frames the whole wall, is the motto from Bishop Berkeley's prophetic verse of 1752, "Westward the course of Empire takes its way." Below that, we see the main scene: the conquest of the Pacific slope.

It is a huge landscape populated with dozens of emblematic figures, toiling up the Rockies to the view of the Promised Land beyond. The trail behind them is littered with broken wagon wheels and bullock skulls from earlier expeditions. A young man rises in his stirrups to glimpse the view; a large Boone-figure, that of the now stereotypical frontier scout, complete with buckskin jacket and coonskin

117. Emanuel Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way (Westward Ho!)*, 1861. Fresco, 20 × 30′ (6.09 × 9.14 m). Mural in the United States Capitol Building, Washington, D.C.

cap, displays the prospect to two women. There is also—for the first and almost the only time in American pictures of pioneering—an African-American, a young man leading a donkey on which an Irishwoman rides. He is there because of the Civil War. Leutze, like most American artists, was pro-emancipationist, and wanted to suggest that the rewards of Manifest Destiny should go to freed slaves as well. This image also suggests that the Irish immigrants, among whom anti-black racism was particularly virulent, should settle their differences with American blacks.

The pioneers are flooded with ruddy light from the Pacific sunset; and below them, in the third zone, is the goal of their journey—a view of San Francisco Bay, seen from the ocean, flanked by two medallion portraits of the tutelary gods of Manifest Destiny: William Clark in his greatcoat, Daniel Boone in his buckskins.

And what of the Indians? They do appear, as ghosts of the past—mere emblems, literally in the margin of the mural, "creeping" (in Leutze's words) and "sneeking [*sic*] away from the light of knowledge," like the little grotesques in the borders of Renaissance manuscripts. They do not belong in the Big Picture. In his sketch, Leutze showed the plains below the mountains as completely empty. In the final mural, there are plumes of smoke rising into the sky. These have been interpreted as Indian campfires, but Leutze probably meant the smoke to be volcanic, not human, in origin.

The paintings that did most to promote the image of Manifest Destiny, however, were made by a younger contemporary of Leutze's, Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902). Born in Germany, Bierstadt came to America with his emigrant parents when he was only two; he grew up in the coastal town of New Bedford, Massachusetts, where his father made casks for the whaling trade. At twenty-three, Bierstadt returned to Germany to study at the Düsseldorf Academy, acquiring a high academic polish and a meticulous eye for detail; afterward he spent a winter in Rome, with the landscape painter Worthington Whittredge.

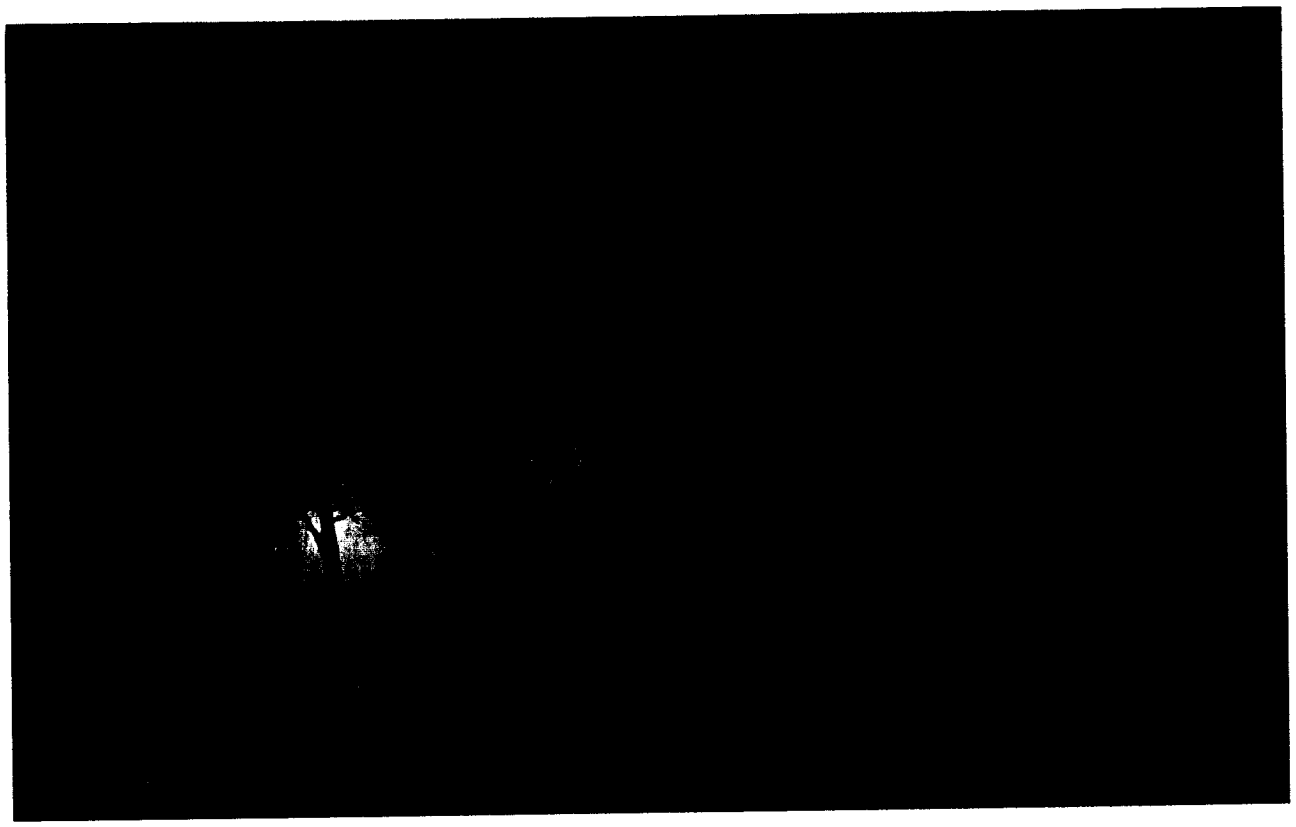
It soon became plain to Bierstadt, when he returned to America, that the image of the West was there to be exploited. The West made America unique among nations, and nobody was painting big panoramas of it. Other artists with Luminist affiliations, such as Sanford Gifford, Worthington Whittredge, and John Kensett himself, had all been on painting expeditions west of the Missouri, but their paintings tended to be fairly small, without the heroics of Church—and Church's territory was the Hudson Valley and South America. They did not express the idea of a providential mission into the wilderness that was at the heart of Manifest Destiny. Bierstadt set out to do so.

