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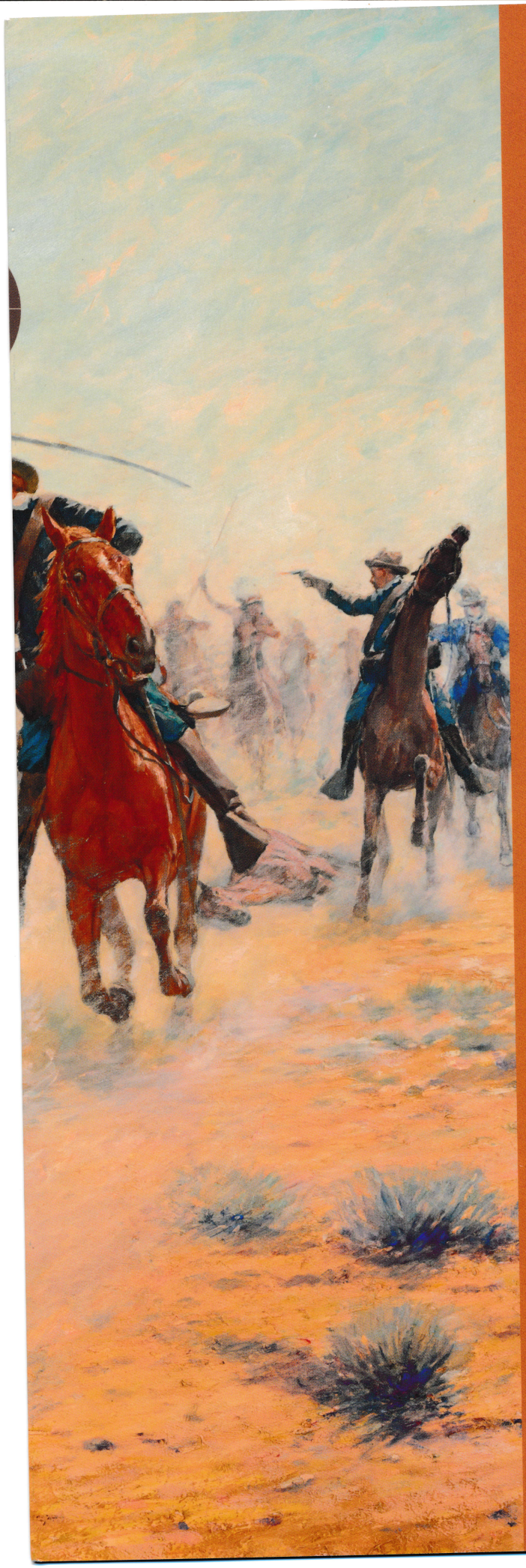
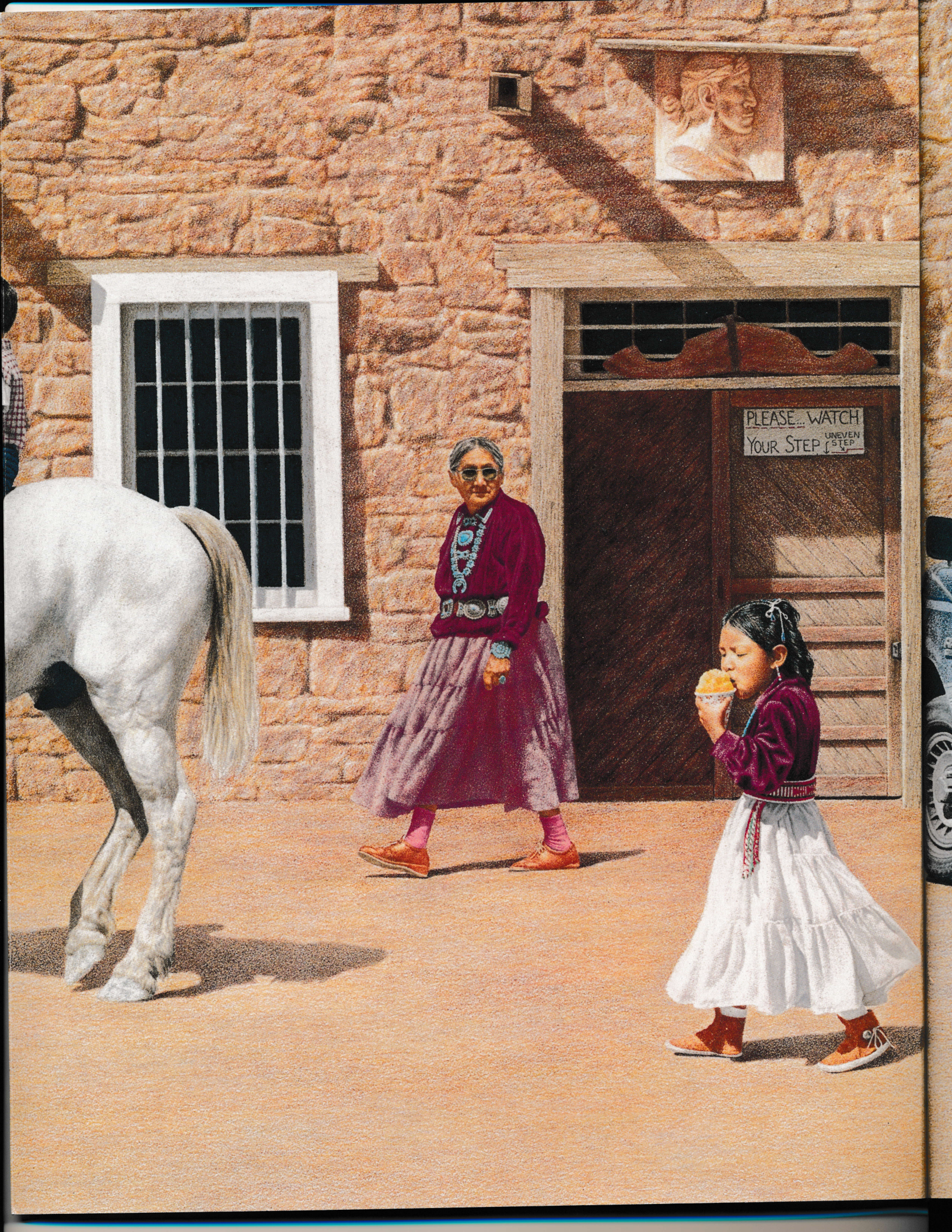


THE JOURNAL OF GILCREASE MUSEUM

Interest in the history of the American West has never waned, and it is once again a hot topic of scholarship and popular culture. Expanding availability of information sources has resulted in a New, New Western History that challenges conventional beliefs. As scholars rethink the ways historians have traditionally viewed the West, new stories are emerging, as illustrated in this journal's essays and artwork: The true story of the long-mythologized Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce exemplifies common mischaracterizations of Native people. The roles of women involved in westward expansion like Carrie Strahorn, who was stereotyped as the consummate pioneer woman, were actually far more complicated and diverse. So few accounts of black migration in the American West have survived, but museum artworks have immortalized some. Environmental historians also have been seeking new stories to tell us how the West came to be. And the life of our own Thomas Gilcrease, who helped shape the country's energy development and land use in the twentieth century, reveals a great deal about Western environmental history.

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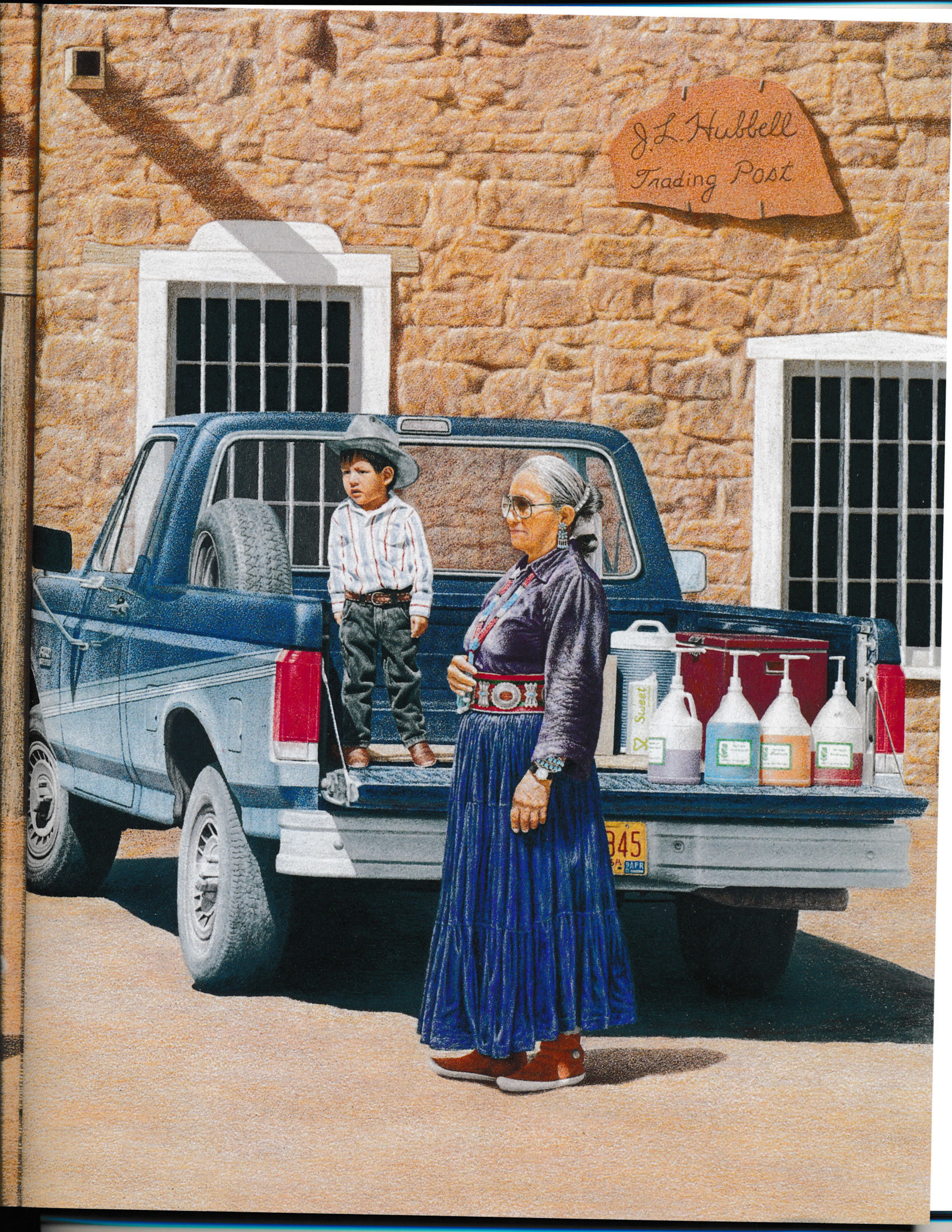
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GILCREASE JOURNAL

WINNER OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUM AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN IN 1998, 1999, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, AND 2015.

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PHOTO CAPTIONS:

FRONT COVER: **Charles Schreyvogel**, United States, 1861–1912, *Breaking through the Line*, early 20th century, oil on canvas. GM 0127.1235

INSIDE FRONT COVER AND PAGE 1: **Steve Forbis**, United States, born 1950, *Saturday Treat at Hubbel Trading Post*, late 20th century, colored pencil on paper. Gift of Jack and Maxine Zarrow, GM 1327.3860

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PAGE 2: **photographer unknown**, *101 Ranch Photograph Postcard, A True Girl of the West*. GM 4327.9050

RIGHT: **Alonzo Chappel**, United States, 1828–1887, *Fate of Jane Wells*, 1856, oil on canvas. GM 0126.1651

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Happy Birthday Mr. Dilorenzo

The New, New Western History

SEEING A MESSIER WESTERN PAST

♦ ♦ ♦

BY ANNE HYDE

For a moment, let's imagine Tulsa businessman, art aficionado, and Creek landowner Thomas Gilcrease (1890–1962) hosting a lunch to celebrate his 128th birthday. Curious about the growth and success of his Western museum, he chooses to celebrate with some historians to find out why people remain so interested in the West. For lunch partners, he's selected one dead historian, Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932), the founding father of Western history, and one living historian, Patricia Nelson Limerick (born 1950), Turner's most recent serious critic. Once Gilcrease gets over his disappointment about business lunches in Tulsa no longer featuring cocktails and giant steaks, he begins to listen closely to his lunch guests. The story of shifting scholarship about the American West turns out to be a good tale. Everyone at the table, living and dead, is amazed by the newest Western history, appearing in the early years of the twenty-first century—and introduced to you here, in this journal's set of essays.

Happy Birthday, Mr. Gilcrease (pictured here cutting his birthday cake, February 8, 1961). During his lifetime, Thomas Gilcrease collected more than 10,000 artworks, 250,000 Native American artifacts, and 100,000 rare books and documents, including the only surviving certified copy of the Declaration of Independence. Photographer unknown. GM 4326.9134

A new resident of Oklahoma after twenty-three years in Colorado, **ANNE HYDE** is Professor of History at the University of Oklahoma, where she edits the *Western Historical Quarterly*. She is the author, most recently, of *Empires, Nations, and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800–1860*.



FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER, c. 1911. Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-28356. Turner died in 1932 in San Marino, California, where he had been a research associate at the Huntington Library.

Right: **EMANUEL GOTTLIEB LEUTZE,** Germany, 1816–1868, active United States, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, 1861, oil on canvas. GM 0126.1615

♦ ♦ ♦

Wisconsin native Turner first delivered his essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" to a gathering of fellow historians in 1893 in Chicago, the site of the World's Columbian Exposition. (The enormous fair marked the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World.) Turner's lecture gained such wide attention that it was considered the single most influential piece of writing in the history of American history. Turner wrote several books in which he claimed that the presence of the frontier "explained American history," and his work was lauded by President Theodore Roosevelt and became the centerpiece of new schools of historical study at both the University of Wisconsin and Harvard.

Both Gilcrease, avid collector of Western art and archives, and Turner, father of the Frontier Thesis, would be surprised to learn that, after a promising beginning, the history of the American West became a subject few respectable scholars studied. Turner, in fact, had made it a little boring: his nineteenth-century frontier saw Indian homelands turned, predictably, into fur-trader forts and then into settled farming communities filled with church-going pioneers. For that reason, Gilcrease himself would have puzzled Turner, because Native Americans were supposed to disappear, not get so rich from oil leases that they could buy up Western art and Tulsa mansions.



"THE FRONTIER IS THE OUTER EDGE OF THE WAVE, THE MEETING POINT BETWEEN SAVAGERY AND CIVILIZATION. MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT THE FRONTIER FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF BORDER WARFARE AND THE CHASE, BUT AS A FIELD FOR THE SERIOUS STUDY OF THE ECONOMIST AND THE HISTORIAN, IT HAS BEEN NEGLECTED."

—FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER, 1893



GEORGE CATLIN, United States, 1796–1872, *View of Black Bird's Grave, a Chief of the Omaha*, 1852, oil on canvas. GM 0176.2129

Three things pushed Turner and his ideas out of favor. First, the limitation of Turner's thesis itself—his claim that the frontier ended in 1890 really only applied to the upper Midwest, his own Wisconsin, not the actual U.S. West and its mountains, grasslands, oil, and deserts. Second, Turner's ideas about the study of history meant that his own students quickly revised and challenged those very ideas. As a historian trained in the German tradition of positivism, Turner believed in scrupulous research, finding new data, and then changing your analysis to fit the evidence at hand. Finally, new interests driven by contemporary issues made slavery and the Civil War, immigration in Eastern cities, the rise of the United States to global power in the twentieth century, and the two world wars seem more important than a bunch of cowboys, miners, and Indians fighting over land.

Even as professional historians turned to other subjects, the West, that capital W place of fantasy and opportunity, remained intensely interesting to Americans and to people all over the world. Songs, novels, paintings, photographs, and especially movies provided a continual flow of information about the region. Local historical societies in western states, founded between 1880 and 1920, collected and published material celebrating early settlers.

♦ ♦ ♦

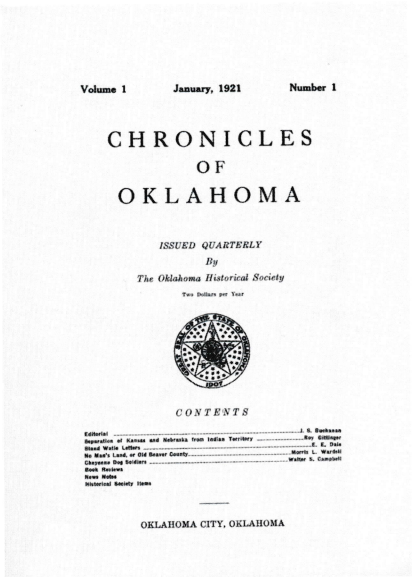
As our fictitious birthday lunch continues, Mr. Gilcrease and Professor Turner would be gratified to hear from Professor Limerick that in the 1980s and '90s, a century after Turner wrote "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," both the West and the Turner thesis once again became hot topics. Turner appeared in the *The New York Times* and *USA Today*, but in such a negative way that the frontier was referred to as the "F word." Lunch could get awkward when Turner realizes that Limerick, author of *The Legacy of Conquest* (1987), the book that made her a ringleader of the New Western History in the 1990s, is sipping iced tea next to him.

For Limerick, and other revisionists known as New Western Historians because of their challenging of Old West ideas, Turner's frontier could not explain events and phenomena like gold rushes, oil booms, Native sovereignty, irrigation, migrant labor, or droughts—all things at the heart of the Western story. The New Western History described the American West as a very specific place, located west of the Mississippi River. And, what made it unique and significant was not Turner's vision of a peacefully developing agricultural world, but rather a distinctive history in which conquest and a hard-edged capitalism shaped a region of challenging geography. High, dry, and isolated, this West,

Below left and cover image: **CHARLES SCHREYVOGEL**, United States, 1861–1912, *Breaking through the Line*, early 20th century, oil on canvas. GM 0127.1235. Schreyvogel, who could not afford art classes, taught himself to draw.

Cover of the first issue of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, January 1921. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.





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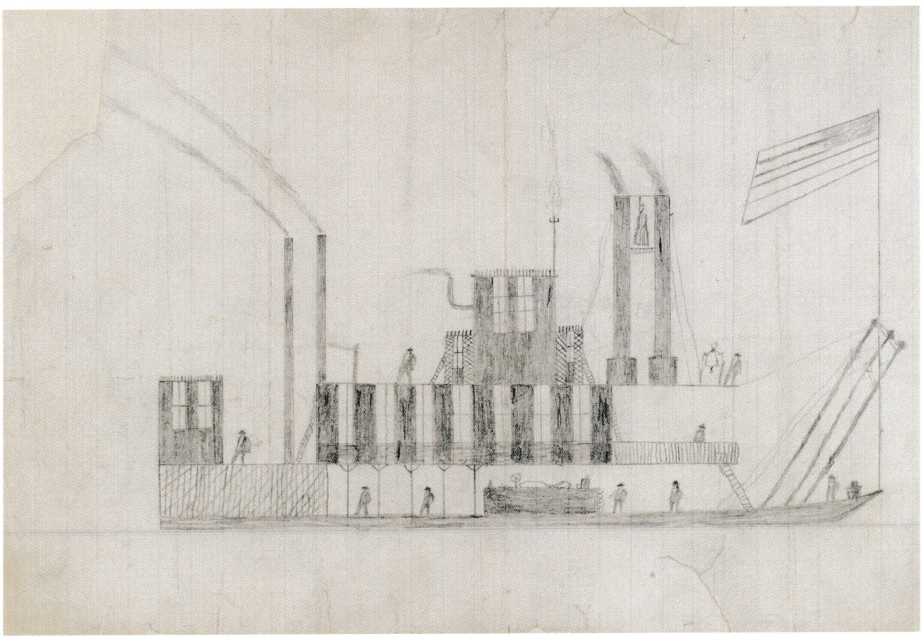


ARTIST UNKNOWN, *Ledger Drawing of a Steamboat*, date unknown, pencil on paper. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Jon R. Stuart.

Right: **CHARLES BANKS WILSON**, United States, 1918–2013, *Family Album*, late 20th century, oil on canvas. GM 01.2509

shaped by unrelenting violence because of the military force necessary to end the powerful presence of Indian people who didn't just disappear, had hardly an encouraging word.

Limerick pointed out the ironies created when the gentle tamers, hardy pioneers, and steaming railroads of Turner's West encountered the region's isolation, limited resources (like water and land that could be farmed), and boom-and-bust economy. Only people with big banks, eastern railroad or real estate fortunes, or federal power behind them seemed able to persevere. That New West's frontier was a bleak and contentious place indeed.

Gilcrease surely would snicker at this supposedly "new discovery" by 1980s historians. He'd seen Oklahoma and the West boom and bust several times. *The New York Times* had certainly noticed unique aspects of the West in the 1910s and '20s, when men like Gilcrease got rich, and described Oklahoma and Texas for its elite eastern readers as "quirky" and filled with "stupidly rich Western characters." When black dirt from the Dakotas, Kansas, and Oklahoma blew into East Coast cities in 1935, the West seemed more apocalyptic than quirky, though most of the nation ignored it for decades at a time.

At their 2017 luncheon, Gilcrease and Turner would learn that the West as a powerful national player is back in fashion. Even the word "frontier" appears in discussions about history, and current historians are brave enough to use it without scare quotes or irony. It is not the unfurling of American farmland across a welcoming landscape that Turner had envisioned in 1893.

"BUT NEVER AGAIN WILL SUCH GIFTS OF FREE LAND OFFER THEMSELVES. FOR A MOMENT, AT THE FRONTIER, THE BONDS OF CUSTOM ARE BROKEN AND UNRESTRAINT IS TRIUMPHANT."

—FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER, 1893

"LIVING OUT OF CANS, THE MONTANANS WERE TYPICAL WESTERNERS, CELEBRATING INDEPENDENCE WHILE RELYING ON A VITAL CONNECTION TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD.... THE GARBAGE COLLECTOR NEVER CAME."

—PATRICIA NELSON LIMERICK





Native people and the landscape itself have become powerful actors. Historians talk about frontier in two forms. First, the frontier serves as a borderland between nations, including Indian nations, where people of all nationalities, races, and homelands meet, fight, love, and create communities. But this borderland could be in upstate New York, North Dakota, Minnesota, Southern California, or along the Canadian River—not always in the Trans-Mississippi West, where Limerick and American historian and author Richard White argued it should be (see image on the right). Second, the frontier appears anywhere U.S. residents and citizens learned how to create and use a new kind of magic glasses: *settler colonialism.*

Limerick identified the earliest glimmers of such magic in her descriptions of the moment when things that were once considered serious, like Indians, range wars, mining labor strikes, and droughts, get labeled quaint and parts of an amusing past. Suddenly, new residents in the West, people who arrived via the railroads and bought up lands recently owned by Native nations, see themselves as innocent pioneers. They appeared on magically empty landscapes that had no Indian past and that required no federal or state effort to make them into towns and farms.

Above: **WILLIAM S. PRETTYMAN**, United States, 1858–1932, *Holding Down Town Lot, Guthrie, April 20, 1889*, photograph. GM 4527.8520

Below: **SAMUEL COLMAN**, United States, 1832–1920, *Wagon Train*, late 19th century, oil on canvas. GM 0126.1522





CORNELIUS KRIEGHOFF, Canada, 1815–1872, *Laurentian Pioneers*, 1862, oil on canvas. GM 0116.1155



MAGIC WAS THE FORCE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ALL THE BLOOD, SWEAT, AND MONEY THAT WENT INTO MAKING THE WEST SAFE FOR PIONEERS. WE BEGIN TO SEE THIS MAGIC IN WESTERN ART.

Magic was the force responsible for the disappearance of all the blood, sweat, and money that went into making the West safe for pioneers. We begin to see this magic in Western art. What is in the Gilcrease collection—maps, empty landscapes, Prairie Madonnas—and what is not—African-Americans, Indian slavery, urban life, and industry—allow us to wear those magic glasses. What we can't see is how much stunning federal power and huge cultural investment settler colonialism required, or that it changed the West forever.

The United States, it turns out, is not unique in its frontier past. Like new nations in South America, Australia, and Mexico, and colonial enterprises that old nations undertook in India, the Caribbean, and Hawaii, the United States used vast military and federal resources to secure its frontier. The effort required an enormous amount of outright force and legal maneuvering. Once title to Indian land was extinguished, and Native people were incarcerated on reservations, frontier places could be remade into the empty West, open for settlement. In Texas, California, Oklahoma, in New Zealand, Brazil, Puerto Rico, and India, various forms of unfree labor served armies, then built roads, railroads, dams, and flood-control and irrigation systems so that white settlers could move in.

Thirty years after the frontier became the "F word," from new research into army records, Indian Bureau materials, country and state land offices, and family memories, we know a lot more about how U.S. and native armies used germ warfare and murder, how governments created borders, and how labor systems like slavery, peonage, and share-cropping built wealth in the region. The continuous violence this research reveals is difficult to look at, which perhaps explains why it had been "forgotten," or made invisible. Settler colonialism naturalizes the violence using deeply held cultural values about who should benefit in a society. It's not exactly a kinder, gentler colonialism; it is one that is invisible and relentless. Taking Indian land or making Indian children into slaves was not only perfectly legal, it was the "Christian" thing to do.

New, New Western Historians are interested in figuring out how this works. How does U.S. ideology and culture, as well as people's most personal decisions—who to marry, who to have sex with, how to raise children—enforce ideas about who can be productive citizens and who can't? How do changing ideas about gender and race appear in government policy? How does government policy and law reflect a logic that having Indian sovereignty *and* white settlement was simply unimaginable? And, how does federal and state government work to turn white squatters, thieves, and scam-artist opportunists into virtuous citizens?

♦ ♦ ♦

Left: **ILA MAE MCAFEE**, United States, 1897–1995, *The Home Pasture*, 1935, oil on canvas. GM 0137.536

JOSEPH HENRY SHARP, United States, 1859–1953, *Singers of the Night, Taos Pueblo*, 1900, oil on canvas. GM 0137.305





Above: **WILLIAM S. PRETTYMAN**, United States, 1858–1932, *A Frontier Home*, date unknown, photograph. GM 4326.3534

Right: **FREDERIC REMINGTON**, United States, 1861–1909, *Missing*, late 19th–early 20th century, oil on canvas. GM 0126.638

At this point, the atmosphere at the lunch gathering may be growing difficult. Gilcrease, surely, would recognize those magic glasses. After all, his own past of Indian boarding schools, missions, allotment, land loss, being taunted as a half-breed and vilified as a rich Indian came out of settler colonialism's brew of ideology and action.

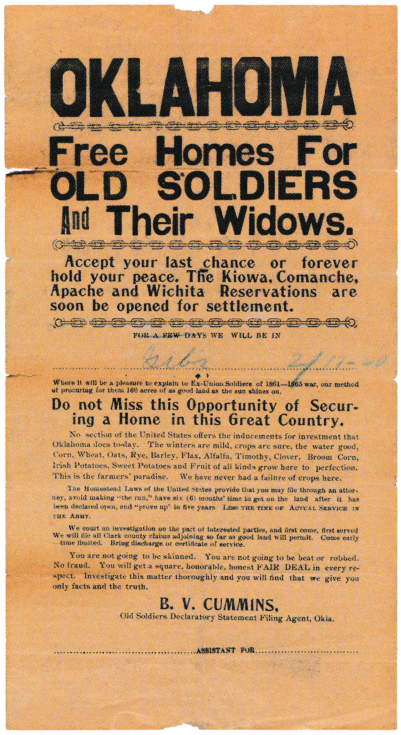
Let's look at some crucial moments of federal policy in the West using these new ideas about settler colonialism: 1862, when Congress passed the Homestead Act; and 1887, when the Dawes (or Allotment) Act became part of the legal package. We can begin to see how government projects resulted in lands owned by Native Nations being repopulated and reimagined by American and European settlers.

In 1862 the United States was in the middle of the Civil War, which was begun by arguments over western land. Would Kansas and Nebraska, California and Colorado, Texas and New Mexico be slave or free? And, in that landscape that everyone was fighting over, Indians had driven white settlers out of Minnesota in what became known as the Dakota War, and on the Great Plains, powerful Indian nations had shut down the roads between Kansas and Colorado. Why would the U.S. Congress choose this very bad moment to pass the biggest spending bills ever created: the Homestead and Railroad Acts of 1862? Viewing this in the context of that moment in time, we see both settler colonialism in its rawest form and the West's power in the national imagination.

The decision was blatantly political. In return for fighting a long and difficult war that valorized free white labor, land would be "created" for loyal white soldiers and their families. The railroad would link the fractious nation together by making the Great

WE CAN BEGIN TO SEE HOW GOVERNMENT PROJECTS RESULTED IN LANDS OWNED BY NATIVE NATIONS BEING REPOPULATED AND REIMAGINED BY AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN SETTLERS.... WE SEE BOTH SETTLER COLONIALISM IN ITS RAWEST FORM AND THE WEST'S POWER IN THE NATIONAL IMAGINATION.





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Right: *Oklahoma Free Homes for Old Soldiers and Their Widows*, 1900, broadside. GM 3527.154



ALBERT BIERSTADT, United States, 1830–1902, *Buffalo Hunting*, late 19th century, oil on canvas. GM 0126.1170

Open West available and possible to farm. Keeping that promise required making free and empty land from already-owned land. It required seeing Native title and claim to land as irrelevant instead of as legal treaties guaranteeing homelands now inhabited by productive Indian families. The magic glasses worn by policy makers and land and railroad speculators didn't work, however, for the U.S. Army. Soldiers now had decades of expensive and bloody war ahead of them to make that land empty and to make it possible for great corporations to build a railroad network that would create great fortunes for some.

