

A Painting in Context

Carl Wimar: Artist of the American West



Daguerreotype portrait of Carl Wimar, early 1850s.

Carl Wimar was born in Germany in 1828 and in 1844, at the age of fifteen, moved with his family to the United States. They settled in St. Louis, Missouri, which was a popular destination for Germans fleeing the political and economic upheaval in their country. At the time Missouri was the westernmost state in the country and St. Louis its westernmost city. By 1849 it was a departure point for wagon trains heading into the vast, little-known western territories along the Santa Fe and National Trails. It was also an important center in the fur trade and Wimar's father had a public house that was very close to the encampment for Indian traders. As a young man Wimar would have come into contact with both frontiersmen and Indians; he was particularly fascinated by Indians and friendly with some.



A. Janicke & Co., *Our City*, circa 1859. This map shows a bird's-eye view of St. Louis, Missouri, Wimar's home town, from above the Mississippi River. At the time St. Louis was the westernmost city in the United States.



RIGHT Wimar dressed in buckskins, 1858. In Germany Wimar, who had a dark complexion and hair, was sometimes mistaken for an Indian, a notion that he cultivated by occasionally dressing like one. Sometimes he entertained his fellow artists with performances of Indian war dances.

In late 1851, having decided to become an artist, Wimar returned to Germany for his formal training. Like many American painters at the time, he went to Düsseldorf, drawn there by the presence of Emmanuel Leutze, a German-American history painter of international renown. While in Düsseldorf, Wimar—an ambitious young artist trying to carve out a niche for himself—decided to specialize in historical landscapes of the American West. This was a way for him to articulate a distinctive identity abroad as an “American” painter; he wrote to his parents that “Indian and American topics in general seem to be especially well-liked here, and there is nobody else who does them.”* With these paintings Wimar established the American frontier as a valid subject for history painting. In 1856, he departed Germany with two of his masterpieces, *Attack on an Emigrant Train* and *The Abduction of Daniel Boone's Daughter by the Indians*. He hoped to make a name for himself in the United States with these works and he traveled around the country exhibiting them to a public eager for images of the storied West.



Emmanuel Leutze, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, 1851 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Emmanuel Leutze (1816-1868) was, like Wimar, a German-born American artist. He was one of the most successful painters of the time, and perhaps best known in the United States as the painter of this work, which depicts Washington's attack on the Hessians at Trenton on December 25, 1776. The painting caused a sensation both in Germany and the U.S. when it was exhibited in 1851; it was reproduced in engraving in 1853, and copied many times.

*R. Stewart, J. Ketner II, and A. Miller, *Carl Wimar: Chronicler of the Missouri River Frontier* (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1991), 44.



ABOVE Carl Wimar, *Buffalo Hunt*, 1861 (Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri).

ABOVE RIGHT Carl Wimar, *Portrait of an Indian (Bear Rib)*, circa 1860 (Mr. and Mrs. Gerald P. Peters, Santa Fe, New Mexico).

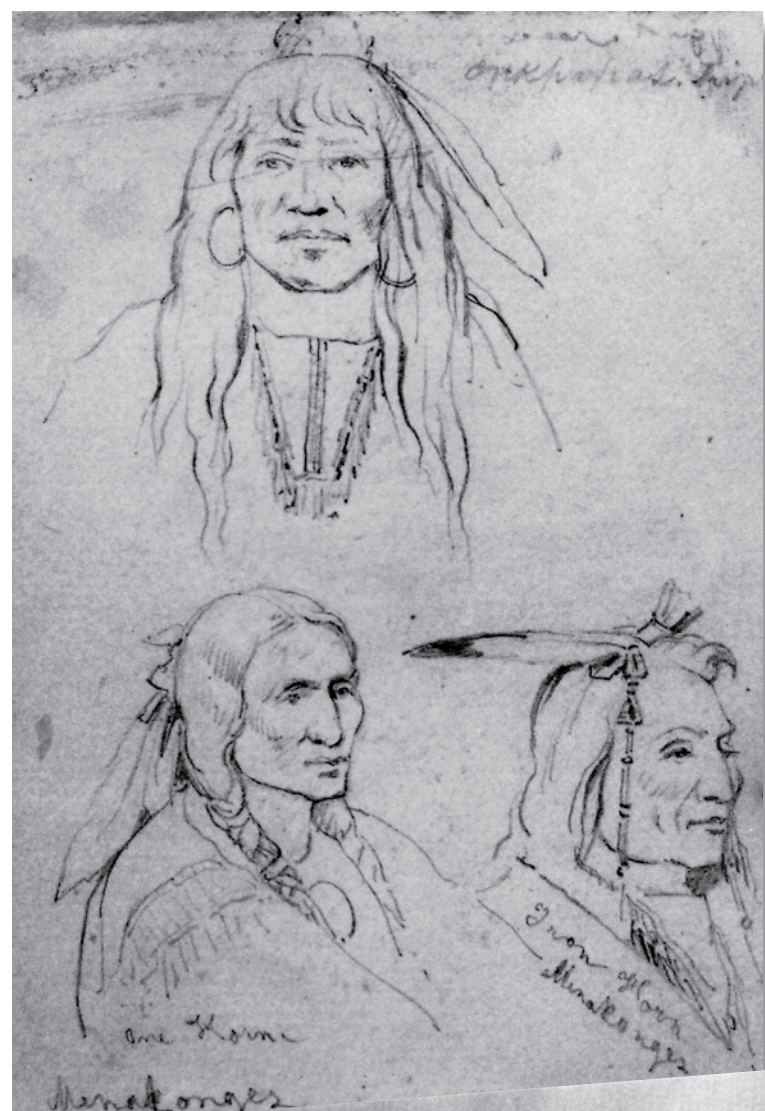
RIGHT Carl Wimar, *The Abduction of Daniel Boone's Daughter by the Indians*, 1855 (Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas).

Wimar did become a successful artist upon his return to the United States and *Attack on an Emigrant Train* a well-known and influential painting. He continued throughout his career to specialize in painting scenes of the American frontier and Indian life. His career, however, was short: he died of consumption in 1862 at the age of 34, soon after completing a set of murals on the settling of the West in the St. Louis Courthouse rotunda.



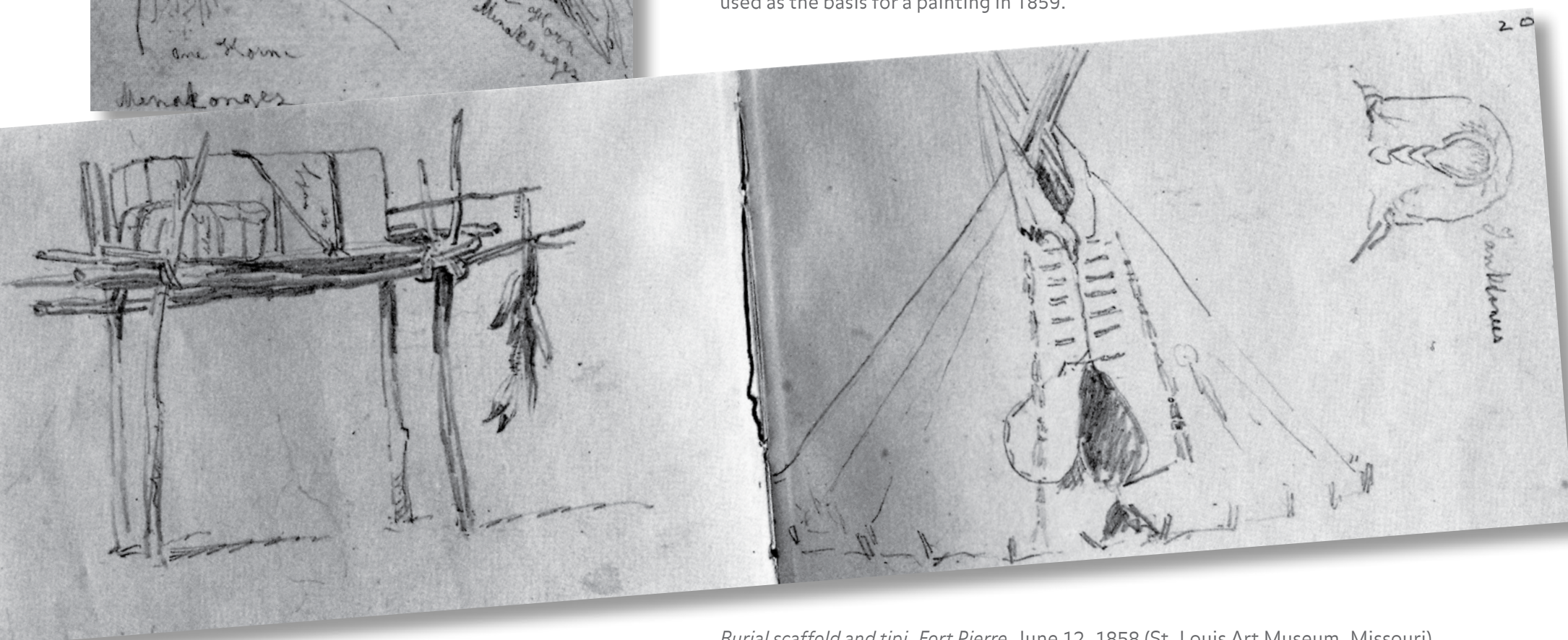
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The Artist's Journey



Ankara graves at Fort Clark, June 25, 1859 (Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts). These drawings suggest that on his trips Wimar was interested in recording different aspects of Indian life. In addition to sketching detailed likenesses of the people he encountered, he seems to have been particularly interested in living structures and burial practices.