In 1858 he joined a Western surveying expedition commanded by Colonel Frederick Lander. Its aim was to plot an overland wagon route from Fort Laramie, Wyoming, to the Pacific, and Bierstadt went as far as the Rockies, making copious drawings and watercolor studies along the way. He then peeled off

on his own to make sketches on the Wind River and in Shoshone country, and returned to New York in 1859, taking a studio in the same Tenth Street Studio Building as Church. Here, fired up by the success of *Heart of the Andes,* he worked his studies up into huge landscapes, which he promoted as showing the West "as it really is," but were actually composite views, just as Church's Andean scenes had been. There is no actual view which corresponds to Bierstadt's six-by-ten-foot *Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak,* 1863 (Figure 118), but this hardly mattered. What counted for its audience was the grandeur of representation of the mountains, the far misty crags rising behind the glassy lake and its waterfall, brilliantly lit by a shaft of sun in the middle distance; and the apparent care with which he rendered the details of Indian tribal life in the Shoshone encampment in the foreground. This was, as the art critic James Jarves pointed out at the time, an unstable mix—idealization in the large view, materialism in the details. Bierstadt was propagating a dream of conquest, and he had no illusions about what would happen to these Shoshones, Claudean figures in his idyll of primitive immensity. One day, he said, in the very foreground of the painting, "a city, populated by our descendants, may rise and in its art galleries this picture may eventually find its resting place."