On February 8, 1887, President Grover Cleveland signed the Dawes Act. The idea was to take reservations where the U.S. government had placed captive Indian populations after a series of promises in treaties, and turn those reserves into plots of land farmed by individual Indian families. The Dawes Act was created by reformers who genuinely wanted to improve the situation Indian people faced in the West, and by western land speculators who wanted to get their hands on more Indian land. Such shared ideals made land owned in common by tribes impossible to tolerate in a culture that narrowed the definition of white citizenship with each passing year. Even though millions of acres of open land still existed, and many small farmers who attempted to farm the Homestead Act's 160 acres on the Great Plains had failed to prove up and fled, the need to make land available for white farmers who might need it some day remained a powerful desire.

It can be hard for us to understand in the present how people in the past who saw themselves as reformers and humanitarians could possibly have thought this was a good idea. Wearing the magic glasses of settler colonialism, such actions looked perfectly logical. Now that people believed that white settlement had occurred naturally, and that Indians were anachronisms in the Great Open West, the idea of breaking up reservations made sense. As President Theodore Roosevelt explained in his inaugural address, the Dawes Act had been "a mighty pulverizing engine to



WILLIAM S. PRETTYMAN, United States, 1858–1932, *Large family group sitting in yard of two-story home with men holding violins*, date unknown, photograph. GM 4326.3533

break up the tribal mass" that he hoped would encourage individual initiative. In addition, it would reduce the cost of federal and state involvement in Indian affairs, and best of all, it would open up ninety percent of those lands for white residents to settle and sell.

Once that land had been handed out and "settled" by U.S. residents and new immigrants from Europe and the Americas, evidence of this different, messier history about that landscape had to disappear. Pioneers, chambers of commerce, and historical societies in the 1910s and '20s did the difficult work of erasing one past and creating another. Not just in Oklahoma but everywhere, we see similar efforts to make Indians invisible and white pioneers visible. One past was bulldozed: buildings of Indian agencies, boarding schools, black towns, prisons, and farms. Buried, maybe, but not gone. New residents of Oklahoma and Dakota, many of them immigrants themselves, remembered the windy empty plains and the Indian bones, toys, and campsites they found when they plowed fields on their new farms in that "empty" landscape.

Our story line of heroic white pioneers and their struggle to tame empty land doesn't include African slaves, black and Indian cowboys, and farm laborers who broke the land and then lost it to white farmers and banks. Settler colonialism requires a certain kind of racial thinking so that it becomes logical that white settlers should own land, that Indians should disappear, and that African-Americans should work land but not own it.





For white settlers, this had real costs too. Many parts of the Great Open West were difficult to farm. Eighty, 160, 320 acres didn't matter if rain didn't fall, rivers didn't run. People gave up farming and took to raising cattle or sheep on "empty land." The myth of empty land just waiting for the small farmer and the "little guy" in U.S. history makes the all too common story of Western failure impossible to live with. American men weren't supposed to fail. Many lives, savings accounts, and dreams evaporated on landscapes impossible to tame. Rain didn't follow the plow, and it turns out the Indians were right about how much land people and animals needed to thrive.

In spite of such loss, Indians are still here, along with other settlers who've faced Western realities. The New Western History underscored the harsh realities of the Western landscape and the brutal work and huge federal dollars required to settle it. Those

historians would see Gilcrease and his museum, the art he bought and that others have collected as ironic and perhaps a little naive. Now, the New, New Western History might push Gilcrease and his birthday lunch guests to understand how and why the magic of empty land was performed so skillfully. We can't see, after all, the sleight of hand that the museum has played over the years in creating what many Anglo-Americans wanted to see. However, Native people have survived to challenge that story. And perhaps the perspectives offered in the following essays can work like new glasses, allowing the visual records of the museum to show us exactly who has lived on this landscape before us, and how it has changed—for better and for worse.

Happy Birthday, Mr. Gilcrease.

♦ ♦ ♦

Left, top: **ILA MAE MCAFEE**, United States, 1897–1995, *Long Horns Watering on Cattle Drive*, early 20th century, oil on Masonite. GM 0137.537

Left, bottom: **ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN**, United States, 1915–1985, *Dust is too much for this farmer's son in Cimarron County, Oklahoma*, April 1936, photograph. Library of Congress LC-USF34-004047-E

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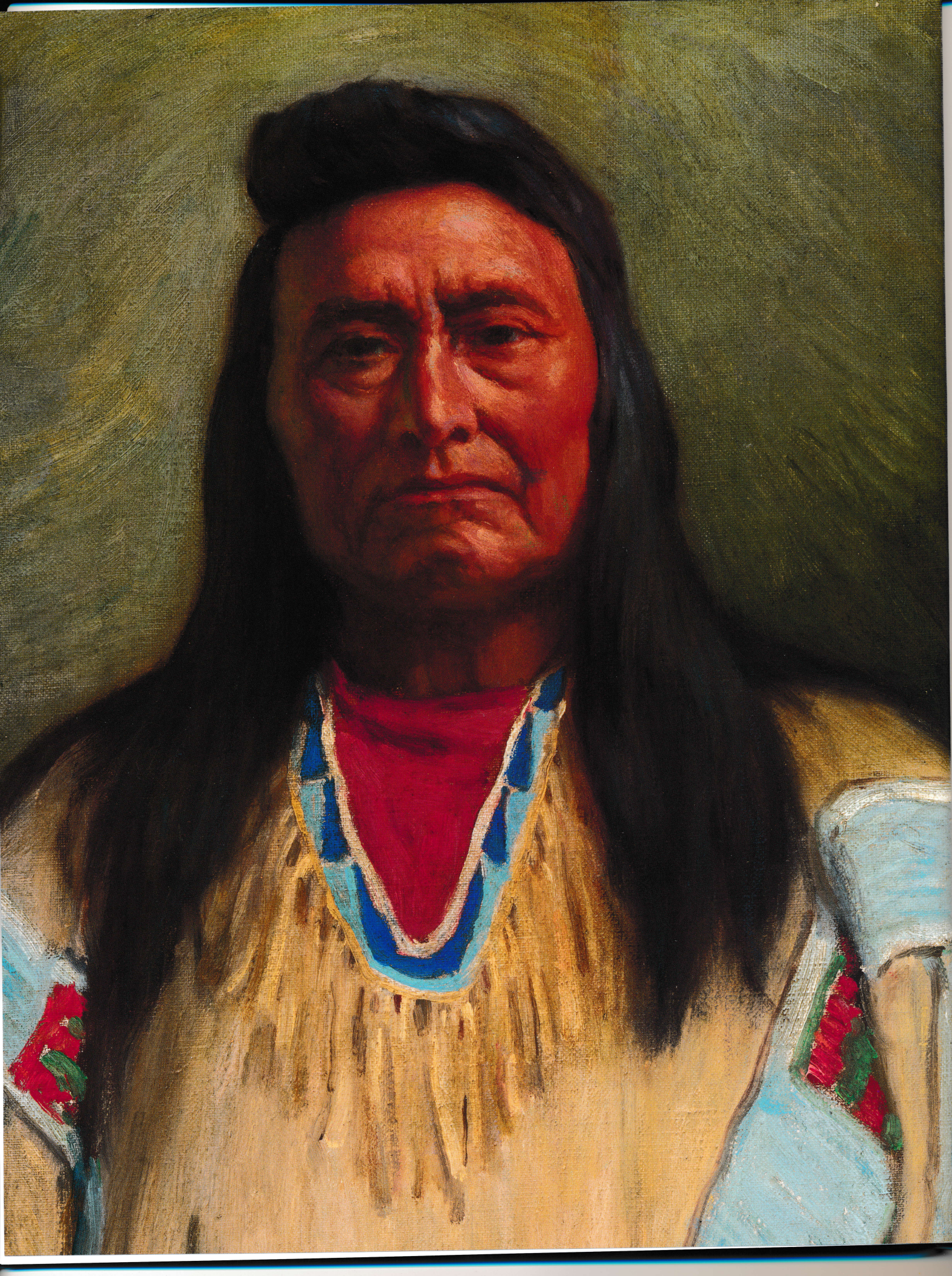


Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce

Deconstructing Myth with the New Indian History

▼▼▼

BY LINDSAY MARSHALL

There are some names that are just box office gold—have one in the title of a book, and its spot on the best-seller list is secure. Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce is one of those names. Even before the 1877 Nez Perce War, which drew him into the public eye, came to its conclusion at the Battle of Bear Paw, people were fascinated with his story. A Native chief friendly with neighboring white settlers, long-suffering in the face of blatantly unjust government action, and reluctant to fight, he fled to protect the women, children, and elders of his tribe before delivering a stoic surrender speech worthy of its place among American history's great orations.

JOSEPH HENRY SHARP, United States, 1859–1953, *Chief Joseph*, 1890, oil on canvas. GM 0137.427

LINDSAY MARSHALL is a PhD student at the University of Oklahoma concentrating on the ways in which secondary U.S. history education shape public memory about Native American history.

JOSEPH WAS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.... AND LIKE THOSE OF OTHER CELEBRATED NATIVE LEADERS SUCH AS SITTING BULL AND GERONIMO, JOSEPH'S LEGEND AS "RED NAPOLEON" IS MORE FICTION THAN FACT. HE DID PERFORM EXTRAORDINARY FEATS TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE, BUT WHITE CULTURE CELEBRATES HIM FOR INVENTED ACTS OF GLORY, NOT THE BRILLIANCE AND HEROISM HE EXHIBITED.

Joseph was too good to be true. He received national acclaim even as dispatches were rolling in from the battlefield, and he quickly became a legend. Even Joseph's death fit the bill: longing to return to the home in the Wallowa Valley of Oregon he loved so dearly, he died, according to official medical records, of a broken heart. And like those of other celebrated Native leaders such as Sitting Bull and Geronimo, Joseph's legend as "Red Napoleon" is more fiction than fact. He did perform extraordinary feats to save his people, but white culture celebrates him for invented acts of glory, not the brilliance and heroism he exhibited.

Like other famous Native leaders, Joseph and his role in his tribe's history have been inflated, misunderstood, and mischaracterized. The history of the U.S. West holds a special place in the formation of American identity, and the portrayal of Native people and their roles in that history has been indicative of shifts in this constructed identity. The West is a forge for our public memory, and it is hailed as one of the most distinctly American pieces of our history—about which we have fought most fiercely. If we can view the history of the Great Plains as a romantic struggle between the forces of civilization and the forces of savagery, fighting against the Native warriors on horseback and even against the land itself, we can rest assured that the great American experiment succeeded. In that narrative, our fledgling democracy carved out a living from a hostile environment. And under that paradigm, Native people are not historical actors but rather obstacles to be overcome; their conquest is as amoral as laying track for the Transcontinental Railroad. But the New Western History challenged that vision, and as the paradigm crumbled, historical narratives about Native people had to change.

WHITE SWAN, Native American, Crow, c. 1851–1904, *War Record*, late 19th century, watercolor, ink, and pencil on muslin. GM 0226.589





ALFRED JACOB MILLER, United States, 1810–1874, *Elk Hunt—Pawnees*, mid-19th century, watercolor on paper. GM 0226.1077

The shift in studying Native history in the United States, what scholars call the New Indian History, preceded New Western History. While Western historians still worked on the assumptions of a Turnerian model for the history of the U.S. West, radical changes in Native legal status and the development of the professional social sciences promoted new narratives of Native history.

As the late John M. Rhea argued in his 2016 book, *A Field of Their Own: Women and American Indian History, 1830–1941*, gender bias among professional historians pushed a growing community of women trained in professional history out of the field and into anthropology, more specifically to conduct fieldwork for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Barred from practicing their own profession but dedicated to the work and people who had captured their interest, scholars like Angie Debo and Alice Fletcher laid the groundwork for ethnohistory, a methodological perspective that would come to dominate the field of Native history by the middle of the twentieth century.

Changes in federal Indian law also challenged the settled narratives of Native history. Mid-nineteenth-century schoolbooks nearly always presented Native people as fierce foes, and conquests of Natives represented triumphs of the virtues of American society. By the late nineteenth century, those narratives grew more sentimental, and perspective shifted: Native Americans were considered a noble but backward people who were tragically destroyed by material greed and the inevitability of progress. The tragedy of the vanishing race was, of course, always written in the passive voice, underscoring the destruction

of Native people as the inevitable course of events, what education historian Frances FitzGerald called the "natural disaster" theory of history. But as law changed throughout the twentieth century, and tribal recognition became termination and finally self-determination, Native identity and Native communities persisted. The vanishing Indian simply would not vanish.

Changes in historical study itself provided another impetus to shift historians' points of view on Native people and their places in U.S. history. During the early years of the twentieth century, traditional nationalistic political history gave way to the revisionism of the Progressive historians, as scholars like Charles and Mary Beard peered into seemingly settled narratives of the nation's founding and questioned their underlying assumptions. The rise of social history and the influence of growing social sciences and their new methodologies also pushed American historians, especially Western historians, to reexamine their approaches and areas of focus in the field. As the field began to fragment along lines not just of disciplinary focus, such as politics, economics, and culture, but also along lines of race, class, and gender, the traditional ways historians addressed Native people in their scholarship became less and less adequate to answer the new questions that scholarship raised.

As decades passed and activist movements within Native communities emerged, U.S. history could no longer present a history of a vanished race. Historians had to reconcile the traditional image and narrative of the Native American with the seeming contradiction of the modern yet non-assimilated Indian. To see how this shift took place, it's helpful to return to the story of Chief Joseph—not to the historical string of events surrounding his life but to the story told about Joseph and how it evolved from the myth of the Red Napoleon to a nuanced tale of savvy survival.

WOODROW WILSON CRUMBO, Native American, Potawatomi, 1912–1989, *Returning Warrior—Legendary*, mid-20th century, tempera on paper. GM 0227.520

AS LAW CHANGED THROUGHOUT THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, AND TRIBAL RECOGNITION BECAME TERMINATION AND FINALLY SELF-DETERMINATION, NATIVE IDENTITY AND NATIVE COMMUNITIES PERSISTED. THE VANISHING INDIAN SIMPLY WOULD NOT VANISH.





BENJAMIN HARJO JR., Native American, Absentee Shawnee-Seminole, born 1945, *Keeper of the Fire*, 1989, tempera on paper. Gift of Homer and Ruth Herrington, GM 0227.1803

THE JOSEPH MYTH

The Joseph Myth, sometimes called the Red Napoleon Myth, portrays Chief Joseph in three ways: as an excellent tactical military genius who orchestrated the tribal flight down to the last detail; as an eloquent orator whose speeches rivaled those of the greatest statesmen in history; and as the lone, greatest chief of the Nez Perce people. While some myths about Native leaders grew slowly over time, the Joseph Myth sprang forth fully formed during the time of the conflict. It originated with military field reports from the Nez Perce flight, primarily those authored by Gen. Oliver O. Howard, an officer eager to maintain his tenuous command despite multiple blunders. It was Howard who reported an Indian foe of uncanny brilliance, which conveniently explained the army's failure to contain him.