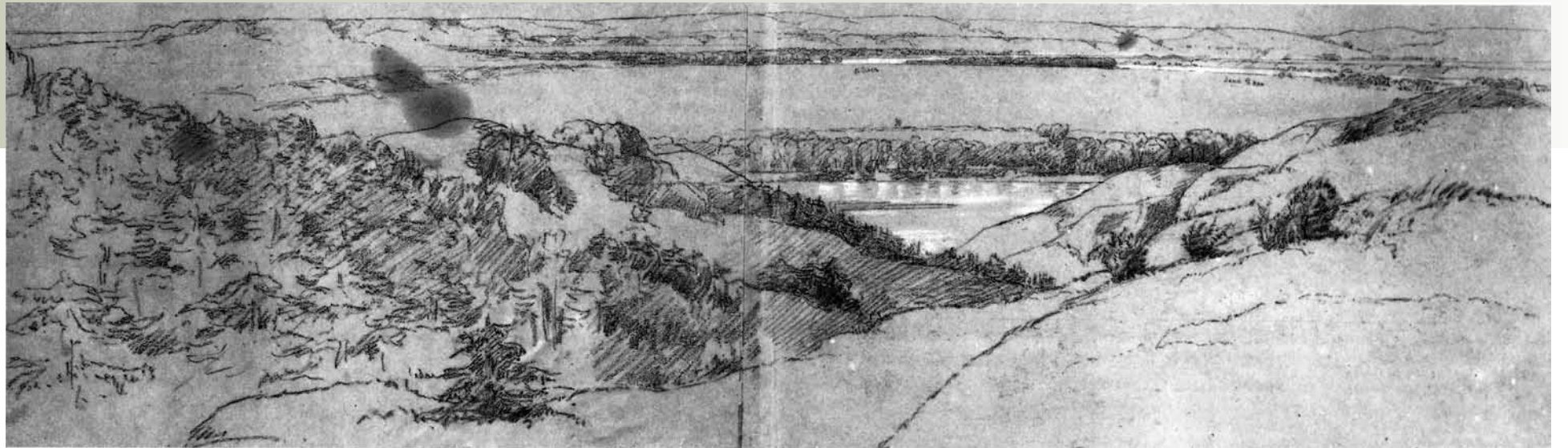
LEFT *Sketches of Bear Rib, One Horn, Iron Horn, circa June 7, 1858* (St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri). This page from Wimar's sketchbook, the contents of which sequentially follow the course of his 1858 trip up river, presents portraits of three well-known chiefs, all identified by inscriptions. Contemporary photographs confirm that these are close likenesses. The drawing of Bear Rib was used as the basis for a painting in 1859.



Burial scaffold and tipi, Fort Pierre, June 12, 1858 (St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri).

At the time Wimar painted *Attack on an Emigrant Train* he had no first-hand experience of the frontier. For the subjects and details of his paintings he relied on illustrated accounts, books by popular authors like James Fenimore Cooper, and his collection of Indian artifacts. He finally visited the frontier after he returned from Germany, making the arduous journey to the upper reaches of the Missouri River in both 1858 and 1859. Wimar set out with many small objects that he hoped to trade for Indian artifacts along the way, intending to take them back to St. Louis to use in future paintings. He wrote that he procured “a variety of curiosities, costumes, arms, and accoutrements”* in this way. During these trips he also photographed and sketched the Sioux, Crow, and Blackfoot Indians of the region. The paintings he made afterwards are different in character than those, like *Attack on an Emigrant Train*, that he completed in Germany. These later works tend to be mournful records of a vanishing race and culture rather than heavily symbolic stagings of the hostile interactions among Indians and white settlers.

*Carl Wimar: *Chronicler of the Missouri River Frontier*, 93.



View of the Missouri River across the Great Bend, June 16, 1859 (Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis).

“THERE WAS A VAST EXTENT OF COUNTRY BENEATH AND AROUND US. Westward rose the famous Medicine Hill, and in the opposite direction were the wanderings of the Missouri for many miles, and from the distance we were from it, the river appeared as if a small, very circuitous streamlet.”*

—Wimar’s description of the Missouri River



Carl Wimar, *Buffalo Hunt*, 1860 (Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis, Missouri). Though Wimar was by no means alone in painting buffalo scenes, his version of the hunt is considered to be very accurate and probably the product of first hand experience; on his trips up the Missouri he made detailed studies of buffalo killed along the way. This painting influenced many subsequent depictions of the subject.

This section is based on Carl Wimar: *Chronicler of the Missouri River Frontier*.

*Carl Wimar: *Chronicler of the Missouri River Frontier*, 153.

All from photos from Carl Wimar: *Chronicler of the Missouri River Frontier*.



Indian Encampment on the Big Bend of the Missouri River, 1860 (Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma).

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Visual Storytelling

Attack on an Emigrant Train is an account of a fictionalized event based on a book by a French author, read by a German-American artist who had never visited the frontier, while working in Germany. Like a story, which is told in a particular way according to the teller and the situation, a painting is a construct—the result of a series of choices on the part of the artist that cater to specific audiences. For details of the painting Wimar relied on illustrated books and prints as well as Indian artifacts from his personal collection. These sources were creatively altered to suit both the composition and the message of the painting. The artist's choices encourage certain kinds of interpretations, or readings.



How does Wimar's painting present this story of the confrontation of Indians and settlers in the western territories?

Decide for yourself: what is the story?

Can you find other details that support this interpretation of this painting?

There is evidence that wagon trains coursed the trail in horizontal lines, rather than in caravans; here the seemingly endless line of wagons is a metaphor suggesting that the battle is only a temporary setback to the inevitable expansion of the United States across the continent.

The Indians' traditional dress leaves their muscular bodies exposed, reinforcing the notion of their savage and primitive nature.

The wagons appear to have been modeled on European market carts rather than the so-called Prairie Schooners that made the trip across the American frontier.

The settlers are shown in clothing that would have been familiar to most viewers; it substantially covers their bodies—a sign that they are "civilized."

The group of settlers includes women and children, who shelter in the wagon tending the wounds of the sick; thus the Indians appear to be brutes that kill the most vulnerable. Women were often invoked as the great civilizing force of the frontier and the key to the future prosperity of the new territories.

Though the settlers are under attack, their shots have successfully hit two Indians and a count shows they are holding their own; it seems they will be the victors not just here but in their settlement of the West.

The Indians ride fast moving horses that swiftly descend upon the slow moving wagon train.

The prairie grass is inaccurately depicted.

Though the Indians were using rifles by the 1840s, here they are shown, as is common in popular images of hostile encounters with whites, using traditional weapons. This reinforces the idea that they are both savage and, just as important, technologically inferior, suggesting at once that they are doomed to extinction and that U.S. policies of limiting their rights—and worse—are justified.



George Catlin, *Chée-ah-ka-tchéé, Wife of Nót-to-way*, 1835-36 and *Buffalo Bull's Back Fat, Head Chief, Blood Tribe*, 1832 (both National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.).

Even people living at the same time can experience the same events very differently, and these experiences influence their perspective.

A white person living in the United States in the nineteenth century, for example, would likely have had a different perspective on the continental expansion of the United States than a Native American. Here are a few voices that suggest what the settling of the frontier might have been like for whites and Native Americans in the middle part of the nineteenth century.



William Ranney, *Advice on the Prairie*, circa 1853 (Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming)



William Ranney, *Prairie Fire*, 1858 (Private collection).