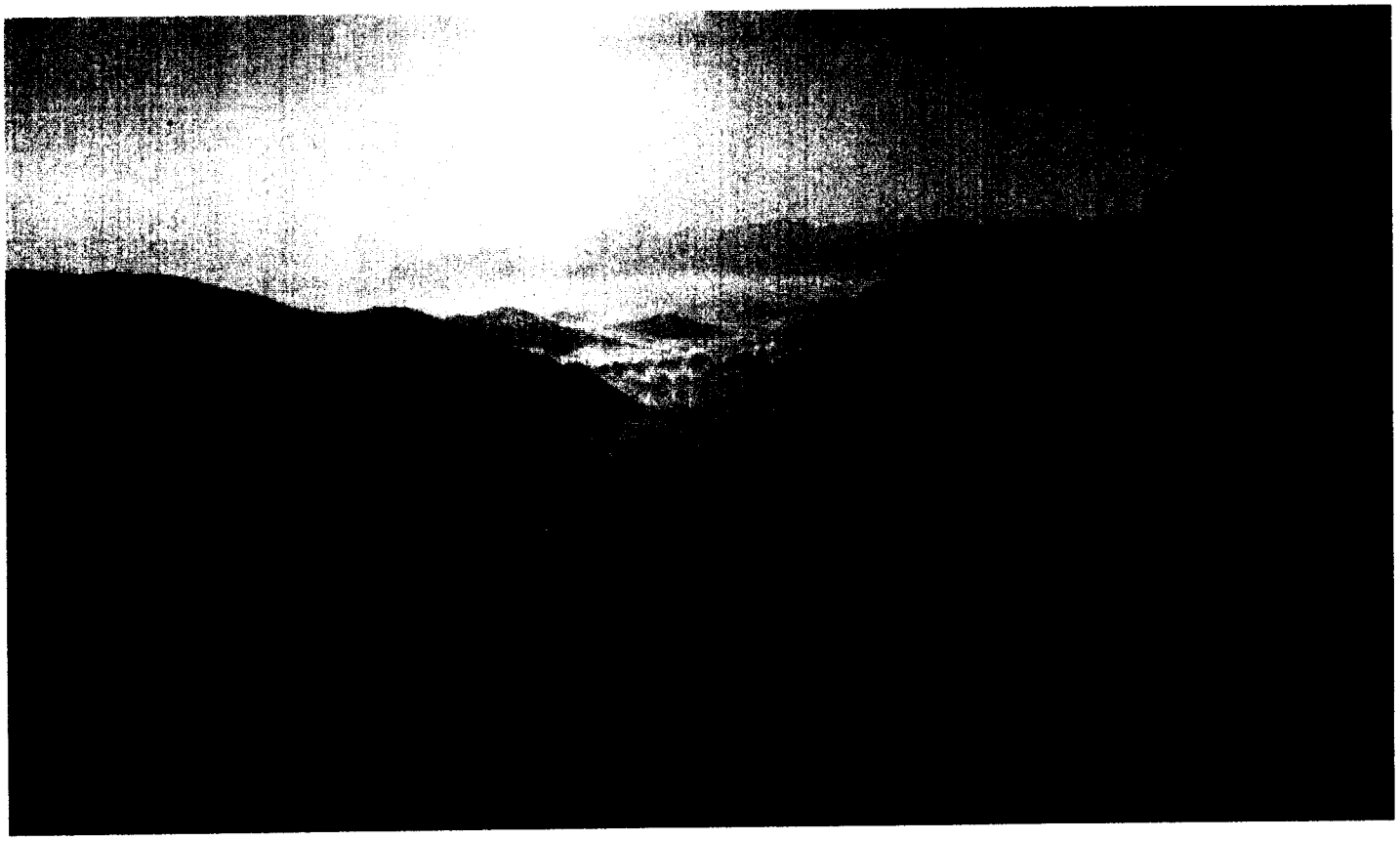
Bierstadt's first Western superviews were an instant success, and in 1863 he set off west again, this time in the company of a writer, Fitz Hugh Ludlow. Ludlow was a young New York journalist-bohemian who had caused a sensation a few

118. Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak,* 1863. Oil on canvas, 73½ × 120¾″ (186.7 × 306.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Rogers Fund, 1907.



years before with *The Hasheesh Eater,* a lurid account of his drug experiences modeled on Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater.* (Soon afterward he died of the combined effects of dope and booze, leaving a notably pretty widow named Rosalie, whom Bierstadt married.) However, the two young men were seeking the natural Rocky Mountain High, not the *paradis artificiel* of cannabis, and they found it in abundance on a trip that included the Yosemite Valley and the western slope of the Sierra Nevada down to California. Ludlow's bombast—his dispatches from the frontier were commissioned by the *Atlantic Monthly* and collected in 1870, the year he died, as *The Heart of the Continent*—admirably matched the sublime histrionics of Bierstadt's paintings. He described the Yosemite Valley at sunset as opening "into a field of perfect light, misty by its own excess,—into an unspeakable suffusion of glory created from the phoenix-pile of the dying sun." On their way through Nebraska, they had encountered a convoy of German emigrants, fifty wagons or more, driving their cattle toward Oregon; and Bierstadt, identifying with them, turned the sight into one of his most extravagant paeans to Manifest Destiny, *Emigrants Crossing the Plains,* 1867 (Figure 119). Scattered in its foreground are cattle bones, the emblems of earlier death on the trail, but the live cattle next to them are fat, and for these settlers everything sets fair: their wagons roll forward into a beckoning sunset of such excessive splendor that it's obvious that God himself is calling them on, flooding their enterprise with metaphorical gold. "Progress," as one orator of the day put it, "is God!" There are signs of Indian presence—a few distant tepees—

119. Albert Bierstadt, *Emigrants Crossing the Plains,* 1867. Oil on canvas, 67 × 102″ (170.2 × 259.1 cm). National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.



but they are all but invisible in the radiance, and the farthest wagons are already past them.