Contributing to the rapid formation of the myth were the facts that Joseph was a member of Nez Perce, a tribe long celebrated by the American public as ideal "benign" Indians, and that the sensational 1877 conflict occurred during a series of newspaper-circulation wars. The timing, circumstance, and players aligned to create and spread the Joseph Myth.

The myth, while captivating, bore little resemblance to the truth. Joseph was the head of his band, but he was no war chief. During combat, he guarded the women and children, guided them to safety, and stampeded the horses to keep them out of the army's hands. Nez Perce leadership was decentralized, and though a prominent warrior usually





Left: **PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN**, *Chief Joseph, half-length portrait, seated, facing front*, c. 1900, National Photo Company, photograph. Library of Congress, LC-USZ61-2087

Right: **PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN**, *Chief Joseph, c. 1840–1904*, photo-print by Rudolph B. Scott, Spokane, Washington, Oct. 17, 1899. Library of Congress, LC-USZ61-2085. **JOSEPH HENRY SHARP** used this photograph to create his 1890 oil painting *Chief Joseph* (see page 24).

suggested a general battle plan, Nez Perce combat was an exercise in skillful improvisation. But white culture did not have a category or label for this sort of leadership, so newspapers and published memoirs recorded it in terms that could be understood in the context of the time. Due to Joseph's prominent role as diplomat during the initial negotiations before the conflict began, his stature as the last surviving chief present to offer surrender, and simply because it was just too good a story not to tell, he emerged from the war, in non-Native eyes, as the undisputed brilliant and noble general of the Nez Perce people. Joseph immediately became known as the defeated adversary of a noble effort to selflessly save his people from greedy white encroachment on his father's lands.

The true genius of Chief Joseph is obscured by his imagined exploits. After his famous surrender at Bear Paw, as the Nez Perce were shuttled along the route that would eventually take them to Indian Territory, the citizens of Bismarck, North Dakota, invited Joseph to attend a banquet in his honor. At the banquet, it was expected that the exhausted chief would give one of his famous orations that they had read so much about. Straight from a long, forced ride following the surrender, Joseph accepted the invitation and used the opportunity to emphasize his weariness, his goodwill toward non-Indians, and his desire to take his people home. Later, once he realized that the government did not plan to return his band to the Wallowa Valley, Joseph began to employ his newfound celebrity to keep the Nez Perce cause alive in the newspapers. Through interviews, appearances, and even multiple visits to Washington, D.C., Joseph wielded his legendary image to gain public support for the Nez Perce return home.

THE NEW INDIAN HISTORY'S THREE R'S

The New Indian History changed the way historians think and write about Native history in three key ways: Rethink, Reframe, Revoice.

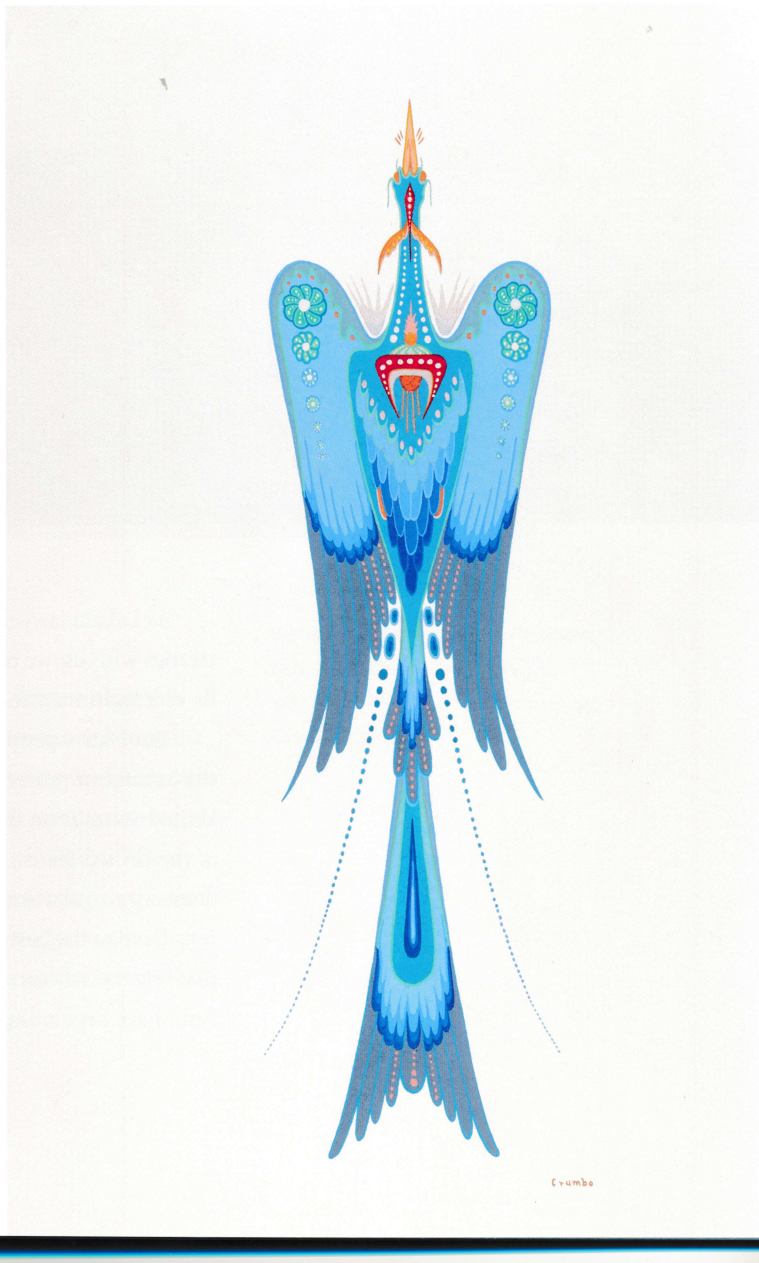
Rethink.

First, historians began to rethink the entire approach to studying Native people in U.S. history. As generations of American historians questioned the established narratives of the history of the U.S. West, scholars began to question the assumptions they had inherited. While most early sources that address Native history treat all Native people as having relatively the same culture, society, and political structure, historians of the New Indian History began to realize that those basic assumptions were not only false but political tools employed to legitimize westward expansion and dispossession. They began to question the narratives presented in traditional archival sources. Why did government reports so often fixate on one particular Native leader and ascribe all decision-making and action to that person? Why did newspapers publish such rigid narrative patterns when describing conflicts between Native people and white settlers and their government? Influenced by the complexity of new advances in social, gender, and race histories, scholars began to read against the sources and expose political and economic motivations that earlier generations of historians had missed.

Western historians also began to expand their definition of an archive. While the historians of the early twentieth century tended to rely on official government documents or first-person written accounts as source bases, the New Indian History demanded a more diverse approach to historical research. Combining the tools of ethnohistory forged in the formative years of anthropological study with the traditional methods of historical inquiry, Western historians began to complicate the accepted explanations of Native political, economic, military, and social organization.

So, as earlier historians viewed Joseph the Red Napoleon, war chief, and orator, the New Indian History presented Joseph the diplomat, skilled politician, and cultural apologist. By consulting oral histories, traditions, and other indigenous sources, historians began to acknowledge the complexity of Native engagement with the encroaching white world. History could no longer be the simple dichotomy of Native and settler, win or lose. Native people had not vanished through death or assimilation after all; they had lived on to continue a long tradition of adaptation and survival.

WOODROW WILSON CRUMBO, Native American, Potawatomi, 1912–1989, *Peyote Bird*, mid-20th century, tempera on paper. GM 0227.341



GEORGE CATLIN, United States, 1796–1872, *Comanche Indians Throwing the Lasso*, 1852, oil on canvas. GM 0176.2163

Reframe.

The New Indian History changed the history of the U.S. West, as well as the larger history of North America, by reframing that history. As contemporary Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie asserted, the place you choose to begin a story determines which story you have chosen to tell. Until the rise of the New Indian History, most histories of the United States began with the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. While that may make some sense from the perspective of U.S political history, it misrepresents the nature of power relationships on the continent that formed the fledging colonial and American governments.



NATIVE PEOPLE DO NOT EXIST ON THE FRINGE OF U.S. HISTORY.... THE UNITED STATES IS ON THE FRINGE OF NATIVE HISTORY. NATIVE CULTURES LONG PREDATE THE EXISTENCE OF THE UNITED STATES, AND NATIVE IDENTITY PERSISTS.

As Lakota lawyer and activist Chase Iron Eyes reminded us, "Because America signed treaties with us, we recognized the fledgling settler state of America. And America derives its very legitimacy for even being in our hemisphere from those treaties."

But Native people do not exist on the fringe of U.S. history. If we account for the initial balance of power in North America and the relative longevity of societal histories, the United States is on the fringe of Native history. Native cultures long predate the existence of the United States, and Native identity persists with greater cohesion and continuity than does any singular American identity.

Despite the best efforts of settler colonial society to rewrite the early trajectory of that history, scholars like Richard White, Daniel Richter, Colin Calloway, and Elizabeth Fenn have begun to present an understanding of a world in which Europeans and their

Euro-American descendants were unable to assert their will over the Native people whose land they had entered. Instead, they were forced to negotiate both power and identity with powerful culture groups.

By reframing our history to center on Native people rather than the interlopers, the resulting scholarship raises vital questions of contingency. If the tale of conquest and occupation is not also a story of inevitability, the history of the U.S. West demands that we wrestle with the consequences of decisions that led to disasters like the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, as well as the processes and assumptions that led to them.



BOBBY C. MARTIN, Native American, Muscogee (Creek), born 1957, *APR '55*, 1998, mixed media on canvas. GM 0127.2503

Revoice.

Most crucially, the New Indian History challenged the way historians determine which voices have authority to speak our historical narratives. Caught between maintaining the traditional methodologies and practices of the historical profession and finding innovative ways to transformatively incorporate the subaltern perspective into the standard narrative, historians continue to struggle to properly represent the Native voice in Western history.

In 1973 Nez Perce scholar and tribal member Allen Slickpoo Sr. wrote one of the first academic histories of a Native culture researched and written by a Native person and sanctioned by the tribal council, *Noon Nee-Me-Poo (We, the Nez Perces)*. In his introduction, he noted the inadequacy of most academic histories of the Nez Perce people:



VIRGINIA STROUD, Native American, Cherokee-Muscogee (Creek), born 1951, *Ledger Painting of Indians Stealing Military Horses*, 1978, tempera and color pencil on paper. GM 0227.1804

> *Previous books on the Nez Perces present many problems because they are written from an alien point of view. An example is the use of government reports by writers who fail to see the bias of the reports' authors. There is a general lack of an Indian view of events in their own history. There is too much emphasis on the Nez Perce War of 1877 and the special groups involved in that war. Previous books have not presented the history of the Nez Perce Nation as a whole.... These writings [of missionaries and soldiers] also omit many figures who played important roles in the history of the tribe and concentrate on but a few individuals. More recent authors have failed to explore the rich oral traditions among the Nez Perces....*

As more Native scholars pursue academic history, their perspectives and lines of inquiry offer the wider historical community an opportunity to examine narrative choices and interpretive frameworks that enrich our understanding of both the past and the formation of public memory. By prioritizing the Native voices, scholars can think past the calcified myths of people like Chief Joseph and pursue better understanding of sophisticated negotiations of identity.

In our focus on formal history, we should never forget that identity is something that is negotiated in all realms—not just in the pages of academic journals. Native artists have wrestled with the tension between traditional belief and practice and the pressures of acculturation since their first contact with non-Native people. That tension intensified during the reservation era, and artistic expression was often where Native artists could assert

their identities more freely than anywhere else. Drawing on traditional styles and methods, artists like Virginia Stroud (Cherokee-Muscogee, Creek) blend modern expression into historical form and create images that reflect contemporary indigeneity. In bright splashes of tempera paint, the familiar ledger art of the nineteenth century gives way to a new, vibrant form, one that honors the presence of the past and incorporates contemporary experiences.

As Native art, as well as Native history, continue to advance, our understanding of the past is enriched. And as this understanding evolves, it breathes new life into well-trod paths, helping us escape what Patricia Limerick called "the deeply worn set of ruts" of Western history.



EDWARD S. CURTIS, United States, 1868–1952, *Chief Joseph–Nez Perce*, 1903, photograph. GM 4327.971.1

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Carrie Strahorn and a Woman's Place in the New Western History



BY COURTNEY BUCHKOSKI

"The Sphere of Woman"

They talk about a woman's sphere as though it had a limit;
There's not a place in earth or heaven,
There's not a task to mankind given,
There's not a blessing or a woe,
There's not a whispered yes or no,
There's not a life or birth,
There's not a feather's weight of worth—
Without a woman in it.

In 1911 Carrie Adell Strahorn (1854–1925) quoted C. E. Bowman's poem about a woman's place in her biography *Fifteen Thousand Miles by Stage: A Woman's Unique Experience during Thirty Years of Path Finding and Pioneering from the Missouri to the Pacific and from Alaska to Mexico.* Verbose as its lengthy title suggests, this 738-page doorstop of a book is like a greatest-hits version of Western travel writing, and it presents the region as an exotic environment full of curiosities.

PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, *Unidentified Woman, Philip R. Goodwin, Nancy C. and Charles M. Russell (seated), and Carrie Strahorn,* 1910, gelatin silver print. TU2009.39.7651

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It was an adventure that Strahorn began in 1877, when she shocked her community of Merengo, Illinois, by marrying an advertising man for the Union Pacific Railroad. Despite childhood vows to never be a pioneer, she traveled with her husband around the West in the service of his job, collecting stories along the way. Buried beneath layers of illustrations and adventure tales, Strahorn made a nuanced point in *Fifteen Thousand Miles by Stage*: she drops hints throughout about the necessity of female influence on the region. Once away from their restrictive Eastern homes, the Western women Strahorn meets blossom into tough and crafty harbingers of "civilization" to the "wild" West. Her Western adventures were convincing tales that the journey west was not just for ranchers and cowboys—it was for hardworking families too.

Pictured on page 37 (in hat), Strahorn appears the consummate pioneer woman. Standing before a log cabin with a gang of hearty travelers, she exudes the confidence of a settler. How are we to understand the role of women like Strahorn when the old story of the West is one of almost exclusively brave men? The cowboys, gold rushers, and cavalry regiments all supposedly forged a path for women and children, whom they swore to protect from danger. Women were the passive recipients of a beautiful gift—a "tamed"

Left: **PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN**, *Carrie Adell Strahorn, Caldwell pioneer and author at time of her wedding, 19 Sept. 1877*, photograph. Donated by Richard Elliott, College of Idaho. Idaho State Historical Society, 78-15-23a.