The Settler's Perspective

The mass migration to the western parts of the United States was the largest in the country's peacetime history; it is estimated that some years over 7000 people set out on this journey. The poorly marked route to the Oregon Territories wound 2000 miles through difficult and inhospitable terrain, crossing through uncultivated prairies, dangerous rivers, and enormous mountain ranges. The settlers who undertook the journey often organized into parties of several wagons for mutual aid and protection. John Wentworth of Illinois vividly described the hardships of life on the trail:

"Only think of it, men, women, and children forsaking their homes, bidding farewell to all the endearments of society, setting out on a journey of over two thousand miles, upon a route where they have to make their own roads, construct their own bridges, hew out their own boats, and kill their own meat; and undergoing every diversity of pain from agues, chills, sprains and bruises; where twenty miles is an average day's travel, exposed to every variety of weather, and the naked earth their only resting place! In sickness they have no physician; in death there is no one to perform the last sad offices. Their bodies are buried by the wayside, to be exhumed and defiled by the Indians, or devoured by the wolves."^{*}

^{*}W.H. and W.N. Goetzmann, *The West of the Imagination* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), 115; [†]D. Glanz, *How the West Was Drawn: American Art and the Settling of the Frontier* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI, 1982), 53; [‡]M. Baigell, "Territory, Race, Religion," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* (1990), 3-21, 5.

Photos: Pioneers from L. Bantel and P. Hassrick, *Forging an American Identity: the Art of William Ranney* (Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming, 2006); Catlin paintings from CAMIO.



George Catlin, *Bird's Eye View of the Mandan Village, 1800 Miles above St. Louis*, 1837-39 (National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.).

The Native American Perspective

The historical record is largely without Native American accounts of the experience of being displaced from their traditional lands during the settling of the United States, so we must rely on contemporary historians to speak for their experience:

By the 1850s and 60s, "the presence of emigrant trains passing through Indian territories was beginning to annoy the tribes who occupied the Plains regions and who had been guaranteed by the U.S. government that their tenure of prairie lands would not be violated. At first the Indians granted safe passage across the prairies to the emigrant parties. However, when pioneers began to wreak havoc on game supplies and to encroach on lands reserved to the Indians, the Indians lost patience and began to retaliate with attacks on wagon trains and on parties of white trappers and hunters."[†]

"Imagine ... that strangers appear in your backyard one day, announcing that they represent a superior civilization; they demand that you leave your property or be killed. Would you resist or comply?" Yet "the native Americans are shown as marauders, and the whites, the real plunderers who are seizing their lands, are portrayed as defenders."[‡]

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Visualizing Manifest Destiny



Emmanuel Leutze, *Study for Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way*, 1861 (National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.). The idea of the West and an American Empire was so intrinsic to national identity that a 20 by 30 foot mural painting of the subject was used to decorate the staircase of the House of Representatives. In this exultant vision of manifest destiny, settlers look out at the promised land, a group on the hill resembles the Holy Family, and a figure on a mountain peak waves his hat and prepares to raise a flag as huge numbers of mountain men and emigrants continue to move west. The medallions below contain Daniel Boone and William Clark framing a view of the Pacific Ocean.



John Gast, *American Progress*, 1872 (Museum of the American West, Los Angeles, California). This image was commissioned for Crofutt's *Overland Tourist and Pacific Coast Guide* and seen by thousands. The text used to market the print leaves no doubt as to its meaning:

The 1830s-50s were an age of expansion in the United States, and the borders of the country were constantly moving. As American identity became tied to the frontier and the pioneering spirit, paintings of the West proliferated, especially after the mid-1840s. The many mid-nineteenth-century images that show settlers crossing rivers, plains, and mountains in wagons, encountering Indian attacks and prairie fires, looking out at the Promised Land from mountain tops, and building or living in cabins and settlements are often invested with patriotic and political significance. Such images were closely bound up with the idea of Manifest Destiny, the name given to the concept that it was the obvious and inevitable future of the United States to, in the words of the man who coined the phrase, “overspread and possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us.”* This meant that since the United States was founded on the principle of democracy—a superior philosophy of state—it was its right and duty to settle the continent from coast to coast and, and accordingly, could expel from the land anyone else who asserted a claim to it, whether Native American, Mexican, or British.

This rich and wonderful country—the progress of which at the present time, is the wonder of the old world—was until recently, inhabited exclusively by the lurking savage and wild beasts of prey... In the foreground, the central and principal figure, a beautiful and charming Female, is floating westward through the air bearing on her forehead the “Star of Empire”... In her right hand she carries a book... the emblem of education and the testimonial of our national enlightenment, while with the left hand she unfolds and stretches the slender wires of the telegraph, that are to flash intelligence throughout the land. On the right of the picture is a city, steamships, manufactories, schools and churches over which beams of light are streaming and filling the air—indicative of civilization. The general



George Caleb Bingham, *Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers Through the Cumberland Gap*, 1851-52 (Washington University Gallery of Art, Saint Louis, Missouri). Here Daniel Boone is represented as a new Moses, leading the chosen people towards the Promised Land of the western frontier. Rebecca Boone, riding the horse and reminiscent of the Virgin Mary, symbolizes both the courageous spirit of pioneer women and the promise of reproduction and thus family life, the basis of community and, eventually, government and statehood.

tone of the picture on the left declares darkness, waste and confusion. From the city proceed the three great continental lines of railway.... Next to these are the transportation wagons, overland stage, hunters, gold seekers, pony express, pioneered emigrant and the warrior dance of the “noble red man.” Fleeing from “Progress”... are Indians, buffaloes, wild horses, bears, and other game, moving Westward, ever Westward, the Indians... turn their despairing faces towards, as they flee, the wondrous vision. The “Star” is too much for them.... What home... should be without this Great National Picture, which illustrates in the most artistic manner all the gigantic results of American Brains and Hands!’



ABOVE Fanny Palmer, *Across the Continent or Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way*, 1868. The left side of this painting features a bustling town with a prominent school—the foundation of “enlightened citizenry.” Telegraph and railroad lines—symbols of progress and technological superiority—physically divide the white community from the Indians on the right side of the painting. As the Indians look on from astride their horses, a reminder of their nomadic (rather than agrarian) lifestyle, they are partially obliterated by smoke from the train. A print of this painting was widely distributed by Currier and Ives.

LEFT Thomas Cole, *The Hunter’s Return*, 1845 (Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas). The homes of pioneer families frequently appear in paintings; these were understood to be the first step in establishing secure and prosperous communities like the one pictured by Fanny Palmer. Such paintings often include representatives of family life, which was considered the chief agent in the civilizing process. Here trees have been cleared in order to build the home and a garden has been planted, both examples of improving the land, which justified American expansion west over the interests of others.

The notion that the United States had claims to the land that transcended laws, customs, and other people’s rights was based on several interwoven beliefs. On the one hand, Americans were understood to be God’s chosen people, with a consequent right to the Promised Land. At the same time, the theories of Darwin and others suggested to many that society should evolve (just as species did) from a less to a more developed state; since the American settlers intended to improve the land, unlike its earlier custodians, by farming, building communities, and instituting government and the Christian religion, they were thought to be bringing a more evolved culture to the frontier and contributing to the progress of civilization. Paintings like Wimar’s *Attack on an Emigrant Train* that show violent confrontations between settlers and Indians suggested implicitly that the removal of those peoples who stood in the way of progress was justified, but so did images of railroads, and pioneers building houses and establishing communities.

Andrew Melrose, *Westward the Start of Empire Takes its Way—Near Council Bluffs, Iowa*, circa 1865 (E.W. Judson, New York). The trans-continental railway allowed settlers (and commercial goods) to travel in five or six days the distance it took five or six months to cover in a wagon on the Overland Trail; it was crucial to the eventual conquest of the West. Here, as the train rushes forward toward the deer crossing the track, there is a sense of its unstoppable force. A small log cabin to the left is lit by the rising sun.