The peak of Bierstadt's career coincided with, and was supported by, the boom in Western business—logging, mining, and, above all, railroads. Financiers who were making fortunes in the West by destroying wilderness naturally wanted trophies of the same wilderness in its Edenic state, and paid Bierstadt the kind of prices that only Frederick Church, up to then, had been able to ask. One such magnate, Legrand Lockwood, bought Bierstadt's *Domes of the Yosemite* for $15,000 (perhaps $1.5 million in modern dollars), fresh off the easel, for the octagonal hall of his New York mansion. When the transcontinental railroad was at last completed in 1869, the vice president of the Central Pacific Railroad, Collis Huntington, commissioned Bierstadt to do one of his six-by-ten-foot specials commemorating the landscape where its greatest difficulties had been overcome: the Donner Pass, in the Sierra Nevada. The two men rode up there together, to pick the right spot. The name of the Pass was synonymous with death and disaster: in 1846 a snowed-in expedition had perished there, amid gruesome scenes of cannibalism. Constructing a track across it had been an immense feat of engineering and labor, and once the track was laid, much of it had to be covered with "snow-sheds," timber-framed tunnels that kept the snowdrifts off the tracks so that the trains would not stall. They can be seen on the right of Bierstadt's vista, *Donner Lake from the Summit*, 1873 (Figure 120): a small straight line among

120. Albert Bierstadt, *Donner Lake from the Summit*, 1867. Oil on canvas, 72 × 120″ (182.9 × 304.8 cm). The New-York Historical Society, New York.

the granite peaks. Bierstadt poured all his rhetoric, inherited and invented, into this canvas: the God's-eye view from the summit, reminiscent of Church but with an ancestry that stretched back to Pieter Breughel and Joachim Patinir in the sixteenth century; the early morning sun burning through the vapors above the lake; the grim ramparts of rock, the stand of sequoias (the biggest trees in the world, and already famous as such, but dwarfed by the scale of the landscape) and the brilliant blue eye of the lake. The crowds that assembled to view this tour de force when the Central Pacific Railroad exhibited around America learned three things: first, that the Donner Pass held no more terrors for the traveler; second, that the railroad didn't damage Nature; and third, that the deep cushions of a Pullman Palace car on the CPR were the right throne from which to view its splendors. *Donner Lake from the Summit* was the patriarch of all American travel posters. It was not for nothing that a journalist remarked that "Alfred Bierstadt has copyrighted all the principal mountains."

But not, as it turned out, the principal gorges. That was left to a painter of Irish ancestry, born (like Thomas Cole) in Lancashire and raised in Philadelphia: Thomas Moran (1837–1926). Unlike Bierstadt, this son of poor immigrant handweavers was entirely self-taught. He got some training as an engraver and opened an engraving business with his two brothers. But his heart was in painting, and his predilections intensely, youthfully Romantic. One of his earliest canvases, *Among the Ruins—There He Lingered,* 1856, took its title from Shelley's *Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude* (1815), in which the pure young poet is imagined pursuing "Nature's most secret steps,"

> where'er
> The red volcano overcanopies
> Its fields of snow and pinnacles of ice
> With burning smoke, or where bitumen lakes
> On black bare pointed islets ever beat
> With sluggish surge. . . .

Shelley's imaginary landscape predicts the real one of Yellowstone that Moran would eventually paint. Indeed, one dealer was later able to sell a very early Moran entitled *Childe Roland* under a new and topographical title, *The Lava Beds of Idaho.* And Moran would always be on the lookout for the sublime, the exceptional, and the picturesque—landscapes that satisfied the Romantic prototype. Only the great scene, he viscerally believed, could produce the great picture. He would find such scenes in the West, and nowhere else.

Moran rationalized his lack of formal training, as the self-taught are apt to do, with the belief that art was not "teachable." "You can't teach an artist much how to paint," he would declare in his later years. "I used to think it was teachable,

but I have come to feel that there is an ability to see nature, and unless it is within the man, it is useless to try and impart it." Nevertheless, the example of two painters obsessed him: Claude Lorrain and Turner. He was able to spend a year in England in 1861 studying Turner and copying his works in oil and watercolor: in particular, *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus*, 1829, which Ruskin had called "the *central picture* in Turner's career." Moran kept his full-size copy of *Ulysses* in his studio thereafter, and it is not difficult to see why the painting had such a deep effect on him. Its high-keyed, unusually saturated color—yellows, ochers, crimsons, and roiling tracts of impasted white cloud—is just what Moran would reach for in his landscapes of the Green River and of Yellowstone. Turner's vision of Polyphemus' island, the crags on which the giant mistily reclines, is remembered in Moran's later visions—or, as he insisted, accurate transcriptions—of Western scenery.