Right: **WILLIAM S. PRETTYMAN**, United States, 1858–1932, *Early Indian Territory home with men seated in parlor and the women in the dining room*, date unknown, photograph. GM 4326.3501



landscape and its "tamed" enemy, the indigenous population. However, Strahorn's is an altogether different picture. Far from a passive actor, the white woman is absolutely essential to colonizing the land. In fact, it was the "poor, hardworking women [who] toiled without rest [and] suffer(ed) the most in pioneer life," she wrote. And as the poem she quoted suggests, nothing in the life of settlers was beyond the control of "the gentler sex." Strahorn shows us that the dime-store-novel interpretation of a "Wild West" full of rambunctious men who protected their dainty women was not the real-life experience of most white settlers.

It has been the task of the New Western Historians of the last thirty years to complicate, break apart, and revise the monolithic idea of a "Wild West"—much like Strahorn broke the stereotype of the pioneer woman. Congruent with the rise of the burgeoning fields of Women Studies and Gender Studies in the late 1980s and '90s, New Western Historians provided the first serious attempts to critically analyze the female perspective on westward expansion.

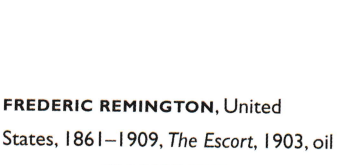
In *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (1987), Patricia Nelson Limerick criticized historians for their tendency to overlook gender in imperial




Frederic Remington

conquest. Her work proved vital to breaking down the long-held ideas of the pioneer woman. After all, the project of empire, of taking and repurposing indigenous lands, was not performed by men only. As Strahorn personified, women were, in fact, integral in its success, and as her poem suggests, in the West there was "not a task" that white male settlers took on, nor a "life or birth" in the West, in which women did not participate.

While Strahorn pushed us to think about women as part of the process of the frontier, Limerick pushed us even further, breaking down Strahorn's simplistic understanding of westward expansion as a march toward progress in which white pioneers conquered "virgin" land. Limerick opposed the very concept of the mythic pioneer woman as a "generic concept imposed on a diverse reality." By looking at the diversity of women in the West, which included Native Americans, Latinas, and Asians, among others, Limerick suggested that the pioneer woman would no longer be a monolith but "a complex swirl of people as adept at preying on each other as at preying on Indians."



FREDERIC REMINGTON, United States, 1861–1909, *The Escort*, 1903, oil on canvas. GM 0127.2312

In quantum physics, the principle called the Observer Effect *very* simply (I'm a historian, after all) states, that when matter is observed by a scientist, it reacts to that observation, which results in a completely altered outcome. The best way to describe this is that scientists have proven that the very act of observation *causes* an alteration. This, in effect, is what New Western Historians also proved about including gender in the history of the West. When they focused and observed women in traditional narratives, the results were not just the same stories with women tacked on. The very act of observing women within the history of the West changed the entire narrative. As the New Western Historians fundamentally altered the way they observed their subjects, the history and the stories they told started to look far different than the paradigms of the mythic West.

Thirty years later, that observational work has led to a Western history that continues to push against the myth of the Old West. We have moved well past Strahorn's idea of the West, in which women were included but presented primarily as morally superior harbingers of civilization. The more diverse West that Limerick called for has shown that white women were not always "Republican Mothers" but often took part in the many atrocities of Westward expansion. We are also beginning to understand how non-white women—Native American, African-American, Latina, and members of other groups—resisted hostile takeovers of their lands or sought to compromise within the circumstances of their discrimination. The question for New Western Historians has not been to prove that women are important; it is to understand them as flawed human beings.

Strahorn actually hinted at how this was possible. In her travels, she met educator Estelle Reel, the first woman elected to state office in Wyoming (1890) and an exceptional woman. Reel's career also included serving as superintendent for Indian schools for the federal government. Strahorn praised Reel, recalling how the Indians "love and adore her in the true Indian way of wanting to give her their children." This casual remark about Reel's success in the act of "maternally" removing children from their families and communities refers to what historians now consider a highly oppressive system: the Indian boarding school movement in which Indian children were forcibly taken away from their

homes and families and delivered to faraway schools, where they were taught how to "assimilate" and stripped of their cultural heritage. What Strahorn celebrates as the maternal success of a female administrator, historians now denounce as part of settler colonialism (the concept explained in Anne Hyde's essay, "The New, New Western History: Seeing a Messier Western Past"). New, New West Historians have shown how, far from a policy of benevolence, the boarding school movement was a way in which white women complied and perpetuated the forced homogeneity of the West.

Other historians have demonstrated that familial relations were key to settling the West—just not in the way Strahorn envisioned. Instead of white families transplanting into the West as units, it was actually interracial marriages that built the foundation of trade agreements between white settlers and indigenous groups. Historians have shown that indigenous people were not passive victims of an inevitable process of settlement but individuals who made rational decisions based on their best interests. And indigenous women, in many cases, were the purveyors of peace and the negotiators between warring factions. The family pictured below and represented in the Eastman Johnson collection therefore could have been one of the essential pieces in creating a diverse West, and not just a subject to be painted or gawked at as part of a "vanishing race" (as Lindsay Marshall's essay, "Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce: Deconstructing Myth with the New Indian History," explains).

EASTMAN JOHNSON, United States, 1824–1906, *Portrait of an Indian Family*, late 19th century, oil on canvas. GM 0126.1506





ARTIST UNKNOWN, *Indians Abducting Woman*, 19th century, oil on canvas. GM 0126.1227

Furthermore, though the captivity narratives made famous by popular culture and pictured in this painting (above) certainly occurred in some capacity, they also were part of the creation of the mythic version of the "frontier." Indigenous people did use violence to achieve their goals, as the painting suggests, but history has proven that the myth of the violent Indian is overstated. Historians have demonstrated how Indian captive-taking was a complex process that resulted in a variety of outcomes. In some cases, white women who were taken captive actually achieved higher status and more equality within indigenous society than within settler society. The idea that indigenous people were somehow more violent than pioneers has not held water under the scrutiny of the New Western History.

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Consideration of the diversity of women in American history, including whom is viewed as important, has expanded to represent the Mexican women who labored in the nation before its colonization. Others were immigrants, who were able to "become white" as they crossed boundaries from east to west. These Europeans, many of whom were Irish and Italian and regarded unfavorably in the hierarchy of American race at the time, found new acceptability as they moved west. Out west, the white women bound by the cultural ties of eastern Protestant morality were less and less the normal citizen. The New Western (gender) History does indeed reflect Limerick's "complex swirl," and now historians continue to study it even further.


C.M. Russell
1904



As the New Western gender history has come more and more to reflect Limerick's call for a "complex swirl," historians have continued to push analytical boundaries. They have asserted, for example, that gender refers not just to women and how they understand their femininity but also how men understand their masculinity. This painting of George Rogers Clark surveying the landscape calls to mind many such Western images of rugged explorers coming west for settlement, gold, or adventure. But wait…you may be thinking…aren't we back to square one? The Old West, full of white men ready to seize land? In the New Western interpretation, the study of men does not glorify the march westward as a confirmation of manliness; instead it seeks to interpret how masculinity changed over time. For example, historian Susan Lee Johnson examined how men reacted to gold rush camps, where there were very few women to perform the traditionally female tasks. Men had to learn how to do laundry, cook, and clean. They did adapt, and in doing so, created new perceptions of gender and culture. Some of this cultural identity was not altogether different from what Strahorn described as one of "whisky in plentiful supply" in which men violently exhibited their passions. But many had to constrain their "violent passions" in order to survive, and thereby created a hybrid society that bent traditionally held notions of gender.

Our understandings of gender in history have come a long way since Strahorn's biography came out in 1911. They have come even further since Limerick wrote about the subject in 1987. Some of the lessons are simple but essential. We have learned that the past was never really that golden age we sometimes wish it had been. There has always been violence, joy, diversity, and complexities. People acted for the most part in their own self-interests and according to social norms, though there were some who ventured outside the box and tested the waters of change. White settlers comprise only a portion of the "characters" of these narratives, and the stories of the West should include those of a more inclusive range of people and the ways in which they interacted.

The long understanding of how the field has shifted reminds us that history is always the result of an educated guess, always a "complex swirl," and always ripe for reexamination. Thus, just the act of observing, of looking at something old with a new perspective, will change the narrative of how we view the West. The history of gender in the West has held different meanings for different people. To Strahorn, it exemplified how morally strong white women could prove to be, and that they were worthy of suffrage. To New Western Historians, studying gender has served as a critical tool to illustrate the intense and complex diversity of the region's inhabitants.

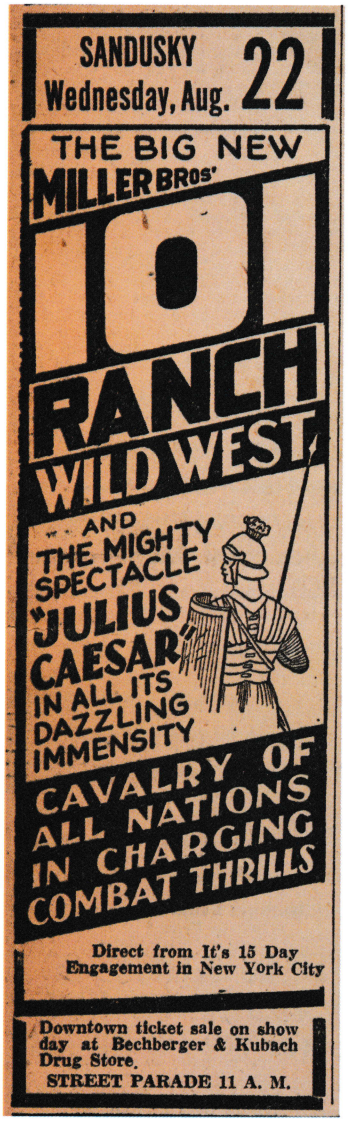
The idea of *intersectionality*—a concept used in modern gender studies to describe how different types of discrimination overlap—comes to mind here. When one type of identity (being a woman) intersects with another (being a racial minority, disabled, etc.), the resultant human is a complex mix of both identities. The two cannot be separated; they must be analyzed in tandem. When we look at the intersecting identities of Strahorn—that is, white, female, and middle-class—we can see that in many ways she wrote from a perspective of privilege compared to many of the women she met on her travels.

Historical analysis that embraces the exploration of discrimination through intersectionality has been linked to the controversial "identity politics" of the modern feminist movement, but it also serves as a tool historians are employing to push the boundaries of

Far left: **CHARLES MARION RUSSELL**, United States, 1864–1926, *Powder River, Let'er Buck*, 1904, watercolor on paper. GM 0237.1314

Center: **HOWARD PYLE**, United States, 1853–1911, *George Rogers Clark on His Way to Kaskaskia*, late 19th–early 20th century, oil on canvas. GM 0127.1569

Below: **ARTIST UNKNOWN**, *101 Ranch Newspaper Advertisement*, August 22, year unknown, newspaper clipping. GM 4117.655



the field. The "true" story of history and especially of women's history can be found only beneath layers of mythic veneer. A critical approach to stories of old must always include careful discernment of possibilities. For example, remember the "hearty travelers" and the "log cabin" from the photograph, *Charles M. Russell, Nancy C. Russell, Philip R. Goodwin, Carrie Adell Strahorn, and Unidentified Woman* (on page 37)? In fact, these mysterious ruffians are none other than Charles and Nancy Russell and Philip Goodwin, famous Western artists and authors; and the rustic cabin is the summer home of the Russells in Glacier National Park. This exemplifies the role of artists and authors in the creation of images of the mythic West that historians have been revising, but it also reminds us that Strahorn experienced the West in a context specific to her race, class, and company.

Strahorn's biases can be further prodded by learning something of her husband, Robert Strahorn. As a publicist for the Union Pacific Railroad, he was charged with enticing settlement. So as an elite, white woman with famous friends, what assumptions did Strahorn really hold about the people who appear in her biography? In the end, each person we study, like Strahorn, grappled with the intersection of multiple contexts, identities, and pressures. Sorting out the intentions of historical characters is always difficult work, but it promises to help us increase our understanding of the vital contributions made by women in the West.

So when we see a picture of a "pioneer woman" like the one in *Old Family Recipe*, which was painted in 2005, perhaps we can see both the truth and the mythic veneer. White women did go west and create families that furthered the colonization of the land. But what does it say that, in 2005, this is the sort of image we as a society find nostalgic? The beauty of the New Western History is not that we have to eliminate these interpretations of the past but that we get to understand them as more complicated, more diverse, and more like contemporary narratives of our own time.



CHARLES MARION RUSSELL, United States, 1864–1926, *B. M. Bower's "Chip, of the Flying U,"* illustration for sale-circular advertising the book, date unknown, periodical. TU2009.39.8273



SONYA TERPENING, United States, born 1953, *Old Family Recipe*, 2005, transparent watercolor. Gift of Jodie and James A. Rea, 2006, GM 02.2031

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PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, *Bill Pickett*, 1890–1916, photograph. Frederick S. Barde Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, 14338. African-American cowboy Pickett (c. 1870–1932) was the first man to bulldog a steer from horseback; the rodeo performer also appeared in several films and is credited with being the first black cowboy star.

Finding Ned and Elam

Black Migration to the American West



BY LEROY MYERS JR.

We as a people are oppressed and disenfranchised
we are still working hard and our rights are taken from us
times are hard and getting harder every year.
We as a people believe Africa is the place
but to get from under bondage
we are thinking of Oklahoma
as this is our nearest place of safety.

—BLACK SOUTHERN ENTREPRENEUR A.G. BELTON TO WILLIAM COPPINGER, SECRETARY OF THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY, JULY 22, 1891

Where did all the black cowboys and Indians go? Even though popular culture and histories have begun to encompass a wider range of people, our narrative of the American West still ignores people of color. Scholars working in academic history offer an important starting point to change that narrative. As historians continue to think critically about shifts in the history of the West, a New, New Western History must include more narratives of race.

LEROY MYERS JR. is a PhD student at the University of Oklahoma, and his current research project focuses on black-Texan migration throughout the American West and the early settlement of free Blacks in Indian Territory and Oklahoma.



OLAF CARL SELTZER, United States, 1877–1957, *U.S. Cavalry Officer,* 1928–31, watercolor on paper. GM 0237.1260

Focusing on race highlights the American West's core elements: opportunity and settlement. What happens when we incorporate African-American history into the narrative of the nineteenth-century American West? Black Americans and their collective search for opportunity following the Civil War become part of the classic frontier tale—and it demonstrates the impact that small groups of people, sometimes racial minorities, had on the American West.

Black Americans are embedded in most aspects of Western history. They took part in some of the earliest known voyages to the region. Slavery too has always been a part of the history of the West, but with surprising actors involved. White settlers brought black slaves along on their frontier journeys long before the twentieth century. In addition, Native tribes of the Cherokee nation forced to give up their lands east of the Mississippi and migrate west on the Trail of Tears (1838–39) also had black slaves. They built roads, cleared pathways, cooked, and protected their masters at night. African-Americans also mined for gold. Even though sources are limited, scholars have conducted research on these subjects, and a number of fascinating stories have emerged. These remain, however, relatively unknown outside of academic circles.