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Encountering Indians: Cultures in conflict

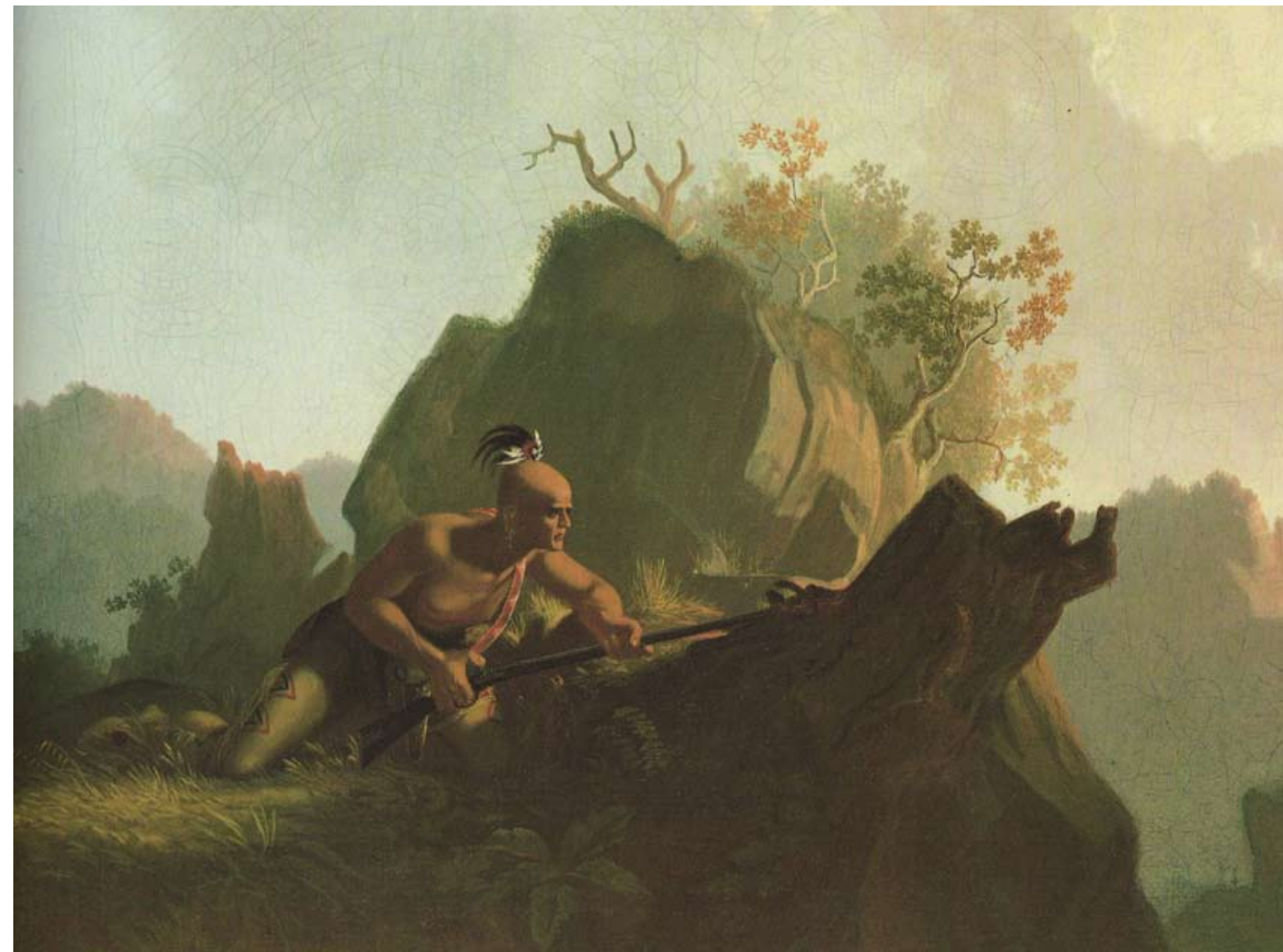


LEFT Carl Wimar, *The Captive Charger*, 1854 (The St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri). In this painting Wimar illustrates the conflict between the U.S. Cavalry and Indians; its original title was *Indians as Horse Thieves*. It shows a group of Indians who have just stolen the white horse of an American cavalry officer; they carry a sack of booty on a rifle. It would have been understood that they have just ambushed a scouting party, but it is also made clear that their act of defiance will fail: the light is waning and the men look around nervously as if they are being hunted.



RIGHT Theodore Kaufmann, *Railway Train Attacked by Indians*, 1867 (The John F. Eulich Collection, Dallas, Texas). Many exaggerated accounts of Indians attacking railroad workers were published in the 1860s and here such a confrontation is visualized. Indians are pictured in the act of removing a metal tie from the railroad track in order to derail the train bearing down upon them and kill its innocent victims; this would have been understood as an attempt to stop the progress of white civilization itself, whose technological superiority is symbolized by the train. This image, and others like it, was widely circulated in prints.

As westward expansion got underway after 1835, a fervent patriotism caused a change in the representations of Indians from romanticized denizens of the wilderness to barbaric savages in conflict with white civilization. Indians were often cast, as they are in Wimar's *Attack on an Emigrant Train*, as villains preventing the peaceful appropriation of western lands. As one congressman described in 1825, "[t]he contest ... was for the existence of our infant settlements, and for the attainment of that power by which a civilized and Christian people might safely occupy this promised land of civil and religious liberty. It was then to be regarded as a struggle for supremacy, between savages and civilized men, between infidels and Christians."* Though scenes of violent fighting like Wimar's were rare, many images evidence a similar desire to depict the white man in stark opposition to the Indian, along with a tendency to reinforce and perpetuate racist stereotypes, pervasive in the culture at the time, of Indians as blood-thirsty savages.



George Caleb Bingham, *The Concealed Enemy*, 1845 (Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas). This painting, completed the same year as the expression "manifest destiny" was coined, shows the Indian as a hostile savage waiting to attack an unseen victim, understood to be a white settler. The Indian is, unusually for paintings like this, armed with a gun; though Indians had guns by the 1840s, it is more common for them to be shown using traditional weapons (as they are in Wimar's *Attack*), which reinforced the idea that they were not only savage, but doomed to extinction on account of their technological inferiority.

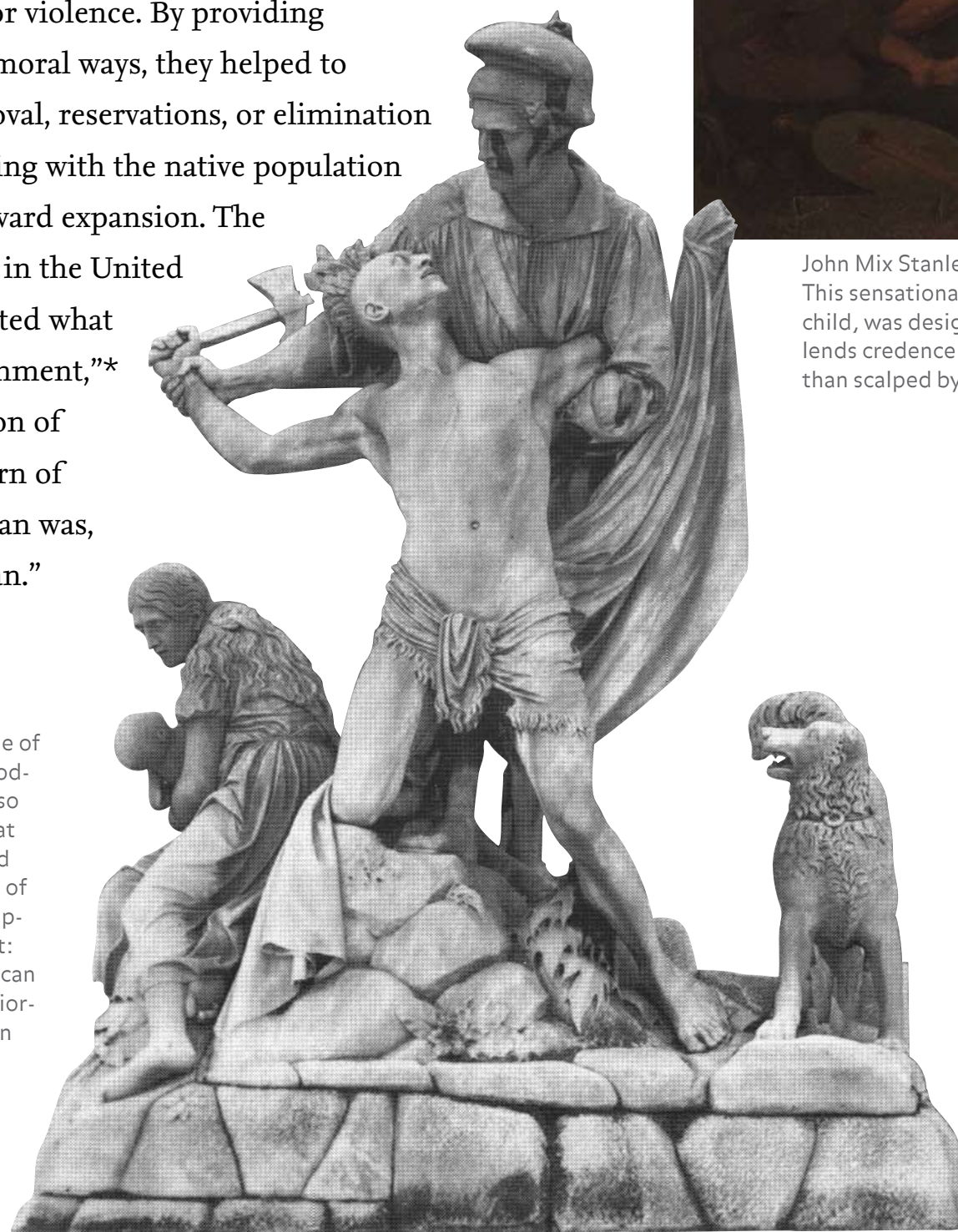
*D. Glanz, *How the West Was Drawn: American Art and the Settling of the Frontier*, 15.