The turning point in Moran's career came in 1871, when Dr. Ferdinand Hayden (1829–1887), director of the United States Geological Survey, invited him to join an expedition into the Yellowstone area of Wyoming. At that time Yellowstone was terra incognita to the white man. It was known, for its hot mud lakes, geysers, and constant geothermal activity, as "the place where Hell bubbled up," but apart from a few mountain men and trappers, the only white man to describe it had been John Coulter, a member of Lewis and Clark's expedition, who strayed into it in 1807. The expedition was backed by the U.S. government, and Moran's role was funded partly by the directors of the Northern Pacific Railroad—who reasoned, shrewdly, that the circulation of Moran's images of Yellowstone, and the publicity they got, might help create a new tourist destination and thus a profitable new railroad line.

Besides Moran, Hayden brought along a former stagecoach driver turned photographer, William Henry Jackson. The two had worked together before: Jackson had accompanied the painter Sanford Gifford on Hayden's 1869 survey of Wyoming, and the two had made parallel images of the same scenes. With his cumbersome cameras, tripods, developing equipment, and fragile glass plates (some of them twenty by twenty-four inches, yielding the largest outdoor photographs ever attempted) all loaded onto pack mules, Jackson now worked alongside Moran. He provided the objective record of Yellowstone's world of wonders, for a public which believed the camera couldn't lie. Moran's watercolors, more interpretative, supplied the color. The photographs confirmed the reality of Moran's strange sketches of fumaroles, sulfur pinnacles, and Dantesque hot lakes. To those back east who saw them on his return to New York, Moran's watercolors of Yellowstone looked as thrillingly alien as the first photos from the moon would a century later. Yet there were some scenes whose scale and grandeur neither a plate negative nor a watercolor could adequately convey, and one of these was the direct view down the chasm of Yellowstone, toward the falls.

Hayden remembered Moran saying "with a sort of regretful enthusiasm, that these beautiful tints were beyond the reach of human art." What the sketchbook could not encompass, however, memory and imagination perhaps could, and as soon as he got back to New York, Moran ordered an eight-by-fourteen-foot canvas and flung himself into work on the climactic panorama of America's years of Western expansion: *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone,* 1893–1901 (Figure 121).

Meanwhile, Hayden had been busy lobbying Congress, with the enthusiastic backing of the Northern Pacific Railroad's directors, to set aside Yellowstone as a national park—a museum of American sublimity. To prove its uniqueness, he displayed Moran's sketches and Jackson's photographs; and in March 1872 President Grant signed into law an act of Congress protecting the whole Yellowstone area, thirty-five hundred square miles of it, in perpetuity. This was to do wonders for the Northern Pacific Railroad's cash flow—and, not incidentally, for Moran's. *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* became the first American landscape by an American artist ever bought by the American government. It cost $10,000, or about 80 cents per square inch, and it went straight on view in the Capitol, where the effigies of so many flesh-and-blood heroes were to be seen. This, too, was a painting of a hero: the landscape as hero, limbs of rock, belly of water, hair of trees, all done with absorbing virtuosity. It rivaled Church and outdid Bierstadt in offering the panoramic thrill that no watercolor can give, and the density of substance that no photograph could rival. It became a prime symbol of wilderness tourism. Two years later, Moran tried to repeat its success with an even larger canvas, *The Chasm of the Colorado,* the result of an expedition down the Grand Canyon led by Colonel John Wesley Powell, another surveyor who needed, as he put it, an artist of Moran's stature to paint scenes that were "too

vast, too complex, and too grand for verbal description." Moran certainly did his best, but the Canyon defeated him—as it has defeated all landscape painters since; not even he could solve the principal problem of painting it, the lack of any scale that related to the human body and so might allow the viewer to imagine himself on the edge of the scene.

In 1911 the "Western" artist Charles Schreyvogel found himself among the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of Colorado, trying to sketch Pikes Peak. "I started [a drawing]," he wrote to his wife, "and it looked fine. I was there at 7.30 a.m. Then the smelters started in and the black smoke just covered the whole valley so that I couldn't see a thing and I had to stop."