Because the majority of black Western research remains in academia, black representation in past popular culture is rare and often inaccurate. A few recent Westerns have attempted to represent the racial complexity of the Old West. For example, Morgan Freeman as Ned Logan in the 1992 film *Unforgiven* shows how people of different races revolved around the notion of settlement. Ned and the movie's other characters made choices to settle in spaces the West offered, and the story portrays racial tensions between Blacks and whites, as well as the region's ambiguous racial nature through Ned's Native American wife. The popular cable television show *Hell on Wheels* also demonstrates the complications of race in the nineteenth-century West. One of the main characters, Elam Ferguson, portrayed by hip-hop artist Common, is an ex-slave who heads west to the Great Plains, seeking opportunity. Elam pushes existing social mores in the railroad town, as he develops a friendship with an ex-Confederate soldier and lives with a white woman who previously had been kidnapped by a Native tribe.

Ned and Elam speak to central issues regarding race and lawlessness of the West. That's what makes their stories appealing elements of American folklore. However, their narratives demand further dissection. Did white people see race differently in the particular spaces Ned and Elam inhabited? How or why did people like Ned and Elam get there? What relationships did they forge between and among people of different races? What happened to opportunity when race was added? What happened when race was missing in the countless depictions we have of frontier life? Continuing to look closer at the nineteenth-century American West will shape a fuller narrative as historians uncover missing pieces of this Western story.



African-Americans from the Deep South looked to the American frontier for new homes following slavery. Blacks wanted to settle land in safe regions. Farming and ranching, about the only jobs available in the underdeveloped areas, appealed to black field hands on southern plantations. And the region itself was a refuge from the racial violence experienced in the Deep South. The Civil War reshaped the lives of many and affected the American West as much as it did the country's North and South. This was especially true in Indian Territory, which was divided (in 1890) to create the Oklahoma Territory and offered a few thousand former slaves the chance to make new lives for themselves.

Oklahoma's history with slavery is an old one because of the Five "Civilized" Tribes who brought their black and Native slaves with them from the Deep South. However, the Civil War ended slavery in four of the five primary tribes in the region—the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole. The Cherokee Nation, meanwhile, abolished slavery in 1863. In the aftermath of the war, there was a void in Indian Territory regarding "freedmen" in both the United States and in Indian Territory. Oklahoma Indian tribes and the United States debated how to manage or colonize former slaves. Some journalists and government officials wrote in favor of turning Indian Territory into a refuge for freedmen.

OLAF CARL SELTZER, United States, 1877–1957, *Captain Lewis at the Black Eagle Falls of the Missouri River—June 13, 1805*, 1933, oil on board. GM 0137.753

Below left: **OLAF CARL SELTZER,** United States, 1877–1957, *Pony Express*, 1926, watercolor on paper. GM 0237.1268

Below right: **FREDERIC REMINGTON,** United States, 1861–1909, *The Coming and Going of the Pony Express*, 1900, oil on canvas. GM 0127.2333

The number of former slaves in the Deep South interested in moving west was growing, and many black migrants, impatient with these discussions, had already headed west to Kansas. By the late 1870s—before Indian Territory and Oklahoma became popular destinations—Kansas had several communities of black migrants. Writers deemed the mass migration of African-Americans to Kansas the Exoduster Movement as an ode to the biblical exodus from Egypt.

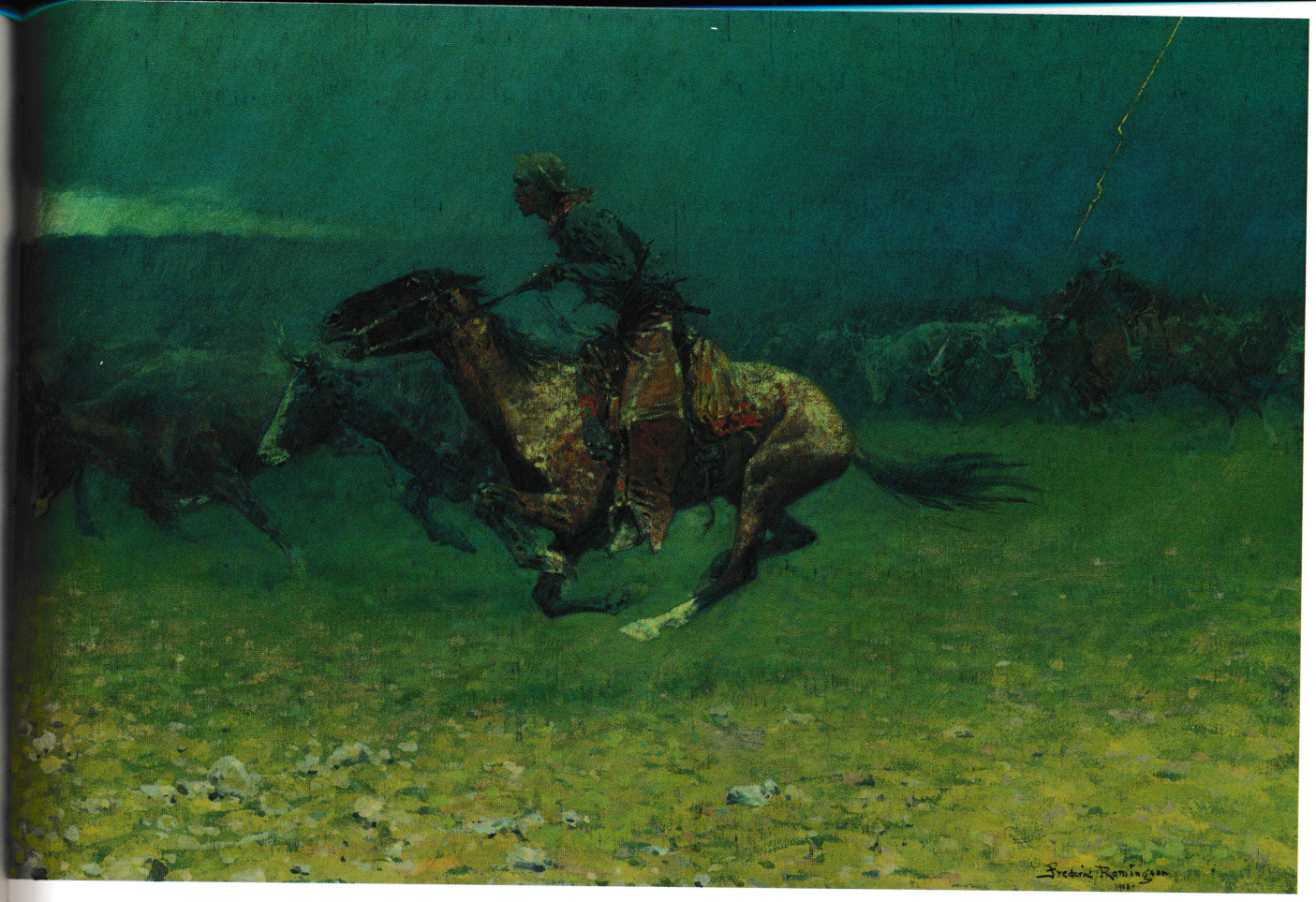
Benjamin Singleton, a former Tennessee slave, led thousands of black migrants away from the violence they had endured in Tennessee and other states. Black leaders like Singleton believed, perhaps naively, that in Kansas and other areas of the American West, African-Americans could obtain land easily, experience economic prosperity, and remain safe from racial violence. However, the majority failed to find safety or wealth. The first groups to experience real prosperity were those in Texas, a state with an important role in black migration throughout the West.

There are several reasons why black Texans were important in the history of black migration in the American West: They were the first to migrate to Kansas, beating even the Exodusters in the mid-1870s. Also, slaves from Texas fled from their masters into Indian Territory and elsewhere before *and* after the Civil War. (Historians have argued that the northern region of the Lone Star State experienced a second Civil War, a battle between Reconstruction officials and very angry slave owners.) And the grand size of Texas made it impossible for the Freedmen's Bureau, an organization dedicated to the advancement and protection of African-Americans, to come up with the resources to enforce the end of slavery throughout the state.

Finding jobs and land were critical issues for freedmen during the 1870s; this was particularly true for black Texans. When able, they developed small independent colonies







FREDERIC REMINGTON, United States, 1861–1909, *The Stampede*, 1908, oil on canvas. GM 0127.2329

in isolated rural parts of the state. Many others moved to urban areas for protection from southern sympathizers who terrorized freedmen living on Texas's sparse countryside. In this desperate setting, cowboy culture made possible opportunities for thousands of African-Americans in Texas. Scholars estimate that one in four cowboys was black. Becoming part of a trail crew, in a profession that had always included people of color, was a respectable job paying unusually high wages.

Following cattle trails that took them through Indian Territory en route to Kansas railheads, most black cowboys did not return to Texas following a successful cattle drive. The cattle industry throughout much of the nineteenth century depended on the trail system. Several trails, including the Chisholm and Texas trails, went from southern Texas into parts of Kansas and Arkansas. These trails revealed new worlds to black men from Texas, bringing black cowboys in contact with black Indians in Indian Territory, and bringing black migrants from the south into contact with those same black cowboys.

The Chisholm Trail carried far more than cattle. Exodusters used it as an easy path to Kansas, as the trail had advantages over other, earlier Texas trails. It went through the less-populated portion of Indian Territory, so migrants and cowboys faced less risk of encountering white or Indian raiders, or Indian and black settlements that forced them to pay a toll in order to pass by. Thousands of Blacks walked along the Chisholm Trail to Kansas in the late 1870s, while into the early twentieth century, other black migrants trickled in from the Deep South to the racially fluid American West, to places like Oklahoma Territory, Indian Territory, Arkansas, and Kansas.

Right: **OLAF CARL SELTZER**, United States, 1877–1957, *Cattle Rustler*, 1928, watercolor on paper. GM 0237.1279

Far right, upper: **LEONARD & MARTIN**, c. 1883–1887, *Benjamin "Pap" Singleton*, 1880, photograph. Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, #333.

Far right, lower: **ARTIST UNKNOWN**, *The Bull-Dogger*, date unknown, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming, USA; 1.69.2030



The legacy of the Exodusters in Kansas increased interest in western lands during the 1880s and '90s. As racial violence continued to sweep through the Deep South following the abolition of slavery, African-Americans proceeded to seek out new homes where they could find safety and economic progress. White and black Republicans vied for political power against Democratic counterparts. Black politicians and faith leaders organized prospective migrants wanting to make new lives in the American West. These "colonization societies" focused on planning and moving groups of people to new settlements within a particular territory. Oklahoma Territory became a popular place for white settlement in the 1880s, as migrants, black and white, illegally settled on Indian lands.

In theory, federal officials escorted settlers (illegal squatters) out of the territory when they were discovered. However, black leaders began paying more attention to Oklahoma Territory by the 1890s, and the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889 encouraged settlers to stake a claim on the newly released land in the western portion of present-day Oklahoma. One black leader in particular, Edward McCabe, advertised Oklahoma Territory as a place where black political power and economic opportunity were possible.

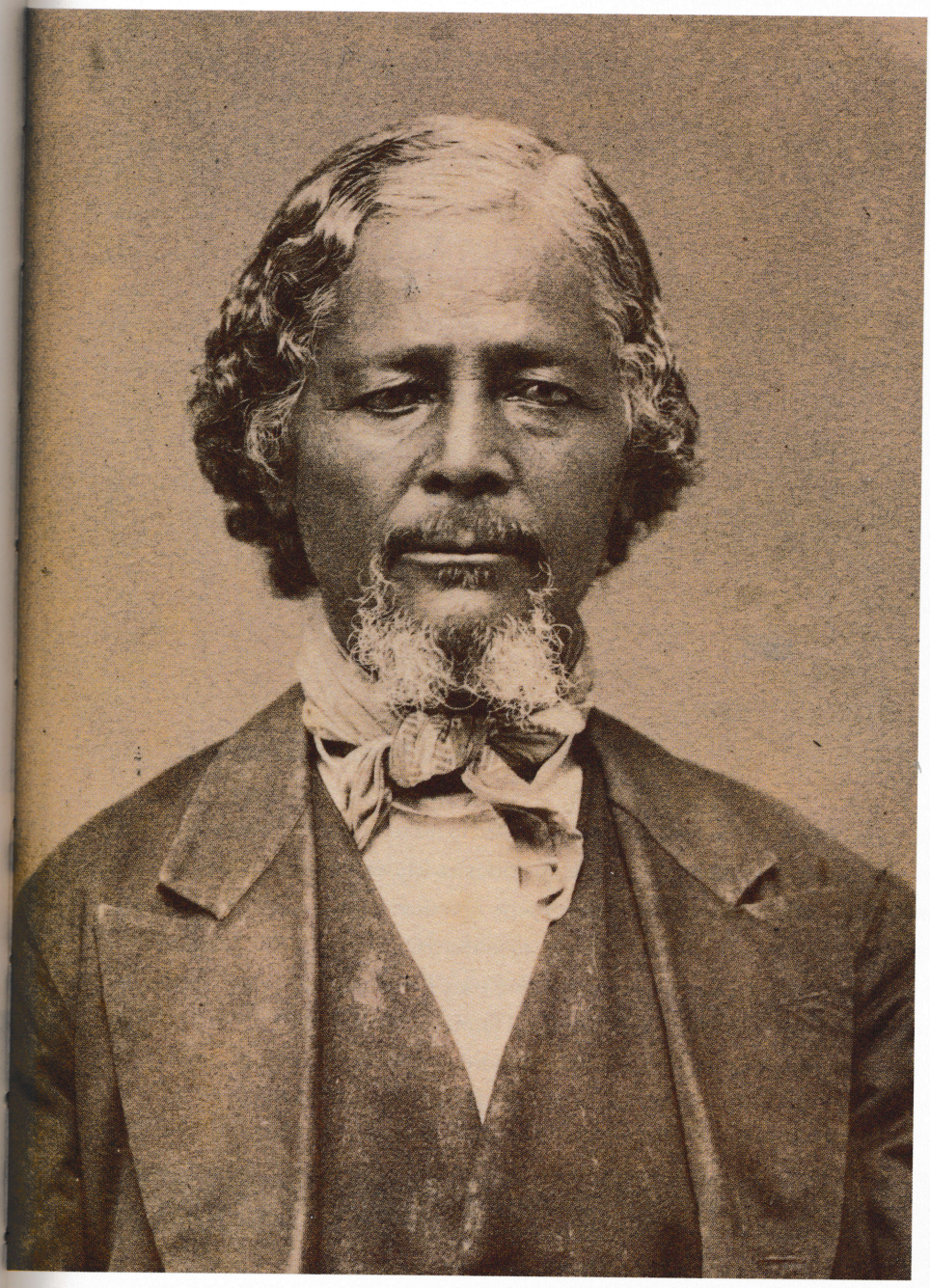
LEONARD & MARTIN, c. 1883–1887, *Edward P. McCabe, Kansas State Auditor, 1883–1887*, date unknown, photograph. Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, #277

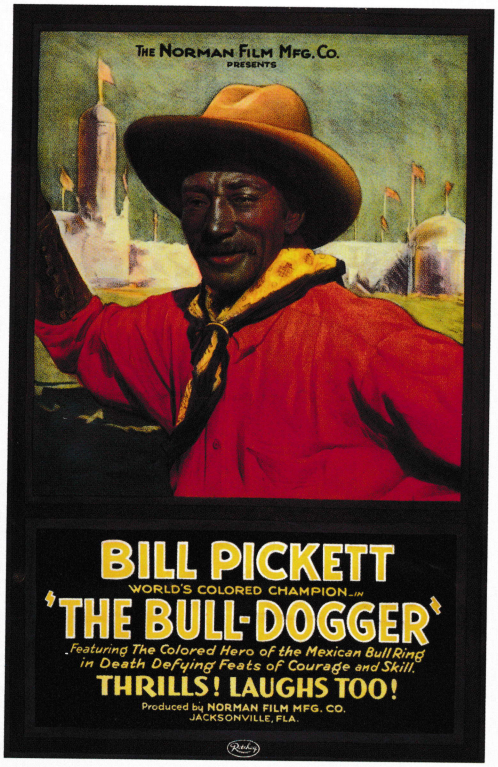


In 1889, for financial and political gain, McCabe moved from Kansas to Oklahoma Territory, where he put to use his experience and talents in political maneuvering and community building from his time as an Exoduster in Kansas. By the mid-1890s, McCabe had founded two predominantly black towns, Langston and Liberty. Ever ambitious, he lobbied the federal government, specifically President Benjamin Harrison, to turn Oklahoma Territory into an all-black state. McCabe used government connections to circulate his views regarding black settlement and attract media attention. Though the attempt to create an all-black state failed, Oklahoma and Indian Territory experienced a boom in what's known as the All-Black Town Movement from 1890 to 1910.