The notion of the innocence of whites and their status as victims rather than aggressors implicit in *Attack on an Emigrant Train* was quite explicit in the many paintings of white women falling into Indian hands. This was a popular and commercially viable subject with long roots in American culture—indeed the “captivity narrative” is the first genre of American literature, dating back to the Puritans. These titillating images confirmed popular beliefs about Indians’ sexual promiscuity and propensity for violence. By providing evidence of their uncivilized and immoral ways, they helped to convince the public that Indian removal, reservations, or elimination was the only adequate means of dealing with the native population that was standing in the way of westward expansion. The deeply ingrained hostility to Indians in the United States in the nineteenth century created what one scholar has called “a fatal environment,”* which fostered the near-extirpation of the nation’s native peoples. By the turn of the twentieth century, a popular slogan was, “the only good Indian is a dead Indian.”

Horatio Greenough, *The Rescue* (1837). The theme of the woman and child—the personifications of goodness and innocence—threatened by savages was so pervasive and important to American identity that this sculpture, now destroyed, was commissioned for the U.S. Capitol. Here, however, the triumph of civilization over savagery is emphasized as the captives are rescued. In 1859 an observer noted that: “the group told its story of the peril of the American wilderness, the ferocity of the Indians, the superiority of the white man, and how and why civilization crowded the Indian from his soil.”¹

*R. Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: Atheneum, 1985);¹D. Glanz, *How the West Was Drawn: American Art and the Settling of the Frontier*, 67.

Photos: Wimar from Carl Wimar: *Chronicler of the Missouri River Frontier*; Greenough from ArtStor; all other images from *Masterpieces of Western American Art*.



John Mix Stanley, *Osage Scalp Dance*, 1845 (National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.). This sensationalist painting, in which an entire group of half-naked Indians wielding weapons threaten a woman and her young child, was designed to play to the market by arousing feelings of outrage. The accurate rendering of the costumes and weapons lends credence to the fictionalized subject, but there is evidence that more white women and children were killed by white men than scalped by Indians.

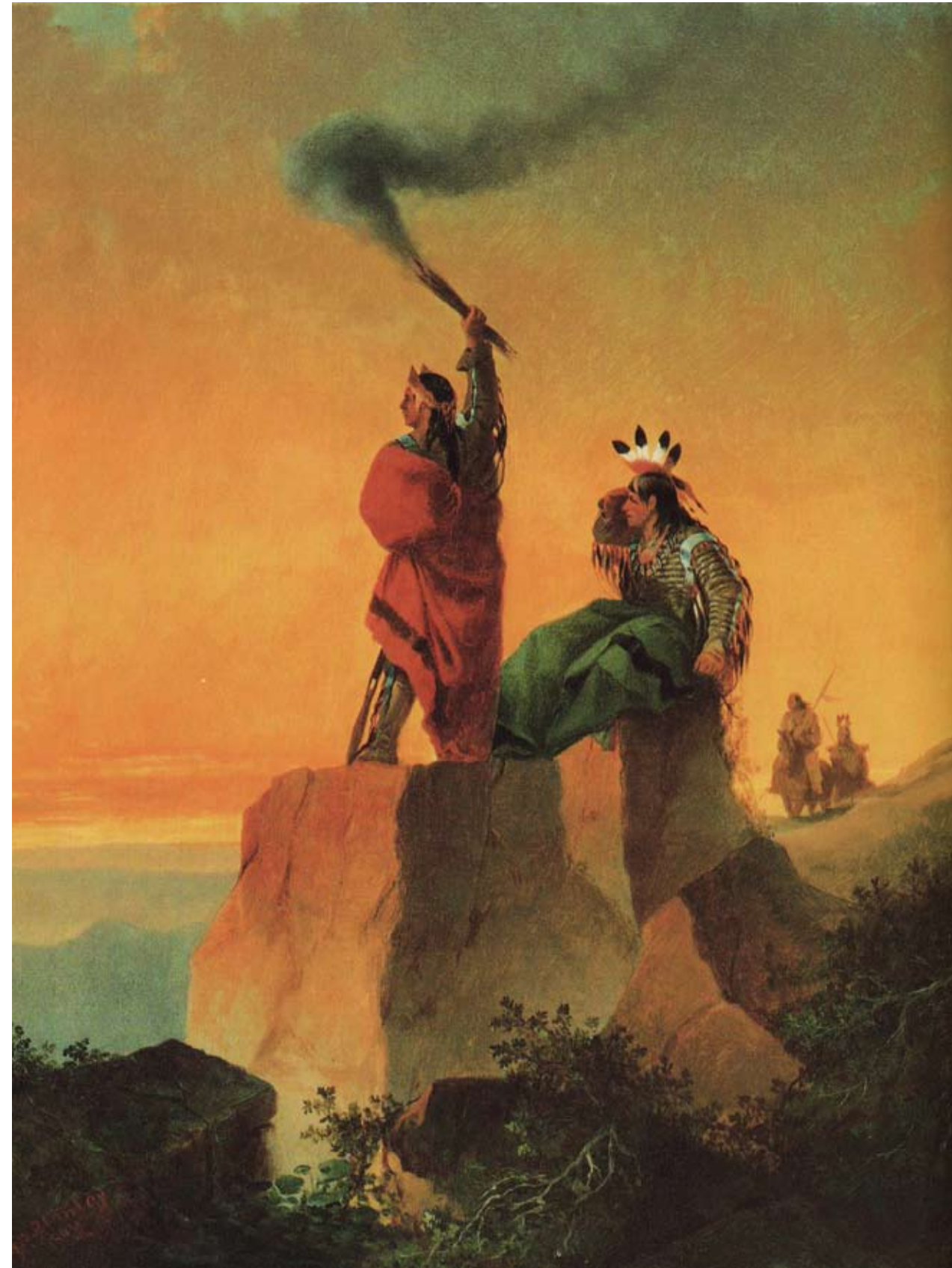
Carl Wimar, *Abduction of Daniel Boone’s Daughter by the Indians*, 1853 (Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis, Missouri). According to legend, Jemima Boone was collecting flowers when she was captured by Indians. This popular subject was frequently illustrated; Wimar painted it four times, and his second version of it was intended, with *Attack on an Emigrant Train*, to make his reputation in the U.S. In this earlier version, Jemima clasps her hands together, pleading for mercy from her captors and praying to God. She is overtly sexualized: her dress has fallen off her shoulder and one man leers at her, suggesting the violation she may suffer in captivity. Paintings like these helped to create support for the aggressive confrontation of the “Indian problem.”



Idealized Indians: Noble and Doomed



Charles Bird King, *Young Omahaw, War Eagle, Little Missouri, and Pawnees*, 1822 (National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.). King did not travel west to see Indians; instead he met them in Washington when they came, at the invitation of the government, to sign treaties and were paid the diplomatic compliment of having their portraits painted. These paintings epitomize the idea of the Indian as a Noble Savage in an era when it was hoped that they might be persuaded to abandon their tribal traditions and embrace American culture. The figures are both exotic and fierce, and calm and aristocratic in bearing; the Young Omaha (second from the left) holds his ceremonial weapon, but also wears the medal with the president's likeness that delegates received for signing a peace treaty. King's noble savage portraits represent the end of an era, as policy soon shifted from negotiation to the forcible dispossession of Indians from tribal lands. Already by 1830 there was a sense of needing a record of a race being wiped out by American expansionism, and King's portraits of Indians became the basis for the first museum collection in the U.S.



LEFT John Mix Stanley, *Indian Telegraph*, 1860 (The Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan). Stanley's painting, which was so popular that at least four versions of it were produced during the 1860s as well as chromolithograph prints, presents an image of pre-technological simplicity.



George Catlin, *A Crow Chief on Horseback*, 1857. Unlike King (far left), Catlin traveled west five times from 1830-36, producing 450 oil portraits and scenes of native life that he called his Indian Gallery. His paintings—romantic images of Indians living in an idyllic freedom beyond the bounds of civilization—were reproduced and widely distributed, and still affect the way Indians are viewed today.