The idea that any part of the West could be blotted out by industry would have seemed barely conceivable to its admirers forty years before, but it had come to pass. Except in the national parks, the Western landscape by 1890 was so disfigured by mining, clear-cutting, damming, railroad construction, and pollution that it was only a shadow of its former self. The great cattle drives out of Texas, along the Chisholm Trail to the railhead in Kansas, had created the cowboy as a figure of American popular imagination after the Civil War—the hard-living, instinctively noble, straight-shooting, resourceful centaur of the West. But after 1890 most cattle ranching ceased to be open-range; feed was farmed, and pastures fenced, and it was cheaper to ship stock all the way to market by rail. The cowboy was rapidly joining the Indian in the vivid shadowland of American myth; both still existed, but not in the way they once had, the cowboys no longer "home, home on the range," the Indians shunted into a deracinated life on reservations. Americans had begun to experience the West through reenactment. The Battle of the Little Bighorn, in which George Custer and his cavalrymen were wiped out by Sioux warriors in 1876, was restaged by the showman Buffalo Bill Cody just a year later in 1877, using Indians who had actually fought there; and it is still reenacted every year in Hardin, Montana. The last major Indian revolt, that of the Oglala Sioux, was crushed in 1890 at the massacre (called by whites the Battle) of Wounded Knee. The U.S. government's policy of slaughtering the buffalo herds of the plains—commemorated in remarkable photographs of whole pyramids of buffalo skulls, like Toltec monuments—had destroyed the Plains Indians' food base.

Their near extinction prompted Albert Bierstadt to paint, c. 1889, *The Last of the Buffalo* (Figure 122). It shows no white hunters with Sharps rifles. The blame for the ecocide is put on the Indians themselves. The picture is a lie, but by then Bierstadt's own reputation was going the way of the buffalo. A committee of American artists, choosing works to be sent to the Universal Exposition in Paris in 1889, voted to reject it—not because it was false propaganda, but because the

121. Thomas Moran, *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, 1893–1901. Oil on canvas, 96½ × 168⅛" (245.1 × 427.8 cm). National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; gift of George D. Pratt.

subject (and Bierstadt) seemed hopelessly out-of-date. Church's reputation, too, had declined. On his death in 1900, obituarists had to remind their readers who he had been. The taste for nationalist blockbuster landscape was gone: it was replaced by a preference for Barbizon-style scenes, moodier, smaller, gentler, and without pretension to sublimity.

In 1890 the U.S. government declared the frontier closed. This began the slow ebb of an American state of mind: the idea that natural resources were infinite, that always, somewhere Out There, the bold and the brave could find more land or another big lode, just for the taking. By the end of the 1870s, it was abundantly clear that the key to American social reality was no longer the frontier but the cities, whose culture was based on fast change, harsh inequality, the friction of crowds competing in narrow social space, industry, and the impersonal power of the machine.

But people rarely want social reality. They want dreams. As the wilderness and the West declined into objects of nostalgia, emblems of imperiled freedom, they drained out of high art and into popular culture. They became a powerhouse of stereotyped fantasy, whose messages were replicated through Wild West shows, memoirs, illustrations, and novels. Zane Grey wrote more than sixty and sold thirteen million copies during his lifetime; Owen Wister's tales of the frontier were also hugely popular. In a photograph from 1903, one sees Charles Schreyvogel painting a cowboy on the roof of his studio building in Hoboken, New Jersey (Figure 125, page 205). Finally, recycling everything, came the movies.

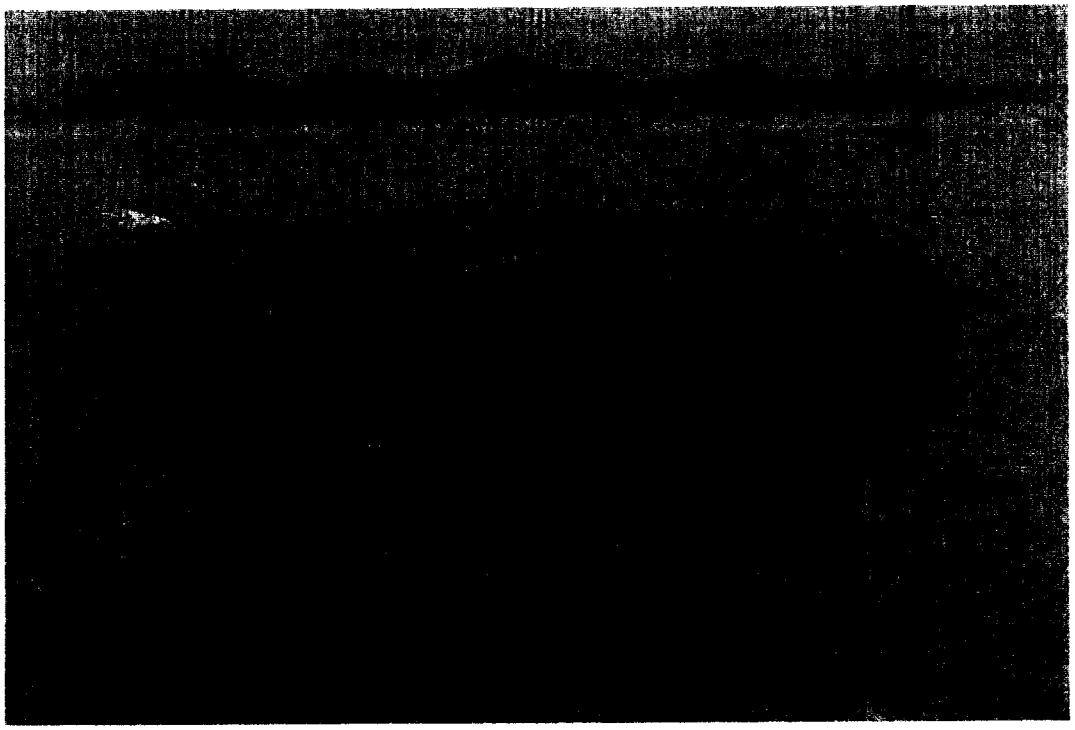
In the visual arts, the man whose work most clearly stood for this nostalgic packaging of a bygone "real" West for an urban public was Frederic Remington (1861–1909). All his life Remington was tormented by the thought that he was seen as an "illustrator," not a "fine artist." He was right to worry; his work was entirely illustrative, but as the historian Richard Slotkin and others have pointed out, it has much to say (subliminally, as it were) about the expectations and anxieties of its turn-of-the-century American audience. Its narrative punch, its vividness of composition and cropping also exerted a large influence on the movies, not only in stereotypes—the good cowboy versus the traitorous and savage Indian—but in its details: there are passages in John Ford's Westerns, such as *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, based entirely on Remington's pictures, which in turn (since one hand washes the other) have come to look like action-movie stills.