The story of black domestic colonization during the nineteenth century was as important to the history of the West as it was to the African-American community. And it remains important to the understanding of a significant legacy of the American West: the region's racially mixed heritage. For many African-Americans, the West was not only a refuge from racial violence, it also represented a window of opportunity for those looking to continue an agricultural way of life during the dawn of rapid industrialization.

However, by the twentieth century, both nature and culture challenged the vitality of Oklahoma's black towns, which were undermined by several historical events. The All-Black Town Movement started at a bad time. The region was experiencing a terrible

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drought, and Oklahoma's territorial government reported accounts of starvation among black and white settlers. Even with his political ties and prominence, McCabe struggled to feed the citizens of Langston. The town built community farms, but some black settlers left in search of more fruitful sites to start anew.

Cultural factors also intervened in the destruction of the movement. Towns like Langston were not accepted in surrounding white communities. Editorials in leading newspapers, including *The New York Times*, published articles proclaiming doubt about the abilities of Blacks. Whites feared a black majority in the region for political implications, while editors of major newspapers were afraid of a race war between white and black settlers. "If President Harrison appoints McCabe Governor," *The New York Times* published in 1890, "the latter will be assassinated within a week after he enters the Territory. There is rapidly growing anti-negro sentiment caused by the aggressiveness of the Blacks wherever they are strong." Both groups continued to fight for governmental control of Oklahoma Territory.

> *I expect to have a negro population of over 100,000 with two years, and we will not only have made substantial advancement for my people, but we will by that time secure control of political affairs.... We do not wish to antagonize the whites. They are necessary in the development of a new country, but they owe my race homes, and my race owes to itself a governmental control of those homes.*
>
> —EDWARD MCCABE TO *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

Oklahoma became a state in 1907. McCabe had failed to make an all-black state with himself at the helm as governor. Meanwhile, Native American leaders were unable to pave the way for Indian Territory to become a predominately Native American state—proposed as the State of Sequoyah. The twentieth century gave way to industrial modes of living. Additional black towns sprouted during this period, but they were few in number. While Oklahoma was catching up to racialized legislation common throughout much of the country, African-American settlers began to move north. Blacks headed to cities like Chicago in search of opportunity; it was Oklahoma's version of what we know as the Great Migration.



JAMES WALKER, United States, 1819–1889, *Vaqueros in a Horse Corral*, 1877, oil on canvas. GM 0126.1480



As a place distinct but not fully apart from the regions that touch it, the West calls us to imagine layered possibilities for people of the past.

—TIYA MILES, "THE LONG ARM OF THE SOUTH?" *WESTERN HISTORICAL QUARTERLY*, 2012

PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, *Members of the Boley Town Council*, date unknown, photograph. Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, 3377.D.2.

Few historians focus on urban African-American history in the West because of the traditional conception of our country based on rural southern Blacks and urban northern Blacks. This ignores a more complicated history of nineteenth-century minority groups in the West that I worry is being lost. As people die, tear down houses, and plow over old fields, stories can disappear. Our job is to find more of these histories, which calls for new approaches.

Scholars have begun to rethink the ways historians view the American West. While seeing it as a kind of neutral place that is often ambiguous, historians attempt to understand different facets of Western history as "South" or "North." Our tendency to attach old notions to the West hides its distinctiveness as an ambiguous place. African-Americans actually took on many roles in the West, including Buffalo Soldiers, cowboys, slaves (to whites and Indians), nationalists, and Native Americans, by assimilating into their cultures. Therefore, the New, New Western History must focus on how the West enabled marginalized people—in a surprisingly diversified range of ways—to migrate and interact within this space throughout the nineteenth century.

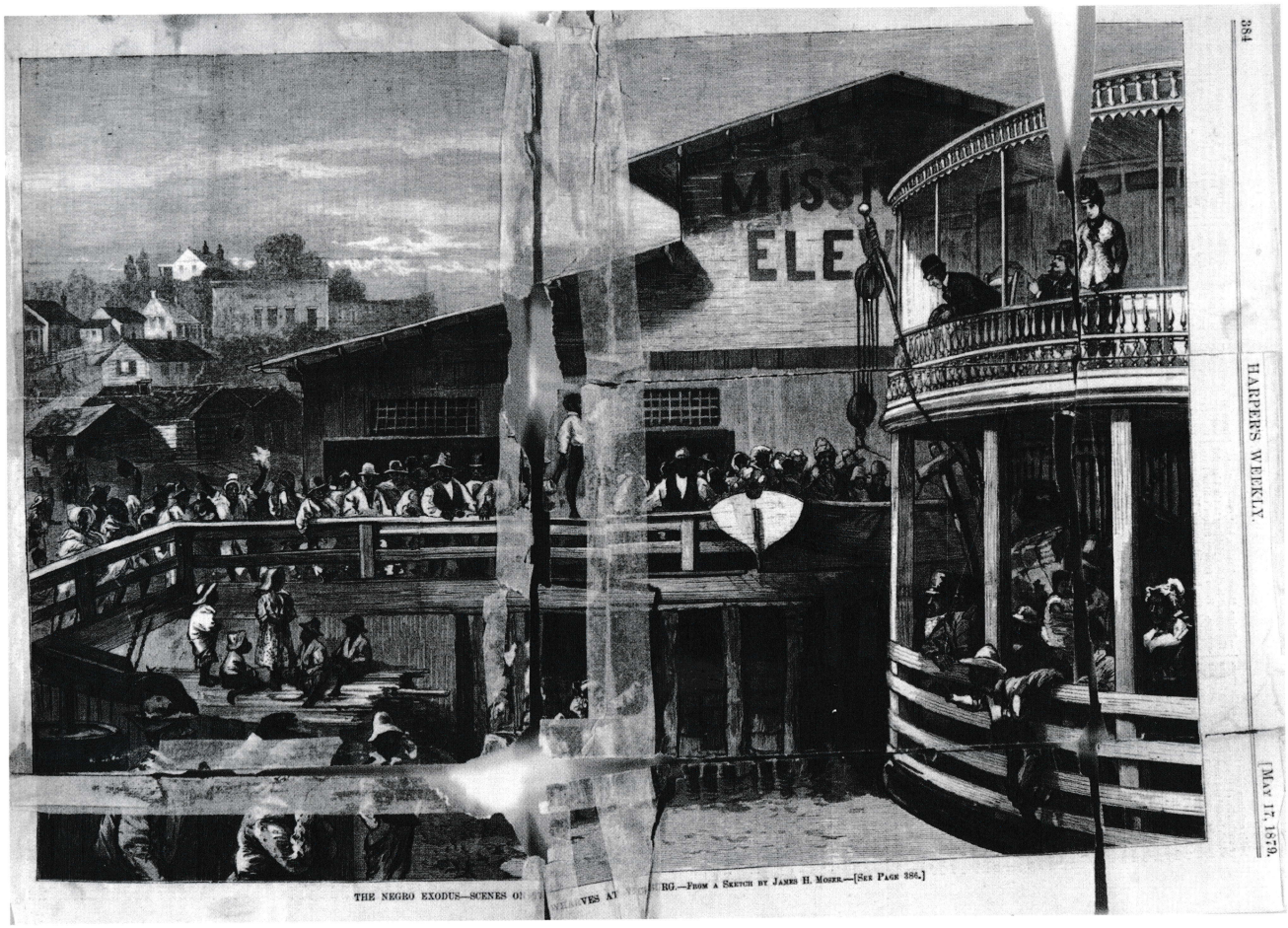
Below, left: **OLAF CARL SELTZER,** United States, 1877–1957, *Negro Bugler*, 1928–1931, watercolor on paper. GM 0237.1285

Below, right: **OLAF CARL SELTZER,** United States, 1877–1957, *Chinaman*, 1928, watercolor on paper. GM 0237.1283

The West was a blank slate for people of all races during the nineteenth century. Like Olaf Carl Seltzer's *Negro Bugler*, the Ned Logans and Elam Fergusons of the nineteenth century went west in search of opportunity. Ned and Elam had unfortunate endings, but their demises represent a truth of the black-American West. Black Westerners like McCabe and Singleton may have faded into obscurity, but their legacies have much to reveal about the real West. This ambiguous West was a region that made possible new and varied kinds of lives for people from myriad backgrounds, and though sources tell important stories about them, few of these stories have survived. Nonetheless, paintings from museums and archives like the Gilcrease provide windows into perceptions of the Old West—and open up dialogues needed to progress into a new era of Western history.







PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, *The Negro Exodus*, from the *Benjamin "Pap" Singleton Scrapbook*, *Harper's Weekly*, May 17, 1879. Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, #21642.

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Oil Paintings

Environmental History in the Art Gallery

‡

BY MARK BOXELL

Like many of his Depression-era paintings, Alexandre Hogue's *Crucified Land* (1939) tells a story of human arrogance. Hogue depicts a farmer's field that is carved into gullies by mismanaged flows of water, the eroded landscape's decay marked by a crucifix that leans precariously over one of the ravines. The cross is draped with ragged farmer's clothes, marking small-time landowners as the ultimate victims of environmental mismanagement in the West. In the background, away from the gullies and the waters that strip fertile soil from the land, looms an approaching rainstorm, promising even more erosion. Something else appears in the background: a tractor. Partially hidden in the shadows and painted dark gray and brown, the tractor appears ominous and guilty. This is no coincidence. Tractors had been a novelty to many Western farmers before World War I, but their proliferation in the years leading up to the Dust Bowl emphasized a new regime of farming that Hogue criticized. This regime of agricultural production depended on the intensive application of industrial technologies across larger and larger swaths of land. Tractors

ALEXANDRE HOGUE, United States, 1898–1994, *Crucified Land*, 1939, oil on canvas. GM 0127.2000

MARK BOXELL, a PhD candidate in history at the University of Oklahoma, researches the environmental, cultural, and political history of energy production and consumption in the United States.



RECENTLY, ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORIANS HAVE SOUGHT ALTERNATIVE STORIES, ONES THAT OFFER MORE COMPLICATED LESSONS. THEY HAVE ATTEMPTED TO MOVE BEYOND STARKLY MATERIALIST HISTORIES OF THE ENVIRONMENT BY CONFRONTING HOW THE ENVIRONMENT WAS CONSTRUCTED NOT ONLY THROUGH ECONOMIC ACTIVITY BUT THROUGH CULTURAL VALUES AND RACIAL IDENTITIES AS WELL. THEY HAVE BEGUN TO ASK A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT QUESTIONS.



JOSEPH BECKER, United States, 1841–1910, *Snow Sheds on the Central Pacific Railroad in the Sierra Nevada Mountains*, late 19th century, oil on board. GM 0136.1212

and the horsepower they harnessed made such an agricultural regime feasible, and the growth of industrial production in the United States during the early twentieth century made these machines increasingly available to a growing number of farmers.

In 1979 historian Donald Worster published a seething book, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*. Like Hogue's bleak paintings of an arid, overtaxed West, *Dust Bowl* lambasted a capitalist agricultural system that forced farmers to plow endless new plots of land at exhaustive rates, tearing up native grasses and setting loose soils that winds kicked up into massive dust storms, which greatly contributed to the years of economic depression that settled on the region.

Worster's book helped establish environmental history as a formal field within the larger discipline of academic history. Concerned with the dynamic interaction between humans and nonhuman nature over time, many early environmental historians embraced stories of environmental degradation and destruction, including the history of the Dust Bowl. Such histories harked back to Hogue's paintings and heeded warnings to Westerners who saw only endless bounty in their landscape.



DONALD DURISCH, life dates unknown, *Landscape, Helena, Montana*, 1957, oil on board. Gift from W.M.B. Davis, GM 0137.598

Recently, environmental historians have sought alternative stories, ones that offer more complicated lessons. These historians have attempted to move beyond starkly materialist histories of the environment by confronting how the environment was constructed not only through economic activity but through cultural values and racial identities as well. These scholars have begun to ask a number of important questions. How did an industrializing West reshape the ways in which people moved through, labored in, and depicted the region? What were the ideas about the natural world that Westerners carried with them into mountain, plain, and desert? How have different energy regimes been cast as firmaments of one race of people and antitheses of others?

Fortunately for us, the life of Thomas Gilcrease (1890–1962) reveals answers to some of these questions, which now occupy a central place in Western environmental history. Defying simple narratives of a region divided between backward, "ecological" Indians and modern, industrialized white settlers, Gilcrease's story is one of the many nuanced narratives that have begun to suffuse histories of the American West.


Pumpers House
Merritt Mauzy





Far left, top: **MERRITT THOMAS MAUZEY**, United States, 1898–1975, *Pumper's House*, mid-20th century, lithograph on paper. GM 1427.609

Far left, below: **MERRITT THOMAS MAUZEY**, United States, 1898–1975, *To Market*, mid-20th century, lithograph on paper. GM 1427.27

Left: **WILLIAM LINCOLN GARVER JR.**, United States, 1911–1996, *Gone but Not Forgotten*, 1960, lithograph on paper. Gift from the artist, GM 1427.559

AS PEOPLE AND GOODS MOVED MORE AND MORE RAPIDLY ACROSS BORDERS, MANY PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD GREW ANXIOUS ABOUT LOSING A SENSE OF NATIONAL CHARACTER AND IDENTITY. IN THE UNITED STATES, ONE RESPONSE TO AN INCREASINGLY GLOBALIZED WORLD WAS A REVITALIZED INTEREST IN AND CELEBRATION OF THE AMERICAN FRONTIER.