So profound was the sense of the destiny of the United States and the faith in its future greatness that even Catlin, a champion of the Indian, critical of U.S. policy towards them and sympathetic to their plight, didn't question their fate. As he said in describing his project: "I have, for many years past, contemplated the noble race of red men who are now... melting away at the approach of civilization... and I have flown to their rescue—not of their lives or their race (for they are *doomed* and must perish), but to the rescue of their looks... [so that] phoenix-like, they may rise from the 'stain on a painter's palette,'... the living monuments of a noble race."* The best he was able to imagine for them was a preserve on which their culture could continue.

**Masterpieces of Western American Art*, 86.



Tompkins H. Matteson, *Last of the Race*, 1847 (New York Historical Society, New York, New York). This was one of the first paintings of a doomed Indian; many more with similar titles followed. The painting was so popular that the American-Art Union offered a print of it to subscribers in the very same year it was produced.

In the 1830s and 40s, the Indian came to embody in the United States the European notion of the Noble Savage—an independent male, unspoiled by and living beyond the bounds of civilization. In many paintings Indians are depicted as the exotic inhabitants of remote and pristine landscapes that suggest the United States is an earthly paradise. They exist in a world completely separate from white civilization, with no reference to the effects of colonization, which brought with it epidemics, alcoholism, and tribal disintegration caused by removal from traditional to distant lands. Instead they are shown as idyllically at one with nature, living in peaceful encampments, canoeing on rivers, hunting game. Though these paintings present on the surface a very different image of the Indian than the savage encountered in Wimar's *Attack* and other paintings, they have something in common. It was, paradoxically, precisely the Indians' closeness to nature that meant they were in need of the civilizing influence of Christian society and thus justified, though perhaps lamentably, the eradication of their culture. Noble or savage, then, the Indian was equally doomed to extinction. Indeed the image of the noble savage gave way in the 1850s and early 1860s to that of the doomed Indian, which proliferated in paintings, prints, and sculptures presenting a romantic fade-out of Indian life. This theme endured throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, except for the period in the late 1860s and 1870s when the Plains Wars with the Indians were at their bloodiest and no artist could afford to lament the passing of the culture.



Carl Wimar, *Funeral Raft of a Dead Chieftan*, 1856 (Gulf State Paper Corporation, Tuscaloosa, Alabama). As in many paintings of Indians as a doomed race, here the mood is calm, stately, and elegiac as a dead chieftan is sent down the river to his final rest.



James Earle Fraser, *End of the Trail*, 1918 (Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, Missouri). Fraser's sculpture of a lone Indian slumped defeated on his horse, his spear no longer raised in combat, was originally made for the Panama-Pacific International Exhibit in San Francisco in 1915, a celebration of American culture that marked the completion of the Panama Canal. The 18-foot plaster original won the gold medal for outstanding sculpture; though Fraser had hoped it would be cast in bronze and set on a cliff looking over the Pacific Ocean, a shortage of funds caused by World War I prevented this. Instead, miniature bronze versions were produced for sale and avidly collected. By the middle of the century, this was one of the most recognizable sculptures in America and can still be seen on belt buckles, calendars, in advertisements, and even signs designating retirement communities.

Images Across the Atlantic



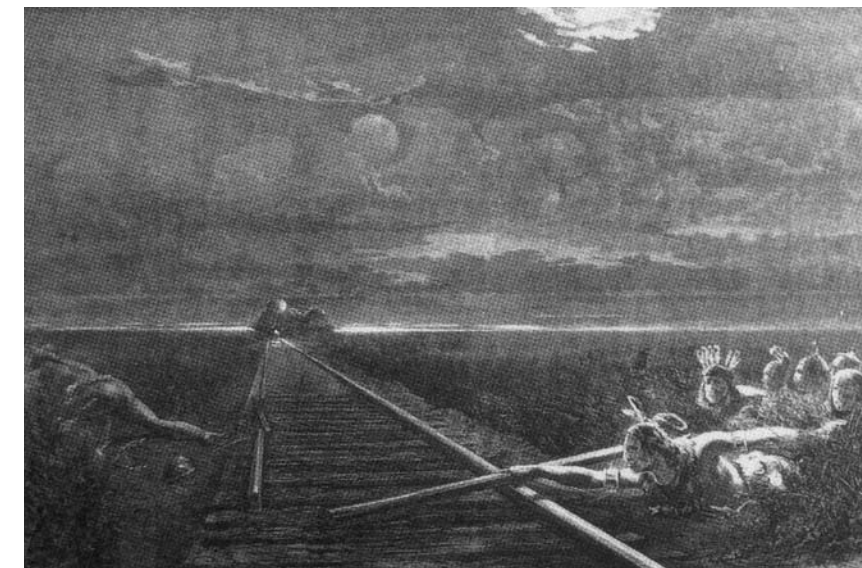
Karl Bodmer, *Head of an Antelope*, 1833, and *Cree Woman*, 1834 (Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska). In 1833 the Swiss-trained artist Karl Bodmer traveled to the United States with his German patron, Alexander Philip Maximilian, Prince of Neuwied. Their project—very much in the tradition of German ethnographic studies—was to survey the “savage species” and document with scientific accuracy both the primitive appearances and habitats of what was believed to be “original man.” On his return to Germany, the prince had the pictures published.

Carl Wimar found a very receptive audience for his work in Germany, where there had long been a fascination with the American West, particularly its vast unspoiled wilderness and native population untainted by civilization. In the mid-nineteenth century further interest in the U.S. was spurred by the huge number of Germans that had emigrated there—approximately 150,000 in the 1830s and 40s, and 100,000 in 1848 alone. These waves of immigration had been triggered by the sociopolitical and economic problems in Germany resulting from the War of 1848; those who left were hoping for greater individual liberties and economic opportunities in the United States, which was considered a place with both abundant natural resources and social and political freedoms. Guidebooks for prospective emigrants often emphasized these qualities and people were curious to know what kinds of experiences emigrants were having.

Indians were thought to be a majestic race, untainted by capitalist value systems, and as Germany rapidly modernized, a sense of longing and empathy developed for their culture, which was seen as being crushed by the onward march of civilization. As victims of an imperialism that decimated their culture, Indians came to stand for America’s worst aspects: a limited sense of tradition; an inadequate appreciation for nature; an overriding concern for business; unbridled greed; and a penchant for destructive acts of violence with little appreciation of their consequences. The Indian was also a metaphor for the evils of the modernizing process in Germany and celebrating Indian culture was a way of criticizing German culture and the narratives of progress that many held suspect. These two pages explore the ways in which the German enthusiasm for Indians has been expressed in myriad and sometimes conflicting ways, in literature, art, and scientific studies, zoos, wild west shows, and theme parks.

Emmanuel Leutze, *Last of the Mohicans*, 1850 (Private collection). The title of the painting is taken from James Fenimore Cooper’s novel, translated into German in 1826. More than any other single author Cooper encouraged the widespread fascination of Germans with Indians and the American West. His western stories, the *Leatherstocking Tales*, appeared in five volumes between 1823 and 41 and a condensed version of them became a staple of youth culture; Wimar may even have read them and absorbed some of their romantic notions of the American West before emigrating to the U.S. at the age of 15.

In this sympathetic and idealizing portrait of an Indian who is both noble and doomed, the majestic figure stands on a rocky outcropping that serves as a pedestal and shares his vantage point with a soaring eagle. But he also rests his weapon against his leg as if resigned to his fate of being the last of his kind, the certainty of the later being reinforced by the dimming light behind him. The painting was inspired by the presence of the Ojibwa Indian, Kah-ge-gah-bowh (Standing Firm) at the third World Peace Conference in Frankfurt in August 1850; he became a powerful emblem of the nationalist aspirations of the 1848 revolutionaries.