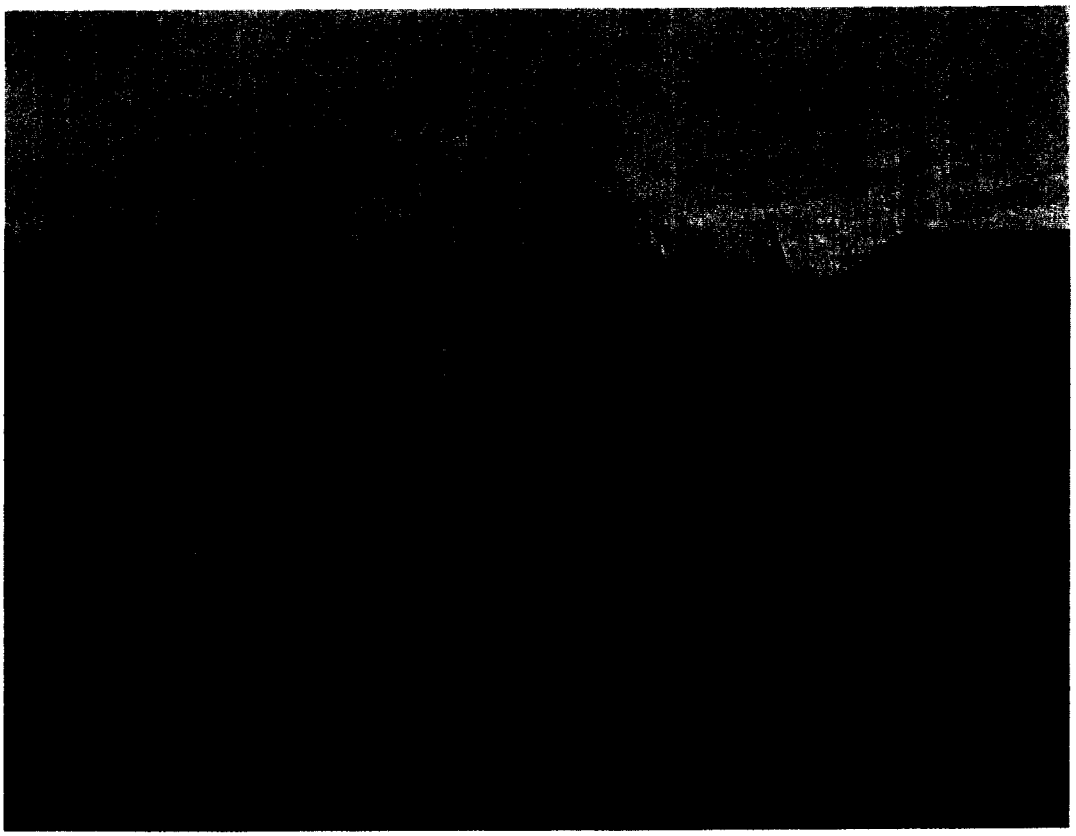
Educated at Yale, Remington had tried his hand at ranching (briefly and unsuccessfully) in Kansas before settling down in New York. Thereafter, he made frequent trips to the West, looking for material. The image he cultivated, that of a hardy denizen of the prairies who had fought in the "Indian wars" with the U.S. Cavalry, was entirely a myth. (Remington could ride, though at forty he was so fat that he could hardly clamber aboard a horse.) He was a facile and prolific draftsman, whose output ran to some twenty-seven hundred paintings and countless sketches. His career took off in the mid-1880s, as a result of his friendship with America's future president, Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt, like Remington (and his writer friend the novelist Owen Wister), believed wholeheartedly in the vanished West as the ground of American virtue. He hired Remington to illustrate one of his early books, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*, and introduced him to magazine editors. The public's appetite for Wild West stories was insatiable by the 1890s, and Remington swiftly became their top illustrator.