Born in Louisiana to a Muskogee Creek mother, Thomas and his family moved to Creek lands in Indian Territory in 1890 when he was an infant. While some late-nineteenth-century Indians sought to abandon their Native identities and assimilate into Euro-American society and culture, the Gilcreases embraced their Creek heritage. Thomas's mother instilled in her son an awareness of his Native roots and pushed him toward other Indians who did the same. Gilcrease's Creek identity remained important to him throughout his life, as is evident in the time he spent working in the art world. He acted as patron to several prominent Native American artists during the middle decades of the twentieth century, and at times he referred to Creek artists as his friends and tribesmen.

While Gilcrease embraced his Native identity, this heritage did not prevent him from embracing the currents of industrial development that coursed through Oklahoma and the rest of the West in the early twentieth century. In fact, Gilcrease's status as an Indian facilitated his entrance into the petroleum industry, which provided resources that eventually paved the way for the Gilcrease Museum. As an enrolled member of the Creek Nation, Gilcrease received 160 acres of land south of Tulsa, which just happened to be part of the famous Glenn Pool that was developed into Oklahoma's first major oil field (crude was initially struck in 1905). Because Gilcrease's allotment rested atop the Glenn Pool prior to its discovery, the most important reason for his early fortunes—his private control of crude oil reserves—was entirely the product of luck. But the young Creek man transformed his good fortune into an education; he used the first royalties he earned from leasing his land to oil developers to attend Bacone College.

Oil also created an altogether different but still formative classroom: Gilcrease, realizing he had leased his land for a fraction of its value, in 1909 commenced a lengthy court battle with the purchasing oil producer. Years of experience in court gave Gilcrease an intimate understanding of the workings of the petroleum industry, experience he used to start the Gilcrease Oil Company in 1922.

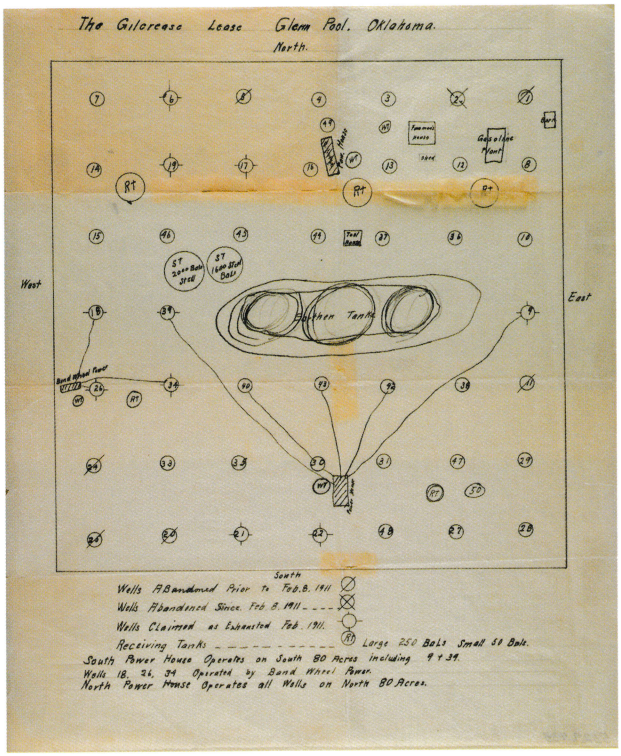
Gilcrease became known for preserving works of art that celebrated a frontier West and indigenous visions of Native lands. But the Gilcrease Museum houses works that illustrate other ways of seeing the West that were no less influential but decidedly more economically pragmatic and scientifically informed. One such artifact is a map of the Gilcrease oil lease (right). The map situates Gilcrease's plot in relation to the larger Glenn Pool oil field, highlighting the subterranean wealth.

If painters like Hogue developed their own powerful ways of representing the West through art, maps of oil resources like this one presented another way of making sense of the region through images. This West echoed with a much deeper geologic past—one highlighted by ancient deposits of petroleum—and held the promise of a fossil-fueled industrial present, which painters of the historic, nostalgic West rarely conveyed.

This West was a place to be mapped, leased, and made to bring forth profit for landowners and investors. It was a place of energy and the site of a dynamic form of progress rooted in technological change, not a place of reminiscence. These themes—emphasizing

Left: **PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN,** *Thomas Gilcrease (center) and group in front of oil derrick.* GM 4327.9114

Map of the Gilcrease oil lease, Glenn Pool, date unknown. GM 5327.433





Three oilmen drilling at Salazar Site, photographer and date unknown. GM 4327.7980.8

how Westerners of all backgrounds depicted and produced knowledge about the spaces they inhabited and the resources they discovered—have recently become important sources of analyses for environmental historians interested in understanding an industrializing West, one infused with new infrastructures and energies that connected the region to eastern markets and financiers.While historians of the American West have recently begun to reveal how Native Americans like Gilcrease shaped energy development and transformed land use in the twentieth-century United States, other changes that Gilcrease's life illustrated have yet to clearly emerge within the historiography. Names like Phillips, Getty, and Sinclair became famous in the Oklahoma and Texas oil fields of the early twentieth century. These mainstays in the history of the West, and others like Gilcrease, highlight the importance of private capital in building the region. Historians have thoroughly documented the often-contentious relationships between Western landowners and the federal government, emphasizing the conflicts that emerged between private citizens and the Bureau of Reclamation, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, and a host of other public-lands agencies. But often these stories feature farmers and ranchers, like those romanticized by Hogue, and largely ignore the capital-intensive energy companies that dug wells, built derricks, developed pipeline systems, and fueled a new frontier of urbanization and industrialization.

Energy booms like the oil boom that Gilcrease helped build represented vital moments in the history of the West, in part because they entailed times when capital-intensive pieces of infrastructure were produced and placed into operation, offering the people who owned those infrastructures a great amount of institutional, ecological, and financial power. Oil rigs, refineries, and pipeline systems literally cemented in the landscape the influence of businessmen like Gilcrease, and the flowing of oil and dollars that precipitated along these privately held infrastructures allowed for the establishment of cultural and philanthropic institutions like the Gilcrease Museum.

The connections between Gilcrease's oil business and his art collection were not confined to the American West. In 1933 Gilcrease opened a European branch of his oil company in Paris and hired Robert Lee Humber to lead it. Together in Paris, Humber and Gilcrease first envisioned Gilcrease's art museum, including its focus on works of art that depicted the American West. Once again, the moments when Gilcrease, petroleum, and art collecting merged illuminate a growing trend among historians of the American West. In this instance, Gilcrease and Humber's Paris-based friendship highlighted the global context in which the American West was situated and how international connections came to shape the region. Such stories have grown in prominence within Western historiography. Covering such topics as the historical links between plutonium production in Washington State and the Soviet Union, or the multinational and multiracial labor force that was integral to the mining of coal in the Rocky Mountains, these narratives often emphasize energy and the environment.

Gilcrease enjoyed the fruits of a global economy that by the 1930s had grown dependent on petroleum to function. While his business operated beyond the borders of the United States, the art collection he envisioned centered on what many at the time believed was a uniquely American crucible, the frontier West. This was not as ironic as it would appear. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century and immediately following World War II, fossil-fueled technologies like ocean liners and aircraft exploded onto the global scene and made international travel more accessible, and national borders increasingly penetrable. This of course facilitated Gilcrease's dealings in France, which led to his partnership with Humber that was so vital to the museum's creation.

However, as people and goods moved more and more rapidly across borders, many people around the world grew anxious about losing a sense of national character and identity. In the United States, one response to an increasingly globalized world was a revitalized interest in and celebration of the American frontier. While oil fueled global changes, those changes in turn fueled a renewed interest in an insulated national identity and its historic roots, one that viewed the United States and specifically the American West as isolated from the rest of the world. Gilcrease helped forge this dichotomy through both Gilcrease Oil and the Gilcrease Museum.



Thomas Gilcrease and Robert Humber at Allen Tooke #2 well site, photographer and date unknown. GM 4327.7980.20

Even so, there are paintings in the Gilcrease that point to the origins of fossil-fueled transport and an increasingly globalized West. William de la Montagne Cary's paintings *The Fire Canoe, Fort Berthold* and *Buffalo Crossing the Missouri River* each depict a transportation revolution along the nineteenth-century Missouri River, which was a transformation that eventually grew dependent on fossil fuels. In both paintings, Indians appear along the river's edge with their backs to the viewer, looking toward the waters where a single boat moves calmly along. Boats would not have been novel sights to these Northern Plains Indians, but vessels moving upstream spewing black smoke would have. Indeed, the foregrounded Indians are in rapt attention before the displays of steam power on the Missouri. Cary thus illustrated his own belief that the steam engine brought momentous change to the Missouri Valley and to the lives of those people native to the river and its tributaries. And he was right. These steamboats were tools of globalization. When they first traveled up the Missouri in the mid-nineteenth century, no one—Indian, white, or otherwise—knew for sure that the United States would secure the West. Formidable Indian nations still controlled that part of the continent, and the U.S. government was struggling to control Anglo-American migration beyond the Mississippi. Steamboats like those portrayed by Cary—first powered by wood and, by the latter decades of the nineteenth century when Cary toured the West, by coal—gave the Americans great technological leverage as they thrust westward. The Indians who occupy Cary's steamboat paintings appear to acknowledge and confirm the coming of inexorable change at the hands of the United States and its burgeoning fossil-fuel energy system.

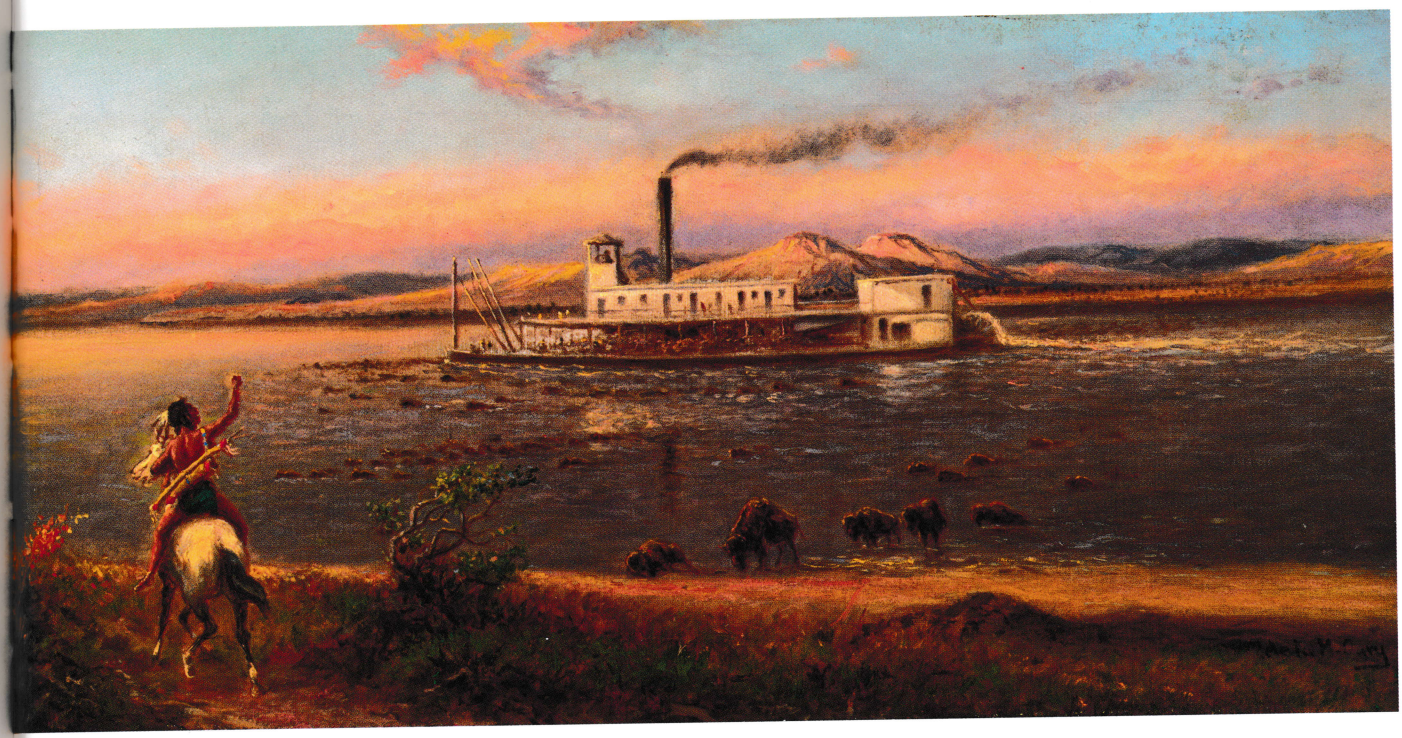
Right, above: **WILLIAM DE LA MONTAGNE CARY**, United States, 1840–1922, *The Fire Canoe, Fort Berthold*, late 19th century, oil on canvas. GM 0126.1834

Right, below: **WILLIAM DE LA MONTAGNE CARY**, United States 1840–1922, *Buffalo Crossing the Missouri River*, late 19th century, oil on canvas. GM 0126.1851

Yet Cary's paintings also convey a fiction. They imply that there was a permanent gulf between Native Americans and modern, industrial forms of energy. This implication is especially powerful in *Buffalo Crossing the Missouri River*: Bison, long the prime symbol of Western Native America, flee the river as the steamboat passes before them. And the Indian man who watches from the shore is separated from the boat by a great distance. The man can make out the boat and its plume of black exhaust, but any intimate understanding of the boat's engine and the sources of energy that fired it remain beyond his sight. The painting thus suggests that the bison and the Native man are of one culture and the steamboat of another, and that the two are distinct as well as incompatible. Of course, Gilcrease and many other Native Americans defied this notion time and again.

In revealing the larger world in which Gilcrease and his art collection came to be, we can look at Western paintings through an additional lens, one that takes seriously the coming together of Gilcrease Oil, Indian identity, and an industrializing West. Such a view reveals the global connections that shaped the West and institutions like the Gilcrease Museum, how Indians and energy merged to create the modern United States, and a host of other stories that historians have only recently begun bringing to light. If we try and separate these stories into their own compartments, we risk creating a fictional gulf between cultural institutions like the museum and environmental changes like the fossil-fuel revolution. A less-inclusive approach to the past also makes it easy for historians to focus only on simple stories of environmental degradation, or to create noncritical stories of white-Native animosity. Recent historians of the American West have begun to challenge these conventions and traditional beliefs of linear progress or decline—and offer a fuller view of the past.





FRANCES FLORA BOND PALMER, England, 1812–1876, active United States, *Across the Continent: "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way,"* 1868, hand-colored lithograph by Currier & Ives. GM 1526.41



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