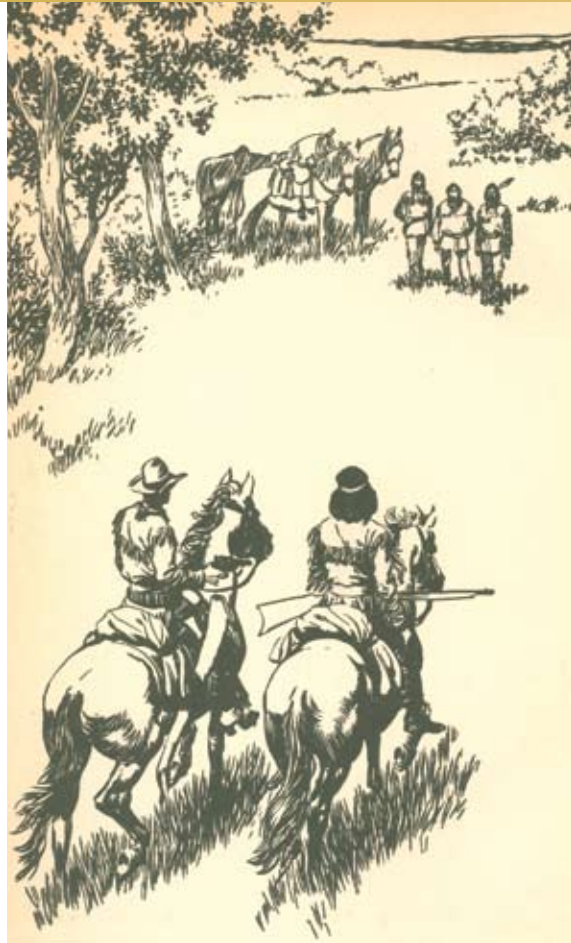


Even a painting like Kaufmann’s *Railway Train Attacked by Indians* was interpreted sympathetically when it appeared as a print in the *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung* in 1869. Rather than being devious enemies, the Indians in the image were regarded by contemporary viewers as using “the weapons of the weak... against the overwhelming power of their opponents,” their actions a desperate act of resistance at a time when “the homeland of these ‘legitimate inhabitants’ [is] more and more restricted,” and “there is no hope to bring to a standstill this penetrating flood that, with its way of life, takes away all the possibility of their continued existence.”*

*Like America: Fictions of the Wild West, 147.

I find myself wanting to be an Indian—to paint my face with the symbols of that race ... to go to the West and face the sun forever—that would be the true expression of human dignity.

– Franz Kafka, *Wunsch, Indianer zu werden* (1914)



LEFT A page from one of Karl May's illustrated stories showing Old Shatterhand (left) and Winnetou (right) and RIGHT Karl May dressed as Old Shatterhand. Karl May's (1842-1912) many books set in the American West have shaped the way millions of Germans view the frontier. Though May never traveled further west than Buffalo, New York, his books are written as first person accounts and claim to describe events he experienced personally. The adventures of his characters Winnetou (the Indian) and Old Shatterhand (a German) are often critical of the evils of society, presenting Indians, who are essentially good and live in harmony with nature, as the innocent victims of white law-breakers. In their time, May's escapist books provided his audience with a reprieve from the ruthless materialism of an industrializing society.

May is probably the most widely-read German author ever; his books have been translated into more than 30 languages, and several were made into films in the 1960s (with Yugoslavia serving as the American West). Einstein has said that he spent his entire adolescence under their spell. An annual Karl May Festival, inaugurated in 1938, still celebrates his characters and the land he mythologized.



ABOVE "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of the Rough Riders" traveled to 23 cities in Germany and Austria in 1890-91 and to another 45 in 1906, bringing the frontier to Europe's door. The show was comprised of 800 actors and 500 animals acting out "historical scenes" detailing how the west was won; the performers included actual Indians—living representatives of a vanishing race—were recruited from several tribes. In these staged reenactments of their historical defeat at the hands of whites, Indians were always portrayed as savage aggressors ultimately defeated by Buffalo Bill. The show was so popular that when it left Germany, the circus entrepreneurs Hans Stosch-Sarrasani and Paul Busch manufactured home-grown Wild West shows that they presented throughout the country.

LEFT *Sioux Indians* advertising poster, Summer 1910. Germany's appetite for the spectacle of the American West continued undiminished, and to capitalize on it, in 1907 Carl Hagenbeck founded a zoo in Stellingen (near Hamburg) where he displayed both animals and humans, including Indians. In the summer of 1910, he set up an entire Indian agency, in which a group of Sioux under Chief Spotted Weasel could be viewed by visitors. There was also a show with a program that included Indian attacks on a log cabin and stagecoach, and horse stealing. This kind of marketing of Indian culture continues to this day: a wild west theme park outside of Munich attracts over 1,000,000 visitors a year.

Attack on an Emigrant Train: The Life and Legacy of a Painting

Carl Wimar, *Study for Attack on an Emigrant Train*, 1854 (St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri). Wimar's earlier painting of this subject, the study for which is seen here, is different in several respects. For one thing, it relies on parallels with religious imagery to convey its message. At the lower right, for example, a white haired and bearded man holds the body of a wounded boy in his arms, while a distraught woman holds one of his hands; this group of figures is modeled after the Deposition of Christ. This helps define the settlers as Christian martyrs, in contrast to the pagan Indians, suggesting they have the moral right to the territory they are entering. Another loaded figure is the black man being handed a gun to join in the defense of the wagon. Probably he is a slave since he wears poorer clothing than those around him and has no weapon of his own, but he is clearly the equal of the settlers in this situation. His appearance here would have been a reminder of the fraught and much debated question of whether to extend slavery into the new territories.



What are other differences and similarities in Wimar's two versions of this subject? Do you think they are equally effective? Which version of the painting do you think is more powerful? Why?



Leopold Grozelier, after Carl Wimar, *On the Prairie*, 1860 (St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri). When Wimar's *Attack on an Emigrant Train* was exhibited in Boston, it was acquired by Missouri Governor Gamble, and then lithographed by Grozelier in 1860 and distributed nationwide. As was typical in the period, it was this print, rather than the painting itself, that had the biggest influence on artists.

U MMA's *Attack on an Emigrant Train* is the second of two versions of the subject that Wimar produced. It became well-known after a print of it was made and widely circulated, and the subject subsequently became a central image in the western myth and a genre unto itself. Though there were literary precedents for it—Wimar's paintings were themselves inspired by the French writer Gabriel Ferry's fictional account, published in 1851, of a caravan of gold seekers on the prairie defending itself against an attack by a group of Indians—before his paintings there were only two visual precedents, and probably neither was well known until he made the subject famous. The legacy of Wimar's painting extends far into the twentieth century: it is fair to say that all subsequent western artists had to consider this painting when treating the subject. It also extends far beyond the history of painting. Though the frontier was indeed a dangerous place, attacks like the one painted by Wimar were the exception rather than the rule. Visualizations of the subject, however, reinforced the belief that attacks were accurate representations of life on the plains. In this sense they did not just reflect prevailing attitudes, but shaped them. Even contemporary society has been influenced by the version of history that such paintings present. The Hollywood moviemaker John Ford, for example, studied western paintings, including Wimar's *Attack*, to give authenticity to the scenes in many of his films; these in turn have influenced the way that millions think of this historical period.

To what extent have images informed your idea of life on the frontier?



Emmanuel Leutze, *Indians Attacking a Wagon Train*, 1863 (Dover Public Library, New Jersey). Even Wimar's teacher, the famous Emmanuel Leutze, was inspired to paint a version of Indians attacking an emigrant train, though he, too, based his work on the Grozelier print rather than Wimar's original painting, which would have been in a private collection at that point. In Leutze's rendering of this subject, the pioneers are attempting to circle their wagons as the dust rising on the horizon warns of the advance of attacking Indians.



Felix O.C. Darley, *Emigrants Attacked by Indians*, 1860 (New York Public Library, New York, New York). Darley copied Grozelier's print shortly after it was issued. Though he never traveled west, he was one of the most successful western illustrators of the era, regularly copying from artists like Wimar and Catlin. By 1860 the genre of Indian attacks in paintings was so well established that Prince Napoleon commissioned Darley to paint it for him as one of four western subjects. These paintings survive only in engravings, as seen here.

This section is based on Carl Wimar: *Chronicler of the Missouri River Frontier*.
 Photos: Remington from *Masterpieces of Western American Art*; Davis and Leutze from *The American West: Out of Myth, into Reality*; all other images from Carl Wimar: *Chronicler of the Missouri River Frontier*.



Theodore Davis, *On the Plains—Indians Attacking Butterfield's Overland Dispatch Coach*, 1866 (Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, Mississippi). Theodore Davis rode the train and then a Butterfield coach across the continent in search of imagery for *Harper's Weekly*,

an important illustrated periodical with a wide readership. Though he claimed to have portrayed only scenes he had witnessed or participated in, it is clear that he has been influenced by previous images of his subject. Like Wimar, he casts the settlers as innocent victims assailed by a ferocious enemy. The close focus on the besieged stagecoach infuses the scene with the high drama his audience sought; popular literature was filled with such images, which were later supplanted by the twentieth century film and television "western."