He fitted the *Zeitgeist* like a Colt sliding into a well-worn holster. "Manliness" is as much a talisman in Remington's work as it was in Roosevelt's politico-moral vision of "the strenuous life." Rather defensively, he enjoined art students to remember that "to be a successful illustrator is to be fully as much of a *man* as to be a successful painter." He saw the Old West as populated by "men with the bark on"; now (he wrote to his wife in 1900) "I shall never come to the West again.—It is all brick buildings—derby hats and blue overhauls—it spoils my earlier illusions." His entire imagination revolved, in a naïve way, around the vision of an Arcadia of noble violence, a black-and-white (or rather, red-and-white) world of frontier conflict, of displacement, and, in the end, of loss.

Hence, one of his favorite themes was the Last Stand, the back-to-the-wall defense of the white man's values against all the odds. Hard-bitten cowpokes down in a waterhole, their Winchesters pointed at the Indians galloping around them (Figure 123); Custer and his men huddled together on their hillock, holding out to the last cartridge. Such images had a very clear metaphorical life. Their core

122. Albert Bierstadt, *The Last of the Buffalo*, c. 1889.
Oil on canvas, 71¼ × 119¼″ (180.9 × 302.9 cm).
The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; gift of Mrs. Albert Bierstadt.





123. (above) Frederic Remington, *Fight for the Waterhole,* 1903. Oil on canvas, 27¼ × 40¼″ (69 × 102 cm). The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; The Hogg Brothers Collection, gift of Miss Ima Hogg.

124. (below) Charles Schreyvogel, *Defending the Stockade,* c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 28 × 36″ (71.1 × 91.4 cm). Oklahoma Publishing Company, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

was an obsessive sense of doom. Turn-of-the-century America was filled with anxiety about immigration: many of Anglo-Saxon stock felt imperiled by a rising tide of racial "impurity." The idea of a beleaguered white society holding out against invasion was close to Remington's own hotly xenophobic heart. "Jews, Injuns, Chinamen, Italians, Huns!" he declared in a letter, "rubbish of the earth. . . . I've got some Winchesters and when the massacring begins I can get my share of them, and what's more, I will." The Last Stand, in Remington and others, entailed a reversal. The Indian became the cruel invader; the white became the native, the true owner of the West and of America. And there is no hope in sight: Charles Schreyvogel in *Defending the Stockade*, c. 1905 (Figure 124), leaves little doubt that the troopers will soon be overwhelmed by the hordes clambering over the wooden border of their enclosed world. Such images had a political dimension as well. In 1876 the American press made close connections between the defeat of Custer and the agitation by labor radicals in the cities. In the eyes of many conservatives, universal suffrage was a menace to civilization: it endowed "alien hordes" with more power. The Last Stand symbolized the closing of the frontier, but also served as a warning of what could happen if the lower orders—freed blacks in the South, immigrant workers in the North—began to claim their rights and take over government and industry. Custer could never have become such a powerful symbol if his doom did not represent such powerful anxieties. They were not to be assuaged until Theodore Roosevelt led the charge of his Rough Riders up San Juan Hill, thus redeeming the memory of Custer's defeat and symbolically baptizing Americans as what Roosevelt called "one of the great fighting races." In this way Manifest Destiny was adapted to an age of immigration, and the West underwent one more mutation as it receded from the experience of most Americans. It is hard to imagine what Remington, had he lived into the golden years of the Hollywood Western, would have thought of the continuing influence that his paintings exerted on the form. For everything his work transmitted was taken up and expanded by an industry owned and run by the "rubbish of the earth" he hated and feared: Samuel Goldwyn, Carl Laemmle, and other studio heads, the Jews who re-created the West. Nobody, in the end, was more faithful to the primal vision of America, or did more to promote it, than its European immigrants and their children.

125. Anonymous, *Charles Schreyvogel Painting on the Roof of His Apartment Building in Hoboken, New Jersey*, 1903. National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.