Frederic Remington, *Downing the Nigh Leader*, circa 1907 (Museum of Western Art, Denver, Colorado). This vivid image of a stagecoach being waylaid by a group of faceless Indians, created for wide distribution as a mass-produced illustration, is clearly descended from Wimar's painting; the Indians are fierce animalistic creatures that are scarcely distinguishable from the horses they ride. In *Stagecoach* (1939), one of his most famous films, John Ford modeled the Indian attack on a stagecoach directly on this painting.



A Timeline of Westward Expansion

1783 — **Treaty of Paris ends Revolutionary War, defining original borders of United States;** Britain cedes a vast amount of Native American territory to the United States without permission.

1787 — **Northwest Ordinance** organizes the Northwest Territory (modern Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota) for settlement. This, the first organized territory in the U.S., established the precedent of expanding the country by the addition of new states. Settlers pour into the region, Indians resist encroachment, and war ensues.

1791 — Vermont admitted as a state.

1792 — Kentucky admitted as a state.

1795 — With the Treaty of Greenville the U.S. begins rapidly to gain title to Indian lands, eventually causing pan-tribal resistance under Tecumseh.

1796 — Tennessee admitted as a state.

1803 — **Louisiana Purchase** adds all of modern day Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and parts of Minnesota, North and South Dakota, New Mexico, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and Louisiana to the U.S.; Ohio admitted as a state.

1803–6 — **Lewis and Clark expedition** produces first map of the upper trans-Mississippi West.

1811–15 — War of 1812 erupts in part because Britain provided military support to Indians resisting the U.S.

1812 — Louisiana admitted as a state.

1813 — **Tecumseh dies in Battle of Thames**, ending Indian resistance in the old Northwest.

1814 — President Jackson personally negotiates a treaty with the Chicasaws to open a large area of present-day Mississippi to white settlement; Creeks defeated at Battle of Horseshoe bend.

1816 — Indiana admitted as a state.

1817 — Mississippi admitted as state.

1818 — Treaty of 1818 establishes 49th parallel as border of British-held lands and Oregon Country (most of present day Idaho and Oregon, all of Washington, part of Montana, and part of British Columbia), shared by British and U.S.; Red River basin (consisting of parts of Minnesota, North and South Dakota) transferred to the U.S.

1819 — **Adams-Onis Treaty** with Spain adds Florida to the U.S. and sets the boundary of U.S. territory and claims through the Rocky Mountains and West to the Pacific Ocean. Alabama admitted as a state.

1820 — Maine admitted as a state.

1821 — Missouri admitted as a state.

1823 — **U.S. Supreme Court rules that Native Americans may occupy lands within the U.S. but cannot hold title to those lands because the "right of occupancy" is subordinate to the "right of discovery."**

1823–24 — **South Pass discovered in Wyoming**, a gradual crossing permitting wagons access through the Rocky Mountains to Oregon, California, and Utah.

1829 — Georgia's state government passes law extending its authority over the lands of the Cherokee Nation.

1830 — **Indian Removal Act** authorizes the president to negotiate treaties that exchange tribal lands in the east for lands acquired in the Louisiana Purchase; numerous treaties signed, paving the way for removing Indians from lands between the Great Lakes and the Gulf of Mexico—territory desirable to land speculators, railroad magnates, bankers, and entrepreneurs. 60,000 Indians from tribes including the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole are eventually removed from traditional lands to Indian Territory west of the Mississippi. Subsequently, Americans are urged to explore and settle the vast territories of the West.

1832 — Treaty of Cusseta ends communal ownership of lands by Creek, assigning tribe members individual allotments that may then be sold. Land speculators and squatters begin to defraud Creek of lands, leading to violence.

1835–41 — Second Seminole War occurs after tribes resist implementation of treaties removing them from Florida; war ends with Seminoles being relocated to Indian Territory in Oklahoma.

1836 — Creeks forcibly removed to Indian Territory west of the Mississippi; Arkansas admitted as a state.

1837 — After Chickasaw sell lands east of the Mississippi to U.S. government, for which they are not paid for 30 years and never in full, Chickasaw Trail of Tears begins: 3001 cross Mississippi River into Indian Territory and 500 die along the way; **Michigan admitted as a state.**

1838 — **Migration to Oregon begins over Oregon Trail;** by 1845, 6000 Americans will have reached Oregon.

1838 — In the winter the forced relocation of the Cherokee begins. The thousand-mile march, later called the **Trail of Tears**, begins in Tennessee and ends in Oklahoma; approximately 4000 Cherokee die along the way from starvation, disease, and exposure.

1842 — Webster-Ashburton Treaty establishes border with Canada.

1845 — Florida and Texas admitted as states.

1846 — Oregon Treaty brings an end to boundary dispute between U.S. and Great Britain in Oregon Country, which is divided at the 49th parallel; Iowa admitted as a state.

1848 — **California gold rush** begins, bringing 90,000 people to the region in 1849 and 200,000 more over the next decade, overwhelming the Hispanic and Indian populations; Wisconsin admitted as a state.

1848 — **Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo** sets boundary with Mexico after end of Mexican American War, giving U.S. parts of modern day Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Wyoming, and all of California, Nevada, and Utah, and establishing Rio Grande as southern border of Texas.

1850 — California admitted as a state.

1851 — **Concentration or Peace Policy devised for western tribes** with goal of persuading them onto reservations north of Nebraska and south of Kansas that were clear of the main transcontinental routes.

1853 — Gadsden Purchase from Mexico gives U.S. the remaining parts of present day Arizona and New Mexico.

1854 — Kansas and Nebraska territory organized and the remaining unorganized land, corresponding to modern eastern Oklahoma, becomes colloquially known as Indian Territory.

1858 — Minnesota admitted as a state; gold discovered in Rocky Mountains sets off gold rush, bringing flood of white emigration through Arapaho and Cheyenne lands.

1859 — Oregon admitted as a state.

1861-65 — **U.S. Civil War.**

1861 — Kansas admitted as a state; Arapaho and Cheyenne agree to a controversial treaty reducing their lands to 1/13 of original size and tribal violence ensues.

1862 — **Homestead Act** grants free land to citizens who live on and improve the land.

1863 — West Virginia breaks from Confederacy and is admitted as a state.

1864 — Colorado militia of 700 massacres a village of peace-seeking Arapaho and Cheyenne on supposedly protected land, killing over 400, many women, and children; Nevada admitted as a state.

1867 — Congress establishes Indian Peace Commission, which recommends that all Plains tribes be moved onto two large reservations, one in present-day Oklahoma and the other in the Dakotas; Alaska purchased from Russian Empire; Nebraska admitted as a state.

1867 — **Open-range cattle ranching** comes to and flourishes in the West for twenty years, giving birth to the cowboy.

1869 — **Union Pacific (first continental railroad) completed.**

1874 — **Gold rush begins in Black Hills**, Dakota territory, encroaching on tribal lands.

1875 — Sioux uprising begins; southern buffalo herd virtually extinguished.

1876 — **Battle of Little Bighorn**, in which Sioux annihilate Custer's federal troops; Colorado admitted as a state.

1877 — Desert Land Act promotes economic development of arid and semi-arid lands in the West; individuals may apply for entry to reclaim, irrigate, and cultivate these lands. Nez Percé Indians resist relocation and are defeated, accepting a reservation treaty.

1878 — Timber and Stone Act allows citizens to buy timber land cheaply, but also enables large corporations to acquire huge tracts of forest land.

1879 — Utes surrender after resisting territorial concessions in western Colorado.

1886 — **Chief Geronimo surrenders**, ending two decades of Apache resistance.

1887 — **Dawes Severalty Act ends communal ownership of Indian lands** and allots Indians individual plots of land, or homesteads, on which to live and farm; adults accepting this offer receive citizenship, but full title to the land is delayed 25 years; surplus land thrown open to whites for homesteading or purchase.

1889 — North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Washington admitted as states.

1890 — **Battle of Wounded Knee**; Wyoming and Idaho admitted as states. Oklahoma territory, corresponding to western half of present-day Oklahoma, is organized from the western portion of Indian Territory and opened to white settlement; **the census bureau announces that the frontier is closed.**

1896 — Utah admitted as state.

1906 — Congress passes Burke Act amending Dawes Act so that Indians become citizens 25 years after receiving land allotments rather than immediately; the Secretary of the Interior is allowed discretionary power to abbreviate this probationary period and permit the sale of these allotments, accelerating the alienation of Indian lands.

1907 — Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory combined and admitted as state of Oklahoma.

1912 — New Mexico and Arizona admitted as states.

1924 — **Native Americans granted U.S. citizenship.**

1959 — Alaska and Hawaii admitted as 49th and 50th states.